Summary

It can take a while to familiarize yourself adjusting to someone else's habits, weeding through ups and downs to find a co-existing plane, especially when strange demonic attacks are thrown in the mix. But what happens when common ground is found for good? DanteXNero towards the end.

Notes

So, these two have quite the interesting dynamic don't they? Nero's a hormonal teen and Dante's just horny.

Yet I should warn some of you, this story won't have them romantically pouncing on one another within the first few chapters, and that will come in much LATER chapters once their feelings have started to develop. They are FRIENDS firstly, and then I can build themselves around each other to do all that love stuff...which probably won't be easy since both of them are incredibly stubborn, but I'll try!

I don't own Devil May Cry or the characters, but I do own this story!
"Dante!"

A youthful face covered in smooth, alabaster skin held a soured expression looking over the stair banister, wincing after the sound of his own voice echoed in the office. Below him, long legs clad in black leather rested on top of an antique, wooden desk, caring less to acknowledge his name.

Weary limbs traveled on their own accord down the steps, eyes blinking to adjust themselves to the dimmed room. It took every ounce of his willpower to resist laying down on the withered, burgundy couch, ignoring the beckoning allure of slumber.

Speaking of sleep-shattering calls, Nero struggled to sort through his jumbling thoughts, sifting through his groggy memory to recall a client's words.

Twenty minutes ago, he received a call from a female. He couldn't remember what the specifics of the conversation included, but her clipped tone claimed to pay any price to rid of the monsters accumulating near her house. With Dante running a mercenary business (specializing in eradicating demons), he set up a call screening system through a secret word to separate the jobs destined to waste his time from those that piqued his interest.

The devil hunter advised Nero to never take a job without the customer saying the specified password (keeping the chances of false jobs to a minimum) and he should have hung up, but some inner responsibility sensed this was no game she played. Not too many people knew what field they operated in, and wrong numbers calling in were few and far between.

When cerulean eyes glanced over to the half-devil resting by the antique, rotary telephone, a rise of indifference crept along his spine, knowing the bum listened to their chat. On many an occasion, he witnessed the hybrid stomp his heel on the desk; the handle flying right into his hand. It was an effective maneuver when he didn't feel like reaching to answer it, so why did he forgo the gesture this time?

This bristled Nero's jittery nerves.

Nero jumped out of his sleep, disoriented from rising too quickly, almost stumbling face first down the steps to answer the phone's shrill ringing. After his wobbly stance and blurred vision cleared to see the half-demon letting the loud object ring, he took it upon himself to collect the information. He neglected to respond to the pressing twitch in his foot to punt the older slayer's teeth in, deciding to don his work gear.

Dante had other plans. Staying rooted in his chair to snooze the day away sounded much better, having his two female associates butcher the demonic tourists overstaying their welcome. Nero handled the local jobs, which left the devil hunter time to relax while his minions did the majority of the work.

Though Dante didn't want to face physical harm by his femme fatales for calling them minions, so he used the term 'associates' loosely.

"Dante!" Nero bellowed in front of the man, a black boot twitched in response.

Strappy brown boots stomped over to the sleeping zombie's side, one human hand and the other fashioned out of blue taloned fingers and burgundy scales hoisted Dante's heavy feet, dropping them to the floor. Dante clenched his leg muscles to stop their rapid descent, placing them gently
back on the desk.

A dark hum thrummed in Nero's throat with his ignored presence, grabbing a magazine and rolling it up, aimed to pummel Dante with it. Midway on his destination a glove-covered hand caught his wrist, an iceberg blue eye opening to see the heated glare staring at him.

A voice full of throaty sleep spoke, barely moving his lips to make his query known. "Mind telling me why you're waking me up?"

Her address didn't sound locally close, so he had to find fast transportation. And Dante is his taxi driver. "Get up. I don't know where Blythe Valley is, and you're taking me there."

The other iceberg blue joined its twin, processing the teen's words. "I don't see why I have to-"

"You do and you are. I know you listened in, so stop acting so surprised."

Dante's resting rib cage exhaled all the air it held, rolling his eyes at his younger counterpart's grouchy disposition. "Aw, come on kid. You're always taking the fun out of everything."

Black boots removed from the desk and stood, elongating his limbs to eliminate the kinks in his back. An odd taste settled in his mouth, smacking his lips to rid the sour flavor. Four hours ago, he and the teen slaughtered and executed their quarry, blood and bones yielding to their massive blades. Rebellion and Red Queen decimated their Hellish forms with relative ease, gaining a workout from the immense number in which they appeared.

However, the irregular mixture of the Hell family and those synthetic scarecrows hailing from Fortuna sought their curiosity. The real ogres attacked the artificial race of demons, but turned their full attention to the two slayers. How they vacated the city of Fortuna when their numbers dwindled to nothing confused the duo. Maybe they missed crossing swords with the youngster and followed him here?

"Dante..." Nero started, trying to calm himself enough to speak with clarity. "I had to get my ass out of bed, run down the steps still half asleep, and answer the phone you sat inches away from! What fun am I taking out of anything if I have to deal with you?"

A sly smile graced Dante's lips, thinking how easy the kid humored him with his lacking patience. "Exactly."

Nero primed to retort something sharp when the elder walked around his desk, grabbing his twin pistols Ebony and Ivory and holstering them in their desired places. He walked over to the side of the couch to retrieve Rebellion, donning his signature strides to the door to show the brat of his functioning body.

Dante enjoyed that nap, wishing to stay asleep longer but Nero would chew his ear off; the punk wasn't above doing something so annoying. Now awakened, his empty stomach growled in protest of going anywhere. Surely he couldn't perform his best when all his focus concentrated on stuffing his mouth with food.

The elder's body stiffened, Nero detecting the signs of someone wanting to procrastinate. He intercepted the hybrid's goal, pulling his thick arm with his scaly, demonic hand through the front door. "That's gonna have to wait, old man. If you woke up when the phone first rang, you wouldn't feel hungry."

A wrinkled forehead answered his affront. "The hell? I'll only be a sec, just grab a slice from the fridge--"
"We are late."

"And if I'm nauseous from not having anything."

"Throw up out the side of the car."

Dante exaggerated a sigh. "You are evil, kid."

"Yeah, well I learned from the worst."

"What did I do to deserve this?"

"Remember what happened the last time I let you go eat, and you told me the same thing?"

"Yup, I told your lazy ass to go walk to your job."

Nero's face settled into a blank canvas, recalling the events of that day. Some time ago, he made the young man walk about a good two miles and catch the train to his destination. It would have taken about five minutes by car to drop him off, but Dante claimed the car needed rest, Nero expressing colorful words with vigor in response to his laziness.

In truth, he had no one to answer the phone if they left. Money rolled in, and he needed to ensure he received every penny. But since his associates had been in or around the area of the caller, the situation carried on to its end, and he had free time to take the squirt wherever he wished.

Nero didn't understand this. As revenge, the brat came home with a fresh, crust-stuffed meat lovers' pizza and shared none of it with him.

"Fine, fine, let's go."

Outside, the air rested stale and smoggy, flyers from nearby taverns gathered in front of his office, collecting into a messy pile on his sidewalk. A light breeze combed through the street, soured beer and burning rubber riding on its coattails. Speaking of scorched tires, Dante just had a tune-up on his red 1969 Copo Camaro, serving as their transportation for the week. Lady took her bike she sometimes left over there for quicker access to job destinations, and Trish claimed stake over his black Ducati.

Perhaps asking Trish for his ride back would incur less repair costs for him. Coming into contact with a horde of haphazard Hell prides with terrible scythe-swinging aim enabled them to strike the reservoir tank for the anti-freeze, ensuring the car endured mechanical problems. Sure, the outward appearance of the car sought replacement to near perfection, yet the machinations inside rattled with every other stop he made.

Money which should have gone towards bills barreled towards keeping the ravishing lady in red in top condition rather than his own office. Still, with Nero taking residence, the kid added little furnishings to the place, much to Dante's delight and dismay.

Kitchen appliances, like the toaster oven and the microwave, made cooking a variety of foods easier, truly since Nero's the main one who used it. Only the laptop brought in by Nero, heavily convinced by Lady to get, got him into trouble because he smashed the thing in a fit of rage while the youngster fiddled with it.

Technological creations could not last long in his house because they found themselves broken from his abuse. He wondered how his jukebox stayed with him for so long; given its ill-treatment.
Each devil hunter placed their weapons in the spacious back seat, soon after placing their own backsides in the front seats. After a few kicks to the gas pedal, a couple of slaps to the steering wheel, and a few 'psyche' punches to Nero, the car emitted a gracious purr. Dante had to make it to the destination steady and fast before the car overheated.

He had no interest in reliving the embarrassing memory of sitting on the side of the road with smoke coming out from under the hood. With that thought in mind, he gave a playful smirk to Nero, who returned a glare, and sped down the street towards their destination.
Sunny rays illuminated the environment's colors in a vivid hue, creating a languid and relaxed ambiance in the car. Nero returned to his slumber for the hour drive, Dante thinking to rouse him awake because he had no reason to be here.

"So, my pre-pubescent companion, what are we hunting this time?" The elder jibed, turning onto a dusty road from the highway.

On the outskirts of the city their destination awaited them, rolling hills of gold grass taking over the scenery. Houses, businesses, and diners populated in scarce clusters the further they ventured from the metropolis. With surprised elation, the vehicle didn't sputter croaking noises.

Nero jerked from his seat with narrowed eyes, but took out the sticky note with the information.

"Uh… she said something about weird blue mist that keeps hovering in her backyard and swiveling land-fish... Cutlasses if I could remember their names."

Dante gazed over, barely seeing ink on a small piece of paper. "Didn't you write it down?"

"You were right there by the phone, I'm sure you heard her better than I did."

Dante picked up the teen's snarky tone, returning his eyes straight ahead. He admired the kid's spunk in whatever the situation called for. However, this journey had him envisioning one of them, or both, ending up injured afterwards.

Soul Eaters, if it wasn't any other creature, are sneaky little bastards, enacting slick tactics without a moment's notice. When backsides faced them, they ensnared a poor bastard with those rope-like tentacles to feed off of one's life force.

As for the Cutlasses, they're just irritating. Their stamina is high and they aren't slow in the matter. Nero once talked about their easy destruction, but Dante's participation with them had not been so… taunting. Especially when those fuckers gathered in groups.

When he focused his attention on one, here comes the other to sneak in a cheap hit. After using Ebony and Ivory to daze em' and whipping out the sword thrust from Rebellion, then he… forgot to bring additional weapons to his arsenal.

"Oh… " Maybe he should have asked about their objective when he stood up from his desk, or grabbed a spare weapon. He liked a challenge now and then, so bringing extra armory didn't create the atmosphere of a full dispute... except for Cutlasses.

Pandora's pure, demonic energy saved time concerning those virile assholes. He ought to have taken the call in the first place, but the dream floating in his brain remained so interesting; well the part of who he dreamt about.

The teen picked up the groan in his voice. "Oh, what?"

"Oh," replied Dante.
"Oh… what?" Nero had a problem over withheld details.

"Kid, have you ever encountered Soul Eaters before?"

He called to mind the imps he combated and the ones Dante told him about. The monsters he clashed with at his stay at Devil May Cry differed in variety, shape, and size. It excited him to return real demons to their homeland. No artificial or human-created rogues he ran over, just the actual Hell-spawn which gave him more to fight with.

He fought prides, blood-goyles, spear-throwing pansies (they were a pain), and acidic-based demons. But these Soul Eaters sounded promising. "No, why?"

"These lovely, long limbered legs love to suck and suck and suck and suck and suck..."

"Dante."

"…out your stamina. If you're gonna get em', get em' hard and fast. It's not in your best interest to turn your back for more than two seconds… maybe less than that. If you choose the former, you'll probably find death as a close friend.

Dante glanced over at Nero, contemplating and processing the words spoken. The teen hasn't met with this demon, and it could be dangerous. If he'd seen what they do from experience, it would be a hell of a lot safer to battle on his own. Watching the brat's life force drain out was the last thing he needed… unless the 'draining' acted in his favor.

His lips quirked upwards, the dream he experienced earlier coming in to soil his coherent focus. How inconvenient it is to envision naughty images, but he would at least indulge in a random, happy memory before the darkness turned on them.

"What are you smiling about?" Nero squinted at the dubious expression on the elder's face.

"Ah, nothing. Say, why don't you take care of your inbred fishy friends while I get the blue farts." If he played his cards right, he could outmaneuver the demons without taking too much damage. With Nero around, that seemed like his only option.

Nero didn't scare easy. The last time Dante had a plan, Nero almost passed out from sharp beaks and wide wings attacking him. Damn Blood-Goyles! The chieftain had battled some reeking-like-shit demon in a big, black cloak all the while.

Making plans wasn't the elder's strong suit. If he loosely created one then that would be fine, but a full-fledged outline spelled disaster; Nero cemented the idea after the meeting.

"What? And leave all the fun to you? Forget it, old man. We chop down what we lay eyes on."

"Did she say how many there were?"

"About six of em', when they stopped floating and disappearing. That's what she said."

Well…. that was not good news. How is she so close to them—unless she's at a window and counted their shapeless forms?

He grimaced. That existed a high tally for Dante to combat himself. Back when he first sparred with these creatures, they appeared to him one by one. This enabled him to find a suitable tactic to dispose of them easy. Subsequent meetings made it a breeze to do away with them.
It'll be better if Nero took on the Cutlasses, and he'll sweep through the rest. Dante internally kicked himself for not introducing the freaks to Nero beforehand.

He could spend days telling the fledgling about different demons and their abilities. The few books scattered in the office regarding the indigenous people of Hell and their traits the kid read, but he merely told the youngster about them.

For the last three weeks an abundance of Hell-bound fiends sprouted in numbers, supplied with the odd mixture of the gathering. The demons he fought on the regular shouldn't be mixing with the "city" folk that inhabited Fortuna.

Trish and Lady wondered of its coincidence; if it resulted in Nero living at Devil May Cry and his friends wanted to follow him, or a devil playing with his dirty bag of tricks. The real rascals weren't too accepting of this new breed, though. Eventually, they forgot their beef with each other long enough to attack the slayers.

"Negative kid, you deal with the catfish, then we can regroup and go on."

"You think I can't handle them on my own?" A brash tone veiled Nero's question, but upon hearing the mockery out of Dante's words dissipate, he asked with caution, while giving the barest hint of sarcasm.

Silence came from Dante's side.

"You don't think I can defeat them?"

"Anything that drains your strength is nothing to play with. Even if we split em' in half, it's still risky messing with them. The Hell family I have no problem leaving to you, except the Hell Vanguard-"

"You mean that ugly fossil in that black, tattered curtain?"

He smirked in light remembrance when he forced the teenager to tag along with him to dispatch some of Hell's uglies. Blood-Goyles weren't hard to kill, a couple bullets stoned them and a quick slash killed them.

Nero picked up the tactics in haste, but when the Hell Vanguard showed unexpectedly, he told the youngster to keep fighting. Yet Nero stopped attacking the scarlet-hued birds to watch the black-cloaked demon zip-zap here and there, willing himself to become the fleshy version of demonic birdseed.

"Just handle the fish-blades."

"Whatever," he boasted, his brash tone returning, "You think I'm gonna beat-"

"No Nero. These little bastards don't play. Before you even consider an attack strategy, while watching what's behind you at all times, you'll feel the need to sleep." Dante's stern voice cut through the teen's dismissive one, seeing his younger companion's mind frame.

Despite the teen being his own man, Dante's in charge of running everything inside of his house; dead, alive, and the roommates. And that included taking care of the brat, without direct acknowledgment.

Nero saw Dante's sincerity. The red hunter knew a lot of info for most of the demons he fought, and how to rid of them with minor difficulty. Most of them explained sounded simple in nature.
Only when Dante told him of the more interesting, challenging foes did he pay attention in full.

Yet Nero remembered a few creeps Dante had trouble killing while they garnered no difficulty with him.

Nero would not let that deter him you know, pride and whatnot. Still, he would heed to his advice for now. Then he would show Dante he could hold his own in a fight, no matter how tough Hell's uglies may seem. That's what endeared him towards it, exploring the unknown for his discoveries.

"Besides, you don't need to worry as much with big daddy around."

"Yeah, right." The youth rolled his eyes skyward, snorting through his nose. "And this big daddy; is this a self-proclaimed title?"

"Nope. I've got more than a few references that can attest to that. Or... do you want to find out for yourself?" Dante eyeballed Nero with a side view, slanting his eyelids into a languid slit.

Nero turned his head, a warming blush staining his cheeks. Dante's jokes had been light-hearted at first, but they became flirtatious and sensual as time went on. Nero brushed the words off as playful bantering, seeing how he could seldom differentiate between the elder's quips and serious mood.

Everywhere they traveled, inviting eyes fixated on Dante, especially if women hung around. He admitted Dante had the looks, but he still had a lot of maturing to do in the mental department.

It's like the half-demon posted a sign on his forehead saying 'Sex on Two Legs'. And it endured a definite truth that some sex nestled themselves between entwining legs.

Within the first month after the teenager moved in, he heard the veteran sexing a random chick. Her raspy mewls became muffled throughout the sex romp, probably from Dante covering her mouth in respect to his sleeping roommate. Or maybe he shoved her head into the pillow with his masochistic tendencies.

When morning struck, Nero made no notion to ask about the topic because Dante slept in his bed, or he'd been out on an early mission. Many nights passed since those incidents, with Dante bringing in less one-night suitors.

Until Nero had an eccentric dream the fickle women had experienced with Dante.

Days dragged by after the steamy collision in la-la land, but it felt real. The lingering touches, the butterfly kisses, the sensual hands roaming up and down his back, the nips cascading down his torso, that freakishly horrible stubble grazing over his chest, the rough, sleek muscle licking and tasting everything his lips touched, his hot breath on the inside of the younger slayer's thigh...

Nero jolted out of his sleep with the image blossoming into view, wiping the sweat from his brow. Before that night, he never imagined Dante in that light. He saw him as a close friend, even stretching into the older 'brother' boundary.

The sensations muddied his thoughts with uncertainty. He sought after Kyrie and she wanted him. She existed to be the closest thing to a relationship due to his abnormal normalcy. An attraction towards men held a lacking interest, right?

Right?
I was in my room
And I was just like staring at the wall thinking about everything
Then again I was thinking about nothing
And then my mom came in and I didn't even know she was there
She called my name and I didn't hear her and then she started screaming "Mike, Mike!"
And I go "What? What's the mat—"

Nero snapped from his musings, staring with wide eyes at the loud sound. He gathered his wits to realize the radio blasted a peculiar song, stupefying him.

Dante claimed an interesting preference of rock tunes on the jukebox; heavy metal occupying most of the selection, so for him to listen to music as bizarre as this was, well… normal in Dante's terms. It's just that he remembered something. Whenever the tuner turned on, the car…

"No! Don't do this now!"
… flared up in smoke.

"Weren't you the one moping about touching the radio?"

The veteran pulled over to the edge of the dirt road, putting his noggin against the steering wheel, turning off the car. He forgot the boom box somehow became the source for the vehicle to bring its internal problems into the limelight. "Damn prides and their stupid cock-crap aiming," Dante muttered, rubbing the side of his temple.

Nero sat back, pressing his lips together to hold in his laugh at the elder's misfortune. Served the dumbass right for making him walk all that distance to and from the office not too long ago. Though, upon thinking on it further, the same predicament applied to him.

"Hey kid, how much is the pay?"

Nero slipped his hand into the halfling's lily-white locks, pulling his skull from the wheel to shove the piece of paper into his mouth with his right hand. The teen intended on shutting the dummy up before he groaned and griped the day away.

Having his fingers splayed in and around his chin brought about excessive swallowing, muddied and panicked thoughts springing to his mind's forefront. They stayed motionless, neither willing to move or speak. Nero's breathing hitched, feeling like a wet surface, but he wasn't sure if it was the note either. Eyelids blinked twice, the half-demon rotating his head, his face without expression with piercing iceberg blues.

Hormonal instincts stole the reigns to his common sense, telling him to hop on Dante's lap; to grind on him in vigorous thrusts. Salmon labiums twitched to replace his devil bringer where his hand lied.

Taking a risk from an impulsive decision could lead to a reactive situation, yielding destructive consequences he wouldn't be able to live down. How would his reckless spontaneity affect those in his circle sobering up from his whimsy actions, and why did his hormones want to be so... suggestive towards this big oaf?
Nero withdrew his digits and stared straight ahead, wondering what in the world brought that event on. He shoved the note in Dante's mouth hoping to shut him off from any more senseless prattle, or the prevention of his further whining. His fingers staying there eluded an explanation.

"Are you gonna bash my skull into the wheel, kid?" Dante peeked at him out the corner of his eye, the note still inside his moist cavern.

Nero removed his left hand from Dante's head like he touched something hot rather than from his initial embarrassment.

The chieftain took the paper out of his mouth, reading the scribbled contents it withheld. Without warning Nero, as if he was going to anyway, he grabbed his blue coat and pulled him close, kissing him multiple times on the cheek akin to an over-indulgent grandma would kiss her grandchildren. He let go of Nero and hopped out of the car, lifting the backseat to get Rebellion.

Misfortune turned into merriment, the veteran whistling an old tune from an action flick he'd been meaning to watch again. That chick in the movie with the yellow jumpsuit proved herself a badass when she set a goal.

Nero sat in a stiffened posture after Dante kissed him, like something grand happened. Well, the pay offered totaled to $6000, so that probably had a lot to do with it. Most of the customers paid $100 here, $500 there, some as low as $25 and high as $25,000 with Lady there to take Dante's share.

Nero didn't mind sharing his earnings with Dante, but in trying to strike a deal with the half-demon, say to give the elder money to stop saying crude jokes, it never lasted long.

He shook off his taut form, Dante having a major head start in front of the youngster. The partial-demon sensed a light crimson river wafting inside his cheeks because of the unexpected kisses, his body secretly warmed at the pecks, for some uncomfortable reason.

"Hey, wait up you speeding tortoise!" The youth yelled after him, hopping out of the Camaro and reaching to grab Red Queen, jogging up to his elder companion.

Chapter End Notes

Does anyone other than me notice how their clothes seem to stay intact no matter how serious their injuries are? Like, do their clothes automatically regenerate as well? I just find that to be utterly strange... not just with the demon hunters but with other characters in games, lol.

Where in the world is Devil May Cry located? Oklahoma, New York, Europe, Nigeria...Asgard? Just wondering is all. On a side note, does anyone know the movie I'm talking about with the woman in the yellow jumpsuit; just a lil' quiz for ya'll.

And if anyone wanted to know the song to those lyrics, it's called "Institutionalized" by Suicidal Tendencies.

Til' Next Time!
The duo walked along the dirt road in silence, Dante ever vigilant to his surroundings and Nero walking a few steps behind him. The incidents in the car created an awkward vibe between them traveling forward. Nero kept glancing at his devil bringer, expecting traces of Dante's saliva to glisten in the sun. Dante wandered on, thinking about the multitude of kisses he left on the teen's cheek.

Hey, he was happy.

His savings increased to where he had money at the end of the week. That is, if he snuck the money from Lady. After paying off his seemingly endless debt to the female huntress after the Fortuna scandal, she still insisted he owed her interest for being so late on his payments. He would have to ask her why she kept compounding interest, and why she continued to do so.

Even if she squandered away his currency on female vices, he felt confident that Nero would share his fortune. Not that he necessarily had to, by occupying a room there and all, but added income helped his utilities remain in function.

Nero, for once, remained silent. Dante knew he surprised the runt, just not to that extent. When he first heard the brat running up to him, he assumed the punk would smash his face into the hardened earth lying beneath him. Instead, he gave a gentle shove to the elder, telling him not to leave him alone like that anymore.

"Oh, I have no intentions on it kid."

Dante paused, catching himself after he heard the emphasis he placed in his comment, noting how it sounded clingy. He hoped the kid didn't interpret his words as anything sensual despite the extra emphasis on the 'no.' In truth, his presence welcomed an inviting atmosphere with good company, and quite the diversion from the elder's troubles too.

In the midst of his wayward thoughts, a faint, briny odor drifted to the hybrid's nostrils, slowing his pace, inspecting the west for the growing scent. After his warning for Nero to practice caution around his environment, he figured he could assess the twerp to gauge his attention span while investigating the aroma.

The idea seemed decent, so he followed through with it; an unfamiliar spike poking in his gut since light effort tip-toed into its creation, yet he assured himself it served Nero's benefit. Reassuring himself of his scheme, he tapped into his demonic powers, moving into the bushes with inhuman speed.

Nero, being occupied with his right hand, lacked the sense to realize the elder's plan. When the partial-demon lost Dante's footfalls he halted his steps, scanning the area and inhaling the air for irregular smells. A familiar buzz within his devil bringer sensed the elder's presence nearby.

A sleek, double barreled revolver rested in his left and advancing with wary steps, sorting through the dense shrubbery, expecting a demon to jump out at him. His hearing picked up no strange noises. Even the birds stopped squawking about.

"Dante?" whispered Nero.
Billowing gusts of wind responded to him, his finger involuntarily firing off Blue Rose with sudden efficiency into the thicket of trees. On the forest floor lay a thick branch, Nero berating himself for his jumpy reflexes.

Nero aimed the gun at the fallen twig, stiff legs traversing in slow steps to examine the ground. Wait… if the sprig dropped from a heightened area, then it meant something waited for Nero in the tree. He redirected his aim to the area above him, expecting to find something ready to pounce on him. The younger slayer knew Dante wouldn't joke at a time like this. How can he talk in a vigilant voice about Hellish rogues, only to descend into prankster mode?

Speaking of which, did any of those Soul Eaters grab him before he called out to him? Did they appear as blue mist around the veteran and disappear with him? Could they have hoisted him into the sky somewhere, zapping his energy all the while he searched for him? Panicking is not a suitable solution, nor is jumping to the worst conclusion.

"Dante!" the youngster bellowed. "Where the hell is he?"

Nero moved upon the fallen stick, pushing aside the shrubbery with the tip of Blue Rose. He squinted, something broke it off by how the splinters from the branch's base split. But he still felt him close by, so what happened?

Strappy brown boots crept deeper into the green landscape with the tangy odor increasing twisting among the foliage with his devil arm pulsing in a bright shine; a surge of demonic energy closing in on his location. He followed the aroma to where it smelled the strongest and lingered under the…

"Oh no, this is not good," Nero inhaled deep breaths to exert control over himself, failing to calm his thudding heart.

On the ground rested globs of varied bloodstains surrounding the base of an old oak tree where Dante's scent resonated. The trail came from the direction which they traveled; thick, coagulated droplets smeared across the lower thickets of shrubs.

Next to a large stain of blood lay the chief's own precious Ivory. Nero's face froze, enlarged eyes and a widened mouth processing the scene. Realization settled that the worst happened to the man. Were the Soul Eaters that tough and the elder couldn't warn him before he disappeared? Here lied Dante's trusted weapon he'd never leave without, and the hybrid vanished from sight. With a forced breath, he ran forward to retrieve the gun and discovered…

A hard slap to the back almost made Nero fire another shot into the open area.

"Fuck!" Nero flinched from Dante, hanging upside down from a perched branch with a smug grin.

How low of him, pulling a silly prank. Nero steeled himself from his frightened nerves taking over, if not for the mission at hand he would have brushed it off. But with his sudden disappearance and Ivory surrounded by bloody pools, who wouldn't think the worst in the first place?

The younger demon backed up, clutching his chest from the surprise. Nero assumed something injured Dante, and here he joked like an over-zealous monkey, sporting a crazed clown's smile. Out in the middle of no-man's land with a broken car, a new threat of demons, and a missing hunter who deemed now the perfect opportunity to play a prank...

Dante took it too far this time.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"
Startled by the outburst, the veteran shaped his lips to apologize, but didn't see the need for it. Did he scare the punk that badly? "Relax kid, I—"

"You dumb-dick!" His chest heaved, balling his fists to reign in his temper, yet the words flew out faster than his mind comprehended them. "You disappear with no trace and I believed something really happened to you! You're the one telling me to be all cautious and shit, and you're the one fucking around!"

Nero's elevated voice restrained from cracking, yet it slipped from his lips. His body slumped, losing the pressure building in his chest—relieved the veteran still breathed, but the thought plummeted to the bottom of his worries. His ears and cheeks flushed rosy with anger, gnashing his teeth. He saw why Trish and Lady treated him the way they did. At first, Nero disagreed with their snippy ways towards him, but he sided with them on his actions. No wonder Lady shot him more often than not.

His asshole nature popped up in the worst of situations.

Dante jumped from the tree, unable to discern his partner's riled up emotions, seeing no harm in the matter. He told the twerp to curb his distractions if anything happened, and the runt had his mind elsewhere.

Upon his stint in the trees, he found a useful ploy for their mission. His high lookout yielded their demon destination close by, and the mongrels infesting the place. From the curved angle the house sat, Dante surveyed a thick layer of blue mist surrounding the mansion, most hovering in the front yard. Toward the side of the lot, he scanned a clear view of oddly, triangular-shaped movement skidding across the land, no doubt the overgrown goldfish he dreaded with a passion.

Perhaps disappearing in plain sight may have been excessive, only Nero hadn't fought with Soul Eaters before, and the test can show him their attack strategies. He dropped Ivory around the suspicious red droplets as a trap to analyze the readiness of his ally. And like he predicted, Nero's attention lingered on some other shit.

"Look ki– Nero, I vanished because of this blood I smelled and—"

"You couldn't give me a fucking warning?"

"Um…" Telling Nero he created a pop quiz to test his cognizance would usurp raging emotions, and he didn't want to hear any more bitching. Honestly, did he do something that bad?

"What the fuck do you mean 'um'?"

Aw shit, time to get it over with.

"Well, I told you how they can attack if you're easily distracted, and you just proved my point. Why weren't you on guard?" Dante ran his hand on the back of his neck, shrugging away his explanation.

"My guard, huh?" Nero stated, stepping out of the thick green land and onto the dirt road, wiping the side of his nose in distemper. "I'll fucking show you who's on their guard."

Nero stomped at a brisk pace toward the job, not caring if any blue smoke or mutated fish came into view. He didn't need to be on patrol, he had enough of doing that shit pre-destruction of Fortuna.

He spent the majority of his later life with his arm protected in long gloves and grating slings;
vigilant to his movements to protect the changes to his limb. With his right side being a 'freak of nature' he protected its appearance everyday; purposely isolating himself so no one could make the discovery.

Last thing he needed called for someone to preach about being on the defense.

"Whoa, now wait a minute. I need to tell—"

"Fuck off, bitch." Any wrath stirring inside him poured out in his speech. Probably not the best choice of words to use, but they flowed in free anger.

Dante stopped in his tracks, eyes blinking and posture stiffening by the outburst. This could go one of two ways: either the kid rephrased what he spoke, or Dante would do it for him.

Lingering in the past suited the elder none too well, and Nero closed in on pushing his limits. He scared the kid and the brat knew he did it without hurtful intention, so why wasn't he over it already? If Nero frightens that easily, then he needs to work on his composure.

Those demonic clouds had a knack for doing shit like that, and luck would not be on Nero's side if he gave the same reaction earlier. What would he do, huh? Back himself up against a tree and screech about how bad the demon jostled his nerves by scaring him? They would use his rage against him and end up proving the victor.

Nero tasted a darkening, spiritual field from the elder, sensing this inexplicable feeling trying to worm into his stomach. Is that annoyance, because he sure wasn't apologetic about his declaration.

He moved about a good three yards from the half-demon, still sprouting colorful words to demoralize the elder and his pep talk about being on his 'guard.' Hey, it served him right for wrongfully embarrassing and worrying Nero. The teen didn't have to apologize for his actions, nor should he. Only the lack of admitting, of any sort, from Dante infused this cold shiver crawling up his back at his choice of vocabulary.

"Who knows," continued Nero, "Maybe I'll disappear, and you can discover Blue Rose with my detached hand on it. Eaters might get hungry and they may want-"

"That's it!"

Dante dashed forward towards the youth, fed up with his incessant nagging and senseless blabber. Before the youngster registered what happened, a hard hand whipped him around, chin grabbed in force to stare into Dante's frosty visage.

"Insult me one more time, Nero."

The elder misplaced his jovial smile, morphing into a stoic mask of ice. A profile of dry sulfur merged in the halfling's eyes; the same scowl he had after putting a bullet in Sanctus' head; just … hollow anger. Only thing missing from his vexed expression lacked the blood splatter covering half his face, probably Nero's if he didn't respond right.

Moving his chin from Dante's vice-like grip proved fruitless, chewing the inside of his cheek with balled fists to keep himself from starting a mini-war. His lifted jaw line rose at a high angle, forcing his neck to stretch to lock gazes with the veteran. Nero glanced away from the veteran's glare to have his mandible jerked in strain to focus on him.

"Speak your mind, Nero, I'm all ears now. You were saying?"
His voice poured out biting and venomous, as if he loathed the sight of him. His erect and imposing stance created an air of disdain, suffocating the younger slayer in thick waves. No one glared at him with such disgust since Fortuna.

Glances of animosity and aversion after the fall of Sanctus remained a crucial hobby during his routine activities. They couldn't and stubbornly wouldn't believe Sanctus wrecked their happy lives. That innocent old man they revered as a grandfather and father to the city's inhabitants didn't deserve his fate. So they blamed Nero. Kyrie trusted him, stood behind him, and defended his honor daily, but grew weary with the incessant blaming.

It endured a strenuous job defend Nero, and it wore on her fragile psyche. To relieve the stress of Kyrie and wait until the city's accusations died down, he left for a while. She implied to like the idea more than he did, yet insisted he return the instant some order restored into the city.

He enjoyed his stay at Devil May Cry. As soon as he shuffled into the office after traveling for weeks to get any leads on the man in red, Dante sat at his desk chatting away to a customer. His blasé stare strived to deem how important the mission was; the demons explained hardly seemed worth the effort. He saluted Nero a thumbs up and directed him to the couch. Looks like the hybrid already guessed it would happen sooner than later.

If the hunter viewed him the same way the Fortunians evil-eyed him, he'd be out of a place where he temporarily, yet comfortably, called home. Staying at Dante's welcomed a habitat where he didn't have to feel akin to an outcast. Dante made sure Nero kept his right arm uncovered for everyone to gaze upon it. He told the youth if anyone gave him any disgusted glares, shoot them the bird.

To call his home a security blanket dwelled in the land of clichés, but it rang true, and he opposed to letting that go, for now. Provided, he wouldn't admit it out loud you know, pride and whatnot. Apologizing or submitting has never been his forte, but he didn't want to be kicked out over a stupid problem such as this, even if the fault pointed solely to Dante. It's doubtful Dante would evict him over something this stupid, but there's no telling in what direction his feelings may change towards.

Nero flickered his sight from the veteran's stare, battle lost in silent rout. The good times outweighed the bad around the dope, and this whole argument delved as pointless. His words expressed themselves in a fit of anger, except the emotions surrounding it should let the elder know of his agitated sentiments. He made no excuses to what he ranted, but he wished to find common ground after the petty debacle.

Gulping down his ego for the sake of preventing a war was a fair price to pay, on Dante's part. Tightening his fists allowed his bitter-tasting pride to falter after he swallowed it. His posture slugged forward and his head bowed, face going from a deep scowl to dejected neutrality, just barely though. His breathing evened, clenched palms threatening to break free the mutual setting he attempted to put forth, howbeit the display of submission didn't seem to cool off the man. Iceberg hues bored into his forehead, envisioning to melt a hole through his skull.

"Got something to say, Nero?" Dante re-held his chin back upright after the kid's face slackened.

The teen shook his head, refraining from showing any signs that Dante's grip stung.

"And why is that?"

Nero shrugged, abstaining to peer into Dante's eyes to visually witness his unwanted defeat. So strange how everything progressed so smoothly to a damn catastrophe. Emotions streamed
haywire, and callous words should never have been blurted. Tempers flared in erratic haste, a sudden coldness emanated onto an unsuspecting being.

And through it all, neither of them apologized.

Fiery pools of glacial ice gazed at his younger counterpart, noting his submissive nature. He didn't want to snap at the brat, it's just that Nero needed to know he couldn't speak to him however he felt, angered or not. He rarely snapped at people to put them in their place because most of them sustained intellect not to fuck with him.

A hot-headed firecracker acquiesced the kid's overall temperament, but he never assumed he would use those words against him. He scrutinized the runt, bearing resemblance to a child scolded at by their favorite person. Slightly pouty lips, rosy cheeks and long eyelashes supplied an inviting display of his yielding, yet Dante maintained his irritation to notice his stance in full. They would have to discuss this later.

"A bit of advice Nero," his icy voice spoke, shaking the kid's chin until he made eye contact. Nero stood on his tippy toes to release the tension in his neck. "If you want to talk shit, you better be ready to go through with it and tell it to their faces. Otherwise—," he pulled Nero's face merely centimeters from his, "—you may not shrug your way out of an explanation the next time."

His scent smelled so enticing, and his submission nearly unlocked the beast lying dormant within Dante. He looked so defenseless and smoldering; possessing the urge to lock lips right then, they barely touched… but he didn't.

He blinked at the mental imagery, taking a moment to wonder where the idea came from to smooch the boy. His devil side purred at the submissive stance, but he wasn't keen on kissing Nero. With that, he maneuvered around the fledgling and headed towards the woman's house, hearing the youth release a jittery breath when he got a good distance away.

At no time has anyone left Nero so… so raw before. He never exhibited a shaken core by the elder. In truth, he expected Dante to say something much more cutthroat, even give him a few whacks upside the head. He knew one thing however, he'd seen Dante in a new light, flashing deadly and devastating to behold. His words didn't seem that harmful, except its delivery made him feel shaky and… turned on?

Cold steps shuffled to face the same direction as the elder, exhaling slowly to regain his composure after following the other demon, thankful for the space between them. Still, he didn't doubt Dante stood seconds away from physically injuring him, the hostility in his eyes conveyed murderous intent.

"Maybe I should've let him get something to eat," he thought, heading on the path to his destination.

Chapter End Notes

And there you have a situation where egos clash with each other. Dante with his devil-may-care attitude and Nero with his hormone-filled one, destined to forever butt heads with one another. Both already started the action, but it's not with the demons! They
should be using that energy to fight off the hordes of bugaboos...or on each other if they really wanted to.
Too Hot for Comfort

Chapter Notes

On a side note, their inner devils/consciousness/ will be talking in italics. Any thoughts that they have (little voice in their head) will be in quotes, followed by the words 'he thought' or 'he said to himself'...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If silence invited an unwelcome intrusion before, then what could describe the current setting now? Nothing could foreshadow the blunt anger bursting from the hunters. Their brief and unexpected reactions broiled over to flared tempers. Dante thought the brat would take his advice with active cautions. Even if something happened to him, Nero should compel himself to retain control.

This had worried him.

One, the pansy-yelling made Dante question the kid's reflexes. Nero outlived jump scares; the chieftain's sudden disappearance shouldn't have riled up those emotions within the kid at once.

Two, the brat expressed himself as an emotional individual. He wore his flared (hormonal) sentiments vibrantly on his sleeve after most menial altercations. A dog nipped him; he's in a foul mood. Scarecrows jumped him; he'd sulk around the office for hours. Showed up by the veteran; he'd bitch about it.

Dante joked to calm the youth, loosening his uptight tension to redirect his vexation. It was rare that it worked; the elder finding himself strewn across the room as Nero's rag doll. He enjoyed seeing Nero flustered over a small slip-up, the friendly sparring sessions they indulged in confirmed that.

He smirked at the memories in secret.

Oh, damn it all to hell! A pitted feeling in his gut told him to tell the punk to forget about what happened. It's no use staying mad at each other because they could never do it. No matter how unique their senseless banter persisted, it drove them to make up without a direct apology sometimes. Yet his body ignored his mind's request. His memory reeled over Nero's selective term, the ferocity with which he spread the insult disconcerted him greatly.

Nobody dared to attack him in such a fashion and if they did, they coveted regret, case in point with Nero. The teen wore his confidence with brash poise; from his walk, to his fighting, to his style in clothing, to his choice in weaponry. In bereft of said bravado stood a kid with a head bowed in vulnerability.

Dante snuck a quick glance over his right shoulder, seeing Nero pacing like a mindless drone void of emotion, wallowing in a state of shock. His wide eyes peered at everything and nothing, trudging along in stiff movements. If Dante summed up Nero's stance in one word, it would be paranoid… but cute. Okay, two words… cutely paranoid.

Perfect example of how pissed they can be at each other, and forgiveness isn't needed.
A chuckle vowed to escape his lungs, but he grounded his teeth together. Nero hit a nerve, and it struck deep. No man likes his manhood threatened. He'd seen and dealt with shit that could make Nero's ears bleed confessing the half of it.

Sanctus' horrible stint spurned no surprise to Dante. Demons obsessed over obtaining his father's powers for themselves. And who had to stop these faux perpetrators, some of them posing in his father's image in the process? Neutralizing problems of that caliber can drive the average person crazy.

The kid needs to learn the phrase 'respect thy elders'.

Damn. Dante wanted to turn around and give Nero a piece of his mind, to grab him by his jacket collar and shake him; maybe supply a few punches to the face. Certain things are taunt-worthy, and others aren't.

Personally, Dante desired to live in the class of things not to taunt. The more he pondered on the situation, the angrier he grew. Perhaps the reason of Nero being a close ally to him rattled his calm demeanor upon the blatant disrespect, almost in relation to a betrayal by a loved one.

A disgruntled mind told strong legs to quicken to the approaching destination, yet his pace slowed. Dante's decreased footfalls reached Nero's hearing and as a response, he lagged in his strides. He didn't want to confront any emotions, thoughts, phrases, space… nothing from Dante. Seeing the hybrid's eyes showcased in a hollow coldness remained a sight he'd do anything to never witness again.

Dante slowed down even more. Nero slowed down even more.

Dante completely stopped. Nero completely stopped.

He stood a good twenty feet from the veteran, bringing attention to his tense posture and twitchy head, like he talked to himself, or trembled with some negative emotion. Nero frowned at his right hand to see a dim glow, telling him they weren't close to any demons. So why did the jackass stop? Flared nostrils sniffed the air for any sulfuric scent lurking about, but nothing smelt amiss save for the veteran.

"Stupid old man and his damn tricks," he thought in simmering annoyance. Nero wanted to distance himself from Dante, wishing the whole thing never happened. Though, the aspect of muttering aloud something like that, knowing Dante's disposition, sent chills slithering over his back despite the warm weather.

Summoning courage out of nowhere, he shuffled forward with laggard steps, ever careful in trying to read Dante's overall presence. A bleak face with a slight scowl marring his eyebrows met his sight when he reached the half-demon.

Nero geared to question why he stopped, but his legs had a mind of their own to pass him. Upon gaining his fifth step, the halfling's soles connected with the ground, strong in their approach.

A youthful profile turned and looked behind him, hastening his pace. Dante, in turn, picked up his footsteps. If this provided Dante's way of telling him to keep up, then Nero got the message loud and clear. If this proved Dante's way of communicating a different, silent meaning, then that hint wasn't so easy to decipher. It confused him if Dante continued to play one of his inept jokes, or if he aimed to make him feel lower than dirt.

Focusing straight ahead might have told him why Dante halted his footsteps initially. The woman's
house came into view, Nero slowing his tempo down to assess his vicinity. His right arm tingled, glowing a brighter hue closing in on the fiends.

For the second time, another set of footsteps ceased from his hearing.

He exhibited traits of a quick learner though, since no more wrong could be done thanks to the veteran's temper. He erected his posture, his left hand ghosting over Blue Rose, alert vision scanning the area. When he turned around, Dante had vanished. The youth however, knew the joking atmosphere dissipated, considering how close they were to their destination, hopefully.

With determined nerves he strolled along the path, distancing himself from the elder hunter while broadening his senses. His backside ignited in a strange flare, wondering where the sudden heat came from if the sun beamed in his face. Ignoring the rising temperature no longer, he stopped in his tracks and moved towards the large trees. Ceruleans shifted to land on Dante leaning against a thick trunk, glaring at him with crossed arms. Icy orbs flickered an ominous cool within them, penetrating into Nero's baby blues.

“Did that bum light my back on fire by staring at it?” Nero unholstered Red Queen to verify if gasoline spilled on him, sheathing her when all appeared well.

Both slayers eyeballed each other, waiting for the other to make a move. The man in red beheld the same blank expression, Nero's eyebrow raising over the hybrid's stern demeanor. For someone associated to taunt and jest 24/7, they can change their attitude into that of an apathetic bastard.

…No. No, that wasn't fair. That 'apathetic bastard' welcomed him with open arms, giving him daily essentials, and an odd form of entertainment—which he wasn't privy to in Fortuna. He allowed miniature fix-ups and equipment into his home, but it wasn't guaranteed to withstand Dante's violent nature.

Is he destined to have this incident held over his head every time they have a hiccup with each another? Narrowed eyes broke contact with the veteran, facing towards their current destination, fighting the urge to keep his pride from lashing out in conflict with Dante's irked disposition.

When he looked up again, the hybrid disappeared from his former place, catching a flash of red shifting through the woodlands. "If he wants to stay in the forest so badly, then why don't he build himself a nest?" Nero whispered again, making his travel into the wooded scenery.

*Covet the desire to be his chick.*

As the days passed by living at the office, another being came to bunk up by his side, in the form of an inner, demonic conscious proving itself an unnecessary hindrance. "What the hell is wrong with you, demon?"

"Questioning what I'm doing now?"

Nero froze, hearing a dry tone speaking among the greenery. Did he say that out loud? Shit, he did! Ceruleans had trouble spotting him, but he knew Dante shot daggers with his supposed burning sight.

"I-I'm just... forget it."

"Think something is wrong with me?"

Damn it, where is he? "No, you're not worth thinking about," he mumbled, wishing to arrive at the destination instead of playing all these games. Talking involuntarily to his inner demon aloud
painted him as someone mentally unhinged. Its baser instincts drove the partial-hybrid to ignore its pressing calls, centering its focus on the red one.

Two weeks ago, it cemented its presence in the youth's psyche; as if the thing awakened from hibernation, spewing random, lewd comments. There existed a link between their sparring sessions and the deviant conscious, speaking with salacious intent after suffering losses yielding to Dante's raw power. The voice loved to chime in and compliment the hybrid's strength while urging Nero to bask in the red one's physical prowess.

He strode further into the thick brush, mindful to watch for anything suspicious or Dante-like. A slight gust flowed through the green environment, preferring to take residence in here than out on the open road. This same breeze swooped by him in a sharp whirl, seeing nothing when he turned to what created the noise. His cautious gaze made his left fingers twitch, deciding if his gun needed firing, search abruptly ending when he came face to face with the hybrid.

A subtle flinch jolted his form backwards, noting how close his lips nearly grazed the man's throat. His baby blues neglected to tear away from Dante's powder blue ones. An unnatural heat projected from the veteran's form onto him in the sunny afternoon. Dante had to be burning up in his leather garb, yet he emitted a calm persona.

It maintained the truth the hybrid was physically stronger, faster, bigger… and smarter than him, but so what? Nero rose to combat any confrontation, proving himself against his quarreling matches with the chieftain; intimidating looks didn't scare him off easy.

He just couldn't confront the chieftain right now.

Nero's heartbeat sped when his eyes drifted on their own accord to Dante's labiums, that chafing inner voice coming out to put in its two cents.

Pleasures will be bountiful from his succulent lips.

Lily-white locks shook around his head, trying to shake his inner devil from its useless prattle.

"Speak up, Nero. We got the day to chit-chat."

He courted annoyance when someone trumped him, needing to avoid posing like an idiot to himself. "No, not really. If she's dead, it's your fault.” A soft tone heightened towards his normal voice, talking through his discomfort.

“Well, who knows, maybe they'll have her wrapped up in a pretty little bow before detaching her limbs.”

“That might make you happy though, killin' em' all by sucking the life out of them from the back.”

Salmon-hued lips folded into themselves, a rushing blush staining his cheeks after his faltering rebuttal. Grounded teeth stopped his tongue from correcting his words, feeling the blood pool in his ears after he replayed the terms grouped together. It's gotta be the heat making him say dumb shit.

Dante quirked a silver eyebrow, stunned into silence over the brat's statement, unable to stop his lips from twitching over the funny response.

A demonic forearm raised to his eye level, showing the hybrid they weren't too far off from the demons, however Dante made no move to regard it. Nero reversed his eyes from his right limb to Dante, telling him to notice his hand without verbally saying so.
The half-demon gave the arm a quick once over before returning to lock gazes, eyebrows disappearing into his hair, still silent.

Beads of sweat threatened to fall down his temple, not because of the weather but because of Dante's proximity. He'd prefer to go three rounds with Berial than to be under the half-demon's scrutiny. His quiet resolve unnerved him rather than any scathing words hurled at him.

As if reading his mind, Dante backed from him and resumed his scenic route through the thick foliage. An impetuous chill crashed upon the youngster, frosting over the warmth the chief seemingly took with him. It felt like something ripped the blanket off him on a cold, winter morning.

An exhale he wasn't aware of withholding eased out in a shudder, dreading to share any breathing space with the veteran. At one point, he thought the halfling would nip him on the mouth for sassing him, they were so damn close to each other.

The faint smell of strawberries and worn leather mingled by his nostrils before dissipating into the late afternoon wind, holding the breeze hostage as if he and it were a unit. How funny. A simple stare froze him from doing something so natural as breathing, scared to babble any other foolish nonsense.

After a few shaky breaths to still his nerves, he followed in the hybrid's trail, hoping to never be that close to the veteran again except for extreme situations. Like, if he needed assistance or needed carrying because someone popped one in his brain.

*Or until his weight ignites the dominant submission you will supply.*

"Oh, would you shut up!" he hissed, mentally scolding his inner demon.

Chapter End Notes

Well, there you have it. The next chapter will be the action chapter. Nero is in such denial. It's a shame that his inner demon has to fill in for him, lol. And Dante... is just so tempting when he's being a little evil, no? Well, whaddya think Dante would smell like if you smelled him? Ha-ha. Til' next time.
The vast, green environment failed to match the radiance of the Mitis forest in Fortuna. It didn't appear magically manicured and elegantly sculptured as it was on his island. Well, it wouldn't be as lucent and sculpturally planted because these wooded plains are natural. There wasn't any Hell Gate affecting the landscape, or a psychotic plant demoness trying to use them to host her parasitic offspring.

Wild rhododendron bushes grew over the lengths of a dirt pathway, littered with shiny, dark leaves splashed with vibrant apple blossoms. Nero guessed this section of land once remained in top condition, but for whatever reason, the owner must have grown tired of the upkeep.

Moss-covered plants crunched under his brown boots in silence, smelling an ozone musk hovering in the air. Fresh, breezy wind blew through the trees, easing the tension settled on him… if only for a moment.

Feed the devil to me. Crave his lusting aura.

A widened, blue palm smacked his forehead, smashing half of a fly on his face, hoping to stop his inner demon from its nonsensical ramblings. No matter how much his demonic side egged him, his rising and angsty urges won't make him hump Dante.

His thoughts mistook replacing Kyrie with the veteran. Dante didn't fancy after males and neither did he, so what's the reason his demon wanted him to act on its desires?

Do not suppress your desires. You will fall under its weight...

"Seriously, shut the fuck up!" He growled in a low tone, rolling eyes and gritted teeth conveying his growing irritation. Pale eyelids closed after a calming breath tried to steady his nerves; failing to see where he walked before colliding into Dante's muscular backside.

Marvel in your needs. Claim his lust.

He cursed, muscles jumping into taut strings. It was bad enough Dante humiliated him, but he extended the matter by pressing against him, without focusing on the area to his front.

A dash of worn leather and strawberries returned to his nostrils in full force, Nero's heartbeat quickening the longer he stood still. If he moved too quickly, then Dante would think he intentionally planned it. If he moved too slowly off him, then his embarrassment would convey to the elder. So... what other option did he have other than to stay put?

Nero's human conscience battled to his mind's forefront, reminding him of the distance he wanted to keep from the dope and his mood swings; how this situation in no way helped his cause.

Heat enveloped him after his flustered action, ceasing to carry the agitated aura when Dante confronted him earlier. This one warmed him like a soothing lullaby, inviting him to nestle closer to the veteran, and bathe himself in its comforting embrace.

Quick hands shot forward on instinct, bracing himself from the impact, giving the impression to give Dante a massage. Misfortune piled onto his mistake, some of the blood flooding his ears
traveled to his crotch.

Nero's arousal carried a mystifying, heady scent, careful to keep any lustful thoughts hidden while in Dante's presence. It was unknown if the elder could smell his carnalities, but he wasn't too keen on finding out. The young man needed a distraction, lest he explain his erection pointing near Dante's...

Dante snorted. "What is up with you today?"

_Fulfill my desire. Claim his lust._

Never more thankful for the interruption, Nero tore himself away from his mold, eyes staring ahead with a blank expression. Dante turned around and eyed Nero's twitchy left hand, the teen battling his will to prevent his finger from swiping his favorite place on the side of his nose.

"You weren't going to sneeze into my coat, were you?"

After the awkward rebuttal, he presumed Nero to jump on his back and tackle him to start one of their 'kiss and make up' banters. But after the kid stayed there with his hands on his shoulders, with his body pressed against his posterior, and a quickening heart beat, he didn't know what the hell to think. Other than the punk attempted to cop a rub?

Practicing a wary caution around the kid should prepare him better towards his antics; those virile emotions coursing through his blood burst without notice. Even when he lived around his teen years, Dante kept his sentiments in check, and unleashed them when the time was necessary: either on demons, on human males, or _in_ females.

The brat let those suckers fly when the need arose, no matter the situation. First the kid insults him, then he's having a monologue, and now he's trying to feel him up?

Damn that drama twat and those potent hormones.

Nero moved forward with Dante on his tail, burrowing disinterest in engaging in another confrontation with the elder.

"Nero," Dante spoke, holding the tone of someone berating a juvenile. The punk didn't trail on his heels, and Dante stopped because he thought the youth told him to shut up. In fact, he had about five feet worth of distance to the _left_ of the kid, so that gave Nero plenty of time to stop his legs from colliding to his back. Nor did they travel in a straight line. So what... what's the problem?

"Just drop it. I'm fine."

Can he tell Dante the truth? Would he meet doubtful criticism for blaming his actions on a voice in his _head_? Whatever, maybe talking through his shame can steer his thoughts towards sanity.

"I'm hearing... this voice in my head, okay. It keeps saying weird and creepy shit for no reason, and I keep telling it to shut up."

Nero processed his spoken words, tasting his regained bravado in slow increments. Yes. Yes. No more did he have to harbor awkward sentiments about the confrontation. Wandering around with a sullen attitude didn't suit him to the better; dumbing him down to the likes of a spoiled brat.

Dante raised a lone eyebrow. "What kind of weird shit?"

"Anything it wants to say."
The elder stayed quiet.

"… Well?"

"Can you be more specific?" His tone remained flat besides the lighter topic.

"Whatever it has a mind to say, it does."

Dante raised his other eyebrow at the youth, partly because he wanted to question Nero's sanity. If it was anything akin to his blunder of a comment about sucking demons to death, then maybe he should figure out why that is. The veteran didn't know if the brat spoke to him, or to himself, or 'the friend' living inside his mind. How creepy. Sure, his demon side (if the demonic whispers is what Nero implied) talked to him occasionally, but it went for decisions in battle… and maybe which chick to quench his horny nature.

"There's a name for people who talk to themselves, you know."

"And that is?"

"They're called the homeless."

And yet Dante did it again. He grouped together harmless words that stung, reminding him of an obstacle he had to overcome.

Nero endured a long trek to find the devil hunter. The run-down, roach-infested motels he slept in gave way to restless nights, plaguing his mind with his forced evacuation. Swallowed pride accepted defeat when he rested on benches every other night, starting his day early in the morning to continue his voyage due to low finances.

Fortuna hadn't been home to him after the Sanctus incident. His abode invited a gnawing, empty feeling hovering in the air. Maybe the sudden bonding with the elder left him with longing after his departure. No one in that sad ass town could match his wits, let alone challenge him in vigor. If the bum came by a few times to visit, then he probably wouldn't be in this position.

Subtle changes in the teen's face combed through Dante's observant vision, watching his emotions slide beneath a mask. This time, he tried to put forth an effort to lighten the mood, but his comments seemingly lowered the kid's ego.

"Well… that is if you're Agni or Rudra," the veteran stated, rubbing a hand behind his neck, hoping to steer Nero away from whatever harrowing thoughts he unknowingly brought to the forefront.

Nero squinted his eyes in confusion, shoving the mental anguish away. “And who are they?”

"Two devil arms who took an oath to never talk again for the sake of my sanity."

With swift action, his mind pushed the images forward of Dante's treasured devil arms adorning the walls and rooms of Devil May Cry, letting his somber memories fade into the forgotten recesses of his psyche. He still didn't know who Agni and Rudra were, sticking to his own weapons and their familiarity, but he was glad Dante changed the subject.

To hide his erection, he turned his back towards him. The quicker he paced to get to the lady's house, the quicker he could separate from the hybrid and blame the adrenaline on his 'problem.'

Except Dante outlived being a fool.
Being a Cambion had its perks, ranging from his potent sense of smell recognizing odors long after they've dissipated, to his enhanced vision detecting the slightest movements. He didn't have to see Nero with a hard-on; he could inhale the pheromones.

"Why would anyone swear to never talk again?"

"Because—" Dante slinked in exact strides next to Nero, who stopped with widened eyes, placing his right arm on his hip and Blue Rose across his crotch.

Dante avoided calling out the punk in trying to play off his arousal because the display threatened to tickle him to the core, granted he contained himself, barely, "—it really grinds my gears when people talk more than me." He turned around to regard Nero, seeing if his stance would falter, but the little soldier held strong.

He may not know it yet, but his libido had an alluring effect, drawing the hybrid nearer to him. Minty black ash coiling through his nostrils stirred a familiar sensation within him, but alas, he can only indulge in the intoxicating essence from afar... at another time.

Nero peered past a red shoulder, watching blue smoke surrounding the woman's front yard spiral just beyond the edge of the unkempt forest. The elder swiveled to face the house; the youngster's legs moving on their own to bypass him.

Yet cerulean hues flashed wide again when Dante strolled beside him, leaning over to sniff his neck with surprising abruptness. A taut body flinched, his heart spiking at the sudden motion.

Dante sniffed again. "You smell... bothered."

Oh, crap! Can he detect the musk of his pheromones, if he thought it was that? How embarrassing. "Yeah well, you don't smell like French vanilla either." Nero searched for a distraction away from his aroma.

"French vanilla? He snorted. “You bought some candles for me in secret?"

"Ha, you wish. I guess since you're always around Trish you forget what it smells like, and her fragrance gets on you. It's an improvement from smelling like stale pizza, gunpowder, and shitty perfume."

"Says the guy who also eats stale pizza when there's nothing left to eat, the guy who whimpers when his gun can't pop off quick enough, and the guy always around the guy that smells like shitty perfume."

Nero chuckled in a light huff. Okay, so he got him there.

The angry aura once surrounding them in a thick blanket lessened its covering, easing the stressful ambiance.

“Do you ever consider using some of that alcohol to sanitize yourself after being with those girls?"

Yup. Bragging rights and bravado returned with an edge. That sinking void closed up, feeling himself return to his old character. At the slow but steady pace they ambled, they neared their destination, Nero's right arm pulsing stronger.

"Is that so?" Dante gloated, walking with a small smirk. "I'm sensing jealousy here. Don't get mad 'cause I have over two hands to help me out."
"Oh, hardy har-har. Jest all you want to. I'll have the last laugh when your dick is the color of your shirt."

He wandered ahead, smiling in triumph but halted his steps when he didn't hear the chieftain's footfalls behind him. "Oh no, not again," he groaned to himself in silence. "Things were back on track! Is he gonna be mad all over again?"

*Your puerility will cost you dearly.*

Nero shifted to see Dante motionless, wondering if he took his comment too far. It wouldn't seem like the hybrid would take offense to the words, he thought it good to keep up the friendly banter. Dante reclaimed his stoic expression, showing no signs of what he felt.

*Your chances are dwindling.*

Nero agreed, but for them to be on a leveled plane. "Come on, dude. Those chicks look like clowns with all that makeup on," he stated, laughing to make the elder get the joke, yet Dante remained impassive.

He shuffled to his left to study the man from a better angle, face scrunched when Dante hadn't shifted from the original spot Nero just vacated. The youngster ultimately forgot about his faltering tent and moved towards the halfling, failing to see the elder take a discreet peek to Nero's south of the border.

Facing the same way Dante did, he viewed tall, brownish-looking demons carrying big circles on their shoulders... backs... or something, slightly headed to the side of the house. These 'spheres' burdened their carriers based off their struggling gait, and Nero evoked the urge to personally "relieve" them of their stress balls.

"Hell Wraths." Dante mumbled in a quiet tone.

"I'm guessing they're the party crashers," Nero affirmed, sensing relief because the red one wasn't offended.

"Yeah, I guess."

That wasn't on the note Nero almost made him eat, though it came as a neutral surprise to the hunter. Making the Wraths blast its Hell-bound buddies accidentally on purpose posed no issue, since its logic is minuscule. Yet to his dissatisfaction, he'd probably have to stand in the explosion to lure the Soul Eaters while in their tentacle form. Still, there wasn't a mentioning of them anywhere.

"Nero, you're fired-"

His tension returned. "What?"

"-from answering the phone. Missing details much?"

His tension went away.

"Fine with me. Maybe you'll start answering the phone for once," Nero spoke out, glaring and relieved the veteran didn't sound heavy with anger.

"Gladly, since you don't write everything you hear."

“Oh, I'm sure you miss looking at your pretty writing style.” Dante sucked in half of his left cheek, lowering his eyelids into slits. The teen continued, “Besides, I wrote down all she said. She said nothing about these so-called Wraths.”

“I don't feel like baby-sitting you.”

_How fortunate for you._

"I can take care of myself-"

He scoffed. _Sure_ you can, but let's hurry so we can get back."

"So, we've kissed and made up then?" Nero visibly blanched, trying to hide it as a shrug. It slipped out quicker than expected. Well, he meant to say _that_, but not with those choice of words. However, Dante mentioned a "we", so the incident is behind them now, right?

Dante noticed the fledgling cringe, but kept quiet on the gesture. His spirits could heighten a bit; seeing him with a flat personality lowered his own mood.

"Not all the way yet, kid. There's a high percentage that your ass will sting from the beat down I'm gonna give ya. After the demons get a head start on you. " Dante unholstered his prized guns, placing Ivory behind his right shoulder and twirling Ebony in his left hand. A crooked grin flashed on his face, sauntering past Nero, giving him a rough, shoulder nudge in doing so.

_A spanking will sire from your selfish whims._

"Pfft, not without putting up a fight, you won't," he insisted aloud, secretly glad to move forward and focus on the task. Awkward silences wouldn't do them good if they bumped into each other in battle. He sighed before following the chieftain into the fight about to ensue.

Well, the ass-whupping shouldn't be too bad. At least Dante called him kid again. Aw, great, Dante called him _kid_ again.

Chapter End Notes

_A/N: I know it can seem like I'm 'jumping around' a bit in this chapter, but I wanted to show the remnants of their heated confrontation slowly simmering away through awkward talks and gestures. Kind of like how you try to recover from an embarrassing situation and you can't quite find your balance yet so your still a little clumsy... Okay, since they're already ready to fight and what not, let's get to the action, shall we. And since Nero has his little, erm, problem, I'm gonna have to find a way for the both of them to "accidentally" bump into each other on purpose, lol._
Nero's eyes gazed upon the house bedecked in luxurious splendor. The homes of Fortuna graced the city with a quiet and run-down antique elegance, but paled to the castles and main offices of the district in their design. Yet even Fortuna's buildings seemed drab next to this mansion.

A stone wall and gate enclosed the three-story manor with manicured shrubs and a stunning backdrop overlooking the vast forest. Cream-coated marble walls embellished the columns like shimmering pearls in the sun. Maple trees danced to their own vibe, with the wind providing soft music to sway in the breeze. The upper two stories had decorated balconies with lavish furniture creating a cozy patio. Hexagonal cobblestone adorned with the blue clouds created a walkway leading to the entrance.

Nero ogled through the explicity designed gates, slightly jarred from the demons barging in. His thoughts roved to why so many of them congregated at such a fancy place. Is there a portal or Hell Gate sitting around here? Did a high-ranking devil summon them to do their evil will? Besides all that, Nero enjoyed the house's view.

To Dante, it was just a big-ass house.

A big-ass house with probably three people living in it, not including the maids. Chances are the sole child received everything from mommy and daddy dearest.

Well, wasn't that calling the kettle black? Thinking back to his youth, he recalled living in a home as exquisite and separated as the one set before him. Many of the rooms remained closed or off-limits to him and his brother. He remembered his mother saying how easy it could be for them to get lost, yet their backyard stood twice as large as their home.

Playing, and often fighting, with Vergil filled his childhood days with bitter enjoyment. That is if Vergil sustained the mood to accompany him, the little prude. Even then, Vergil grew bored and lost interest in whatever activity they entertained the longer it waged on.

Coming out of his brief trance, Nero had disappeared from by his side, creeping in light steps towards the oblivious rogues trolling the premises. Running into battle headfirst, and not wondering about the consequences until later, suited Dante to the better because he operated in that style.

Planning involved strategy and timing and ideas. Who had the time to do that shit when the target prepared its next move to attack or escape? Nevertheless, Nero is a virgin to two out of three of the creatures, therefore he still should heed caution.

Hell Wraths are slow-witted, overgrown ticking bombs too feeble-minded to differentiate between foe and friend. If he played his cards right, being the terrible gambler he ruled at, he could use the Wraths' bombs to clear clusters of demons, minimizing the effort on his part.

Soul Eaters are vicious and annoying little fuckers, using sneak attacks to wrap prey in its clutches. Cutlasses are just… fuck them and their entire existence.

"I can't believe we're getting paid six grand to dispatch these idiots," Nero thought, the urge to flee
into battle twitched his anxious nerves to shed some blood. Cutlasses are a cinch to handle, and from the appearance of these new brutes they didn't look so threatening.

Salmon-tinted lips stretched into a wide smirk, fingers tightening on Red Queen's handle. Screw that damn seafood, Nero wanted to see what all this mist mess abided by; what they really looked like under that blue smoke. Right when his foot propelled him forward, disregarding the pep talk Dante gave him earlier, his momentum pulled backwards to face a serious-looking half-demon.

"What the hell are you—?"

"Dammit, what did I tell you?" Dante growled in a low timber. "You take care of the fish in the back, and then we regroup when you're done!"

Nero blinked, incensed over Dante undergoing a patronizing tone, like he was in the wrong for not listening to him. Did Dante forget he needed no one's help to begin with? "Why not the other way around?" Nero retorted, defiant eyes blazing into Dante's icy ones. "Let me deal with these bozos—"

"It'll be better if you listen or else we'll—"

"Do you think I'm that much of a kid? That I can't handle shit on my own, or did you forget what I'm capable of?" The awkward tension resurfaced, but he concealed the feeling with anger. Dante didn't need to order him about like a child. He's fine on his own, and he didn't need to have any forcefully restrictions on his free will. Besides he had a father, somehow and somewhere, to tell him what to do, but the bastard wasn't here now, was he?

"Yeah, you can handle shit on your own kid, but it's a lot less stressful—"

"Then let me do what I gotta do!" Nero revved up Red Queen once, indirectly telling the chieftain to shut up and let him do his job. "And stop thinking you know what's best all the damn time, old man."

Dante gazed at Nero's hard-headed ass before snapping his attention to the Hellions. They stopped their ministrations to enjoy the front row seat to the hunters' pointless bickering, well Nero's anyway.

Without saying another word Nero dashed towards the air spiders, slicing Red Queen through the thick blue smoke only to watch it float away. Dante gave a shake of his head in disbelief, seeing the surefire way for a Soul Eater to snag him.

Long legs strolled in a calm gait over to a tree, leaning against the trunk a yard away from the scene of action. A neutral profile watched on in silence, crossing his arms while condemning his partner's naivety. He knew of the punk's capabilities among any demon. The fledgling took on Berial, that psychotic plant lady, and those rancid ice frogs with the hot naked chicks as fishing lures, with no help in Fortuna. The kid even had the balls to drop kick him in the face during their first unofficial meeting.

Did he complete the job with the other devils though? Not exactly. If Nero knew any better, he would've finished the devils thoroughly instead of letting them recuperate inside of the Hell Gate. He had to go after the brat and clean up behind him.

He remembered his fair share of mistakes for the damned, but he didn't waste knowledge to eliminate those errors. There are certain demons to taunt, and there were those who kicked your ass. Soul Eaters, the little buggers, blended the two concepts. A few shots killed them quick, but they became a task if they congregated into a large group.
So fuck it. Let the punk have his way and handle both sets of creatures on his own. He told Nero to fight those in the back for he had the proper killing equipment. Dante suggested his plan was the preferred course of action since he is the seasoned pro. He didn't know what was best for the brat, but the boy still had a lot to learn, not just about hunting demons but life in particular.

To answer his question from earlier, yes Nero is a kid; a well-trained, hormonal kid with a small amount of bewitched blood running through his veins. The youngster should practice caution in his decisions. If the teen wanted to discover shit by himself, then so be it. Dante would point, or glare, him into the right direction... if the youth listened or even respected his advice.

As the popular saying goes: a hard head makes a soft ass. Speaking of which...

Maybe Dante should crank up his horny exploits more often. While the younger fledgling lived with him, his one-night trysts have lessened, out of respect for his partner. Ever since then, strange dreams about the mouthy little shit in sexual vices polluted his brain.

Men gregariously hit on Dante when they couldn't get enough of his charming looks. He would go along with it to skip paying for something or to amuse himself, but it was all in good fun; he never took it seriously. Plus, Nero's mentioning of his inner side talking over him meant the kid needed to get laid too. Perhaps the punk should visit that Karen, Kyla... whatever her name is and smooch her down.

Powder-blue eyes watched the fledgling fire a set of bullets into one of the Wraths. He ventured a little too close when the Hell-spawn exploded, sending Nero tumbling backwards. His clawed fingers dug into the ground to stop his momentum, gritting his teeth in surprised anger. Two of the Soul Eaters emerged from the ash surrounding the now-blown-to-bits demon, attempting to zero in on their weakened prey. Nero's ears rung in a piercing echo, failing to hear the Soul Eater hissing behind him.

Jean-clad legs stilled. Something odd drained within his core, like a hand crept inside his body and unplugged something, like a bathtub letting out. He stood in the blue mist but the elder said they grabbed you before they fed off you, or did he say they paralyzed you before they began their depletion methods?

The leggy monster screeched a startling cry as it dove in to wrap Nero in its long embrace. Before the creature ensnared its meal and sucked his life away, Dante withdrew Ivory and fired a few shots into the target, barely killing it before it got to the punk.

Nero never heard the slugs ring past him, his hearing taking a little too long to recover from the blast. Dante chose to relieve the two air spiders in front of the teen too, since he hasn't regained his ground.

Criss-crossing his prized babies, he charged up the twin pistols for a moment before releasing a barrage of bullets into the tentacle-like freaks. They dissipated on the spot, leaving a very surprised yet glowering Nero in surprise.

"Well, looks like we split em' up anyway." He holstered both guns with a swift flick of the wrist."
"I handled my share, kid."

Three more Soul Eaters and Wraths croaked about. Something told him to wait until the youngster finished, but those Cutlasses are a matter by themselves. "Brat should've taken care of those bastards in the back first," Dante sneered, dreading to face those irksome assholes.

The veteran ventured to the side of the house where a walkway led to the commotion ensuing
behind the manor. To his surprise, the backyard held no fencing of the sort to determine what property belonged to the mansion and to the forest. Anything could have jostled up into the area and made its claim here.

Peeking around the wall before the walkway led him out into the open, Dante saw the group of man-bred fish circling a large, gray-toned statuette. Ragged cloth hung in thin drapes over skeletal forms, wielding ominous scythes aimed towards the figure of a woman. A red substance poured over the figures pooling in the fountain underneath.

In the bosom of the woman a vibrant, gold knife protruded from her chest, ornamented with a glittering black gem on the handle. Dante lifted his nose in the air, inhaling a mixture of copper and rusted stone, senses going into overdrive for something seemed amiss here. He hoped the female in the statue wasn't the caller.

“That's an odd piece of landscaping. Hope there aren't kids playing near that.”

He turned and walked to where Nero engaged in combat. The youth and his party relocated towards the tree the elder leaned on before Nero's battle went at hand, leaving the entrance to the door all clear.

Nero hacked at the blue vapors, wondering why in the hell its true form hadn't showed. Didn't Dante say they had legs or arms? A bubbled sensation spiked in his core again before rolling away. The inside of a tentacle flashed across his vision when he faced away from the foe; the limb dispersing back into the blue smoke.

Those slow-moving bomb things dumbly followed Nero wherever he moved, groaning to the world of its suffering burden. He planned on using them soon, he just needed to find the correct timing to do so.

As a muffled screech alerted him, Nero somersaulted out of the way from being captured in the fiend's tentacles. In his brief glimpse, he saw the monster held the qualities of an octopus-like creature before turning into mist, blue in color with green, white and pink lines covering its body. So they resembled creepy, open-legged spiders floating in the air?

"Don't wanna face me head on, huh?" Nero taunted, sneering in jest as the demons acted in cowardice... Hey wait a minute, that was the trick. The smog only showed its true form when he faced in the opposite direction, leaving them on the offensive with his back turned.

"So," the youth ignored their approaching strides, "You like taking it from the back."

Dante knocked multiple times on the front door to see if the woman would greet him. A full minute went by before he turned a suspiciously unlocked door and walked into a spacious living room, whistling at the spectacle.

Mossy-hued paint adorned every wall. Cream-colored pillows sat lazily on the seats of gray-green couches. A red oak table rested between the couch and so did a cream La-Z-Boy armchair, with Granny Smith scented candles placed on each corner of the miniature stand. Wild plants had manifested themselves in the corners, completing the therapeutic vibe of the space. A nice comfy and cozy place to take a nap indeed.

Eyes swept over the expansive room, making sure nothing appeared amiss before taking a right down the hall. A few steps later and Dante found his way to the kitchen—only to find more rich décor. A plum-toned dinette set and open glass, wood-refined cabinets balanced out the emerald
walls. But what impressed Dante the most, other than the cleanliness of the kitchenette, stood the size of the refrigerator.

Double doors. Extra bin on the bottom. Ice maker. Expansive on the outside. Man, he would kill to own this. His cooler back home hadn't thoroughly kept his beer nice and cold. Or maybe the kid left the fridge open to look for food that wasn't in there. Yeah, his old fridge ran with less efficiency. He meant to buy a new one, but financial issues hindered him concerning repairs.

Might as well see what owning one as grand as this felt like. He slid a hand on the silver handle and opened the large door to grimace at the collection inside. Lots of yogurt cartons, bins of varying fruits and vegetables, milkshakes, containers full of left over dinners, and low-fat, low-calorie… junk populated the shelves.

Without a doubt a chick's house.

The half-demon reached forward and pulled out a rectangular foil pan to place it on the counter, having the sudden urge to eat..

Dante couldn't explain this weird feeling in his gut about the woman being here somewhere. How did she know of their occupation, and how did she get the office's number? There was a reason he had a password to take on jobs, he hated going on wild goose chases.

The chieftain heard a bomb explode outside before placing his hand on the aluminum cover, soon followed by a series of grunts and snarls. It appeared the brat didn't learn his lesson about Hell Wraths: keep your distance or you'll spend some time stopping your tumbles.

"Hope the kid ain't dead," he mumbled, more worried about the food lying beneath the silver wrapping. He pulled back the covering, anticipation marring his features before it turned into a deep, driven scowl, mortified to discover what he found in the foil pan.

Whoever mustered the nerve… no, the audacity to defile his favorite meal in such an offending way should be shot.

Pizza contained enough elements from the food pyramid to remain healthy. The crust came from the grains/bread group. The pepperoni is from the meat class and the cheese from the dairy. Three out of five ingredients are already on the pizza. Four if you count those disgusting olives from the vegetable category.

Dante lifted the pan to his nose to inhale the peculiar object in front of him, only to snort out the odor in disgust. In place of the dough existed this flat looking piece of grilled bread. In bereft of tomato sauce, the "fake" had mashed up dark chunks of what appeared and smelled like olives.

"Olives should be extinct," the halfling snarled, forgetting he didn't live here.

Spaced out shavings of mozzarella, or maybe Parmesan, acted as the cheese. Dante picked up a single shaving and sampled it, tingling his taste buds to awaken from their drowsy slumber. Parmesan it was then. To make Dante's face scrunch up, the topping on the phony had leaves.

Who puts shit like that on a pizza?

Did someone pluck them off a fresh tree sprouting into its first season of life? Or perhaps it came from one of those houseplants people use for decoration to gussy up their dinner. Whatever the case, the veteran didn't want to return it to the refrigerator. He wanted to acquaint the impostor to the trashcan resting a few feet from him; it deemed a more suitable site for the 'pizza.'
"Who has the nerve to even call this shit edible?" Dante muttered with a hard scoff, lips thinning over the lack of his favorite pie in the fridge.

Foods saying low-fat this or low-calorie that combed through his sight, rummaging through the fridge. His hand opened a fruit bin, finding a crate full of fresh, plump strawberries bursting with a bold red color.

"So this creepy stash of food redeemed itself, minimally."

Dante pulled out the crate, popping off the lid with an expert flick of his thumb. Pale blue orbs roved over the juicy pieces, looking for the right one to kick-start his starved taste buds into high gear. He chose a medium-large red fruit and chewed the sweet bliss before closing his eyes, thankful to get something on his stomach and for it to be one of his favorite foods.

He picked up the carton, spitting out the green stem while walking to the kitchen window. This house had a certain, sinister vibe hanging overhead like invisible smog. He couldn't see the physical source yet, but a wicked presence clung to the atmosphere, further spurred by the statuette outside.

Statues depicting such a scene usually displayed themselves in museums revered for the public. However, in his line of work, it conveyed to a great evil lurking nearby, sometimes with a bigger, tougher devil ready to fight after its minions have failed to cause the proper destruction.

He took another plump fruit from the carton, indulging in the savory filling. His suspicions only increased as the goblins circled the statue in an endless stride, not seeming to care or notice the throttling action in front of the house.

The gears in Dante's skull churned out queries about this damned fountain, thinking the sculpture could be the reason so many ghouls were out in abundance.

Jobs piled up since this ordeal started about two months ago. The money rolled in nicely until Lady came and sucked him dry like a drained well.

Two, the "man-made" monsters should be wiped out of existence after the Fortuna scandal. The Fortuna demons were bio-genetically engineered to serve as Agnus' lap dogs to hype up the citizens about their "Savior"; have the artificial Hellions run around scaring people shitless into praying the Savior would save them.

Talk about a twisted sales pitch.

How long did Agnus experiment with these creatures and where did he get the ingredients to create them, other than by using Yamato's essence? Sure, most devils are cruel and uncaring in their own manner, but to be captured and tormented to mold into one's creation is undeserved; even if most deserved the harsh treatment.

The most malicious of the damned can seem friendly compared to the acts humans engage in.

"Vergil, you ignorant dumbass," thought Dante in bitter remembrance, wishing his stoic twin could see what mere humans did with his sword and what they tried to achieve. His brother would downright cry at the gesture of it.

With an audible sigh, he strolled to the fridge to put away the strawberries. After eating most of them and spitting out the green stems, he placed the crate back into the refrigerator, leaving only four for the taking. Personally, he wanted to thank her for the cash and the food, but he needed to find the girl... if she lived.
"Uh, excuse me, miss?" Dante bellowed, making sure his voice reverberated against the walls in the house.

He went back to the living room to see if the caller showed up. A thought suddenly struck him, remembering the unlocked front entrance. Anyone who called the demon busters had their doors locked and waited to pay the hunters after the things were dead and gone. So did she hide and he needed to search for her?

A thump harked somewhere in the distance towards the opposite end of the hallway. Making his trek down the hall, Dante picked up faint aromas of lilac and cigarettes; never a pleasant combination as the chick would look older than she appeared. He made his way into the foyer, smelling the two scents growing stronger the closer he approached. His head turned to pause on an odd door in the middle of the corridor, backing up a few steps to scrutinize his finding.

"That's the last time I let that punkass answer the phone, I knew something weird was up."

An obsidian door etched in white, demonic symbols confirmed his suspicions. A gloved hand reached out to the door, sensing a vibrating hum shooting up his arm. Something scratched his mind to check on Nero, but the twerp bitched about his independence; his curiosity egging him on.

Ivory twirled in his right hand before bursting into the room, scanning the space for the noise's source. The silver gun aimed at a clear table placed near a set of curtain-less sliding doors. Black walls and matching carpet complemented the glass bookcase, holding an expansive book compilation in demonic writing. Light poured in from the window pane, showing the sun sinking away from the world's view.

Dante ran his fingers across the selective variety of references, thinking of re-stocking some of the enchanted reading material himself. With the new additions of monsters sprouting as of late, along with those bewitched curses, he should take a few to bring his current library up to date. Didn't know when he'd examine through the collection, but he needed to have them on deck.

A sudden pressure of a hexed aura infiltrated the room, bringing the hybrid out of his stupor. His eyes trailed to the computer table and saw a small briefcase resting on the edge of it. He ventured closer, noticing the damned essence expanding. Dante eyed the entire room before standing in front of the casing, positioning Ivory at the rectangular box to ready his attack should anything jump out at him.

The red slayer inhaled before unlocking both sets of locks with the flick of his thumb, swiftly opening the briefcase… to find the six grand he was "contracted" for. A big, smug grin split the chieftain's face in half. He would travel home satisfied today. Except he garnered this nasty feeling in the pit of his stomach, seeing these events run parallel to a coincidence.

A "normal" house doesn't have a door with accursed spells written on them, nor a statue of that caliber resting in its backyard. Where is that woman?

"Great," he snorted, looking around the room once more. "If I touch something, is it going to trigger a trap?" A small chuckle rumbled in his throat, wondering if this woman called him out here to kill him.

Testing that idea, Dante picked up a $100 bill and lifted it to his nose, taking in its leather-like scent. Nothing happened. His tickled mood soured over by the image of a glowering brunette with a cannon strapped to her back.

He sighed, having his thoughts interrupted by her greedy purposes. He'll put away $500 for Lady
to keep her off his back. Hey, he'll be damned if she came and took his whole paycheck for her own vices.

Holding his hand over the case he sensed no lurking danger, producing a 'hmm' sound. It's likely impossible for money to be evil... in the currency sense. The aura still transpired there, but why did the hexed ambiance emanate from the briefcase?

Maybe he mistook his senses for the Cutlasses scurrying about outside, or perhaps it came from the door he left open.

Three minutes passed with the half-hell making a mental to-do list for when he went home. He owed it to himself to catch a break, up to his neck in ogre-slaying non-stop. Fortunately, he knew just the person to take over his duties until he nourished himself to full capacity.

As the red one planned out his day for tomorrow he omitted caution as a small, black legless animal slithered out between two rows of dollar bills. His distraction with the current pay lingering underneath his nose neglected to see the black animal coil into a tight spring and lunge forward, aiming at the half-demon's throat with sharp pincers.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I am super giddy about the whole pizza/food group thingy. Since Dante doesn't seem like the type to like healthy food (much), I put in his definition of the term "healthy." And yes, that pizza thingy is called an Olive and Arugula Flatbread Pizza Salad. When I first saw that, I was like WTF? The word "pizza" shouldn't even be in there! And...I doubt if anyone could just walk in someone's house and start eating food that isn't even theirs! Oh the stuff Dante can get away with.
And Action, No Wait, Cut! Pt. 2

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Nero's constant tactics of dodging and rolling thinned his patience. Facing away from them proved ineffective after two Soul Eaters lunged for him simultaneously, leaving him to reassess his situation before they gained the advantage.

A misty demon caught his right leg and hauled him into the air, zapping his energy. Its limbs made a show to enclose around him when the youngster reacted quickly, grabbing Red Queen's hilt to make an upside-down horizontal slash, slicing the air spider on through.

The other freaks shrieked in fury after seeing its comrade dissipate into purple liquid. With Nero's squatted form facing from the rogue it charged towards the younger slayer, using its rage to impel itself forward. Nero swiveled just in time to propel a roundhouse kick into the core of the demon's... face-stomach. He withdrew his prized firearm and shot the air-spider point-blank, getting some eggplant-hued blood sloshed onto his jean jacket.

The partial-demon landed with a soft thud on the ground a few meters from an approaching Hell Wrath, smiling in devious mirth before aiming his double revolver and firing a single set into the Wrath, enlarging the bomb on the critter's back. Discarding his senses to detect the screech behind him, Nero slammed with brute force into the earth by the remaining Soul Eater, knocking the gun out of his left hand.

Six limbs wrapped in a tight clinch around the youth, sucking his life away; the teen growing weaker as escape fleeted through his thoughts. Nero had both arms lifted above his head by two separate tentacles while both of his lower legs enfolded in a single limb; the rest enveloped his mid-section.

He struggled and snarled to release himself from the draining hold. There flashed this unsettling, tingling sensation swimming throughout his entire physique then pooling out of him, like a sink full of water going down a drain. Nero rolled on the ground only to have the creature tighten its clutches.

The Hell Wrath survived long enough into its final stages; its orange bomb reached its maximum potential, collapsing behind the blue octopus imprisoning Nero. Mr. Explosion catapulted both demons of different backgrounds into a nearby thicket of shrubs. The Soul Eater dissipated into slushy, purple liquid all over the back of Nero's jacket.

A light sigh escaped his lips when the feel of soft, rich brown earth touched his sore muscles, welcoming the calming, earthy smell wafting through his nostrils.

Pfft, and the veteran assumed he couldn't handle his business.

Forfeiting a dispute never sat well with him. If anything, it urged him to face the obstacle. Exploring new things always perked his curiosity, some for the better and some for the worst since leaving the closed-off town.

He had a mind of his own which entitled him to do what he pleased. Nobody thought for him and they didn't need to. He had to experience life to understand its trivialities. Well, this one on the account of it being full of shit.
Still, he failed to overcome that livelihood in Fortuna.

It exposed him to an abrasive reality. Nero knew the Order of the Sword and its leader pumped themselves with falsehoods; thus why he scoffed at religion. Even he was smart enough to realize humans worshiping a devil wasn't *normal*.

In the righteous society Sanctus created, the outside world is flawed. Evil. Corrupt. And what the fuck did Fortuna harbor exactly? The same principles he taught with such enthusiasm came right back around and bit Sanctus in the aft end.

When the facts revealed itself, the community refused to accept the change. People fear the unknown. It's easier to relish in an easy ignorance than a hard truth. Dante allowed him to see the world and how to escape these preconceived notions.

Amidst all the crazy drama the elder saw in his life, he still poked fun at it in its entire splendor. Though Nero caught glimpses of the man brooding. Maybe he had seen and done too much shit in his lifetime to let those emotions slip out every so often.

The teenager rolled over to assess his current footing, mind a sluggish cesspool of wandering thoughts. On average, going a whole round with Hell's inhabitants existed as a warm-up. Damn Soul Eaters.

Lying down gave Nero the impression that that move wasn't a wise choice. His back felt wet and slimy turning over. Sitting up with a worried look, he glanced over his shoulder and scowled, deeply.

The back of his jacket looked as if he made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in a muddy puddle, with his jacket serving as the bread. Apparently these demons are a messy kill, leaving a mark on everything they die on. Nonetheless, this was just *nasty*.

He took to a slow movement to crawl onto all fours, placing his left hand on the ground and his right against the side of a nearby tree. Shaking his head to ward off the groggy sensation wasn't helping to rectify his stance.

Not bad for his first time dealing with the new ghouls. Got a few bumps and bruises along the way, only he survived to be the survivor. Nero braced himself against the trunk and lifted himself, aware of the oozing mess of purple and brown trails descending his spine.

"Un-fucking believable," he groaned.

His coat wasn't easy to clean due to the denim material. Accursed blood would splatter and splotch all over him slaying his enemies, and the smell of the reeking substance possessed a stench that blurred his vision until the odor wore off. Luckily, the elder acquired home remedies to clear out the tough spots. However, Nero felt the substances seep into the fabric of his jacket. No soap powder or DIY kits can get that out. He guaranteed that.

The last remaining Hell Wrath approached in front of him. These big dipshits are annoyingly helpful in eliminating their own friends. They supplied a neutral trump card in battle for either side of the playing field.

Considering the area deficient in anything left to blow up except itself, the youngster might as well dispose of it and move on. Yet Nero bubbled with disgust that his jacket washed itself in a sea of purple demon jelly and mashed up brownies. So what better way to take his pent-up anger out on the bastard at fault for his dirtied appearance.
Dante.

If he hadn't been so pre-occupied in explaining his safety precautions, he and Nero could have taken care of all these Hellish dwellers with no trouble at all, but nooo. The dork wanted to hold his hand and give him a grand tour of the situation, probably before handling the problem all by himself.

_Yield to his submission, next time._

"Oh no, not you again!"

Red eyes narrowed into tiny slits, boring acid holes into pools of stony periwinkles. Rows of sharp teeth displayed in pride, oozing green liquid from the fangs on the dark carpet. Its black, porcelain body dangled from the tail, the body's glass structure feeling as tense as a coiled spring.

The hybrid looked at the legless scorpion that nearly latched onto his throat. These assholes secured the amazing ability to use their pincers to hop from place to place, and at a high velocity. Luckily for him, their claws were too heavy to hoist, along with their stinger, which drooped helplessly in Dante's grip. The scorpion's material made the thing bulky. Dante guessed the legs broke because its weight was too much to bear.

"Looks like someone stayed in the cookie jar," Dante snickered, giving the trapped bogy a rough shake. "You know, losing a few pounds won't hurt; my arm's getting tired just from holdin' ya!" He held the thing up close to his face, observing the white bedeviled symbols etched into the skin of the scorpion. He surmised that the emblems controlled the mutation, closely resembling the ones on the door.

His brain pushed an image to the forefront of his thoughts. On one of his stranger missions he confronted a month back, these bat-looking things attacked him, leaving a rather nasty poison coursing through his veins after a few chomped on him. Trish guessed the signs enabled the demons to hide dormant venom until they bit someone, killing them within hours. Dante and his healing abilities however...

Taking another glance around the room, Dante assumed this woman diddled in dark magic, judging by the references on display.

He needed to take some of that material to build up his damper collection of a library at home. And maybe even look through them... like actually _reading_ them to see what the book yapped about. If they wrote it in a demonic language then... that's the author's fault. He understood a nice amount of the foreign dialect, it's just that some of the books required decoding and he did not have the patience to sit down and translate the text.

Focused pale blues scrutinized the hideous thing, noticing missing ears, nose and a chin. Its tiny mouth supported sharp and gnarled teeth, wondering if it used the orifice as a suctioning device... like Maria. Maria had a small mouth with the thinnest labiums yet she moved them in sultry gestures, along with a busty rack. When this mission was over, he should hit her up so he could watch her mouth stretch to swallow his—

"Hey! You little shit!"

The porcelain scorpion either committed suicide for being upheld in an insulting style or the veteran's grip held it too tight. In turn, he let the critter fall onto the floor, shattering into pieces. The chieftain took a step forward, satisfyingly crunching the remaining portions too big for his
liking. He wasn't finished thinking about Maria's talents, and that cretin spoiled the moment.

Dante wiped both hands on his black chaps before closing the briefcase, wincing from the pain on his left forefinger. He looked at said finger, noticing a tiny, protruding black splinter, bringing the knuckle up to eye level to confirm his suspicion.

The veteran picked at the stubborn thing yet his short nails couldn't grasp it. Though only a sliver and it shouldn't be of major importance, the acid or venom would affect him. If he had something pointy and small to get it out, like Nero's girly claws, he'll be right again.

"... Sparda... Sparda... come to me, my love."

Now this is getting interesting.

Dante swiveled around to pin-point the soft yet alluring voice. He left the door open, thus he supposed whoever saw him can witness his pre-occupied musings. Bad move on his part. The call became a little louder and more persistent.

"Come to me, my Sparda... come to me now."

He suspected the voice belonged to the woman who lived in this house... and those symbols on the door. Evidently, she waited on him to discover her; the bearings of falling in a setup coming to mind.

The hunter decided to play a game to identify who or what challenged him. He took slow steps away from the desk, ignoring the numbing feeling starting to reside in his forefinger.

"Why don't you come to me, babe? You won't be ashamed if you come forward to see Sparda."

"Come now. Give me what I want," said the voice in faint whispers.

Dante made his way out into the hallway, making sure to look both ways to avoid engaging in an attack; hand still on Ivory should anything and surprise him.

"Why don't you come now so that I can see you, my love," he spat out the words in mocking retaliation.

"Do as I say, my sweet, and come to me now," she said, her tone fluctuating in irritation.

"Why don't you come here to see what I got coming for you," he said, arms open in his ever-familiar gesture.

Apparently the mystery woman disliked being toyed with, her hissing sounds undergoing a venomous undertone. Did she hold a snake in her hand or something?

The hybrid spun to see a small French-tipped, slender palm curve around the wall, drawing imaginary seductive circles to entice the halfling.

"Well now see, was that so hard for you to do?" he drawled.

"This is your last warning Sparda, come to me now!" The mysterious fiend alluringly beckoned her finger to the devil slayer.

"How 'bout we make a deal? You show yourself, and I'll give you the whole lot of me. Sounds good, babe?" He took a few steps toward the mysterious hand; the ever-smelling concoction of lilac and cigarettes growing stronger.
The vixen slid another hand across the wall to join her other seducing him. Only this one held a pincer twice the size of her palm, with sharp ridges on the inside claw. The chieftain's grin faltered in expecting a total babe to stand before him. Anyone who had a mutated arm destined to look hideous... except Nero.

She lifted herself up and came around the corner, crawling sideways along the wall, revealing herself to the hybrid. An olive complexion stood out against her long, auburn-red hair. High chiseled cheekbones and natural pink, pouty lips detailed her face.

That stayed the nice thing about her, with her bare upper assets.

Light caramel nipples peeked from under her long locks, her skin tone carrying down to her waist where her warm shade changed hues. A rough formation of obsidian-hued, porcelain like-scales continued downwards throughout her legs.

Instead of stubby limbs like an actual scorpion, she had two sets of feet on each side of her body, black as tar sliding along the white hallway walls. Yet this woman had the nerve to have the toenails painted red. Red. To complete her hybrid appearance, Dante caught sight of a menacing stinger waving silently behind her the closer she ventured to him.

"Hmph," Dante said, a mixture of appreciation and disappointment fighting to come through at the lack of wholesome beauty. Sure, she looked a babe in the face, it's just her gangly physique turned him off.

"Maybe I should have let... Okay, I'm sorry. You're a total hottie from the waist-up and... I'm just not into bestiality."

The she-fiend hissed with sinister vibrations, not taking the jesting comments lightly. The skilled hunter knew to think on his feet. She repeatedly called him his father's name, and whenever the bad guys called him that, the brawl would justify vengeance of a dead comrade or a fight to the death, or some other worthless shit like that.

"You will not escape me, wretched seed of Sparda. I can still smell his foul stench flowing through you. You shall die for his betrayal!" She came off the wall, her full height standing somewhere around six feet.

Go figure.

Dante back flipped out of the way with quick reflexes, avoiding a nasty injury with the lady's stinger. His feet touched solid ground, too slow to dodge the she-demon's beastly uppercut with her human hand to Dante's stubbly chin.

The devil hunter reeled backwards, airborne for several seconds before rolling to a halt at the opposite end of the hall; eyeballs shifting upwards to look into smug, cerulean hues.

Nero worked his way into the massive mansion with caution, taking warning to keep his presence incognito. Though, he wasn't sure what made him go into the house. Nero surmised it wouldn't hurt to check on the lady to tell her they arrived to rid of her infestation.

Nero took a right to see if the woman would be in the kitchen, her eyes probably filled with terror as to what lurked outside her premises. Mentally distraught described most of the callers by the time the hunters got to them, and he conceived this one to follow suit.

When he snuck into the kitchenette however, he viewed the Cutlasses roaming undisturbed as if
nothing disrupted their actions. No sign of a stressed-out damsel popped up either.

"I know these are his favorite friends, but what is he waiting for?" he chuckled. His intentions didn't include battling them anyhow. He tired of their irksome ways from his encounter back home, and he had no interest in handling them again.

Cerulean hues scanned with scrutiny of his surroundings in the kitchen when a silky whisper beckoned Sparda's name. At first, he assumed he heard things until the voice became a little louder and more pressing.

Following the sound came the taunting tone of the red hunter, not doing his job and dawdling on some other shit. He pictured the crimson jackass romancing her, showing his pearly whites and easy smile and her falling for his natural charms.

"Dammit Dante!" Nero walked back the way he came into the living room, ready to hand the veteran's distracted ass to him. The voices echoed the closer he moved to walking towards the other side of the house. "We got a fucking situation here, and all you're thinking about is stroking...!"

Well, wasn't this a sight to behold. Nero halted in his march upon seeing the infamous devil hunter getting sucker-punched by a… topless she-scorpion. A sharp, grunted curse left his lips, flying backwards from the impact and skidding to a stop right at the youngster's feet.

In all of his days, Nero never thought he would chance upon the man making a silly slip-up like that. He presumed Dante had the suave moves to get any woman to swoon to his advances. This was too good an opportunity to let slide.

Arms of different biological markings stretched upwards then sideways, folding them across his chest, looking down at the half-hell in humor. "Lemme guess… she didn't fall for your rugged charms?"

"Bi—" Dante never responded, an audible crack filling the space of his answer. Nero's sneering visage turned into a grimace. His stubbly jaw, that thing he failed to keep closed, had physically broken and jutted out at an odd angle, leaning over towards the right.

The teen's bones skipped the frugality of breaking, just small cuts here and bruising bruises there... and the incident when Agnus cracked his breastbone open. Seeing the elder fracture before him grounded him to lead with caution approaching this fight. Never minding the injured hunter, it tickled him to see his slip-up.

"Okay, so we'll chat later once I finish everything myself." He bent over to grab both of the chieftain's hands, intending on helping him up and moving him to the side. "You rest and watch me do every...!"

Nero's words caught in his throat, glancing up in time to yank both him and the veteran backwards from the descending stinger, dislocating both of the elder's arms out of their sockets with the hard jerk.

"Someone didn't stretch this morning," the teen strained, hands lightly trembling after a guilty feeling trickled into his gut. He didn't mean for that to happen and the elder... would bear healing himself because Nero's busy.

The youth stopped to release his grip before mouthing the word "sorry"; charging to face the bewitched hag responsible for his injury. Maybe from now on the "chief" will stick to the job at
hand instead of getting disturbed by unimportant interruptions.

She diverted her attention to the mongrel moving to recover from his fall. The only thing in her way stood a mini white-haired wannabe who should've stayed at home playing those mind-numbing video games. The demoness wondered if one of those human fashion “trends” happened with that terrible hair color and hideous style in clothing.

"Get out of my sight minion, or you'll come to suffer the same fate the half-breed shall endure," she growled, eyes never leaving the halfling's form.

"I don't know who you're talking to because I ain't a minion, saddle bags."

"You wretched brat! I'll have your skull on a mantle!" She leapt forward, trying to enclose Nero in her overgrown pincer. Nero shifted to the side to see her stinger coming down on him, almost making a jab into him. His devil bringer deflected the attack but just like the red hunter, he was too slow to react from that uppercut, sending him reeling headfirst… suspiciously into Dante's lap.

"FUUU!"

The red one couldn't close his mouth to form the "ck" sound from his exclamatory reaction. Nero's face planted itself in the heart of the veteran's crotch, remaining frozen upon realizing where he landed.

His position should've prompted immediate removal from the veteran's precious jewels, only his head spun in circles from the sucker punch she delivered. That thing held its weight on par to his devil bringer when he gave that a go.

Dante had to swiftly and mentally prepare his left hand to hold itself over his right shoulder to pop it back into place. Easier said than done with his genitalia feeling on fire from Nero's 'embedded' placement.

He wouldn't mind being blown off, (in this case by Nero because her attitude bathed in the bath of atrocious etiquette) but pressing matters called his attention. With a final tug, he popped said shoulder into its socket with force, twitching his eyes as pain tore at his arm. He reached into his holster and grabbed Ebony; Ivory detached from his grip spiraling backwards in the air.

"That, my dear seed of Sparda, is how you will spend the rest of your days, nestled between my legs as my children feast from your flesh." The she-devil approached in strong steps, her meaty breasts swaying in a light rhythm to a seductive gait.

The crimson hunter would have stared in awe at her perky pair longer had she not said that. He aimed Ebony at one of her human-like soles and fired. Her reaction time couldn't dodge the bullet, but still progressed towards the two.

Dante readjusted his aim at a foot on the opposite side of her, readying to pull the trigger when Nero exerted a hearty groan into the heart of his crotch, his target veering off balance and shot a slug at the couch. Her stinger positioned to spring into another attack when he regained his composure, shooting a barrage of bullets into her stomach; bits and pieces of her porcelain scales breaking off.

She shrieked and retreated, her stinger twisting excitedly behind her. Dante reached up and grabbed his chin with his right hand, popping his stubbly mandible back into usage; rotating his jowl around to get it functioning again.

Biting stings of anger rocketed throughout his mouth, jabbing and stabbing electric bolts all along
the course of his jaw line structure. He rotated his left arm until the thing naturally clicked into place, annoying little ebbs of agony pulsing within his limb.

A dark essence simmered inside his core, Dante trying to push it down for it desired to mutilate with his increased injuries. At present, he can either try to retreat until his body calmed or use that misery to fuel his desire to end her. Both seemed like a sound idea; the latter would prove better results.

As his nerves bit at his sanity, he supported his weight on his right arm, looking at the mop of white hair moving too slowly to gather himself back to reality. Nero's unexpected groan distracted him, feeling his blood travel to his sleeping snake, changing into a somewhat stiffening rod.

Dante shook his noggin prior to any more useless thoughts polluting his mind, allowing her to strike again and kill them both.

"Love Planet, here I come."

In advance to telling the punk to move she leapt in front of him, within striking distance to behead the fledgling. With a spur-of-the-moment decision his right leg wrapped around Nero's shoulder, pressing him further into his manly apex to keep her from killing the teen.

Speeding bullets shot her milliseconds before she sliced Nero's head off, the teen's stifled yelps of alarm mixing in with the sound of pellets piercing into her stomach. The partial-hybrid thrashed about, trying to lift himself away from said place but Dante kept his leg firm.

"Mmante, met moff!" Nero's muffled demand went unanswered as the slugs rained down on the demoness. His arms found anchor on the veteran's knees, using those sturdy things to loosen himself from his grip. The elder saw a scaly arm glowing in bright intensity, releasing his leg to let the youngster fall onto his back.

Dante withdrew Rebellion with her distracted howls, penetrating the broadsword through her hide. Rebellion carried the she-fiend with enough force to pin her to the opposite wall, temporarily immobilizing his opponent.

She bucked under her newfound entrapment, trying to pull the damned sword out of her stomach. Satisfied with her temporary prison he stood up, glancing down into a flushed face, his body still aching from its enforced healing.

A stiffened, reddening face had trouble deciphering the elder's bewildering actions. "What did… Why… What the fuck?"

"It's called thinking on your feet." Dante spoke, quickly inhaling to calm his inner demon from breaking its cage.

"But why did you do… that?"

"Either your head would have rolled on the floor or have my balls smother your face. Pick a lesser evil." Dante said, giving the youth a long, hard look before making a 'come here' motion with his hand. Rebellion responded to her owner's call, along with the seething, half-naked scorpion.

He back-flipped over her head when she lunged at the halfling, kicking her in the nape of her neck for good measure. She staggered forward, coming under the duress of a whiplash. That child sidestepped her proximity, her tail descending upon him in a rapid curve.

Taking advantage of the fledgling's stunned state would assure her victory over the half-breed's
defeat, if only that brat didn't grab onto the ball-shaped part of her stinger with his scaly arm. Feeling the unwanted weight on her end piece, she flung the appendage in vicious jerks while the youth held on.

Nero whipped around like a haphazard rag doll, crashing into walls with brute force. The action picked up, leaving him little time to assess his emotions on... that incident.

His back met the living room table, breaking said furniture into a batch of varying splinters. Nero grabbed the biggest wooden stake and stabbed it through her stinger. A porcelain-like chunk of hide came off, exposing green, acidic liquid oozing out of the wound. A screaming wail flew out of her mouth while she spun, intending on delivering another right hook to the irritating rascal.

"Keep her busy for a sec." Dante searched around the couches for Ivory, side-stepping and dodging the titty queen's pincer.

Balled fingers traveled towards Nero, his devil bringer soon meeting her fist with equal velocity. His arm shook from the impact, sending trembling vibrations coursing through his body.

In direct view of her profile, he saw her pleasing features. Large almond eyes smiled in cruel rage into his own. Her perky breasts lifted with every breath, holding a soft jiggle to tempt his sight to stray. An airy, lilac scent questionably made his demon hum in appreciation, but the heavy perfume of cigarettes turned him away from appreciating her allure in full.

The teen's peripheral vision caught her pincer inching closer, ready to sneak a damaging blow to his person. Suspecting such an action he reared back, an enlarged blue specter of his demonic hand punching the titty lady square in the face.

She staggered, loosing her balance on the left side of her body. Angered at the cheap shot she threw Nero out of the living room window, straight into the heart of the commotion where the Cutlasses roamed.

Alerted to the new sound bestowed upon them, two of the Cutlasses made a beeline to the youngster while another disappeared into the ground; ripples of the earth forming beneath the youth.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:. Yeah, I couldn't end the action here, so I gave it another chapter. These 10 pages came easy for me, but why can't I do a term paper this big, lol. I tried to give a little hint of naughtiness for the both of them, [Dante actually] since some of ya'll wanted to see them rip into each other already (you perverts). XD

Also, I think it was Natgeo or Animal Planet or something, and they had these legless scorpions on there, and like they would 'hop' to get where they needed to go! It was the weirdest thing, so I put that idea in there.
"Nero!" Dante called after his companion, peeking out the window to see if the kid stood in one piece. She packed muscle behind her throw, an attack to look out for when he engaged in battle with her. In secrecy, he applauded her when she flung his virile ass outside; it saved him from dealing with those pesky fish-thingy's.

Now that Nero was in the backyard like he should have been originally, the brat could finish the job and tag-team with him later. It also gave Dante a chance to avoid odd stares or questions from the youth about the whole head-groping thing. She readied to kill the punk and he needed to protect him. Though his plan of execution... wasn't really the proper way to go about it.

The hybrid flipped over a couch and found Ivory, readying to grab the weapon when one of the she-demon's feet stepped on top of it. She thrusted her pincer forward, intending on decapitating him, Dante side-blocking her with his forearm.

Her stinger lunged to stab him in his chest but he caught the burden in his hand. A tiny jolt ran through his finger, remembering the stubborn sliver still embedded in his left forefinger. She thrashed about in violent vigor, eager to release the extra weight from her tail again. Dante wanted to know what her problem remained to be, and why she craved to kill him so badly, besides the obvious reason.

He jumped on her back, grabbing a fistful of her hair with one hand and holding strong to her stinger with the other, the demoness using her muscles to shake it out of his grip. Sun-kissed breasts jiggled with her every movement, Dante pointedly leaning over her shoulder to watch her breasts bounce without restraint.

Annoyance simmered in her being at his boyish impudence, snapping at the half-breed by throwing her arm over her shoulder, but he moved his head to evade her attack.

"Get off of me you in-breed!"

"Hey, watch that potty mouth of yours!"

"You disgrace the meaning of the word 'demon!'"

"Speaking of disgrace, did someone forget to get dressed this morning?"

"I will not be insulted by the son of a traitor!"

He scoffed. "Hey, newsflash sweet tits. I am not responsible for the shit my father did. Come to think it, if one guy made the world of Hell look like the greatest joke ever told, then I wouldn't mind taking some credit for it."

A deep, frustrated scream escaped her lungs, jumping towards the ceiling to make the elder collide with it. Before it connected to his back, he shoved the lady's stinger into her neck, kicking himself off of her just in time.

She hissed in pain, latching onto the ceiling while the hybrid dived to retrieve Ivory. He gave his platinum pride a once over, satisfied that it looked as strong as ever. He holstered his pistol while
Ms. Attitude leapt from the roof to smash the half-devil into oblivion. Dante somersaulted out of the way, unholstering both guns to aim at the scorpion lady when his feet touched the floor.

"So," the hunter started, twirling his prized, twin pistols around. "What should I call you while I'm working on sending you back to your shitty home? Mary, Carrie, she-bitch… Anna?"

"My name, you cursed half-breed, is Eusimalkia-Nge," she said, drawing every word as if her title should be said with great care. She flicked her hair over her left shoulder, producing an enigmatic air about her, as if royal blood flowed through her veins. She continued, "and it shall forever be remembered in the annals of Hell for I will be the one to end your existence!"

Nero shook his noggin, stabilizing himself from his dazed state. He guessed his dizziness fell upon him by way of those damned Soul Eaters, aided by that uppercut that sent him reeling… into Dante’s groin of all places.

How he landed in that position escaped his reasoning, even though she intended for it to happen as such. Still, what on earth possessed the elder to smother him in his lap? And if she geared to behead him, why didn't Dante kick him to safety?

The teen felt the terrain ripple, temporarily forgetting where he sat. His slow movements allowed the artificial monster to propel itself out of the ground, head-butting Nero dead on in his midsection. He snarled a shout, withdrawing his double revolver and shot once at the offending demon to buy him some time. A familiar clicking of his pistol let him know his stamina hit a snag.

Before his battle with Dante, he kept a hefty supply of ammunition on deck, eating through rounds to make sure his enemies fell to his gunslinger skills. Though after his bout with Dante, something within his right arm naturally transferred through his body to provide his double revolver with bullets through magic, making his shots much more potent. He lost his infinite ammo status when his fatigue arose.

While the other Cutlasses stalked their prey, the youth grabbed a magazine out of his jacket, scooting to one side as a Cutlass glided past him, leaving a deep groove in the earth's crust.

His right hand threw the munition in an arc above him, emptying the shells with his left. His human hand lifted Blue Rose to connect with the new ammo, each slug sliding perfectly into its designated slot. The earth rippled beneath him again, but he reached in with his devil bringer and snatched the flying trawl out of the hole.

He stood up and swung the goblin four times before launching the demon into its brethren. The next moron nearest to him received a similar fate; it whirled the same as he did the bait before, throwing it into its buddies.

The youngster rose too soon, a heavy sensation pressuring his knees to buckle. His endurance slowly gave way to exhaustion, not having enough to call his demonic limb to offer the magical bullets for his pistol, yet he would be damned if he would quit because his stamina lacked drive.

An accursed fish disappeared into the soil, its fin glowing a bright red. Three more Cutlasses circled him, seemingly to provide cover for the one submerged into the earth. Fired shots echoed around him, the ghostly specter of his right arm reaching for a selected target, but the sly fucker feigned and banked to the left. While he busied himself with the lone Cutlass, the underground fish shot out of the dusty turf and up into the air, taking Nero along with it.

A strained scream tore through his lungs after another head butt caught him in his stomach, landing
hard before languidly rolling back onto his feet. His endurance couldn't sustain the weakness
washing over him, almost wishing those Cutlasses were Dante so he can chop him into pieces. He
hoped that dark-pink, coat wearing bastard got his ass sautéed by that witch.

*Stop these foolish thoughts. You want him.*

―That's it!― Nero roared, rage fueling his body where his energy ran out. He charged up Blue Rose
and shot the quarry that sent him soaring. The bullets struck the artificial-fish into its side, stunned
from the sudden impact laying flat on the terrain, finding itself sailing towards the angry human-
demon.

Tired muscles lifted Red Queen over his head and slammed into it, taking minimal glee in
thrashing the foe, though a little faster and with more power. Repeatedly the action brought a small
smile upon his face, discovering ways to release his pent-up anger on the offending creature.
Tortured screams ripped from the fish's mouth as Nero smashed into its core; the fiend stuck
between the slam of the sword and the ground.

*Shouldn't you be making something else bounce?*

―Shut up!― Nero let out a thunderous roar, snagging the next artificial-fish to him, gripping its fin
with his devil bringer. He jumped on top of the hexed sushi to pull its flipper backwards, intending
on snapping its neck in agonizing pain.

The Cutlass thrashed its tail, arms flailing in distress, screeching its anguish the further the teen
pulled in reverse. Its brethren heard its cry, vanishing into the ground and catapulting in the air a
moment later, planning to crash down with their razor-sharp fins. Nero jerked his scaly arm,
successfully breaking the spine of the inbred fish, back-flipping in time to see the airborne freaks
sink into the earth.

Eight blue slender, triangle-shaped tentacles emerged beneath the youth; the ridges glowing
brightly to rival Nero's own right hand. The youngster stood in a trance in the middle of the odd
object before immediately leaping to the side, avoiding the thing swallowing him whole.

"What the hell?" The partial-hybrid scrunched his face as the strips came up from its lanky shape
to form an ugly mug; minus a mouth because the mouth was the… head. Large crimson eyes
glared at Nero before sinking underneath the damp, brown surface again.

Dante said these things appeared under him every few seconds after he defeated that plant lady in
the Mitis forest in Fortuna. Perhaps they didn't follow the teen because he didn't kill that she-viper
in the woodlands, but how come they were here now?

*Do not let it swallow you. That is your position for him.*

Salmon-pink labiums puckered to retort something smart to his inner devil when another Cutlass
knocked him in the spine, landing him in front of the gray fountain the Cutlasses surrounded
earlier. Red Queen saved him from further bruising his injured back after spending most of the
morning falling on it.

Cerulean eyes peered up onto the effigy, entranced that such a thing stood out here in the middle of
nowhere. The woman held her hands up, shielding her face away from cloaked savages aimed to
swipe at her with its scythe; ugly things looking like that troll from the movie obsessed with some
gold ring.

Two scythes curved in an arc to swing down onto her posterior. The last ghoul squatted near her
legs, its mouth lined with rows of sharp, decaying teeth positioned to take a chunk out of her. Clenched teeth and down-turned lips told of her agony, pain, and fear, and if he squinted hard enough he swore he saw clear streaks trailing over her cheeks.

As sick as it may have sounded, he admitted to the beauty of the beautiful yet grotesque formation, like it belonged in a museum representing some great tragedy... minus the gold knife sticking from her chest.

He lifted to rest on his haunches, smelling thick fumes of copper, seeing, in fact, dark red trails gliding down her back. It couldn't be possible for the effigy to bleed, but the pose seemed so life-like...

Jean-clad leg muscles bunched together to hop into the air before the multi-legged creature connected its limbs to form that hideous mug again. Nero spotted the swirling fish above and fired several rounds into it; the live sushi falling onto its side from lead overdose.

Gathering magical energy beneath his feet he double-jumped, snatching the fish-demon along with him, descending to the ground shortly after with it in his right hand. Twirling the accursed around topped his agenda when that damned blue monster showed up underneath him again. He had to let the sea critter go, dodging yet another chance at being swallowed.

"How fucking many are there!" he snarled, his devil bringer twitching to unleash the raw power lying dormant within the scaly armor. Charging up Blue Rose to the max, he fired off charged bullets, regaining his footing from the revolver's recoil. The Fault retreated too slowly, having two sets of slugs bust a hole open into its skull before it sank dead into the earth.

"That's what'cha get for not using your 'head' buddy," Nero allowed himself to laugh at his own corny joke, but would've laughed longer if the other Cutlass ceased to interrupt him.

A fin emblazoned in red shot off in Nero's direction, intent to slice the partial-devil in half. The young hunter skidded backwards, unholstering his sword to rev up the handle; pivoting on his right foot to twirl Red Queen at an angle to counter the attack. The demon squealed in agony, flames engulfed its flesh in wicked delight; the fire searing and melting its form into nothing. Alert pools of baby blue irises saw the last fish disappearing and reappeared in a snake-like pattern.

The youth's enthusiasm to see these creatures dead fueled his actions, sensing his body catch up to his movements. His belly held no food inside, running on fumes since this morning. As if to insult his memory, he remembered telling the chief he should have ate instead of playing sleep at his desk; Nero's tummy grumbling to demand nourishment. Now.

His stomach could wait; he had one more to eviscerate.

The devil bringer drove forward to catch the trawl in its clutches... surprisingly it worked. It didn't evade his grasp or swivel around; might have taken damage earlier in the tussle.

Two quick slashes hit the demon with his trusted sword and paused, drawing his internal energy to finish the Cutlass and re-group with Dante's bossy ass.

Challenging his authority is futile.

The annoyed hellion finished the rapid carving to the damned fish in anger, right hand and knee resting on the ground from the rough force of the swings. No logical explanation came forth to the reason of his inner nightmare sputtering out shit like that. He'll have sex with Kyrie when they were both ready, so what the hell was its problem?
Some indescribable sensation coursed through his being; the dizzy feeling repossessed his attention. His insides tumbled around back and forth, up and down, sideways and diagonally; allowing him to perceive the effects his outside movements bore on his overall physiological being.

Warm, chunky liquid shot up his windpipe to eject the contents through his mouth. The thick, off-white innards held the meal, or lack thereof, that had not quite settled in the youngster's stomach.

Dante's repeated consumption of pizza led Nero to refute the food, yet his laziness triumphed over his need to go out and get food, seeing how Dante happily shared the grub with him.

"Anybody want calamari?" Nero brought his shaky human hand up to wipe his lips. Taking a nap appealed to him… had it not been for eight slender blue ridges encircling him on each side.

"Aw, fuck me!"

*There is no enjoyment to be had from that.*

"Aw… fuck me!" Dante grimaced. "How the hell am I supposed to remember that?"

"It sounds pleasant on your dying breath."

Eusimalkia charged the veteran but he sidestepped her attack, bashing her in her nape with the butt of Rebellion. She flogged her tail, breaking tables and whacking down pictures, striving to stab the halfling.

She spun around, swinging her human hand to punch the mongrel only to find him missing. Electricity crackled, lifting the hairs on her arms, yet she could not tell where the sound originated. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a red line speeding towards her.

The Hell-cat jumped over the energy, unsuccessful to determine where the half-breed had gone. She landed on the ground, narrowed eyes omitted to see the second wave of pure bedeviled magic, smacking her along her right side, temporarily knocking her down. The third wave damaged the exposed meat on her end piece, weakening her porcelain-like armor.

Dante landed in front of the demoness, seeing no reason to let her live, else she escapes and starts her “Sparda” bullshit again; readying Rebellion to cleave her head.

In the blink of an eye she twirled, spraying green, acidic liquid from her mouth across the hunter's face. Dante hissed and recoiled, the toxin eating away at his skin, baring blood and muscle on his chiseled left cheek. He moved from the vapors rising from the acid, registering violent spasms of pain originate from his already sore jaw.

It didn't click in his mind when his back hit the hardened clay outside, just the aggressive spikes piercing his chin.

Calm breaths stole his focus, taming his dark side from breaking free from his imprisonment. How strange, he thought, to want to shred this witch to pieces after she punched him only a couple times. It wasn't often that his demon clamored to get out of its confinement against such a weak enemy.

The she-hell looked out the window, the demons once swiveling the fountain diminished thanks to that childish wretch. Alas, the ritualistic rights to her ascension had faltered, by conventional means.
The coveted prize for Queen of the Spirits maintained something that few knew about; more or less able to achieve. To gain the desired crown, she had to find Aventurine gemstones, find a solicitor of the dark arts to poison them, and rectify fountains to suck the souls of the fated into the statues. With this newfound ability, she had enough power to raise a hellish, undead army of the unrighteously damned, shielding this pathetic world in unlimited darkness.

Finding a curator of black magic was the easy part.

An understudy of a now-dead scientist heard of her through the infernal community, seeking to become like her in exchange for the information she sought.

Finding a virgin was the hardest part for the statue.

Demons flock to a virgin's wholesome scent, an insatiable urge to defile their unsullied and innocent essence drew the condemned to them.

With the poisoned gemstone inside a blade, the demoness stabbed the virtuous girl and... taunted the demons by dragging the damsel near them. The virgin's pure nectar and savory blood wafted in the air, making the bloodthirsty creatures increase their efforts to have her. The evil stone's magic worked, withdrawing what puny auras the Hellish monsters called souls had and gathered in the gem. Then the statuette formed, freezing them into their final movement of action.

Twelve fountains needed to erect for the ritual. When all twelve stood strong she would chant a spell, opening a tunnel in which the souls would enter her body, claiming her status as a rightful queen.

Regrettably, this idiotic, buxom blonde and some onerous, dark-haired human destroyed all her fountains. After months of planning, searching, and finding it was a lost cause.

Yet she constructed a fail safe in case of such an event.

If she could get her hands on a powerful demon, stab him with the poisoned knife then devour his heart, the process can be saved. On this plane there was only one who fit the bill, protecting those weaker than him with the strong soul he harvested.

His name rung in the deepest annals of the Underworld, able to seal the devil prince Mundus away but where that gloating tyrant failed, she would succeed. The devil prince lived in his foolishness, believing his arrogance would best the son of Sparda.

Through a connected string of concealed networking did she discover his place of business, and obtained his number, formulating a quick plan.

"It must wreak your pitiful heart when you can't save a poor, insignificant human," she boasted, hopping outside the window to smell the scent of dead, degenerative aura.

The red hunter recovered from the impact, staying away from her before he unleashed the beast—free of reign.

"Don't you have a big enough head to realize that whatever it is—" Dante scrunched his eyes closed with his fingers, opening them to survey the area; barely noticing a splotch of white locks at the opposite end of the field hacking at his favorite friends, "—you're up to ain't gonna work? You dumbasses keep doing the same shit expecting different results."

Eusimalkia's finger pointed to the statue, walking her way closer to him.
"Elisa Carmen. Twenty-two years of age. 5'11. Curvaceous and slim. Creamy hazelnut complexion… sacrificial virgin." The she-scorpion read facts on the woman like she called it off a paper, smoothing her hair over from its ruffled state.

Dante solidified his movements at her last phrase, knitting his eyebrows in confusion. The red one looked over to the figure and saw the four brutes attacking what appeared to be the young girl. So this the statue she needed to complete her worthless quest for dominance?

Devils toiling with the innocent and weak soon joined those they murdered by his might.

Virgins had targets painted on their backs, attracting unwanted attention from the damned. Depending on what devil it attracted, a virgin's option for sacrifice, sexual gratification, dismemberment or a breeding host increased over a random human a monster tormented. Thanks to his efforts of keeping the demonic numbers low it didn't happen, much.

She continued. "Since your partner has killed off my quarry, I have to attain my power through other means."

The half-hell and the vixen circled each other; Dante with the look of cool indifference on his face and the she-scorpion smirking in all her glory.

"In order to create a fountain like that, you have to summon these lifeless rascals and trick them into sacrificing their souls to make it work. But I am low on time and patience. So I decided to go with the easier route. I devour your heart, I become a true queen, so let's make this so, shall we?"

She held out her palm, the knife once sticking inside the girl's bosom flew into her human hand. He glanced behind him, whispers of distorted screams filling the air before the fountain collapsed, dissolving into dark-gray sand.

Dante breathed in deeply, stretching out the muscles in his neck, gaining a hold of his devil side to stop him from coming through and slaughtering her to pieces. It tempted him to let it out, to pull her heart out and watch her watch him feast on her soul. But he couldn't ingest something so foul, it was hardly anything to take joy in.

She wasn't worth it.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The she-witch's name (Eusimalkia-Nge) is pronounced U-see-mal-key-yaa-ne-Gee. It's Swahili for "Dark Scorpion Queen" or "Queen of the Dark Scorpions." I'm sorry if any of you broke your tongues trying to pronounce her name, lol. She wasn't supposed to have that big of a role, but it just turned out that way.

I just had to put the Faults in there because they make Dante's life a living nightmare in the game. I noticed they don't follow Nero in DMC4, probably because the Hell Gate supplied magical energy and when Dante destroyed it they sought more energy.

I'll see you guys again in a few days! :D
And Action, No Wait, Cut! Pt. 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Those who contracted their heightened *gifts* through unjustified methods lived in blissful ignorance. He lost count of the people he overturned for their quest of power through unrighteous, demonic gains.

Dante had to remind himself how thin a line separated mortals and devils. Mortals lust after dominance, achieving their means by becoming a concubine of some devil to obtain a piece of that sovereignty. They fixated on the might they would receive; never the consequences they endured to inherit those privileges.

Hellions should have known better than to fiddle with humans. After all the years of the veteran slaying down the ones to leave in remembrance, they couldn't take the hint?

Contracting man to do their bidding ended in disaster; usually with Dante having to kill their 'boss', leaving the humans adrift with their position of newfound supremacy. Those converted souls gained unpaid employment when Dante wanted intel from them, so they posed little trouble.

Many devils figure by throwing a little money at humans will align the mortals to the dark side, turning against their own kind for selfish greed. Acting on this revelation summoned Dante to embrace his baser instincts so heartily, as he planned on executing in a moment.

She squatted low, legs strong and bent to the ground, her tail swishing behind her. The coiled muscles released their hold, spinning around to hurl towards the slayer. Dante called forth a magical barrier, royally blocking the attack, watching Eusimalkia jerk from the sudden stoppage. Her human hand thrust forth to stab at the bastard, but he vanished in front of her hazel eyes.

Auburn-red locks hurled around her face, searching for him just as the hybrid appeared in front of her. He unsheathed Rebellion, spinning the sword around like a vertical windmill into her midsection.

The heavy blade propelled her upwards from the forceful strength of the sword, the hunter staying close upon her. In her uproot to the sky, bales of crimson coated his eyes, her sight soon replaced by rapid blurs of metallic gray. Four, sharp aerial swipes tore at the woman's midsection, finishing the stylistic move by slamming Rebellion on top of her head.

The she-scorpion hissed in pain upon descending to the earth, losing her grip on the knife. A keen sound of whipping air directed her attention to the ground, seeing the half-breed in a slight crouch, his broadsword gripped tightly by both hands. He appeared to take a form of a batter...

Dante channeled his infernal energy into his sword, waiting in timid patience to turn that tramp into a home-run hit.

Unfortunately, his target fled his sight, hard mounds of rocks landed upon his shoulder to dig their way underneath his red trench. The she-scorpion's litter had gathered from the house, distracting him from mauling the bitch apart to bits and pieces.

The little grunts hopped and climbed over him, intent to cover for their queen. His forefinger ebbed in small sprouts of pain, having to curl his hand around the creatures to throw them off. Dante grunted, rational thinking coming back to his mind to get that damn thing out of his trigger finger.
Eusimalkia raised herself on weary legs from the brief, but vicious onslaught. She contained her happiness for her children kept the hunter busy, formulating a plan to kill him. She took a moment to study his gestures, seeing how his anger rose to crush her brood in his hands.

Could it be that a poisonous shard embedded itself in the skin of the half-inbreed? She was so preoccupied in trying to kill him she didn't think to test that. The she-scorpion smiled in wicked mirth, now presenting the time for the half-bastard to see her powers.

She summoned energy deep within her core, lifting her human hand in a graceful manner to beckon the halfling to her.

A tingling sensation originated in the hunter's stabbed finger, spreading throughout his arm and through his physique. His movements desisted, feeling heavily strapped down by invisible shackles. He stood up straight with his arms slightly to his side, lifted off the ground as he came closer to her. The red around the rim of his irises ceased to return to its natural color.

A honeyed glow kissed her complexion in part to the golden rays of the late afternoon sky, to the upper portion of her body anyway. Her eyes beheld a sinister profile, the shine from the sun casting this eerie look to her. Sad really, it was such a shame that sexy babes carried homicidal tendencies.

His air-journey halted in front of her, her exposed bosoms pushed up seductively against Dante's rock hard chest.

"Why do you defend those who are defenseless and weak? Why not take the power you use to protect others and use it to rule with an iron fist?"

"You have a lot to learn about me woman," Dante said, voice clipped and teeth gritted to emphasize his point. "I wouldn't need to protect humans if bastards like you didn't fuck with them in the first place."

The she-devil smiled, taking in his handsome profile and stunning demonic eyes. She leaned towards him to run her lips over to his ear. "Imagine the power you would have if you embraced everything you are-"

"I embrace everything I am, every damn day. Otherwise, I couldn't vanquish assholes like you for a living."

A thin tongue licked the outer shell of his ear, his body stiffening while she laughed at his vulnerability. Without warning, she slapped him across the jaw with her pincer, a forceful whiplash gained from the strength of it.

The Hell-cat used her human hand to make the bastard face her, grabbing his chin. Elongated canines graced his mouth with a bloodied bottom lip, sealing from the place of impact. Such a shame, and a rarity in itself, to have such a beautiful man forsake his own kind to protect humans. Was Hell really so bad that he wanted to stay on the surface world, not being able to live freely, living under human codes and ethics?

"Aw, you would fit the perfect package of Hell's King; all powerful. Strong. Devoted to destruction to whoever causes it. Do you want to turn that down just to side with mortals?" she pointed to where the fountain once stood.

Little did she know it was that same quest for power that befell his beloved brother. Did she think he would follow in the same path? Those same monsters murdered his mother in cold blood because they had a chip on their shoulder for what his father did.
"I'm not siding with anyone. I take great pleasure in disturbing those who disturb the peace, human or not."

"Straddling the fence is no way to live." Eusimalkia drew her lips over the hybrid's jaw line, tracing the angular shape until her lips ghosted over his. Slim fingers slid through soft white locks, resting her arm on his shoulder, her finger beckoning to the knife. A throaty squeal bubbled in her throat when the half-breed bit down onto her juicy labiums, fangs piercing into her flesh, blood trickling down both chins. She nearly tore her lips from his hold.

Infuriated by his insolence, the knife flew into her hand, readying to stab him. In an unforeseen alert, a hard impact hit her head from behind, the uncontrolled reflex made her hand wave, sending Dante flying somewhere into the house.

The young hellion mustered what feeble strength he had and rolled from the Fault. His stomach cramped with the sudden movement, sitting on his haunches to clutch his side in strain. Nero looked around the field, seeing if any more monsters needed killing before he regrouped with the veteran.

Fortunately, the only underworld-bred assholes left were those gorging faces. His eyes ceased their roaming when he recognized the hybrid in a wide-legged stance, as if frozen... or doing one of his crazy combat moves, yet his initial assumption proved correct. “That's some kind of power she has.”

The veteran floated towards her in that strange position. Clearly, her powers extended beyond punching and clawing her way to get by. The inner devil belonging to Nero growled in irritation, viewing the she-fiend pushing her ample breasts against Dante's chest. Nero would've laughed at the scene; women must've had a natural attraction to the red hunter.

On older missions he tagged along, Nero witnessed women fake their 'falls' and 'faints' into the dope's arms. Some pretended to faint (for whatever reason they did it) just to be carried in his biceps. A few gratefully hugged the man in a snug hold, not wanting to let go, in which he had to swoop in and save the hybrid from their clutches.

How hard is it for Dante to say no to females? Then again, he guessed the elder did it to gain a few bucks alongside the job's payment. Still, Nero couldn't fathom why he felt better after he got the veteran away from them. Like a tight weight settled in his gut when they clung to him.

Jean-clad legs pumped in fury to reach Dante. He glanced over his shoulder while he jogged, seeing multiple blue faces appear right after his foot touched the earth. Where in the hell did those things come from in the first place, and why are they so intent on devouring him instead of Dante? Upon his recollection, he didn't kill any psychotic plant lady.

While lost in his thoughts, he caught sight of the raving she-bitch face to face with the crimson hunter, lips pressing seconds away from Dante's plush ones.

*Hell will boil over if she kisses him.*

The youngster ignored the irritating voice, producing a better reason to save him—she might have had a poisonous kiss and the hybrid would be no good to him if he was unconscious or dead. Nevertheless, he did not miss the unrecognizable surge dispersing throughout his body when Dante took the initiative and bit the devil on her peckers.

Nero's first reaction registered a love bite, seeing how he loved to flirt with practically any
attractive woman he came into contact with. But the heated fire in his eyes told a different story, along with the impressive amount of blood dripping down both of their chins. Nero caught the brief look in the chieftain's crimson-hued eyes; a silent exchange shared between the two when out of each other's immediate reach.

He increased his foothold, seeing a silver glint sparkle in the sun's rays, watching her raise a knife at the same time he gathered the forward momentum in his legs. Agile legs pushed off the ground to deliver a dropkick to the she-bitch.

Still, it would have been better if she turned around to take the full throttle of the kick.

Eusimalkia reeled forward, dazed by the sudden attack... with Dante flying into the house. Whoops.

Her movements stilled when a ghostly blue devil arm snagged her tail, feeling weightless then crashing into the ground. Nero yanked her towards him, using his human hand to grab the wrist of her pincer, repeatedly connecting his fist to her face like a paddle ball with his devil bringer.

A soured visage contorted in a series of twisted expressions, determined to end her existence so he could go home and get some grub. Nero punched her a final time, blood marring her pleasant features before sending her sprawling a few feet away, sensing hard mounds crawl over him in rapid haste.

"Who would be desperate enough to knock you up?" Nero shouted, grabbing her brood and throwing them off him. He withdrew Blue Rose from his holster, shooting a few that tried to pounce on him. The she-scorpion threw a guttural growl his way, getting up with a hardened scowl on her face.

"And who is he?" She asked, pointing her claw to where she sent Dante seconds before. "Your idol? Is his outlandish style the craze these days?" She returned her insult with equal vigor, the dropped knife flying back into her hand.

The partial-hybrid lifted his head back and giggled, whether due to what she said or because the delusional effects began to take over he wasn't sure. "Why would skinning a cow then dying it dark pink ever be a trend?"

No sooner than he uttered those words he flinched from the instant burn in his neck, reaching up to grab the protruding shard too late. His body stilled, muscles and tendons locking, unwillingly rising off the ground to float towards her. In a fitting gesture to mock his weakness, she clenched and unclenched her pincer, readying the large weapon to decapitate the young hunter.

He gritted his teeth, commanding his muscles to respond to the nerve signals, dropping Red Queen some meters behind him.

"Is that fear I see in your eyes?" she taunted, pressing her lips together to curve into a wicked smile.

The teen's face soured, bristled over her assumption that she frightened him, granted he couldn't do much but that was besides the point. The fragment embedded in the back of his neck prevented him from triggering, otherwise he would have done it the minute he felt the shard pierce his skin.

His head rested between the sharp ridges of her claw, resistant cerulean blues blazing holes through her hazel ones. The spiked rims inched closer to his neck, letting the spikes stab his throat, drawing small rivulets of blood.

"Drop him." The unnaturally chilled tone sounded off behind her. Eusimalkia hushed at the voice, while a noticeable shudder went down Nero's spine.
Hmm, shouldn't their reactions be reversed?

Neither demon sensed his presence, able to sneak upon them undetected. Her head rotated towards him, taking in his stiff, erect posture with his hands positioned to his back. Something about his stance bothered him.

"Drop him. On the ground. Alive."

The partial-demon saw the barely visible twitch of the veteran's right eye, a hard shade of red encircling the pupil to signify his anger. He supposed Dante wanted him a safe distance away before he butchered her senseless.

Salmon-tinted lips formed to say something snippy to her (and Dante for taking his time) but the combination of blood loss, hunger pangs, explosions, and... smothered face-sitting left Nero exhausted; rational thinking rescuing him, saying to let the elder finish her off. He didn't want to get in the way, especially with the evil look Dante sported.

"What will you give me in return?" she cooed, dangling Nero in her claw inches above the ground.

"A kiss."

The fuck?

She wouldn't ponder such a request, nor will she be that dumb to even think about it. Didn't she have it in her head that when she dropped him, Dante would disembowel her without a second glance. But mostly... what the fuck? Really, a kiss? Out of everything he might have said, he went with a kiss?

"After your little love nip earlier? Yeah right, what do you think I am, stupid?"

The youth, with his increasing delirium, nearly mouthed the word “yes” yet decided against it.

"You kill him, you're dead."

She scoffed, moving to tighten her pincer. "And if I don't?"

"You get me."

"Despite what I've told you?"

"Yes."

"And if I kill you?"

"Just don't come after him."

"Such a sacrifice you're willing to make..." Eusimalkia searched in the half-breed's eyes, searching for any hint of trickery.

Lines appeared between Nero's eyebrows, staring at her as if she went insane. Did Dante hold a weapon behind his back or is he feeling unwell? On the other hand, the thought lingered of the hybrid putting himself in harm's way so the teen can escape. True, he was in a bit of a jam but why didn't Dante sneak up on her and chop her arm off or something? It would have been much easier than all this negotiating crap.

The youth's words echoed in his brain from earlier with a snide vengeance, telling the elder he
could take care of himself and how he didn't need looking after. He shoved those haunting phrases to the deepest part of his mind. His subconscious didn't need to admonish him like a child.

Slow steps advanced to reach the halfling with the brat in tow, deciding to play it smart and keep the child hostage if the bastard did something sneaky. Common sense told her to kill the hunter in such a proximity, but curiosity said to see what he offered. This was after all, her last chance to attain power. Killing the rascal would enrage him further, his skills speaking of the damage immediate to come to her.

In a snap decision Dante pressed his lips to hers, eliciting a sudden squeak from her, a cool glare looking directly to Nero.

The teenager mentioned he never wanted to have the man's hateful stare upon him again, however this time it felt like he communicated to him in silence. The worst would be over or maybe it warned that some distance would inject itself between them.

She released Nero from her clutches, the fledgling landing on his side in a none-too-graceful fashion with his blue friend appearing underneath him. Her human hand buried itself in the crossbreed's white locks, deepening the kiss after the mongrel relaxed.

Soft hues of periwinkles lessened their pointed focus, redirecting his demonic energy into Rebellion. His hands felt cold and slippery, a hesitant nod given to Nero because he didn't know if his next action should help the teen or not.

Dante had his fair share of Faults in Fortuna's forest, knowing their problematic and irritating strategies. On his air journey from Miss Telekinetic, he noticed the brat running away from them out the corner of his eye.

"You can either thank or kill me later, kid," Dante thought in uncertainty.

The chieftain unsheathed his double-edged weapon in his right hand, feeling the she-bitch tense before he forcefully thrusted the sword in Nero's rib cage, the blade sliding easily through the youth's toned chest. Rebellion left a long dirt trail, sending Nero back on through the living room window as the Fault closed up it's... legs, leaving empty-handed.

The elder knew of the punk's temporary incompetence, observing his bloodied, beaten up state to dodge the hag so he thought of something quick to help the little guy out. He hoped, for both their benefits, that his sword refrained from damaging the teen permanently.

She broke off the kiss first, surprised that the hybrid harmed his partner. Yet did it mean the halfling changed tactics or he saved the brat from death?

"You've switched sides?" An eyebrow raised, gripping the knife still clutched in her hand, away from his peripheral vision.

"Maybe, have you?"

"I don't think I will, sweetheart." The demomess brought her fist forth, the blade connecting to a hard surface above his heart.

A thick, strained scream rippled through his lungs, on the verge of tears when the aches tore through his body. Blood seeped through his chest, mixing with the red of his sweater. His vision blurred, burning from the pain coursing through him.
When that dipshit Agnus pricked him in the same spot he functioned at full capacity, but he closed in at running on empty since this morning. Perhaps the magical energy invested into the sword crippled him.

Frail whimpers sprinkled his voice while lifting his devil hand to the back of his neck where the shard rested. He yanked out the portion, dropping his arm on the side of him, the fragment dropped onto the floor. The black piece held strange, white demonic-looking symbols carved on one side. Maybe that's why he couldn't trigger; it may have held dormant poison or something.

Nero invoked his inner strength to summon Yamato, hoping to at least heal from the large hole tearing his rib cage from the veteran's blade. Upon brief reflection, he got pierced through the chest by the elder. Not in the same aspect as the case in Fortuna, but close to it.

No sudden burst of magical stamina simmered through his limbs. His throat burned with intensity; the lack of oxygen forcing his lungs to expand to inhale more air in his already weakened state.

He grew accustomed to his damned nature the more he utilized it. Out of all the times he used his demonic side when his ass got handed to him, which wasn't often, why wasn't his devil side coming into the limelight? It didn't stop him before when Agnus plunged that bird-sword in him, so what stopped him now? Did this transpire because of Dante's weapon? Is it a demon inhibitor or something?

As if on cue, the bedeviled claymore retreated from within him, falling to the ground with a sprout of vigor filling his veins. Yamato's vibrations nourished him with rich, pure demonic energy, his injury mending itself together; the bones, tendons and muscles merging. Invisible strings pulled him to his feet like a puppet, the urge to reunite with the conflict motivated Nero to ram Yamato up Dante's stubborn ass.

Nero was more than capable of moving out of the way from being swallowed whole by that face. Why didn't Dante say anything? 'Sorry, kid.' 'Head's up, kid.' 'This is gonna sting, kid.' Any of those sayings would have sufficed plenty.

A legitimate notion occurred that the youth couldn't dodge the hungry demon in time, and what the veteran did nested on the side of reason. Another thought commenced at the possibility of Nero meeting his unjustifiable end at the hand, or claw, of a rather disturbed she-bitch, and he should actually thank Dante for saving his ass.

He didn't make everyday mistakes, tougher, smarter devils had the strength to inflict a few bruises on his person and he watched for that.

He didn't know the right words to describe this day. Starting with Dante's joke, his defamatory word, the anger shared between the two, and rolling on from then on out confused him. Neither man liked having their ego bruised by the other if it wasn't necessary, and Nero's leaned heavily on a crutch.

That didn't sit too well with him.

An envious aura swelled within his being, feeling an urge to send a 'fuck you' to Dante for the way he handled this situation. It would have been so much easier if they hacked shit to pieces instead of all this 'planning' bullshit.

A surge of energy flourished inside him, holding a crouched, poised stance as Yamato flew out in an arc, sending a wave of blue demonic spirit towards the barbarians outside. He cared not for who the wave hit, preferring to smack that she-devil.
The dark magic invigorating Nero dissipated, feeling strong enough to dig through the fridge in search of a quick bite... or to rest on the couch. A heavy inhale centered his shaky form, turning the cream Lay-Z-Boy armchair over to plop down in it.

He reflected upon the day's affairs, rubbing over his chest where the hole once lied, looking out the broken window to see the chief whip out a pair of funky looking scissors. Well, at least he presumed they looked like scissors.

Challenges kept his senses sharp, preserving the need to prove his worth over whatever obstacle stood in his way physically. Unfortunately, this day puzzled him on a mental level; the stabbing incident coming forth in his mind expressed the reason it endured so mystifying.

The negative zeal Dante wore on him like a second skin returned with a vengeance. Alas, with Rebellion thrusted in him that energy coating his aura zoned in on the lady. The scene of their entangled lips ran closer to a kiss of death than anything flirtatious. He surmised that the smooch doubled as a distraction to move aside while Dante finished her off.

By the way she attacked the veteran and brushed the youngster off created the impression that the red hunter had a price on his head. But a pushover he harbored no traits of, even if the fight summoned the hybrid only.

The desire to go back outside to prove to both knuckle-heads his ability to hang in battle with or without the man's help nudged him on. He saw the blue wave closing in on the two barbarians, his legs lengthening to join them... but they walked elsewhere instead, further driven by the growls his stomach emitted.

The red devil hunter strove to maintain a leveled head during his fight with her but something in him broke, reaching deep into his inner core, calling the dark essence nestled with the urge to destroy.

It filled him with a delicious, archaic energy. Red electricity enveloped his entire body, cackling with unbridled pulses with his human mold changing into thickened armor. His coat transformed into red scales, his coattails flaring out into wings with yellow veins pulsing inside the flappers. Turbulent, lemon-hued eyes smiled in hated mirth, sharpened rows of teeth glistening in promise of savage violence.

The shock wave stunned her, recoiling like a cat touching water. A roundhouse kick to the side of her face knocked her off balance, sending her soaring in the air, tumbling hard in the earth. The half-devil brought forth his large fists, showcasing a pair of black and gold tofana scissors over each hand, bending into a fighting stance.

"Get up. Just try and kill me," Dante's voice reverberated in a grim taunt.

"You fucker, you lied!" Her eyes landed upon his altered form, radiating power beyond anything she could have fathomed him to have in his control.

"Goes to show you can never trust a devil." He jeered, ready to hear her cry and scream, images of her mutilated body tickling his imagination. "And I said you could get me, not have me," his distorted voice growled.

Through with the distractions and the taunting, Eusimalkia launched a forward charge, utilizing the momentum to try to tackle him. Dante advanced at the same time, sliding underneath the Scorpion Queen at the last second; using the tofana on his left hand to cut the underside of her belly,
grabbing her rear foot on the right. Seeing her hideous, red-painted toes, he decided to get rid of it.

The weapon cleaved her back hoof from its attachment.

Misery laced her howls, whipping her tail around to impale him only to finish losing the familiar feeling in her feet, Dante had sliced those off too. Blocked punches, evaded stinger attacks, and side-stepped maneuvers left Eusimalkia handicapped, her feet reduced to bloody stumps after the half-hell flowed into each crouched attack.

The Hell-cat panted in heavy breaths, worry creeping onto her features, realizing the ease of how his vicious nature struck her in fury. Dammit, she knew he had a trick up his sleeve; blinded by her rush to complete the ritual instead of reading him further. Such a stupid move on her part.

She counter-attacked his every hit, but his damned side swiftly met her blow for blow. Acid sprouted in a line towards him yet her head reeled back, three-clawed toes striking her under her chin. The she-devil bit through the pain ripping through her, thrusting the knife forward.

A toughened shell connected to the steel, breaking the blade in half in her drive to stab his heart.

The most sensible thing to do occupied her hasty retreat and return with some added help... and a stronger weapon. Stunned from the ineffective knife, she felt a surge of spiking torment emanating from her tail; the ground sizzled behind her, sensing a lightness registering toward the rear of her body.

The bastard cut off her stinger.

Frustration prickled her face from the wounds inflicted upon her. She heard rumors that the sons of Sparda are tough little bastards to exterminate when focused on a target, and she tasted a raw sample of the rage they harbored.

It would bring her satisfaction the world over if she could take his head and devour it.

Remembering the shard he had flinched from earlier, she lifted her hand to stop the hunter. Not knowing when he reverted into his human form, he took her wrist, yanking her towards him in a possessive fashion and kissed the back of it in a gentlemanly gesture, drawing forth the tofana scissors and cutting off the appendage.

Eusimalkia screamed like a rabid cat, thrashing around her pincer in a haphazard manner, intent on landing any kind of punch on her smiling attacker.

He steadied himself, forcing his devil back into its cage before it finished savoring its meal. It rattled and thrashed in its prison, demanding to cleave at her until she remained a bloody stump of her former self. But it wasn't necessary.

She had nothing left to fight with.

"Throwing in the white towel already? I haven't even got my worth in yet," Dante remarked in a snide tone. He stood in front of her, taking in her messy mane, bloodied face and swollen lips.

“You wretched scum!” she growled, saliva forming to pool out her mouth. She did not come this far, on the verge of tasting victory, just to fail. She couldn't allow it. If she can retreat to rejuvenate and come back, she should not disappoint herself.

Only the son of Sparda didn't seem too keen on letting her go.
"I refuse to fall before you—"

"Yet you ain't necessarily standing either," the veteran gloated, unaware of the evasive maneuver she conjured.

"You think you... have it so... easy, don't you?" A scratched throat wheezed out her words with force; using what weak strength she had left to summon a portal to a secret location she guaranteed would heal her. "Always believing that... you're unstoppable and you... can't be defeated. I grow weary... of the talk surrounding you."

The red hunter noticed a wavy-like structure forming behind her. Another desperate attempt to attack him? A last-ditch effort to try and kill him, or did she call forth some bodyguards to have a hand at him?

"What's the gossip about me this week, huh? No wait, let me guess... the hellions are planning my oh-so-inevitable demise?" Dante said in a bored voice, yet the deepened scowl on his face belied the teasing joke.

Dante shook out his arms, readying to deliver the finishing blow when the hairs raised on the back of his neck. A slender, blue wave surpassed him, hitting the she-devil dead on in her chest while concurrently... knocking her into the portal, closing up behind her. That's what that wavy thing was? A portal she could go run to cry in, how pathetic.

"So, the little lady can open up portals at will, huh?" The half-demon wondered in disappointment. Without a doubt his mind knew she would turn up again, not to mention with some probably irritating-as-hell minions to support her.

"Fuck," Dante said, pestered that he had no choice but to stay here until she showed her face again when he should've ended her existence. At least she couldn't control him with her hand anymore; the triggered state must have rid of the sliver enabling her to whip him this way and that.

And what the hell did Nero call himself doing?

Dante absorbed his new weapon into his body, Rebellion regaining her seat on his back. Nero's beloved sword lay on the ground a few meters away, Dante absently approaching its location.

Maybe the kid roamed in a weakened, delusional mindset as he would not desert his prized baby or pull a Yamato-esque move without just cause, helping out or not that was foolish. Once Red Queen slipped into his hand he turned towards the house, the scowl never leaving his face, stiff movements trailing to the sliding kitchen door.

Nero looked out the window of the kitchen to see the chieftain with a hardened glare aimed in his direction, unhurriedly sinking his teeth inside a banana. A silver eyebrow lifted with the piece of fruit still in his mouth, wondering why Dante glowered with such a cold look.

He wasn't in trouble with what he did with Yamato, was he?

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to show Dante's dark side with more of an aggressive streak than usual, so hopefully his actions didn't startle too many of you. :D Thanks to you all for the kudos
and comments!!!!!
"Who has the nerve to even call this shit food?" Flared nostrils exhaled in sharp bursts, sampling the questionable grub lingering on his taste buds, spitting out what should be blueberry yogurt. This fruit didn't seem blueberry at all, a bit sour and stale.

Did its low-fat branding alter its flavor, or is it past its expiration date? Slim fingers turned around the carton, searching for the black font to tell him how much time he had until the frozen dessert expired.

"Where is it?" Nero retrieved the lid from the trash can. "September 3... today's the 20th."

Nice. Ain't nothing more satisfying than gorging on rotten treats. And those few spoons he swallowed would probably upset his stomach later on.

Open markets lining the streets back home flashed to his memory's forefront, visually remembering the various edibles for the picking. He seldom bought anything from the shops, skeptical over how long the eats sat out or if it spoiled, especially the meat.

Mackerel, sea bass, clams, and calamari supplied the island with bountiful meat. Natural seasonings (sea salt, pepper, garlic and rosemary) marinated the sea creatures from its otherwise bland savor, the food tasting alike to the teen.

To escape the monotony, he often splurged on pastries from the local confectionery shop, never minding the sweets mainly compromising of fruit-flavored muffins; the chocolate ones stayed a favorite when the bakery baked them up fresh.

Infrequent for the townspeople to have the indulgences of lamb and pot roast, those selections remained exclusive to high-ranking officers. At one point, red meat increased in volume; the food not roasting well enough when prepared. If he was smart enough to realize their “changed” ways, he would have known that the "holy” lieutenants purposely cooked it that way to accommodate their new appetites. He didn't associate with them much, but still.

Too bad those fancy eating customs flew out of his head when he witnessed Dante's morbid consumptions.

Nero has never seen anyone devour pizza daily like it held the key to their overall well-being. Days old pizza to pizza dropped on the floor (Nero thought it was alive once) sought its way inside the dope's stomach. Dante's gruesome dietary habits forced the teen to explore the multi-everything world, and test different foods on his own.

And he loved every minute of it.

The elder's unsure face when he returned with groceries humored him some time ago, picking out what he had an inkling to try... and for Dante to eat for once.

Nero rummaged through the refrigerator, searching for something to quench his belly's pestering grumble. Orange juice tempted his buds, seeking the date before setting the fruity drink on the counter and closing the fridge.
The violent contractions in his stomach returned, demanding nourishment prior to getting sicker. Hopefully, the freezer might improve on its results, having at least something microwaveable in there.

Hope turned into disappointment when ceruleans scanned the selection, frozen-canned juices and packages of vegetables lined the shelves. With a grunt he closed the door, wishing to turn back to that putrid yogurt because that was the only thing with any familiarity.

He broke the seal on the container and chugged down the tangy liquid, nearly choking on the pulpous contents, growling in annoyance of him not scanning the title properly. Looking over the large red letters, it said "HIGH PULP" at the top. Smacked lips filled the kitchen's silence, swiveling his tongue to rid of the clingy mush gathered at the roof of his mouth.

Nero jumped at the desperate howling coming from outside, briefly catching Dante moving in a dance-like flow on the ground, decapitating her feet with those big, scissor-looking things.

"So that's why he stood so proper-like—" An impatient stomach ruptured with an inhuman growl, seeming to tell the youngster to worry about snacking instead of the hybrid and his antics. A defeated sigh escaped his lips, walking towards the crate at the refrigerator's bottom as a last resort before he returned to eat that blueberry blunder.

“Finally!” Nero groaned aloud, pulling open the crate to find various foods to his choosing. Packaged burritos, tamales (whatever those were), Hot Pockets (whatever those were too), and frozen dairy treats filled the extra bin. He’d seen a few of these advertised on TV and in the store, though he had never tried them.

With reserved inspection he grabbed a carton of Hot Pockets, reading the labels in thorough order before he killed himself. "Pepperoni Pizza Hot Pockets... yeah, I don't think so." He threw the box into the assorted collection, opting to eat the chicken-stuffed tamales.

Alert eyes searched for the directions on how to quickly cook them. Flipping the assortment over, he discovered the instructions along with the expiration date, tearing the package and grabbing two of the wrapped tamales in a weird, stringy, paper-like husk.

Living under the impression that mansions had silverware and fine dining tools stashed somewhere in the kitchen drew up confusion when he discovered none. Bare cupboards greeted his sight, as if no one resided here... of the human variety anyway.

"What the hell?" Nero sneered at the revelation. "Who the hell lives here anyway?" How is he supposed to fix the tamales if he had nothing to place them on? He didn't want the internal contents to burst and ruin the food on the microwave plate, not that he would clean it out if it did so. Yet it seemed like he had no other choice.

Moving over to the heating contraption, Nero gained a wider view of the kitchen; locating paper towels and other knick knacks over by the sink. Making a clicking sound with his tongue he shook his head, wondering why he didn't search the whole area first.

Two paper towels settled under the two tamales and another over them, placing his meal in the shiny microwave on three minutes.

Man, this sure is a nice house, all clean and tidy and dirt-free. He wouldn't mind if the red one fixed and upgraded his place similar to this. The teen didn't presume being a roommate required him as the maid of the premises. If he let the office stay like it did, he'd probably live in his own filth.
A bowl of assorted fruit rested by the far end of the sink, drawing the teenager to its location; wondering with humor how he missed the display on his way in there. No matter, at least he can munch on something until the food gets ready.

A peeled banana sought refuge in his mouth, strolling to the window to watch the elder finish her off, if he hadn't already. Instead, hardened pale periwinkles glared into his own eyes, making his muscles stiffen, Nero mentally taking a step back with Dante's negative aura.

Hungry demonic faces came after the chief with an unmatched vigor, overlapping each other to swallow him whole, but he advanced in strong steps. Dante's vacant look baffled him, like a dark entity harbored his state of mind and held the bearings to do damage.

*Or maybe it's because of how you're sucking on the banana.*

Locked eyes snapped out of the hunter's focus, chomping down on the soft piece in his mouth and turned around, grabbing the orange juice off the counter to chug the drink. It helped to push down the knot rising in his stomach. Ceruleans glanced at the microwave's timer, 2:17 displayed with the food rotating on the plate; a light smell filling the kitchen with its unique scent.

Four sharp raps banging on the kitchen door disrupted Nero's food gazing, turning his head to the sound. The murderous-hollow look graced his profile still, the teenager speculating why and what made the hybrid sport this expression. He did nothing wrong. It's the she-devil's fault with all this “I-need-to-kill-you” crap, and he better not have any of that animosity directed towards him.

Cautious steps shuffled over, Nero wondering whether to open it or not, then realizing the dope could knock the damn thing down with a finger if he deemed it appropriate. Timid fingers gripped the doorknob when the door swung inwards, knocking the banana and orange juice out of each hand, sending Nero stumbling backwards.

Defiant baby blues confronted sky blue ones after he stood to gain his bearings, willing himself *not* to submit to a physical reaction.

"Who the fuck pissed on your shoes?"

"If the big kids on the playground tell you to go sit down, is that your way of saying 'fuck you' with Yamato?" Dante said in a frosted tone, throwing Red Queen to the youth who caught it without breaking eye contact.

"I—what are you talking about?"

"Your flashy sword move sent her into a portal."

Ah, so they did see it. "… She saw it coming and fled into one?"

"No, you hit her *into* the one she made."

Oops.

Relief lessened his reactionary impulses over the veteran's anger, instead holding disapproval towards what he did, and not at him. "To the demon world?"

Dante's glare lingered, exhaling in frustration before turning around to gaze at the gray sand blowing in the wind. Recalling the brief details he'd seen inside the portal, it indicated a dungeon, judging by the stone walls and chained locks.
"I don't know," Dante said, raking his fingers through his hair that the she-bitch latched onto. He kissed her so Nero can go sit down somewhere and recover, and the shrew to befuddle her mind. Her hungered lips belied the absent passion in her worthless life. And who would gift her with any romance with that body and attitude?

Dante's face softened, soon pulling inwards to show disgust upon the memory of her words. Did this provide the reason of an influx of critters these past few weeks, all because some broad deprived of attention wanted people to take notice of her, and she had to do this? Shit, all she needed to do is walk through a crowded street and bam! The crowd would pay heed to her then.

He knew this wasn't over, his instincts told him so. With a covert operation like this, who knew if more fountains existed or bitter lady demons hovered about. A dinette chair supported his mass after he plopped down in one, Rebellion resting on the table.

A deep inhale did little to calm his devil nudging to let loose and play again, sniffing something odd, exhaling a harsh snort at an unfamiliar scent.

He pinched his nose, looking up to see Nero holster his sword. "What the hell is that smell?"

"I got a better question," Nero said, his voice tight over the door-hitting incident. "What's your problem, man? Couldn't you wait until I opened the fucking door instead of kicking it down?"

Dante scoffed. "I don't have one. Though I do have a problem with you not finishing your quarry." That seemed unfair to say, but the veteran found it... necessary to rile the firecracker. His anger still churned strongly, so what greater a way to do it than to work up the punk.

Nero wasn't on the same page.

"Blaming your shortcomings on me isn't going to benefit you any."

"You should've knocked her to kingdom come if you kept hitting her like a ping-pong paddle."

"Those fucking critters jumped all over me. Hell, one of them stabbed me!"

"And what was wrong with feeding your goldfish friends your blue flashlight first?"

Nero bared his teeth in a sneer, neither wishing to engage in anymore useless talk, returning to his food. True, it had an odd aroma, but it smelled delicious; Nero's mouth salivating at the meal bordering on assaulting his taste buds.

Dante's biting demeanor lessened, eyes trailing to Nero's jacket, damn near desperate to clown him. Did the twerp bathe in a pool of mud?

"Why didn't you take care of them? I had those idiots in the front on lock. It beats a broken jaw any day." He took the tamales out of the microwave, reveling in the aromatic scent, setting the snack on the counter. Why bother seeking any utensils when he found no plates and bowls in the place?

Seeing the twat's curious actions eased Dante's attitude, sometimes believing the youngster mimicked a human garbage disposal; the brat sampling edibles he held an inkling to try. A handful of munchies he tasted and spat out, but most of the grub made its way down to the twerp's stomach.

With prying intent, his legs moved him over by the sink, leaning against it to study the rascal nibbling the corner of his food. Satisfaction relaxed into a smile with its taste, Nero then taking a wide chunk, chewing in bliss.
"I roamed the house for the woman who gave you the call—"

"Which you should've answered," the teen mumbled the words with a stuffed mouth.

"... to see if she was still alive and kicking."

The partial-hybrid mumbled a harrumph, glancing over at the elder monitoring him. Not a scratch marred his appearance, save for the dirtier white hair holding a few grass strands lying about in the locks. Blood-stained lips couldn't be seen either; his bedeviled side probably licked it all away, like it reveled in tasting her weakness.

Jean-clad legs shifted his weight, Dante's eyes never blinking, intensely focused on his hungry form. Nero offered him a tamale, in which the crimson one scrunched his face.

"You know, if I wasn't here, I have a strong hunch you would've gotten your ass handed to you," he took another gracious bite before licking off his fingers, bits and pieces of the tamale falling out the corner of his mouth.

"And why is that?" Dante half-listened to the statement, his sight resting on the youth using his tongue as a napkin. "You're really enjoying that, aren't you kid?" He forgot about the previous question entirely to watch Nero freeze up, the teen almost forgetting the red mutt occupied the same room.

"Yeah, and what about it?" Nero retorted, wondering why the dope concerned himself with what he ate. He continued, "If you came alone to deal with those fish by yourself, they—"

Pale eyelids widened in alarm, his peripheral vision detecting the hunter standing next to him. A large palm raised to the youngster's lips, Nero tensing to retaliate should he be struck.

What the elder did after rooted his legs to the floor.

Dante's forefinger scooped some of the edible debris that escaped the inside of Nero's oral cavity, swiping upwards into his own cavern to sample whatever the youngster engrossed his taste buds with.

Not much flavor coated the crumbs, so Dante gently gripped the youth's wrist, bringing it up to his mouth and bit it. Teeth sunk into the food's soft flesh, slowing down his chewing as it wasn't by far the best thing in the world, but it tingled his tongue.

"Eh," the half-demon shrugged, dropping Nero's hand, stepping out the kitchen before finding a light switch and turning it on.

Heat gathered in his cheeks over the invasive act, his wrist tingling from where the halfling touched him. The shit he did amazed and stupefied him at times, having no regards if he resulted in someone's embarrassment.

Here embodied the elder acting stingy and arrogant one minute, and the next he's calm and collected. The idiot garnered the nerve to almost bash his face in, then turn around and take a bite out of his tamale. Did the chief have an emotional switch he flipped on and off when he deemed it necessary?

Knowing he just desecrated his only breakfast for the day, Nero set the one the hybrid bit off to the side, and unfolded the un-touched snack from its wrapping. He chomped into the other tamale, slightly miffed he had half a tamale to go before it became infected with Dante's germs.
"I should make you go after her. You're not afraid of spending a night until she comes back, are you?"

A few crumbs fell into the wrong pipe from the elder's sudden appearance behind him rather than the absurd question, inducing a coughing fit.

"And risk the possibility of her mistaking me for you? Like hell, old man."

"It's still your fault, kid."

"Why didn't you kill her instead of doing some fancy-pants footwork?"

"Heh, had to try out a new toy I found in that room upstairs." Dante stood next to Nero, arms folded taking note of the neglected tamale.

"Actually, I think I'll be doing a little shopping before we scram out of here, so if you don't mind, could you swallow that?" Dante gestured to the forgotten half abandoned by Nero's ravenous appetite, or did the blame fall on him?

"Why'd you stop nibbling on that one? Afraid I'll get cooties all over it?"

"Ain't no tellin' what you got, so I'll practice precaution to remain safe." Dante briefly chuckled before patting Nero's head, to which a demonic palm swatted his hand away.

"Ain't no tellin' what is in that."

His lips primed to make a remark on Dante's eating habits when he did his favorite vanishing trick, leaving him on his lonesome.

"By hurry it up kid, I mean now!" Dante's voice boomed somewhere down the hallway. The young man had a good idea of what going 'shopping' meant, so the goodies "bought" back to the office would not be in vain.

Nero took another bite before picking up the forgotten half, expecting to see visible diseases. He offered to let the bum try a piece beforehand, and he turned it down. So, what gave him a reason, or the right, to eat off of him when he said no initially? Then again, Dante didn't verbally say no, but his scrunched-up face couldn't be interpreted for any other meaning?

Shut up and swallow the damn thing.

"Kid, let's go!"

Nero grumbled in frustration at the nettlesome devils, grabbing the infected bit of the tamale before stepping out into the hallway to bump into the hybrid. Nero flinched, not anticipating the guy to be that close. Dante had crossed his arms, tapping his left foot on the carpeted floor, eyeing the still-eating-that-crap-food brat.

"I thought I told you to swallow that? You can't possibly act as a shopping cart when you got that mess in your hands."

"A shopping cart!" Nero said, spewing out chunks of food onto the dope's coat, to which he backed away in disgust.

“You're not supposed to talk with your mouth full,” Dante gave his signature red trench a once
over, seeing a few dirt spots smeared over the bottom half, but it can be cleaned. To restore denim...

"If my coat looks anywhere near as dirty as yours, I'd burn it!"

Dante swiveled to trail for the stairs when a soggy, sponge-like object slid from his hair down onto his jacket. Leather-clad legs stopped their movement, placing his left foot behind his right and pivoted to confront Nero; the look of surprised rage set in stone on his handsome features.

Meeting a similar expression on Nero's face, he saw his human hand vacant of the tamale he bit from earlier.

"Kid, please tell me one of those scorpion babies tried to hop on me and missed."

"Yes Dante, something tried to land on your head, but it wasn't a critter."

A wide, shit-eating grin spoke volumes in effect to his action. That sly remark wore the last tug on Nero's nerves. Dante contained no idea in relation to the irksome bullshit he ventured through thanks to Dante's lacking competence.

Instead of planning and junk, they should have been at home enjoying the rewards of the job. Come to think of it, who placed the call? Did that she-witch reveal her plans to Dante? Is that the reason the hunter simmered in a foul mood, or did it have to do with her escape?

Dante lifted his hand behind his neck at the same odd smell invading his senses. He picked up the spongy object, bringing it forth to his sight.

Nero couldn't wait for his ass whuppin', and now presented the opportunity to start the process.

"Young punk ass of a partner likes to play dirty, huh? Okay Nero." Dante rolled his shoulders, approaching in a determined gait to knock some sense into his thick head.

Nero's eyes slitted at the choice of terms, the blues in his orbs barely seen from under his eyelids. Where the hell did he get off on calling him a 'punk ass?' Throwing the half-eaten tamale at the back of Dante's noggin wasn't necessarily the favorable reproach to his light-hearted jab, but Nero favored no mood to kid around with him and his ill-will words, nor did he have the energy to pick a fight with him.

Well, serves him right for his jesting demeanor. Though it would be in Nero's best interest to divert the elder's attention elsewhere at the moment.

And who gave permission to call him a punk ass?

Nero wolfed down the rest of the morsel in his right hand, taking a second to chew the contents, leaning against a nearby wall his hands tucked in his belt loops. His lips quirked at the edge of his mouth, swallowing the last of the tamale and letting the filling sensation roil over his nerves.

Widened nostrils inhaled the aromatic food along with the hybrid's spicy scent... mixed in with a sudden, briny-cigarette odor. Ceruleans blinked when he saw this mirror-like surface appear directly in front of him, separating him from the veteran's view.

"Guess that spanking ain't gonna happen after all, eh Dante?" The teen couldn't help but jibe, hoping to distract the elder's goal.

Dante stepped from behind the portal, focusing to see the same blurry vision of a dungeon before
the she-demon fell inside of it. Iceberg blues briefly scrutinized the youngster's relaxed stance and lidded eyes.

He wanted to bet the kid harbored feelings of fatigue, explaining the rationale of throwing the tamale at him. What other excuse did he hold for doing something so stupid? Clear thinking didn't register at the forefront of Nero's mind, delusions of grandeur and apathy clouding his judgment.

An elusive movement in the gateway caught the half-demon's eye, seeing the familiar form of lightly bronzed skin and black scales limping around on broken limbs. The thorn of her intentions returned, prompting him to growl in internal hatred because she didn't have the right to live.

He had to act fast on her death, leaving time to banter with the brat later on. Alas, postponing Nero's spanking would have to commence for the moment.

Dante offered his hand in a friendly gesture to the brat, who raised his eyebrow in suspicion at the quick-change attitude yet again. He gestured to the portal before leering at the younger slayer, nodding to tell the kid of his pressing actions.

Uncertainty flashed across his face at the outstretched palm, soon taking it in his own, half expecting for an attack and half expecting the chieftain to throw him over his lap.

"We calling a truce or something?"

Dante showcased a broad smirk, tightening his grip around Nero's bringer and tugging slightly.

"Nope."

Enlarged ceruleans and lips hanging open formed a protest, but he felt himself pulled towards Dante; side-stepping at the last moment to fling Nero inside of the awaiting teleporter.

Let the twerp get a head-start in distracting her so he could deliver the final blow. However the youth had a different agenda, having a large, ghostly hand grasping him by his coat's collar, pulling him into the vessel after the teen.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Those two just can't seem to stay on the right foot for long, huh? Lol. Oh their banter is so much fun to write :D
Low-leveled lights illuminated her 'specialty' room. Instruments of rusted and blood-dried devices hung in proud display on damp, stone walls. Stale copper thickened the air, decayed demon and human remains adding to the pungent aroma.

In this very space, she fashioned new hardware to experiment on whatever she wished. The tofana scissors she created maintained a favorite in her collection, and that grimy bastard got his hands on it.

Rosemary and lilac imbued the powerful weapon, able to harm the damned with proficiency. Rosemary happened to be a repellent against lesser, demonic creatures, becoming handy when she forced lechers to do some of her dirty work. Lilac disguised the smell enough and it stayed as a cherished scent.

An opened book donned gold-trimmed sheets, its pages revealing an ancient demonic language holding a vast amount of dark sorcery. Gritted teeth clenched a tightened jaw, ticking every few seconds, turning the pages in quick lumps with her pincer, searching towards the section on recovery spells.

“Where the fuck is it!” Her teeth grounded, reaching under the table to yank the drawer out, grabbing her favorite materialistic stress reliever. While she believed humans are worthless and despicable, they created enjoyable necessities to entertain her on the surface world; which brought her to her current problem: opening the package. Sure, tearing the pack garnered no hassle, however she didn't carry fire-type devices in her torture room. Many demons are prone to flames, so fire was a no-no unless needed.

Mundus' departure left the Underworld in dissaray. Devils climbed over each other for power, caring less who they scorned along the way. A time or two she envisioned to reign as Hell's Queen, yet she didn't have the patience for false loyalties and rebellions.

Mortals are much easier targets to rule... once their protector couldn't guard them.

She ripped open the carton, taking out a lone cigarette, rolling the tip in her mouth. Her scowl deepened, glancing at the sump of her hand. The stinging of her now-numbed limbs subsided, thanks to the venom in her blood acting as an anesthetic in result of her serious injuries.

Perhaps luring the hybrid out here was a mistake. The Scorpion Queen should have stuck to her original plan: order hordes of demons to collectively distract him, then sneak in to deliver the final blow. A remote location bid to add bonuses to her strategy. When overwhelmed with the absurdity of their numbers, no one could aid him; his human side harbored his weakness with the onset of fatigue.

Eusimalkia needed a starting point for her fountains, discovering the Barnes' manor and its reclusive surroundings.

Through secret meetings with the youngest child, Ramona Barnes, she convinced the human of the riches and notoriety gained besides her family inheritance. The Barnes' fortune widened the bad blood existing between her siblings; she just needed a little 'push' to join her crusade.
Along with evicting the current tenants. Permanently.

The monetary advantage from her fresh neophyte allowed the increase of converts to carry out her plans, gathering materials for her while she laid out the foundations of her kingdom.

Ramona had left since this morning, running errands and recruiting followers to bring them back for their initiation. Her convert kept a personal notebook on her subordinates and their successful tasks completed; many had failed, even fewer survived.

The smoke shifted between her lips, pondering where she could find a lighter or some matches. The only time fire breathed life was when the altered believers cooked that ghastly smelling food in the kitchenette.

Meals meant kitchen. Kitchen meant stove. Stove means...

"Let's fire away then," she muttered in a hushed tone.

A smile broadened her face upon finding the chapter of healing properties; hazel eyes scanning over the sections to lead to her recovery. A focused sight hardened when the incantation popped up, reading each word in silence before repeating the words aloud. After reviewing the spell, she inhaled deeply, both in content and satisfaction, knowing this enchantment would heal her.

\[
\text{Darkness prevails, darkness falls} \\
\text{Into the light, the fallen will crawl} \\
\text{Creeping torture, suffering defeat} \\
\text{As a sheep who rejoices at the wolf's retreat} \\
\text{The darkest day, the lightest night} \\
\text{Reverses the balance to whom's delight} \\
\text{Justice will prevail in eternal rebirth} \\
\text{To give rise to those to reclaim their worth.}
\]

A greenish-blue light encased her form, closing her eyes after a dark, prickling magic worked its wonders.

One by one her appendages connected to her re-grown feet, taking in a deep sigh of relief, regaining the familiar sensation within them. Her tail conjoined to her body, whipping behind her in strong curves followed by her delicate but powerful hand.

Any wounds she had sealed up, giving her an extra dose of invigoration she highly welcomed. Eusimalkia flexed her human wrist, bending and straightening the dainty digits before wrapping them in her disheveled locks. Her fingers raked through her hair, smoothing it down before determining its presentable state. The she-scorpion closed the book, wondering if the halfling still stuck around after her enforced retreat.

"This time, you will remember my name before I take your head," she hissed in a baleful tone.

"Oh fuck!" the teen gritted out a wheeze. The hard impact on the stone brick floor did nothing to cushion his fall with the heavy half-devil planted on top of his prostrate form, in the most
compromising position of all.

His torso turned to the side to expel the sudden sucked-in air from the pain he sensed in his nether region. Short breaths escaped his lungs to refrain from whining in distress. Whatever landed on his crotch, (hoping it's Dante's belt buckle) collided with his sensitive anatomy.

The elder mis-judged the grip on the kid's right arm; the jerk of him breaking away from the hold positioned his landing on the runt.

At the last minute, one hand cupped behind Nero's head while the other slid onto his lower spine. The force of the collision crushed his left palm between Nero's body and Red Queen, but he still retained feeling in it so he would be fine. Yet he wasn't so sure about the rest of Nero's anatomy due south.

Nimbly bent knees leaned widely in the opposite direction with quivering thighs; though Dante hadn't a clue why but he guessed his belt buckle took the blame. The kid's armored digits on his back oddly comforted a forgotten sensation; the bringer piercing the skin on his neck... not so much. As enticing the action to let Nero crack his skull, he needed to have his help when dealing with her.

A light tint of cherry bloomed on either hunter's cheeks, the teen from Dante laying on top of his most private area, and Dante resting in such a way on Nero. If the circumstances happened a little different, say both hunters had a few too many or a bet gone wrong, then the situation wouldn't appear as awkward.

Which made Dante think, is Nero in that much pain to lay there instead of shoving the chieftain off of him, or did his embarrassment run too deeply? He didn't hit his head on the ground too hard because the veteran cushioned it with his hand. Then again, why hadn't he moved from him when he knew the kid wasn't broken from the fall?

"Well, well, well. Speak of the devil, in every sense of the word," Eusimalkia drawled. How unexpected for the two to still be here; she figured they'll go home and come back later. But that's good they stayed. She can kill them both now.

Both hunters oogled at her in languid stares, blank gapes drawn on their faces upon viewing the she-bitch, that had been seconds away from death, stand fully healed and ready for round two. The men groaned at their new dilemma; the awkwardness of their current situation temporarily forgotten.

A broad smirk crept on her lips, her tail swishing around before dashing forward. Dante pressed his weight into Nero, rolling them over to the other side to avoid her feet. The teenager grabbed onto Dante's shoulders from the sudden movement, sitting on top of the veteran with the swift rush of heat running up his cheeks when they paused. His next move required him to lie on the elder's chest to deflect his head's separation from his body; her stinger thrashing about to strike her opponents.

Dante's hands never removed themselves from their original position, tumbling the both of them over, every attack she attempted threatened to kill them. This tramp and her antics waged on for too long. He knew her reticle pointed towards him and the brat just the decoy. And since Nero was the distraction... he might have to be used again as such. He hoped, for his own sake... and Nero's when he thought about it, that the kid had his improv skills down.

Planning has never been his forte; doing shit out of the blue produced better results.
Without so much as an aforementioned warning, the chieftain reached under Nero's jacket and grasped the hem of his jeans, eliciting a cross between a gasp and a shout from Nero, flinging him towards the lady.

Her eyes widened, not in the least expecting him to pull off a maneuver such as that; the collided force pushed her back a few feet. Dante stood up and withdrew Rebellion, making sure she had no scratches on her from the rough floor.

Knitted eyebrows and down-turned lips graced Nero's face, disbelieving what just happened. What the fuck is he today? A damn projectile or something? Whether Dante did this in retaliation for earlier took its course in the youth's mind. Obviously, the elder turned out to be physically inept to find some other suitable source to throw at the hag. First the stabbing, now this?

He gained recovery from the momentum of the collision, catching sight of Blue Rose skidding out of reach from the tumble.

Cold, sharp ridges encircled his neck in the midst of scampering to retrieve his revolver; the heavy smell of lilac and cigarettes permeating through his nostrils.

"Going somewhere?" she snarled in a taunting voice. Nero assumed the dope kept the broad busy, so why did she pursue him?

"Time to die you, arrogant child!" Her voiced dipped into a layer of arrogance at her assumed, easy prey.

A voice that appeared laden in acid spoke in her ear, startling her away from her goal "Time to die is right."

Dante shifted behind Eusimalkia, a mild jerk spread throughout an injured form a moment thereafter. The left tofana dissipated the red hexed energy used to send the Dark Scorpion Queen's head dropping to the floor, her body twitching in a grotesque condition as her tail, hand and stinger swung around hap-haphazardly from her swift beheading.

Awkward silence spanned over thirty minutes with the sounds of occasional grunts exchanged from the hunters. After Eusimalkia's lifeless body slumped to the floor, Dante offered the teen his hand in a friendly gesture, to which Nero glared at him with reservations.

Images flooded back to the perplexing way they had to dodge her attacks. What would the dummy do this time if he accepted his help? Throw him into the wall until it crumbled so they escaped? Stab him again and give him a spanking?

The hybrid sensed the kid's trepidation, rolling his eyes with a grunt to focus on the room. Nero stood up on two shaky legs, unholstering Red Queen to make sure she sustained no scrapes and scratches on her, thankfully she didn't.

Books, notes, gadgets, and stashes of cash found a new residence with the hunters. With keen eyes surveying the room, the elder discovered an informational booklet containing the names and profiles of converted humans, and the tasks they were given.

Gracious compensation favored these neophytes and their efforts, Dante thinking it a pity for large sums of money to go to waste on filth.

The name 'Ramona Barnes' kept coming up, her initials signed by these transformed mortals, gaining suspicion in her part in all this. Is she a certified accountant? A teller from a loan agency?
No matter the case, he would ask around town on the whereabouts of this Ramona, and he knew a couple scumbags to make them spill the beans or he wouldn't spare them this time.

After scouring the dungeon to their great pleasure and acquiring objects to each other's delight, they found these large, odd-looking rectangular boxes. They resembled a cross between a suitcase and a small coffin; stuffing all the armaments and collectibles inside.

The gateway closed up because its maker lied dead on the floor, hauling the contents to a metal door on the other side of the room. Yamato could open a portal to get them out of there, but Dante was a wee bit rusty when it came to doing that; seeing how he never used Yamato to do so and Nero hadn't popped his virginity to the sword's true power.

A testing push against the metal hatchway let the hybrid know that whatever prisoner she trapped in here had no way out without a key; the door as solid as they come. The chief dropped the big box, unsheathing his 'key' to cut a diagonal line down the doorway; the halves sliding down to the floor in twin pieces. To the hunter's great relief, the dungeon room they stood in doubled as a basement located two stories beneath another door.

Scratchy steps held their weight as they ascended, careful not to slip on the grimy surface and fall back down the staircase. A minute later, Dante kicked open a corridor leading to the familiar kitchen, giving him a new viewpoint of the space they hadn't seen yet. He set his briefcase down, moving aside to usher in a winded Nero to rest from trudging up the stairwell.

"See there, eating that crap will do that to you." The hybrid meant to jest, but the joke tumbled out his mouth sans the playful tone. He didn't really understand why his irritation flowed freely. From the battle with the Scorpion Queen and the information in the notebook yes, but he couldn't put his finger on the other reason.

"Watching King Lardass from behind will do that to anyone," the teen took in a deep breath from walking the steps with a hefty ninety pounds added from the suitcase. At full strength, that would not have been a problem, but circumstances given...

A pair of silver-white eyebrows rested on the veteran's forehead. Nero blinked once at him, the unintended double meaning of his words echoing in his mind. His cheeks tinted pink when he heard the elder chuckle.

"My ass is breathtaking, isn't it?"

"That's not what I meant!"

"Say what you mean and mean what you say."

"Shut up." Nero dropped the suitcase on the floor with a huff, rolling his shoulders to get the ache out. His thirst called to him, wanting something to quench the dryness in his throat. He looked in Dante's direction after he pulled out some fruit punch from the fridge, the orange juice long since dripped out of the spilled carton, nearly dropping the container when Dante spoke from behind him.

"Where's this 'King Lardass' comment coming from?"

"Why did you fall on me back there?" A silent but abrupt exhale halted his query from further explanation. Dante's big ego made the teen blurt out the question without choosing his terms wisely.

The inquiry caught Dante off guard, Nero stilling his movements, mouth agape because he didn't
anticipate to answer for his actions right away. He could have given any answer, but he decided to give the most truthful-ish.

"You pulled me on top of you."

"Bullshit, like Hell I did!" The teen's visage pinked two shades darker, whether from Nero realizing him to be right or in denial slipped past Dante's judgment.

He secretly hoped for the first choice.

"No one told Nero to yank me into the portal."

"No one told Dante to throw me into the portal."

"Doesn't matter what I say you always gotta give me something back, and you're making me mad."

The chief brought his right hand up to noogie the brat, but the youngster caught his wrist with his devil bringer.

"I wouldn't have to give you anything back if you stopped giving me stuff to give you back!"

Humored periwinkles glanced at their touching hands, a grin that would make the Cheshire cat jealous plastered itself on his expression, white chompers gleaming down into Nero's eyes. The kid built himself up to be too much fun for his own damn good. And in situations like that, he'd forget his initial irritation.

"Is my hand included as well?"

The youth cast his eyes downward to see a dirtied palm in his grasp, mouth opening to say something smart and snapping it shut. A pink tongue sucked on straight teeth, gripping his hold a little harder because the question pushed some tolerance buttons off.

In a split second, Nero produced a short battle cry, using the strength of his devil bringer to fling Dante out of the kitchen window, hoping those face things could eat him.

First the dark pink slayer's all moody with... whatever in the dungeon, now he mocked Nero when he wasn't in the mood to joke around. The veteran always griped about the teen's quick-change emotions, when in actuality he needed to double-check his.

A ringing telephone cut through his pondering, following the sound into the destroyed living room, stepping over glass and wooden debris to reach the buzzing object. The cordless phone had fallen on the floor, and had somehow remained intact. After the seventh ring, the answering machine picked up.

"Sorry to whomever is calling, but the Barnes family can't pick up at the moment. Leave a message and one of us will get back to you as soon as possible."

Preceding the memo of the baritone voice came the speech of a light raspy female, with the smallest hint of a country undertone.

"Hey Malkia, it's Ramona. I just wanted to stop and say I've recruited three more 'helpers' to aid you in your plans. Though, it looks like I'll be out here for four more days at Desmond's. I'll call you when I'm coming home with them, all right?"

"So that's our accountant, huh?" Dante listened to the conversation starting in at the 'helper's part. He quickly recovered from the throw by the teen, landing in the center of a desperate Fault.
Recalling the chitchat around the grapevine, Desmond's was a high-class bar serving the damned and their converts, or simply a hangout spot for crooks. Illegal dealings created a cesspool of thugs, prostitutes, and criminals to live and socialize freely.

Though he personally never went down there for a formal introduction, he remembered what he needed from Trish. That woman delved in the *gossip* about everything suspicious going on in and out of town.

"Is she their benefactor or something?"

"It seems so,"

"You want to try your luck at dating her instead?" he jibed, miffed at Dante's aloof attitude.

"Sure. And if that doesn't work out, I can always *throw* you in to take over."

Nero's face melted into neutrality, followed by a roll of his eyes, walking towards the kitchen, giving the veteran another look before he disappeared into the hallway.

Her message repeated in his skull, Dante jogging back to the office area where his money resided. On his way to the room, he entertained his thoughts on the whereabouts of her converts. If she had so many of them, where are they?

After searching through the room from top to bottom, he found only a few items worth taking; hoping he found a vehicle to match the Ford key he found.

He swept through the first two floors gathering money, books, weird green gemstones and cash, lugging all the objects to his suitcase.

A *Playboy* magazine sat on top of the pile in the room he crashed into earlier, Dante picking it up to skim through the scantily-clad women. He stopped on a page with a tanned brunette sitting on a pool table, legs spread wide with her puckered lips blowing on a cue stick.

“Ooh, damn babe!” Several minutes passed with him oogling at the same picture, the random image of Nero's head pressed into his lap kicking her poise out of his thoughts, shattering the seductive scene. Then his psyche roved into dangerous territory, picturing the punk in place of the woman.

His head shook, thinking the time came to leave here before more sordid envisions corrupted his perverted mind.

Nighttime dawned with a strong presence; the moon hidden well behind an expanse of thickened clouds. Carrying all that stuff to his Camaro would be a bother, if it had calmed from the overheating. He didn't exactly remember where he parked his ride since he and Nero took a few twists and turns to get here, so heading in the opposite direction whence they came posed something of a problem. Not to mention the probability of a few demons lurking about.

Speaking of which, where did his hormonal twit of a companion trot off to?

"Yo, kid, don't know what you're doing but it's time to go!"

"I'm in here, you creep!" A voice somewhere distant yelled down the hallway.

He peered into the corridor, wondering where the brat was and what he meant by the word 'creep.'
He couldn't have been anywhere near the front living room or else his senses would have picked him up. Dante searched into the distance, rotating his head towards the fledgling's scent growing stronger, heading in the opposite direction of the lounge past the kitchen, a place he hadn't yet ventured to.

The kid's aroma spiked upon nearing a door, Dante taking an extra inhalation, snorting out the smell soon after due to how stinky the kid became. He hoped the twerp had his pants on because he would show how creepy he can be... if this was a bathroom. He gripped the doorknob, turning it to the left and charged in, hoping to hear the squirt scream like a girl.

Isn't that whole surprise-thing what got him into trouble with Nero the last time?

"I knew you'd do something like that, you jackass! What, you thought I was in a bathroom with my pants down?" Nero growled in a low tone, his face scrunching in a glare at the dummy, sitting upon a red, sleek motorcycle.

He congratulated himself in silence, maintaining a straight profile with Dante's childish antics.

A slight shrug and a smirk provided Dante's response, viewing the large garage with a bevy of cars and trucks. Vehicles sported the same Ford symbol, appearing clean and unused from human activity... one he possibly had the key to?

How pleasantly convenient.

On his walk between the cars, he took note of a few flashy sedans with unmarked license plates; maybe the property of the security of this place? Dante pulled the keys out of his pocket, looking at the symbol before sliding his finger towards the alarm. A chirp listened in three coupes away, flashing a silly grin to Nero upon finding his long-term, pickup truck rental.

Carrying those two suitcases in the trunk seemed like a swell idea, seeing no need to have the truck sitting up there to rot, let it be put to good use. He went over to the rear, taking notice of the wide space and how it had more than enough room for the luggage and...

A bike?

Dante turned his head to look over at the kid. The teen eyed the red beauty he sat on in appreciation, one hand placed on the handlebar and the other on his thigh. Iceberg blues glimpsed at the trunk. A knowing smile crept on his face, surveying the pickup's bed. At this rate, Trish could have his Ducati for all he gave a damn.

Nero kicked off the brake and lightly rolled the bike forward; a little devilish gleam showing brightly in his eyes. He didn't know how to ride a motorcycle, but he maintained confidence some 'physical' persuasion to the elder would get him riding in no time...

Yes, ride him like the devil he is.

"I meant the bike you ass!" the teen bit back to silence his dark side.

"Kid, you want to spend a night here?"

As long as you're here, I'm fine with that.

The partial-hybrid froze, giving Dante a scrunched countenance because he refused to even acknowledge the question. In a fit to ignore the man, he rolled the two-wheeled vehicle back and forth again, humming to himself that strange tune he'd heard on the radio from earlier.
"Earth to Nero! Pay attention when someone is talking to you."

Nero halted his movements a second time, eyes narrowed in harm, gazing at the moron.

"What did I say the last time?" The teenager deadpanned. The sooner he left, the quicker he could shower and pass out in his bed. Despite its cozy outlook, this house had evil written all over it.

"Well, you might've changed your answer by then, so what do you say?"

"N-O."

"Even if I stayed?"

"Yup."

"Why?"

"Because."

"Because what?"

"I don't want to be here."

"Me either."

What the hell? "...Then why would you ask me if I wanted to?"

"Hey, I offered to be here with you. Besides, ain't no tellin' what other goodies this place is hiding. You could stay here and practically take everything you find interesting and I'll be back in the morning with the two chickadees to pick you up. Plus, you have your night-light to guide you around so you won't attract attention by having the lights on."

His insides prickled with heat, emotions battled with each other to display on his face; apprehension winning over his comrades. Apprehension at the utter foolishness and absurdity at the words spilled out of the red one's mouth.

Absolutely nothing on this earth would possess him to wait, with a dead she-witch downstairs, in a demon-infested house, broken windows, critters living in the backyard, barely edible food, in the middle of nowhere... not to mention being alone... with Dante.

"Are you fucking nuts?"

"People have called me that before."

"If I don't want to stay here with you, then what makes you think I do without you?"

"The offer still stands, kid."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?"

The angsty tone roved absent, Dante having to blink a few times at the suddenly solemn-sounding Nero. He grew accustomed to the little squirt so that answer was no. Rarely did he encounter any problems out of him except for today.

Actually, Nero wore the introvert tag with pride, only coming out of his bedroom when he needed to shower, eat, or go somewhere. The hybrid remembered the few times when he had to coax the
youth just to talk or barricade himself in the spare room to keep the punk from leaving while he did it.

Problems with the girlies created stronger bonding experiences between them and he rejoiced in the company of another male. He grew accustomed to having the brat there. Lady brought shitty jobs and Trish preferred to be a lone adventurer, finding hideouts and the happenings of curious demons. Sure he liked being by himself sometimes, but he also wanted to socialize with someone of his caliber. And to respond to the kid's query again: HELL NO.

"Do you want me to get rid of you?" Now he had his chance to turn the tables, to have a vibe of what really went on in the twerp's mind. If the twat wished to head home to Fortuna, then fine... but not without some major convincing to stay with him a little longer. Bantering with him and getting on his nerves coveted too enjoyable of a pastime to give up.

"Don't answer a question with another one, Dante." A short pause stretched on before Nero responded, fidgeting with the handle, struggling to find the courage for his next words. "If I'm burdening you, I'll be more than happy to leave."

Pfft, liar.

If the youngster wanted him to take him seriously he should look him straight in his eyes, not at the floor. His stance should be tall and erect, not slouched. His tone and speech had to complement his emotions, not hesitate with a low, muttering voice. He hated to see the kid in such a sad disposition because it clashed with his calm state of mind.

"Burden, absolutely not. It's leaning towards trespassing. You have an incredible knack for taking all the hot water when I'm ready to shower," Dante gave a small smirk to hopefully brighten kid's mood.

It almost worked if the garage door didn't open.

The blue slayer mouthed the words 'oh shit' before putting the brake back down on the bike, sprinting towards the hybrid, finding refuge under the truck.

The hunters lied flat on their stomachs as a sleek, silver car revealed itself at the entrance.

"Dammit, we're gonna get caught," Nero said in a strained voice, his voice's pitch heightening.

"Why do you say that?" Dante didn't want to be near someone chickening out when the going got tough.

"The damn light is on!"

The veteran pulled out Ivory, scooting under the pickup more to shoot the switch off. Nero grabbed his hand with his devil bringer, creating this bright radiance under the truck.

"No, you idiot! He'll hear the shot and see the flash from down here!"

"Just like he'll see your blue flashlight? And who said it's a 'he'?"

"... Are you serious? Fine, she will!"

The chieftain semi-dragged the punk the rest of the way under the vehicle, grabbing the kid's sleeve to pull it over his bright, scaly arm. The jean material wouldn't budge from their awkward position, leaving Dante the option to place the kid's arm underneath his red trench to conceal the
Nero stiffened, intent to remove his limb when Dante nipped his ear, akin to the wolf pack's leader nipping their brethren to maintain order. Nero huffed in annoyance but left his digits under the coat, making sure to keep it well above the elder's posterior. He could've folded his demonic branch under his torso, so why did he have to leave it under the jacket?

The sleek car rolled in, coming to an abrupt halt right behind the scarlet Ducati, bright lights cutting off along with the engine. A black, polished shoe, a sock, and the hem of some matching pin-striped pants greeted the hunters' vision. An essence wafted towards the hidden slayers, almost enough to make the red hunter sneeze.

This particular 'perfume' became a common scent the veteran didn't appreciate too much. As of late, he'd been inhaling the strong stench of sulfur, it was the cologne that neophytes wore on them for at least a month before the fume emerged slightly more dormant.

 Devils smelled like shitty decay no matter what, but these modified believers bore the odor of arsenic to display their newfound status of a higher power; similar to how dogs sniff each other's asses when recognizing one another or to say hello.

In response to the potent fragrance, his nose began to dance.

His nose scrunched up, wiggled to each side, elongated, moved about in circles then brought a finger up to his nostrils. All to try and silence the sonic blast threatening to expose them.

Nero couldn't help his friend in any way. If he shifted his devil bringer from under the secluded place, the brightness would reveal their hiding spot. He couldn't turn or else the grains on the floor collectively might make a noise. So... he watched and strived not to snigger at the elder's dilemma no matter how dire it seemed.

Two feet placed themselves on the concrete ground, closing the car door to begin walking towards the house in a slow, steady gait. The chief had his gun at the ready, but wanted to refrain from using the firearm to see what this mystery person did.

The stranger sneezed, sneezing again shortly after he inhaled through his nostrils. Dante maintained confidence it was a guy; girls just didn't sneeze that deep. The expensive-looking shoes resumed their stroll until they stumbled upon the rectangular boxes near the garage door.

The shiny loafers kicked one of the boxes, grunting as he squatted to observe the trunks more closely. They exchanged glances before refocusing their eyes on the two polished shoes, adrenaline coursing through their veins for different reasons; Dante with the promise of an unworthy kill and Nero from the potential of being discovered. Slowly, it felt like he headed straight for a life of crime around Dante.

"We 'sposed to be movin' these somewhere?" The secret person, now confirmed to be a male due to the gruff voice, picked up a case only to drop it down because of its unexpected weight. His hands, the hybrid caught a glimpse of, had an unnatural green tint to his cream-toned skin, bulbousy blue-purple vessels popped out from under his flesh. The mystery man wore an olive-collared shirt with a matching pin-striped jacket.

"My Lady," he called out once, unlatching the back of the truck to hoist the box onto there, with obvious difficulty, before joining with its brother. Nero smiled a little because the moron just did him a great service for doing manual labor his muscles ached to do. Taking a nap in the car called to his thoughts... whichever vehicle they borrowed.
"My Queen," he said louder, closing the pickup to walk towards the house, opening the door and withdrawing a pistol.

The hunters had a clear view of the mystery man's head; lemon-hued hair cut short with a few spiky strands to the front. His six foot stature formed a solid, stocky build of about a hundred and eighty pounds combing through their vision. Dante still maintained height and weight over him, but he looked as if he could stand his ground in a fight... the brawl would probably be over quickly due to the chieftain's combative prowess, but nonetheless...

The stranger went inside the house and Dante moved into action.

"You cover your arm while I go look after the stinky asshole. Be discreet and get in the truck," he whispered.

"Wait, he had cologne on," the youngster muttered back.

"Yeah, but was there something else added to it?"

Nero thought the mystery man sprayed too much pine-scented, air freshener on, though he picked up a unique scent along the mix, but it didn't affect his senses probably as loud as Dante said it did.

"Well, he smells like this... aged fire or gas or something."

"Hell's newest recruit, a human-turned demon, added insect to the surface world, and I'm the exterminator." Dante's voice dipped to a cool whisper, and Nero knew that it was time to go.

He slid his hand from underneath the dark cave of Dante's signature trench, unhurriedly rolling over on his side to pull his sleeve down over his right arm.

The half-breed scooted forward, producing a silent whistle of appreciation, iceberg blues landing on the silver Lamborghini Estoque, taking his sight completely off of the stranger who opened the door to re-enter the garage.

The stranger took in a gasp at seeing a white head with blue irises and a toothy grin smiling back at him.

"Do you know how much tail I'd get if she was all mine? That is one bitchin' ride, dude!"

Nero rolled his eyes, taking his face in his hands, shaking from side to side; in utter disbelief of the idiot joking at a time like this. Not seconds ago he adamantly spoke about leaving!

Dante crawled all the way out from under the truck, walking in confident strides towards the vehicle to have a closer look at it, oblivious to the gaping male. He wouldn't have to work a day more in his life if he owned a Lamborghini. Shit, his confidence struck the idea that chicks would pay him just to sit in it.

"You... you're the son of that demonic asshole!"

His happy grin fell off his face.

"Asshole? Oh no, no, no my friend. He didn't forsake his own kind to become something he's not."

The yellow-blond haired man narrowed his eyes, wondering if he read in between the lines about what the halfling implied.

"He betrayed his brethren to side with a lower species—"
"Look who's talking jackass—"

"Even stooping so low to impregnate a human bit—"

"Bib! Yes, to impregnate a human bib to drool all over her... beauty!" A young voice interjected to diffuse the temper the veteran would surely get. No doubt in his brain the half-hell would transform into a raging devil and rip the asshole's head off.

Having Dante in a content setting perdued something Nero enjoyed seeing him in. Not a happy state because the dope carried on to do and spout stupid things, and not in an angry condition... because he still carried on to say and do stupid things. The red hunter in a neutral frame of mind reposed a vital part to Nero's sanity. And this fucker will not ruin Dante's disposition so he could further deteriorate his health.

The youngster didn't mean to call Dante's mom a beautiful piece of cloth, but he believed calling her one existed to be a million times better than hearing the name on the brink of slipping out of the convert's mouth.

The blond looked over to the truck he placed the two suitcases in, briefly questioning himself, wondering whether it actually spoke.

Since his ascension into demon-hood, he learned about soul merges, almost anything had the ability to come into creation as long as a damned soul paired with it. It very well might be a product of Eusimalkia's creations; she spent most of her days creating devices and conjuring up spells. So... the cases talked?

"Human women are nothing but mere cows, worthless heaps of bountiful flesh to supp from when we demons need our itches scratched."

The green-eyed bandit gave Dante a salacious leer, sizing up his red-clad opponent, finally discovering a good defense to exercise his newfound power.

"What other explanation did your decadent excuse of a father have as a reason to do what he did? Because of his stupidity—"

"Blah, blah, blah. Same song, different day. Don't you hair-brained assholes have better pick-up lines than that? You're boring my legs shut."

The hybrid re-holstered Ivory back in her slot. His name made scumbags tremble worldwide, letting his abilities speak for him; fashioning to demonstrate his skills on this jerkwad.

"Oh, what's this. Little half-reject wants to fight like a man for once? Okay then, you fucking dick, let's roll." A red-orange glow pulsed brightly from the blond man's hand. He took a defensive posture, bending his knees while he brought up his fists in a circular motion to rest at chest level.

"I'm afraid playtime is over for you, mongrel."

"The joke is all on you pal."

A ghostly blue arm shot forth, grabbing the neophyte in a tight hold and pulling him backwards to gain momentum. The owner of the elongated limb launched the delusional bastard into the front windshield of the Lamborghini.

Before the convert recovered to register what happened, the halfling yanked him by his green collar, throwing him onto the ground and giving him about ten solid punches across his face, blood
staining his hand, unleashing a little steam on the false lecher. A hard knee slammed into his gut, the man doubling over in agony before the hybrid pulled open the car door, placing the neophyte's head right between the slammer and the driver's seat.

"Now," Dante said in a haughty manner, "This is where we get to play the 'Informant' game, alright buddy?"

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dante and Nero got their hands on some goodies, haven't they (and themselves), so we'll see how the rest plays out.
Troubling Actions

A large, black boot rested firmly against broad shoulder blades, holding strong on the blond's neck, ensuring the constraint he had over him. "First question. Who is the girl called Ramona Barnes?"

"Who the fuck did this to my ride!" A bellowed shout echoed, ignoring the half-breed's request, growing over the concern of his injured luxury vehicle.

"Yeah, she was quite a looker, but that's not what I asked you."

"Fuck you!"

"Wrong answer."

Dante pulled the driver's door wide open before flicking his wrist to close it, effectively smashing the blond's head to prove his point. The creepy, green-toned convert snorted in pain, moving slightly to test the hold the halfling held over him.

He wasn't moving all right.

"Now, I'll ask you again, who is Ramona Barnes?"

"If you want her, go find her, you fucking—"

"Uggh." Dante opened the car door and closed it just as quickly, keeping his left hand on the doorway to apply pressure to the male's skull. It got Dante the physical response he anticipated, but not the verbal one.

The mastermind behind the "bib" quote shuffled forward, dragging his feet closer to view the gruesome yet deserving piece of action.

"Okay... all right, god dammit!" The hybrid released his crushing hold to let the blond speak.

"She's the Queen's... right hand, her second in command. Nobody does anything without... her say so. Originally, she was some rich broad from a wealthy family. She murdered them all to work alongside the Queen." He sputtered, wheezing from the released pressure around his neck.

For the moment, Dante pretended he told the truth. All though, the convert knew of him and his heritage. It might give him some leeway as to what went on—given the glib tone he spoke with.

And if it just so happened this Ramona chick killed her kinfolk, on what grounds did she have the means to do so? Millions of people desperately wished to have a tribe to call their own, and here this dame forsook hers to join one of a lesser force?

"Hmph, so she can lie in a ditch too," he scowled with a bitter edge to his voice, "Okay then, tell me about this so-called Desmond."

Hesitation took route, obvious to not say anything. "He's this prick who only cares about shit going his way. As long as you submit to his demands and take his opinions as facts, he don't give a damn about anything else. He made... his place a haven for demons of all kinds, and for those worthless humans to better themselves by joining the right side," he added in his own jibe with a sneer.
Ridiculing pitiful mortals took flight from his tongue before a sharp cough stopped him, red phlegm spurting out after he inhaled to regain some of his thoughts.

"Why is he such a prick if he's protecting demons?"

"I don't know-"  

Dante tapped his fingers along the top door to warn him of his short patience.

"That fucker wanted to gain one over on the Queen, faked his infatuation with her but she turned him down. He needed all the demons to join him and rule this worthless city until he expanded his territory; keeping her ignorant about his plans. That asshole knew to access more power, he had to side with her."

The male paused, spitting out red gunk. “She finds out and rejects him fully. He can't take the rejection since no one refuses him; the jackass killed off her converts. She went down there, showed him her true colors, and had him with his balls glued to his ass. Now all he does is bad mouth her and every one of her followers, but that's all he can do. He still keeps to his word and has demons running in and out of there, away from the eyes of you wretched, fanatic hunters..."

He blinked once, twice after his weighted words sunk in. A veiny forehead bumped on the edge of the car, realizing he practically killed everybody in the club with his confession.

Well then, it appears the whole devil hunting gang can cash in on this. He also thought, more of a note to himself, that this Desmond was a pussy, seeing how he let that she-bitch put him in his place.

Mr. Desmond moved to the top of Dante's hit list, with Ramona being a close second... and maybe this low-life bastard if he made another snarky remark. If the gang couldn't merge to vanquish this menace, he'd put a bug in Lady or Trish's ear about it; that is if Trish wasn't already down there meddling about in a disguise.

"How long has he been in business?"

"I don't fucking know-"

Dante sighed in heated breath before swinging the door back again, this time with the convert putting his hands up to stop his decapitation. By surprise, recognizing his unrestrained limbs, he flailed his appendages with increasing vigor, using the door to lift away from the hybrid's hold.

Thinking of which, why did it pose a problem to move around when nothing but a measly foot held him down? His newly acquired powers should have increased tenfold since his ascension, letting his strength overpower anything he considered decadent, including this waste of a mongrel.

But why is he having trouble moving? Surely, the mutt's human lineage should have diluted his devilish power, right? It made no sense for him to be stronger than a whole devil if he had mortal blood running through his veins.

"You can knock my block off all you want to, but you ain't gettin' any more answers outta me until you tell me who damaged my ride!" He courted torpid disinterest with taking any more blows to his neck, charging his fists with a red-orange glow.

A flexed jaw told of his patience running thin from having to deal with another stubborn punk. He got plenty of sass from the stubborn brat enough as it is.
Dante pulled the man by his hair, dragging him upwards. Gray-green eyes gazed into a smirking youth's expression donning a dragon-type right arm; locks the same color of the mule.

He blinked to make sure he wasn't seeing double; the person constraining him had a bulky, physical stature than this scrawny weakling did, plus the bigger guy had stubble. Regardless, he couldn't wait to wipe off that smile from the pretty boy's face, preferably by dragging it on the ground, but his magically charged fists sufficed enough.

"Who are you? Some copycat of this reject from the 80's?"

"Hey now. No need for name calling." Dante shook his captive's head. Why do people assume he had a bad bleach job? It's genetics. Genetics! He continued, "Wasn't it you who wanted to know who wrecked your babe?"

"This pipsqueak can't hold a pacifier, so who the fuck wrecked my car!"

Salmon-tinted lips curved to snap at the rude convert when the halfling scooted back a few feet, shaking his head once to recover from the punch delivered to that masculine jaw by a red-orange fist.

Swift legs dashed to the garage's other side to view his opponent more clearly, or to catch the extra player involved. No way that kid could throw him like that, more or less lift him up; there had to be another person included.

Slitted laurel hues scanned his environment, wondering if he had enough time to make it through the front door to alert the Queen of these intruders. Surely she would have heard the sounds of a scuffle and came to investigate. Though what if the worst happened, and they violated her while no one was around?

The lecher looked about before his eyes landed on his pistol by the door, running to grasp it as a big, blue... hand encircled his frame, snatching him towards the garage entrance.

His body crashed against it with a quelling thud, his hand never releasing the gun's grip. A dizzying effect took over, groggily getting on his hands and knees to see the third player.

Crimson liquid gathered in his mouth, spitting to the side. A displeased grunt followed a hard kick to his mid-section, the blond curling up in agony.

Dante watched in slight awe when his counterpart's limb picked up and threw the convert more than half way across the room, then kicking the shit outta him after his favorite brown boots had a noticeable, gooey red blotch on them. After the deed, Nero gave him a sneer, minimally conveying his disgust.

"See there, if you were in the car, that wouldn't of happened."

"It might as well have. Thanks to your genius "plan", we're here when this should have been avoided." The earlier events returned to pick away at his self-control. Instead of his conscious, or rather his ego, letting the past remain as such, he needed to talk with Dante.

Now.

"You sure you want to play the blame game right now?"

"There's no game to play because the blame is all on you."
"What did I do this time?" The veteran rubbed his temples, dreading to hear the brat bitch about all the things that could have gone a different way. What happened is done, but something nagged at him to at least explain the reason he used Nero as a devil arm a couple of times; not Nero's devil arm, but Nero himself.

"This whole day has been f*ked up ever since we left this morning. The phone call, the drive here, your f*ck-ass of a prank, your ingenious plan, your ex-girlfriend, your stupid jokes, you stabbing me-"

As if logic returned into his cognitive process about why he became upset in the first place, he roughly shoved the veteran, his anger chipping away his restraint.

"Am I a f*cking projectile to you? What in that scrambled mind of yours told you to do that!" Cerulean hues glared in veiled hurt, the deed's humiliation flooding into focus.

The brief idea flashed of his possible death because of Dante's carelessness. His sword-wound by Agnus was nowhere near as powerful as the blade Dante possessed, prohibiting its removal with his dwindling strength.

Never in a million years did he think Dante would do that to him. The notion he did so settled a sodden weight on his heart, almost akin to a betrayal.

"Well, would you rather be heavily injured or dead?" Dante crossed his muscular biceps, staring hard into Nero. What he did to the squirt probably would have harbored avoidance, but that she-fiend prepared to deliver the final blow. What good would either of them be then?

"Believe me, I chose the lesser of two evils no matter how angry you are now. You'll get over it." A couple options floated in his mind regarding Nero's escape.

He had in mind a direct approach; attacking her headlong to see if she would forget about Nero and drop him, but a fool she wasn't. His second choice involved distracting her long enough to push Nero away from her grasp; which he did with the meaningless kiss but that blue thing appeared under him, and he remained within the she-fiend's reach. If not for her pincer, then surely her stinger would end him.

"Get over it?"

Ah shit, here we go.

"Slapping me while we're fighting or graze me with a stray bullet instead of a demon, maybe. But fucking stab me through the chest because you screwed around-"

"-Will make you to get over it... eventually."

Dante moved to finish off that neophyte. He reached out to pull the quivering sack to his feet when a neon blue hand grabbed his shoulder with force, turning him to confront a red-faced, emotional... shaking, ready-to-fight, or cry, Nero.

"It doesn't matter if I got over it the first time or ten years later. Why. Did. You. Do. It. To. Begin. With?" Nero gnawed and bared his teeth, pronouncing every word with his jaw clenched.

Dante raised an eyebrow at the hasty mood change from his younger counterpart, looking directly into his blue orbs to see them moisten with rage. He recognized their irritated demeanors, especially Nero's, so he decided to give the twerp an honest answer to curb his wrath, partially.
He glimpsed to the side before focusing his icy vision straight into cerulean blues, taking immediate notice of his slight flinch. "Okay then, I knew you stood no chance against her in your weakened state, seeing as you were at the mercy of her pincer, and you did not trigger. Had I not done something to get you away from her, you would be dead. Period. Was it the right thing to do, maybe or maybe not, but it was the only option I thought of at the time."

Reason registered on his face, but Nero's annoyed eyebrows failed to relax. He almost guaranteed Nero would prefer the stabbing by him than that she-hag; the kid held on to his naivety to admit it.

Gratitude became something the punk wasn't too fond of giving, and he lived a lonely life (mostly) presented how he grew up, however the fledgling acted like he did it with foul intention. He did not want to stab the youth in the chest, but no other ways popped up to get him to safety.

"You tell me what choices I had, or better yet, what could you have done to scramble from her?" He took his pointer finger and rudely poked the teen at his puncture wound.

The youth receded in partial defense, not expecting the elder to turn the tables on him, but should have expected him to do so at some point.

Truth be told, she held a solid grip on him, and moving too much made the spikes in her pincer protrude further into his neck. The vexed magic in that shard disabled him from triggering, even the shock wave should have been enough to scramble out of her reach. His slow reflexes ordained to give her the advantage with his distraction.

Damn, the teen thought begrudgingly, he owed another big thanks to the hybrid for saving his life. Minus his decision to admit it, pride and whatnot.

"I really don't care that you're arguing with your bitch, excrement of Sparda, but I must go now and report to the Queen-"

"She's dead," came the double answer from the duo, neither one taking their eyes off each other in their heated staring contest.

In his peripheral vision, Nero saw widened eyelids, glassy eyes, and a hanging jaw etched onto the convert's countenance, nearly snorting at the horrified visage if it wasn't for the situation at hand.

A bruised body moved to sit in a semi-upright position on his side, mouth opening and closing to sputter in disbelief. Before he gathered his words, a well-placed black boot kicked him square in the face, knocking the convert on the floor. Dante never broke contact with Nero, seemingly narrowing his lids deeper than his younger counterpart.

Heed to his submission.

Nero averted his eyes at the startling revelation of his inner demon, searching for a quick rebuttal in place of his growing embarrassment.

"All right then, tell me why you smashed the door into me-"

"You didn't answer my question."

Trepidation lingered on the youngster's expression, knowing damn well he shouldn't approach him in such a way. And he grew tired of the plight. "I made the door kiss your face because you're an ungrateful troublemaker, especially after today. Even more so when you knocked her into the portal."
"How was I to know she conjured a portal?"

"You weren't."

"So why are you blaming me for it—"

"You cowards!" A strained tone yelled from the opposite side of the room, a weak body falling onto the floor in a vain attempt to keep upright.

Neither hunter cared enough to pay attention to the croaking, broken lackey moving away.

"You destroy everything you touch, upholding some bullshit standards for morality!" His voice cracked upon the last word leaving his lips, the slayers glancing at him with bemused faces.

"We have worked for months on this project, and it all came apart from some stupid wankers to laugh at over shitty beer!" The blond man leaned on a truck, fists glowing that familiar glow, narrowed eyes burning in rage.

"I don't drink," Nero stated off-handedly.

"Oh, but you'll start soon enough." Dante started. "My bad habits are easy to pick up."

The teen rolled his eyes, trailing back to the elder's lessened scowl, anger dissipating towards neutrality. Again, the dope can turn an entire situation around with a few words, and everything reverted to normal. Only he didn't want things to go back to the routine; he wanted answers he needed to question Dante about, then shit could proceed as they should.

He wished to know why the bum had such a major stick up his ass, and why he used Nero as an outlet for his frustrations. Nero internally harrumphed, he wasn't going to let this go yet, not until he received a thorough response.

But he had to get rid of that noisy distraction first.

"Just you bastards wait! The Queen's death won't go unavenged. Each of her followers will gun for you at full force, you asshole of a traitor!" The injured male wheezed, saliva foaming at the mouth, his body trembling with rage.

This worthless crossbreed had the audacity to come in and destroy what Eusimalkia worked so hard for; vowing to seek no forgiveness from him. It may have been two against one, but the convert gathered confidence that his drive to avenge his queen would not be ignored.

It went completely without merit when a blue, demonic spectral arm crushed his hand gripping his gun, lifting him up into the air to slam him into the garage entrance.

Nero stalked near the cars to advance on the raging flunky, careful to creep along in silence to not alert him of his presence. When he peeked around a car, the man had charged his pistol with the same vexed energy he punched the hybrid with.

He withheld doubt the energized bullets would affect the hunter, but Nero still practiced caution before he ran head first into a fight; the physical one, thus his need to undergo stealth to reach his target.

Dante walked over to the “borrowed” pickup, unholstering Rebellion opening the door to lay her carefully in the backseat, then moving to take off his trench to lay it on the back of his seat. His next objective included tying the Ducati down to the truck's rear. Getting the bike on there proved
no trouble at all, but what can he use to tie it down with?

"Hey buddy, you got rope lying around here?" A focused form moved towards the bike, giving a quick glance to both partial-demons, searching for the said item.

Softened baby blue hues betrayed the command of his brain, locking onto the veteran's sturdy body, ignoring everything else.

Rarely did the youth see Dante out of his work garb due to their different schedules. He stayed gone throughout the day, while the elder glowed in being a night owl, sometimes staying out until the early sunrise. Only then would he catch him in a dressy shirt and some jeans... attached with the heavy scent of liquor, and an enticing yet repulsive reek of... sweet sweat. It wasn't the correct term for the lingering scent, but Nero couldn't describe the smell correctly.

"Yo, buddy! I'm pretty sure I asked you a question."

"F-fuck off, bitch!"

Oh shit.

Nero couldn't see the muscles in Dante's back stiffen, but he didn't need to; he garnered familiarity from experience, unfortunately. He guaranteed this 'distraction' wouldn't be distracting anyone anymore.

Something kept telling him to let the whole situation go, that it would benefit the both of them in the long-run, however defeat wasn't a concept he held fondness towards, no matter who the opponent.

Defeat also comes by when one does not know when to retreat, and when to fight. Perhaps this once, he can maneuver his way around Dante's temper by turning it into his favor.

He repelled his foot, the front most part of his bloody boot contacting with the convert's back, earning him a sharp yelp. The gun flew from the blond's hand to spiral under the truck, his primary weapon a defenseless tactic to use against them.

Glancing up into Dante's sour face, Nero took care to note of the returning negative energy that enveloped him the last time the teen let his mouth express his feelings; periwinkles narrowed perilously at the partial-demon: him.

Nero subtly blinked, nearly drawing blood from biting his tongue to tell Dante of his innocence. He knew the veteran recalled the morning events, letting those memories fuel his fire prior to burning the convert with it, or rather Nero from the crossed fix on his visage.

"What's the pu—" The blond coughed, unable to get all his scathing words out. He hunched over to start the ill-fated smoker's cough; red phlegm sputtering onto the cement floor below him, attempting to retain control over his breathing.

He started again, "What's the matter, you pussy? Can't take on factual information, or are you mad because you can't top that comeback?" He sneered in triumph over his ability to verbally stump the crossbreed.

Nero stood near him, snorting in amusement. This guy hadn't a clue what he had unleashed.

"May I?" In a mock bow to the chief, Nero internally thanked himself for not sounding like a pansy in telling the captain he wasn't the one to call him a bitch ...not this time anyway.
"I'd be insulted if you didn't."

Nero grabbed the neophyte's shirt and roughly yanked him upwards, intending on giving him a good wallop to the face when his vision abruptly grazed over in red.

Taking a quick moment to register what happened, he released the non-alive convert, watching his body slump to the floor, wiping the blood decorating his cheeks. He glowered in time to see the chieftain twirl Ivory before setting her in her slot; Dante resuming his search around the garage for rope.

"The sooner we get out of here, the better."

"Oh, now you say that?!!" Nero rubbed the blood off his face in fury, the sleeve of his jacket morphing into a burgundy color as the deep blue denim absorbed it.

His vision followed his arm's movement until they landed on the convert, a smoky hole pierced his skull, lifeless eyes staring ahead, contorted into an anguished cry.

"I'd move away from that if I were you. Those things have a reputation of playing possum."

"Playing 'possum?"

"Pretending they're dead when they really ain't." Dante threw over his shoulder, checking the drawer of a red toolbox for the highly searched item.

Nero shuffled back, taking one more glance at the bloody man before moving towards the vehicle to hop in it.

"Playing possum?" Nero asked in a low voice, glancing over at Dante once more to decide whether he should help out or not, but his limbs protested the notion. To his better judgment, he let his body take over his mind, deciding to wait it out in the truck, placing Red Queen in the back.

Dante sighed, about ready to give up entirely, opting to stuff the bike in the rear seat with comical grace when he searched in the last drawer to see the sought after item.

"Man, you guys really planned this shit through and through, huh? Good thing we arrived when we did or else... Nero duck!"

Instead of his brain processing the urgent command, the youth turned to see why the elder bulged his eyes. In his peripheral vision, he gazed upon a graying-skinned humanoid. For a moment the teen thought he hallucinated, but the blond hair let Nero realize the convert finished 'playing possum.'

A desperate attempt made too slow to block the attack with his right hand enabled the teen to take the full force of a red-orange fist to the middle of his forehead, knocking him several feet across the floor until he lost himself in a sea of darkness.

Early morning rays shone through a window when he awoke in a strange bed. Its yellow-brown sheets let him guess the covers had not been slept in or washed in a minute, his jacket laying over his sleeping form.

He closed his eyes breathing in deeply; a fresh-leathery aroma sifted through his nostrils. Snorting out the pleasant odor, he rolled over onto his stomach to better understand where he was.
The clock on the night-stand flashed three numbers on and off consecutively but he couldn't make them out, no matter how much he blinked to get a clearer image.

A long and low exhale eased through his lips, laying back to stare at the ceiling, realizing with becoming concern that red splotches covered its expanse (he hoped that was paint) clashing with the worn colors.

Mr. Lackey and his cheap sucker-punch must have made Dante stop at some sleazy motel until he came to; to see if he needed any emergency medical attention, perhaps. Overhead fluorescent lights filtered through his sight before he blacked out, hearing the sounds of fading, whizzing bullets and disgruntled growls.

Reflecting on the day, an elated sensation flowed through him, grateful to be away from that unusual, creature infested hell-hole souring his mood. Dante's jokes and dual personalities, the titty queen of scorned women and her biting brood, the fun house with all its oddities and puzzles, those bomb-demons and those life-sucking octopi, those horned fish and those face eaters, that convert and his over-exaggerated 'possum' play... all of it endured too laborious for him to handle in one day, and a hot shower steadied a quick-fix solution.

Only this room missed some crucial features—like doors.

Nero bolted into a sitting position. Ceruleans contracted in confusion, windows absent along with other furnishings.

How could he have been in here without coming through an entrance, or a window in any extreme case. An unsure voice called out to Dante, but understood how foolish it sounded since he felt alone.

Falling under a panicky influence wasn’t an option obviously, yet when one wakes up in the middle of nowhere in a room with no stained glasses, doors, and a main partner missing in action, what is the initial response one would do based on instinct?

Panic.

Throwing aside his jacket, his movements stopped to study the red welts and bloodied bite marks littered over his torso, trailing to his lower half. Shortened breaths quickened, his mind taking root of his stark nudeness under his multiple layers of clothes that should be on him—those went missing too.

"What the... wasn't I just dressed?" he muttered aloud. Of course he would have noticed his bare body touching the rough denim material, but his situation turned bizarre.

Nero ran his left hand down his stomach to determine if they ached, and what creature to blame. Maybe he developed an allergic reaction to those scorpions, except he had his clothes on, so that's not it. The embedded sword remained a plausible reason, yet how did it explain the imprints over his belly?

He expected the spots to sting upon brushing his forefinger over them, immediately sensing a numbing feeling at the touch. It's as if the wounds were painted on him; bite marks and welts should tingle, dammit.

His attention returned to the item-less room, scanning once again to assure himself he had his sanity. Or started to go insane because his mind neglected the logic of how he got in here. The only thing supplying the bed with company is the dusty dresser and the alarm clock that wouldn't tell
the time, or did his eyesight remain shitty?

Curiosity got the better of him when he saw two closed drawers off to the side, a lock placed on both with a scorpion symbol engraved on it as a keyhole. Not much of a problem to rip the thing off if it didn't open on its own. He hoped it held information or clues as to where and why he was here.

Nero chuckled in self-pity, discerning that he did go insane; looking for help to be (or not) in a damn box. On the other hand, he figured he had nothing to lose, or gain, in this situation, reaching to unlatch the upper most drawer.

His devil bringer grasped the handle, muscles freezing over after a sudden, low growl rumbled behind him, sending shivers down his back with hitched breaths. Now the boogeyman popped up out of nowhere to make his friendly introduction?

Nothing matched up since his awakening, and the situation wouldn't be so bad if he had his weapons propped against the bed. No boogeyman would appear to harm him in this no man's land, or room, and if it just so happened that Dante played this shit on him...

He curled his appendage inward to deliver his elbow to his rear, bringing his arm in to gather momentum, swiftly swinging backwards to connect his right forearm to whatever lied to his posterior.

Magnolia-white locks whirled about his head, rotating to see his hand ensnared in a black taloned fist with a tough, dark red hide going up its radius, lightening up to a bright scarlet for the bicep.

A nearly audible sigh of relief washed over Nero after he inspected Rebellion's hilt peeking over the hunter's shoulder. Aside from that, why is he in his devil form? And why did his scaly limb not sense the hybrid when he practically stood next to him? The sensations in his extension should have spiked with a white-hot inferno illuminating the entire room.

Are they in a trap set by a demon and Dante fought them off? Did he leave to try and find an escape route, coming back to warn him? Did Dante have to teleport to get in and out of here? What in the hell happened?

"Nero," a deep, inhuman voice rumbled, halting his questions.

Viewing down, a clawed hand reached up to his bare chest, laying it over his heart; the organ quickening in response.

Wait—bare? Confused orbs did a double take in what should be a bloody and bitten-up torso. Not only did the bite marks completely disappear, but so did the welts.

His initial reaction deduced his healing factor coming into play, and everything should be fine. Though, shouldn't he feel those spots receding from his form? Shit, what gave him those 'injuries?'

Alert pools of Cerulean stared upon the now, splotch-free ceiling. The roof returned to a pristine off-white; no traces of any stain or spot seen on it, like it remained nice and clean and boring the whole time.

It's a nightmare. Yeah, it's just one eerie, off-beat, ill-timed, mentally fucked up dream. No more, no less. When he awakened, he'll probably be in the truck Dante borrowed... or still at that house unconscious on the floor. He wouldn't care, as long as he left this other-worldly shit.

Now.
Without warning, Dante flipped a nude Nero onto his stomach, eliciting a surprised scream, remembering he wore nothing under his blue coat, relocating the jacket to lay under Nero. He struggled, demanding his leg muscles to scoot away, but found himself unable to budge.

A hefty weight sat on top of Nero's lower half, sustaining his surprise anchorage to the bed by the human-demon using him as a seat. Well, Dante is quite heavy, so it made sense that his triggered form added mass too. Even with the hybrid sitting on his frame, it should still allow mobility on his upper body.

"What the hell? Dante get off of me," Nero spoke in a rushed manner to hide his mounting panic from being naked, immovable, restrained, Dante in his devil state... and naked.

"Hold still," the in-human voice reverberated.

Nero squirmed, or maybe he thought he did, when the hybrid lowered his scaly, steel-like chest onto Nero's back, sniffing his neck once before making this guttural, humming sound. Ceruleans widened, bucking his hips to dislodge the man off of him, but the half-demon held onto him fast.

"Dante get the fuck off of me," he snarled in violence, growling in anger at the inability to move, and for his failed devil bringer to work. Why is the veteran on him like this, and what did he plan on doing to him?

Nero flailed his right arm behind him to shove him off that way, but a taloned grip captured it and painfully wrenched his wrist, immobilizing him further (if possible). No point in trying to use his normal one to dismount him, his captured hand would suffer the same fate.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? Why are you doing this, man!?" Perhaps an effort to reason with him might distract him from his intentions, but a strong inhale to his neck provided the elder's response. The hybrid nuzzled the spot right under his ear, to which Nero stiffened all the muscles he could muster... and panicked.

"You fucking creep, get off of me!" Nero waved his human limb around to smack some sense into the half-devil before something happened, to him or Dante he wasn't sure of yet. Solid weight rested on his tailbone, having movement cease for him completely.

A slick, slimy feeling swept across Nero's shoulder blades, inducing him to thrash with renewed vigor to jump away from Dante's devil. Bucking up into the hybrid's defined pelvis probably wasn't smart, but he didn't have many options to escape.

He silently prayed, to whatever holy nature out there, that the thing swiveling along his posterior wasn't Dante's tongue. Let it be a snake, a snail, that disappearing blood off the ceiling... anything other than what he thought it to be.

With difficulty, he turned his head to identify the slithery sensation, catching the half-breed descending upon his face with a long, black appendage peeking out from ragged, sharp teeth. With an unblinking realization he'd been reduced to a human lollipop, Nero gasped with a repulsed huff when he saw said muscle lick him in obvious enjoyment.

Dante held onto Nero's right palm, snaking his other hand to rest in his white locks, ensuring a firm hold and dived to suckle at Nero's neck.

A soft, surprised cry escaped the teen's lips at the sudden touch, various contractions spasming over his lithe form. The black muscle pressed deep, circular motions in the center of Nero's neck, pausing every few moments to maneuver his tongue deeper into that particular crevice.
Biting his bottom lip silenced his sounds. Submerged inside his core, a dark sensation soothed an unknown desire, despite the gross act, but he'll forget all this shit once he awakened.

It dawned on him that he knew he dreamt due to his demonic forearm responding to none of his inputs. The energy required to bring forth his devil bringer's extension abandoned his acknowledgment within his arm; no tingles, no twitches, no pulsing, no vibrations, nothing. And his limb would've vibrated without fault in response to the triggered half-breed in such a proximity.

"What the fuck are you... AAH!" Nero smothered his face into the pillow, groaning in wanton confusion after multiple, razor sharp teeth pierced into the spot he gnawed. Liquid traveled down the sides of his throat, forming a pool in the cushion he chomped on. The flow however, held no heat or coldness to it, just a neutral stream going across his gullet.

Except the bite inherited something fierce. He felt it. Sharpened incisors grazed into his skin, piercing through his flesh—actual fangs... sinking into his physique.

A focused drive settled his mind on getting out of the situation at hand... regardless of whether Dante attached his chompers to his spine in striving to escape. What he took comfort in knowing Dante was here turned into a nightmare rather promptly. He assumed a force took trouble to the elder; like he'd been fighting someone that proved too aggravating and it somehow had control over him.

Then he entertained the brief idea of submitting as the elder's sex toy... in his own dream. Funny, finally up under the veteran as his inner demon chanted for however long, he presented himself missing in action.

Nightmares are never a glorious thing to sit through, warping one's fantastical imagery into distorted phantasms. How is he supposed to compete with this delirious shit running amok in his subconscious? Simple. He didn't have to.

After much cerebral scolding and preventing himself to succumb to Dante's fervent, physical ministrations, Nero sensed the transition into limbo; half of his body tugging to reside in his current position while the other pulled him into reality.

As an effect of his obscurity, the teen started to convulse. His limbs twitched in fervor, eyes fluttering open and closed with ragged breaths escaping his throat... but it wasn't due to his waking up.

An eager mouth crept to the right side of his neck, using the hand in his hair to claw down to Nero's torso; enticing a violent shudder from his quaking form. Whether or not it doubled as a distraction to stay, Nero had had enough of all of it. He mentally steeled himself to awaken harder, determined to forget this demented shit or Dante's desire to eat him.

The gravitational pull grew stronger, pulling him towards the real world and its craziness he would take other than this fuckery. Then again, that's all it really was; his fatigue-stressed mind ran rampant from the occurring events of today. He supposed letting his psyche rest over the day's outcome would allow his brain to recuperate from demented sights.

"Nero," a groggy, human-sounding voice called out, underlying with an urgent pitch coming nearer the more he stilled to listen to it. The convulsing twitches flowed in greater strength, signaling the end of this slightly traumatic experience.

"Nero stay still... Dammit, would you stop! Hey, wait a minute!" The normal sound veered closer now, practically screaming in his ear to quit whatever he did, yet he did nothing because the
veteran trapped him under pressing weight.

With a final tremble of his left arm, his body swerved into a hard surface, like he bumped against a wall. Still continuing to flutter his eyelids in his closing moments, his head moved stiffly to the right, not to see if Dante attempted to eat him, but because of his violent spasms.

Something stout landed on his shoulder, his form rocking from side to side, now hearing the distinctive voice of Dante shouting at him to wake up.

With a final hand twitch, Nero briefly floated through a field of darkness into the world he rightfully belonged to.

His eyes snapped open to the elder yelling "OH SHIT!", the honking of a loud horn, bright lights of an oncoming big rig, the breaks of Dante's 'rented' truck, and the slamming of harsh brakes skidding into the vehicular monstrosity's direction.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Don't you hate it when you want to wake up from a dream or nightmare, and you can't because your body doesn't really know how to react to it, so you just try and move your limbs to get going but you can't and you feel like you're going into a seizure? I hate that feeling!

Anywho, now that they are out of that place with an assload of goodies to take home...and Nero's mental psyche stuck in a unique place, they can go back to their friendly bantering and trying to demoralize the other in a way that only they can understand. But will the bantering drive Nero away or will he own up to it: DUN-DUN-DUNN!

Then again, maybe I should just stop torturing Nero...Til' Next Time!
Quick spurs of sharp breaths interrupted the truck’s silence, the teenager latching onto the handle with his human hand clutching onto Dante's outstretched arm. The chieftain reached across the kid's torso to brace for a (thankfully) missed impact; he didn't care to have the road skin him to death.

Nero jerked with a subtle twitch after the truck stopped with abrupt swiftness. The big rig had enough smarts or keen reflexes (or did Dante swerve) in time to avoid a frontal collision.

Widened eyes stared transfixed out the front window, taking a few moments to collect themselves. Nero's heart gave the impression to thump outside his rib cage, but the veteran's broad forearm reached over his ribs to grab the door; Nero sensing his intact torso pressing against Dante's limb. Once Dante recovered from the initial shock, he barreled into the first theory simmering on his mind.

"Okay, who blew you so good you had to flail your limbs like a maniac?"

Cognitive reasoning skidded to a halt, still processing blanks because his skin should've made contact with the pavement. Adrenaline coursed in thick pumps in his veins, timid fingers grasping Dante's forearm to move. His brain short circuited, leaving his hand on top of the other's arm, muttering a thoughtful response.

"Huh?" Nero boomed, eyes glazed over in confusion.

"Someone must've showed you a good time in your dream, right?"

"… Huh?" Nero's brain functioned, steering his logic to common sense but alas, the machinery jammed.

"Who sucked your dick into ecstasy, Nero."

*That* statement jump-started his cerebral equipment, the electrical pulses shooting through the waves of his intellectual organ to conscious reasoning. The absurdity of the question wasn't what the man said, but how he said it. Dante's panting breath, soft-spoken words, and piercing periwinkles captured Nero’s being at full attention, if not for the sudden flow of alertness down south in his pants.

Nero straightened in his seat, nodding once to signal his awake form. Dante left his palm there, taking in the rapid heartbeats slowing down from its speedy rush. He slid his hand all the way across the expanse of Nero's ribs, returning to grip the steering wheel.

Shit, at this rate, he'll probably tell the two huntresses to take on whatever jobs for the next couple of days, and *keep* the pay. He needed a break to recuperate from Nero nearly killing them both with his thrashing.

"You *are* trying to get rid of me," the young hunter mumbled with a half-hearted laugh, looking down his chest, feeling his heart descend from inside his throat from panicking.

"The only way I'll get rid of you is if you get rid of you, by means of suicide, you... psycho."
Nero slumped in his seat, exhausted. "What are you talking about?"

"This." Dante mimicked Nero's gestures, flailing his right forearm around by the teen; randomly flogging him every so often with elevated force. The partial-demon tried to catch Dante's wild arm to avoid a black eye, but failed when he moved his limb at different angles.

"The hell are you doing?!"

"I'm copying you."

"When was I doing this?"

"While you slept." He ceased his erratic movements, giving Nero a stern wallop to the back of his skull.

Obviously unappreciative of the action, Nero supplied the elder his version of a ‘good measure’ by shifting to hit the jackass in his shoulder with his right hand.

Dante moved Nero with a hard push, allowing the kid to take hold of the veteran's palm and punch him on the side of his jaw; not as roughly as the shove, but as a warning for the hybrid to quit. The chief never liked mixed messages, so he took the cue to continue their friendly game.

The half-human turned slightly in his seat, using his other hand to sock the brat anywhere he found a spot. Nero reached to grab his attacking fist, but Dante feigned and slapped his face instead. Heated spikes pulsed in his devil bringer, Dante provoking his inner demon to come out and let the red one know that he wasn't in the mood.

He gave a harder-than-usual punch to a flushed face, reeling Nero's skull to collide with the passenger window, Dante taking to flee out the truck with Rebellion in tow.

A hoarse shout accompanied Nero's fumbling movements after him; so embedded with fury he forgot to exit from the passenger's door. Shaking rage overtook conscious deduction, his sole purpose aimed to give the dope another hole to breathe out of.

Nimble legs pumped in fast strides, planning on using the scratchy pavement to bash Dante's head into. It wasn't his fault he flailed his arms everywhere. He had to wake up from that nightmare-like bullshit.

A flash of red faded into the starless night, the half-moon producing scarce light to see anything behind the Camaro, somehow barely hitched onto the back of the truck. Nero didn't stop to confirm if he took the bike, nor did he care at the moment. The need to expel pent-up energy on someone maddened him into action.

And why did he run towards the darkness?

"Get ready, kid! Just one more thing I gotta get off my chest before we scram outta here."

"I'm getting ready all right! Getting ready to kick your ass!" Nero bellowed.

Demonic senses kicked in the further he moved from the truck's headlights. He didn't have super nocturnal range as well as other demons, or this certain half-breed, but it sufficed to see within six feet of his vicinity; plus, his devil bringer doubled as a flashlight.

Blue Rose’s familiar weight settled into his hand, aimed into the darkened street to catch sight of the hybrid. At this point, he didn't care if he fired without looking because nobody would be
"Why are you playing, you asshole?" Nero gritted out, annoyed with Dante's immature bullshit.

"I swear on your grave if this is another one of your tricks, I'll slap you so hard you won't be able to see right for a week!" Nero twisted around, focused eyes narrowed for the slightest hint of red or a sliver of white hair.

Stomach muscles convulsed, his insides swishing and swirling in unhurried waves before it stopped, demanding proper nourishment in the form of a meal.

"Dante, if you don't quit this shit, I will drive off in that damn truck, leave you, and call Lady to come out here and pick you up. Then you can give her all that money for wasting her time because you like to fuck around!" If the threat didn't send him running out of the shadows, he didn't know what would.

He lacked experience in driving, so that was a bad idea even if the pickup didn't carry the attached crap. It would be useless to crash the car and they're both stranded.

In the distance, a revving engine tickled his ears in the night's stillness. Judging the loud noise's range, he'd say a big rig headed their way. No car lights illuminated the road, the moon casted a dim brilliance and tall trees obscured most of the radiant light. Yet the accelerated motor veered closer, having the intention to do something harmful.

"Get ready to stop the truck, kid."

Nero blinked, unable to determine if his hearing failed him. "What?!

"Get ready to stretch your arm out and stop the truck." Dante's voice seemed near him, but far at the same time. And what the hell did he mean by stopping the truck?

A movement of chrome and skidding tires flashed out the corner of his eye some 600 feet away; the wheels gliding along the road to kick up pavement to form a semi-dust cloud. The big rig carried a trailer on the back. Fully loaded trucks never liked to share the highway with others, seeing how this one sped in their direction with the lights turned off.

To what decree could he stop a vehicular beast going faster than their stagnant speed reposed a mystery to him. He knew his abilities allowed him to stop the truck, hopefully, but why is he doing so to begin with?

"This guy has a damn chip on his shoulder," Dante yelled to the side of him; irritation noted in his statement.

"What guy?"

"Back at that house. After he knocked you senseless, he fled like a pussy. I'm driving all nice and calm on the road until he ran me off of it. Me! Of all people! If you had been awake, I would've shoved him into a ditch. But circumstances presenting-"

"You talk a lot."

"Just get ready to stop the damn thing."

The truck's dark outline combed through cerulean eyes, pieces of steel reflecting the moon's silver rays. White-gray smoke puffed out if its cylindrical tube with its increased speed; the intention to
damage apparent by the acceleration in which he progressed. This played something pulled out of a cheesy horror movie, except there were two 'actors' who knew how to 'play' out this scene.

Well, one if you counted who took it seriously.

"Where'd the truck come from, Dante?"

"The hell if I know!"

His heartbeat quickened upon the death on wheels approaching about forty feet away; the driver blowing the horn to signal the annihilation of the roadies, but Nero had a trump card.

Dante watched in secrecy on the right side of the road, waiting to kill that fucker for good once he caught him off guard.

After he hitched his Camaro onto the pickup, the monster trailer came out of no fucking where, speeding on the dirt trail to crash into Dante. But when he leapt into his rental, the convert turned off the headlights and took a route through the dense forest; presumably to intercept him at some point. The rural plains passed by too slowly, wishing to speed over 60 miles an hour, but he didn't want to mess up his red car. The truck wasn't his, but his Camaro was.

Of the many hills and twists and turns he had to make, Dante felt semi-sure the big rig faltered some distance behind them, seeing how trucks going uphill could take a minute (or ten) to do so.

He didn't realize how dark the highway became, lacking residences and pit stops adding to the sparse environment. The moon did little to aid him in driving, relying on the lights of his truck and his eyesight to get them out of there.

At first, he presumed a flash glimmered in the distance, though it seemed hard to decipher because it was a speck at a great length. Yet no residential dwellings hovered near here, so he believed the big rig took a shortcut.

The freighter turned its brights on, veering into the center of the two-lane highway to trap the hybrid and, so the veteran guessed, be ready to follow the halfling should he swerve left or right.

Dante grabbed Ebony, rolling down the window to get a good shot at the driver, but he holstered the gun with a growl.

Dante carried the maximum load couldn't enact a fancy ploy to outdo the crazy driver, at least not this time anyway. Since he transported boxes full of weaponry, money, books, the motorcycle, the refrigerator, and his Camaro, driving on two tires spelled out a bad idea.

Hey, his old fridge didn't keep his ice cubes frozen and his beer cold. To some extent, instead of buying a motor, why not upgrade to a newer one to ensure his pizza and malt liquor stayed chilled? It would likely clash with the drab kitchen decor, but it worked so he had no complaints.

Second, shooting the motorist dead permitted no beneficial outcome, seeing how the bastard would still be behind the wheel. The idiot might step on the gas or the brake, lean against the steering helm or let go of it, do one of those combinations, or all of them and Dante would be royally screwed.

Blasting the truck's wheels may have the neophyte regain control of the handling, after he attempted to slam into them. With the convert's current speed, shooting out his tires should flip the big rig over on its side, something the red-clad demon did not need.
While pondering his choices, the teen thrashed like a maniac, as if something attacked him in his sleep. Dante ignored him until he received a hard slap to his face.

The youngster grunted with tight, closed eyes and sweating skin. By virtue, it persisted quite a bothersome task in keeping Nero's wild limbs at bay, his hands on the steering wheel, and eyeing the oncoming truck.

He called his name multiple times, yet it only increased his twitches and jerks. When his hand sailed by his eyes, Dante grabbed and twisted it, hoping to awaken the twerp but to no avail. Telling Nero to hold still grounded a mistake because his devil bringer showed up, swinging all over to hit him.

Dante released the steering wheel to deflect the unconscious limbs before he killed them both, the veteran’s left knee guiding the axis so he wouldn't veer off course prematurely. When the truck swerved to the left so did the killer, honking its horn to signal his impending demise.

Forced air huffed out his mouth, Dante biting into Nero's hand to snap him out of his nightmare to gain time to dodge the automotive monster. Incoherent words arose, the punk tossing his head from side to side, thus making Dante presume he had a blow job. Yet no matter how hot the person Nero banged, he needed to wake up.

A harsh tug, a muted curse, and a loud calling of the youth's name startled the youngster into opening his eyes at the last minute. The monster of a truck took a swerve to the left and nearly smashed into them if it wasn't for Dante braking a hard right into the shoulder of the road.

He reached over and acted as a seat belt, knowing the brat would connect his head to the dash board. Should have let him do it anyway, but Nero had a nasty wound under his bangs already from that earlier haymaker.

Mr. Idiot didn't feel like giving up such tantalizing prey. He switched off the truck's headlights and vanished into the night. For a moment, Dante assumed they were out of trouble until he heard screeching in the distance, indicating he turned around for Plan B.

There wasn't time to warn Nero of the scheme to stop him once and for all, so this 'plan' (though horribly thought-up) would put an end to the neophyte and his tricks, waking Nero up fully before it started.

Strong knees bent into a defensive stance, shaking out his devil bringer twice before pulling his arm back, gathering the energy within before lurching it forward and grabbing the nose of the freighter.

Nero skidded backwards several feet, reacquainting himself with the arm's true power when it fought a larger opponent. Its wheels spun counter-clockwise from the abrupt stop, digging into the pavement to chuck up scattering debris. Clawed fingers crushed the rig’s nose, feeling the metal cave under the pressure.

The forceful stoppage lifted the rear four tires into the air, Nero having to adjust his grip so it wouldn't slip out of his grasp. Widened eyes and a gaping mouth graced his profile when the truck didn't cave in from the sudden halt, elated to see the convert collide his ugly face into the front glass; thick blood splattering across the windshield's surface.

"WHOO! That's what I'm talking about!" An uplifting holler echoed from the shadows, followed by appreciative clapping he highly welcomed... more as a means of ammo to use in opposition to the chief when they bagged on each other's abilities.
"Now, just set it down so I can go and... fight... why... airborne..." Dante's stubbed words responded to Nero throwing the object away from him; the big rig executing a full flip in a half before it crashed up-side down. Iceberg blues gazed in silent fascination, seeing the convert tumble like clothes in a dryer before landing crudely on his head.

The trailer landed on the pavement at a distance, detaching when the truck made its first rotation. Whatever objects inside the encased box scraped the interior with awful screeches, reminiscent to metal clanging together.

Nero dusted his hands off after looking at his work, fingertips landing on his hips in a cocky stance. He wouldn't have done anything remotely close to what he did in Fortuna, considering how anything demonic had already died on the island. Tingles coursed through his body, welcoming a much-needed reassurance that he wasn't a human-turned-weapon to Dante.

He still couldn't swallow his "usage" as such or the explanation. And he wanted to believe it as an accidental, spur-of-the-moment decision, never minding the bastard retaliating against him for the 'bitch' event and their later arguments.

Desiring to forget about it all and stopping somewhere to get enough food to last until breakfast sounded better. The fridge back at the office had mustard, ketchup, butter, beer, lettuce, hot sauce, and molded cheese; none of it appetizing to feast off of. Yet a shrewish voice in the recesses of his mind told him to call for closure, despite the confession Dante gave earlier—which made sense, somewhat.

Before they conversed without filters and disruptions from naked titty ladies or scorpion bites, he needed to rid of this unrelenting distraction.

"All you had to do was drop the truck on the ground," Dante's peeved voice spoke through the darkness a few moments later, stepping on the pavement with a glum visage.

"And what were you going to do? Try to scare me while I finished him?"

"No, that's already proven."

A sensation prickled deep inside Nero's skin, nestling at the core to rise up like magma threatening to blow the top off of a volcano. Coincidentally, it visually painted his aura at the moment; his impatience rising in effect to explode just from hearing the dope say that shit.

With learned experiences Dante garnered over his life, he could pick up a person's darkened tone, adjusting to their mood to placate their hostility. Turbulent baby blues misted over in contempt, lips pulling back into snarl, ready to lash out at him.

He meant to say Nero would chicken out to finish the convert off to taunt him, just to rile him up. Withal, the answer steered completely in the wrong direction. Diffusing the situation before it blew out of proportion provided an agreeable solution to an unnecessary problem.

"But I was going to say drop him on the ground so I can take him out from there, but since you're so eager to do so yourself, be my guest." Dante gestured in a mock bow to the teen with his outstretched hand to go after the fiend, to which Nero stood motionless. Expectant eyes peered into the youth's soured face, straightening to his full height to assess his physical state.

Once lily-white locks sported a dull shade thanks to the earth's surroundings tainting its color. Darkened lines appeared under Nero's eyes, telling of his already tired visage. Wide shoulders hunched up into his neck, the tense activities of the day resting peacefully on them while he carried
the dead weight. Dried mud and dirt spots botched his jeans and shoes with purple splotches. His stance slouched forward, straining despite his upright and taut posture. Maybe stopping the wheeled force took more out of him than he realized.

"You bitch-ass PUSSIES!"

Well, Mr. Blond Man wasn't ready to admit defeat yet (along with being an attention whore).

Jerky steps replaced his confident swagger, grabbing onto a probably fractured or broken shoulder. After he knocked the teen unconscious, Dante filled him with hot lead, the green skin of the convert turned gray, half-changing into this freaky-looking humanoid, but fled when his injuries mounted. His deliberate and slow walk headed in their direction, keeping a steady pace unless he wanted to topple and kiss the concrete from the impact.

Maybe the squirt can take on the neophyte, seeing how he clung to his last moments of life. Then again, Dante remembered the artificial asshole contesting he had a bleach job when referencing to his hair.

Mind made up, the veteran stalked over to the injured rogue, laying Rebellion over his shoulder; making a non-verbal statement to let the blond know he wasn't going to make it out of this one alive.

Gloved fingers reached down to the side of the highway and picked up a nice sized rock, tossing it up in the air once before he reared his limb back and threw the hardened piece of earth, hitting the convert dead on in the chest not thirty feet away. The wounded man flew a few meters, legs popping up into the sky from the force of the hit, landing none too gently on the hard asphalt.

Leather-clad legs strolled in steady gaits towards his opponent, seeing no need to rush to him; he took a hard hit to his breastbone, writhing in pain on the ground. Wheezing breaths told of the aches originating from his sternum, branching out to travel over his torso. His legs, speaking more so his feet, twitched to get movement in them, desperate to claim a lost battle.

In his ascended days of demon hood, he had never witnessed a power, or appendage, like the one that brat possessed. As long as a proper soul can match it, any object could hold a damned spirit. Be it chairs, trees, birds, cars, bikes, statues, weapons, and in this case, certain parts on a human.

He didn't know what to expect when he saw the runt in the midst of his oncoming assault. At first, he deduced the knock-off Dante wanted to know where the screeching tires came from. But when a big, blue hand unexpectedly reached out and stopped the truck's momentum, he recognized the little fucker had his own powers.

Thus, the case of his current position.

He focused on crushing them into the pavement, and yet here he was; his body molding into the pebbly road. The irony produced a broken, internal laugh.

The hybrid approached the injured man, face expressionless looking down upon the pitiful creature. He originally thought humans were innocent bystanders in the war against the damned, but a rude wake-up call changed that. He received reminders every so often of the depravity these mortals committed without pondering the consequences.

Something must've fucked the blond up to stoop this low, only to get fucked in the end. Dante wondered if he wounded his heart because this guy didn't move. Sometimes he really forgot his own strength.
"Why did you do this?" Dante gestured with his hand to signal his question about converting.

"What's it to you?" The bloodied man wheezed, coughing up blood, drooling down his lips. Dante confirmed he ruptured something inside from the force of the rock thrown. He continued, "You ruined the only thing that gave me a purpose in this shit you call life."

"You took that away when you gave up your humanity."

A bitter scoff supplied the neophyte's response, knowing life meant nothing because his own race stole his long before he discovered a chance to sell his soul.

"You got a loved one on ya, seed of Sparda?"

"Nope."

"And why is that?"

Dante didn't care for where this conversation headed, already pondering on it many a lonesome night. He heard of many reasons of one turning to demon hood to solve their problems when it worsened for them in the long run.

Besides, the risks hovered too high to have a lover when all of Hell knew his heritage, family, scent, and the scoundrels he exterminated in trying to exterminate him. So, saving the convert from telling his sob story, and to refrain from putting a damper on his mood, he readied to cut the convo short.

"I'm assuming you've exhausted all your means before that final prayer−"

"−To Him?" The altered believer wheezed out those words, spitting in mockery to what the hybrid mentioned.

"-couldn't mend whatever ache was placed upon you−"

"Who the fuck are you supposed to be, huh? A counselor? A walking fucking proverb?!"

Dante snorted before continuing, "Well, since you know who I am, I'm pretty sure you've heard my story−"

"My life wasn't fucked up by demons." By now, the convert closed his eyes, taking small, shallow breaths to lessen the pain. His injuries posed too great an action to finish morphing into his altered state, sensing his finale.

"It still doesn't excuse you from stooping down to their level. You've proven to be no better than the ones who put you in this spot."

"And yet you kill the other half of your heritage without thought."

Dante shrugged, seeing no reason to explain the path he's traveling. He wasn't given a choice to heal and move forward with his life. Demons will follow him into his grave. "I've gotten over−"

"Cry me a river, Lady Gaga."

Dante's face broke into an absent grin. "Yeah, that chick has some serious ass muscles going on."

Down-turned lips and narrowed eyes showcased a disapproving glare before looking away, somewhat wishing for a swift death. The blond didn't need to hear a lecture about life, and he tired
of the half-breed talking about shit he couldn't care less to listen to.

Dante twirled Rebellion around once before pointing her into the ground, leaning slightly against her, hearing shuffling boots sidle up to his side. The youngster stood to the right of him, sans jacket, with a weird, orange-like glow emanating from his devil bringer.

"Any last requests?" Dante asked the convert while gazing at Nero, holding Blue Rose drawn on his left side.

"Yeah, kill me now and go fuck yourself. Or better yet, go fuck your whore next to you." Red, glowing veins sprouted through the blond's face, teeth lengthening with his bones cracking to extend his jawline. Blackened eyes replaced his blue ones, limbs stretching to accommodate his last-ditch effort in transforming into a stronger being.

Dante's eyes, still fixed on the teen automatically replied, "Can do. Though I thought you would-"

BANG! BANG!

Four bullets entered the forearm responsible for knocking him unconscious; the blasted pellets encased in the same orange-like glow enveloping Nero's demonic arm. Fired shots engulfed the ammunition in a spitball of fire entering his limb with a vicious splatter upon entry, the blond falling silent.

Ceruleans slid over to the chieftain before stepping backwards, setting Blue Rose in her slot, crossing his arms after slouching.

"You know Dante, you talk way too much. The man didn't want you prolonging his misery. And secondly, those things have a nasty knack for exploding."

On cue, the blond's body exploded, sending chunks of blood and skeletal fragments all over Dante's shocked form, some even sloshing on his face. Most of the gore splattered onto his black chaps, the glossy liquid interrupted by fleshy clots sliding down his leg. The blast surprised the youth too. He intended to shoot off his arm only. Oh well.

Nero damn near got ape-shit dirty from flipping, rolling, and blasting across fields of dirt just to get a lick in at some demons. And to see the red ass in some mucky-looking goo satisfied him greatly.

A smirk opened a window to his sentiments, watching Dante flapping his coat and stomping his feet to rid the visceral gook off of him. Though unable to see his facial contortions, his gestures mimicked an unhappy disposition, Nero elated to make fun of the veteran instead of him being the butt of jokes. Had the convert gushed blood like a geyser straight into Dante's expression, he would have guffawed like a madman, but him grossed out approved a good enough substitute.

Dante however, failed to catch on to the joke.

Vapors arose from the blond's melting form, cerulean hues sliding to Dante's aghast countenance. A satisfied grin split Nero's face in two, turning around to the truck, yet his body shifted left and jerked into a muscular headlock.

"What do you call yourself doing?" Dante growled, a slight hint of irritation lacing his voice. He didn't appreciate the punk's smug attitude, vowing to get him back for it. He lucked out to have snagged Nero on his left side. If it had been on his right, a puncture wound might injure his stomach from Nero's glow stick elbowing him.
"What does it look like I'm doing? I'm doing your job for you."

"I'm talking about your night light."

"Dammit, let me go."

"Not until you answer my question."

"There's nothing to answer, you idiot!" Nero aimed to dislodge his neck from the inside of the man's bicep, yet he wasn't budging; his legs moving this way and that to get away, but the veteran stayed on him. His resistance curled him harder in the crook of his elbow, Nero using his right palm to grab the hand sealing the hold over him. Only before he successfully did the deed, Dante licked his trigger finger and dug it into his ear.

A half-masculine, full feminine scream tore from his throat, pulling from the sick dork with a hard thud to the ground. Wide eyes stared at the smirking dope, hands resting on his hips and broad chest sticking out.

Turnabout was fair play, and Nero's happy mood vanished. Whether Dante got back at him for flipping the truck over, the whereabouts of the charged bullets, or for the messy kill thereafter left him dubious, but damn he played dirty.

The red devil moved over to the trailer, knowing the interior of the cargo contained a bunch of beautiful vehicles with scratches and marks from the tumble. Nevertheless, it wouldn't hurt to take a peek at the cars he'll never have the fortune to own.

Dante withdrew his broadsword and carved two vertical slashes about five feet away from each other, completing the square by making two horizontal swipes of about equal length; he could make it bigger, but he just glanced inside.

And what his nocturnal sight laid on nearly broke his heart... figuratively speaking, of course.

Lamborghinis, convertibles, Jaguars, Torinos and All-Terrain Vehicles sported unsightly dents, horrible deep scratches, broken windows, and deflated tires. He assumed their plummeted sales prices would half their value if they underwent repairs, somewhere near 10 million lost in their tumble.

Scanning periwinkles landed on one of the ATV's. Thinking about his modes of transportation, he argued with himself of its additional benefit to make it easier for Nero to traverse the city. He could take an ATV, but there wasn't any more room on the truck... or was it?

Nero's heart thudded, sitting shell-shocked on the ground, simmering in heavy surprise to Dante putting saliva on his finger and plunking it in his ear. Of all the disgusting, irrational deeds to fix him with, why did he choose that particular one? By the red one's facial triumph, he knew he had gotten him back good.

Using the tip of his sweater, he dried his ear out. If he predicted the event beforehand, he'd introduce a hard knee to Dante's balls. Then again, he should be grateful he wasn't groped or defiled in any way.

Lost in his grooming, he paid scant attention to the veteran rolling this four-wheeled motorcycle to the already loaded pickup. As long as he kept himself busy with adding more junk to take home, he could occupy himself by all means.

Except the chieftain wanted him to help out. And by helping out meaning he would venture closer
"Nero, the sooner we get this done, the sooner we can go home and bicker like a married couple."
The red-clad devil hopped onto the truck's bed, picking up the irregular shaped-boxes when he looked up to see the kid rooted on the ground.

"Aw, don't look at me that way," Dante challenged, taking in the partial-demon's flushed face,
"There's hundreds of things I could've done worse to you, you know. Compared to the stuff I usually do, that was child's play. Now get your ass over here and help me."

Crave his demands.

"In your wildest dreams, asshole."

"What was that?" Dante stopped working to glare over at the sitting duck, pressed for him to arrange the trunk for more space.

"Nothing." Wobbly legs took time to stand, waiting on their shaky forms to find their balance. An impatient growl rumbled in his stomach, voicing its vexation of helping out with laborious work.

Edging closer to the truck, he saw why they didn't have enough room for space. At first, Nero assumed his mind tricked him, although viewing the unexpected became commonplace concerning the red one.

"… Why... did you take the fridge?" Nero gawked, mouth hanging open at the sight before him.

"Well, it wasn't like they needed it anymore."

"Yeah but... you took their fridge."

"So... your point is?" Dante looked on natural and unbothered. People stole petty values for much less than what he did. And he didn't think of it as stealing. It leaned more towards a 'donation' rather than the five-fingered discount.

"And that blue thing you wheeled over here?"

"Same thing."

"Did it have the key?"

"They were in a box in the rig's glove compartment."

Shaking his head with a tone of acceptance, he uttered, "You amaze me, Dante."

"Why does that seem more of an insult than a praise?"

"I... the shit you do... I'm just amazed."

"Like... good or bad amazed?"

In retrospect, Dante had multiple layers to his traits, Nero thought. His love of pizza, alcohol, women, and strawberry sundaes he learned in a week, but hunting devils topped them all.

There lurked a growing rage he sensed whenever the hunt excited the elder, an instinctual desire to annihilate his foes with stylish viciousness, masked by his cocksure bravado. Nero shared these views as well, however Dante had a dominating streak he kept at bay, mostly; more out of a
necessity to keep himself in check. Spending time in his presence allowed Nero to pick up Dante's other habits, like his habit for sleeping, heavy metal, and submitting to Lady.

The shit she said to him would not fly with the youth, period, all though Dante seemed to let her words slip in one ear and out the other. So far, Nero didn't have any conflict with her, and he'd like to keep it that way. Within the first few weeks of living with the dope he learned these facts, discovering scant details of his personality. He wondered how much Dante knew about him.

"Are you imagining about the stuff I do to amaze you?"

"No, I'm thinking about how amazing it would be to eat something."

"What about the free buffet at the fun house?"

"I'm lucky I ate the tamales, the rest spoiled over...."

Speaking of food, the junk in the fridge will rot and stink on the journey home. What's the point of having a new refrigerator when someone had to wipe it out? Figures, that slob refused to throw away the junk inside.

The chieftain noticed the doubtful look on his face, asking of his ordeal.

"Why would we carry a refrigerator chock full of stuff, and not empty it?"

"Whoa, wait a minute kid. First of all, I did all the lifting and carrying. Secondly, I dumped everything out on the floor before I loaded it up. Give me some credit here."

"Whatever. What do you want me to do?"

"Take the cases and mash them in the back seat so we can call it a day."

Dante placed both boxes on the ground along with the refrigerator and rope. How he planned to fit that crap on the truck reached beyond his comprehension. The fridge had a long length and the ATV the widest. Yet if Dante professed he needed it...

Nero wondered about running into the police, what excuse to come up with about their heavy load. And why wasn't he hitching anything to his Camaro?

"Hey, why can't these boxes go in your car?"

Dante stopped his work and looked at the kid stupefied, wondering why he would ask such a foolish question. Isn't that what trucks are for? To carry large amounts of heavy loads? He wasn't even sure if the rope secured his ride, so nothing hitched a joyride back there.

A staring contest ensued from both hunters, Nero expecting an answer and Dante thinking the brat should know the obvious. Finally giving up with an irritating huff, the teen presumed stacking the ill-fitting boxes in the pickup, Nero never seeing the big grin plastered on Dante's face.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: What happens when Dante gets his hands on some new stuff? Simple, it gets ruined. Chances are he's going to ruin his newly "brought" stuff so we'll see how long it lasts (though I'll say not very long).
“You need a hearing aide, kid.” Dante laughed in sarcasm, picking at the salt shaker, sitting across from Nero at a diner's booth. His left hand rested on the table supporting his head, donning his red coat again; concealing his weapons in case this dive hid a few... trespassers.

"You should of packed them in yourself." Nero snorted.

"Why didn't you just place them in the back seat?"

"They didn't fit all the way, so I put them up at an angle-"

"It was enough room to stack them-"

"No it wasn't."

"Yes it was."

"Says the person who didn't put them there originally."

"Doesn't matter. You don't know how to pack."

"Yes I do."

"They pushed against my seat."

"Oh cry over spilled milk, Dante. Just because it pushed against your seat a bit, you had to go and mess everything up."

"I remember your blond friend giving me that same 'cry me a river' speech-"

"-Don't change the subject. Go on and admit it. You were wrong and I-"

"-don't follow instructions."

The topic in question involved their coffin-suitcases.

There was minimal room to fit them nicely in the rear seat and the teen improvised, laying the second case at a diagonal where it pushed against Dante's chair. After the half-breed repositioned the motorcycle, refrigerator, and the ATV on the tail of the pickup, he climbed behind the steering wheel, eyebrows raising in the air, editing his comfortable sitting position.

A shouting match ensued, Dante attempting to yank the boxes out and Nero trying to keep them in place. In the scuffle, the latches unlocked, spilling the contents on the floor and under their seats. Some of them escaped outside to which the devil hunters played fetch, running after them like dogs.

Scaly fingers itched to punch him in the shoulder if it weren't for the old woman of the establishment calling out their order, well his since Dante didn't want to eat.

With Nero's incessant mantra of 'I'm hungry,' Dante lucked out in finding a shanty-looking burger stand, a run-down gas station, and a cheap motel. By this point, Nero didn't care if he ate a rat he damn near starved. Only when he realized the dive looked like an infestation of rats inhabited the place did he second-guess his wish. But underneath it all, his hunger spoke over everything.
Wobbly legs stood to get his food, careful to keep his devil bringer concealed. His jacket wasn't fit to don in a dingy place like this, regardless of its desertion. Getting his order might have been pleasant if the woman's eyeballs posted somewhere other than his right forearm, trying to sneak a peek at his blue branch.

Traveling without his sling waged to have the public use the 'freak' card when looking upon his arm, judging something they didn't understand. Dante preached about his freedom from that orderly confused city, encouraging the brat to express himself with his middle finger raised.

When the youth went places with Dante, the dope would make sure that a glove or an arm brace didn't reach his vision. He let the young man pull his coat sleeve down, but even that didn't settle well with him.

So here he stood in his sleeveless red sweater, demonic accessory shifting to hide from sight, and an old woman not lifting her eyes from his lower half. Regretfully, the hard skin scaled up his bicep, ending in root-like veins just under his shoulder but now her husband came from out the back, having a good view of his limb. Nero lowered his head to where his bangs obscured his face, hurrying to the counter to grab the snack and run towards the truck.

Discomfort flushed his cheeks when his right arm showed naked to the world. On the religious island, there always existed a chance that that one person would see his burgundy-red palm giving way to his blue-taloned fingers, and he didn't want to fall under the influence of blackmail. The main reason he preferred his lonesome.

Looking out for his own interests gave him a sense of security. No stress over strangers discovering his altered arm and making judgments, pointing an accusing finger and screaming the words 'monster' or 'freak.' And yet Dante challenged him to remove the walls he set up to protect himself, taunting him to let it all go.

However, he wasn't as "normal" as Dante... appearance wise anyway.

The halfling can step out into the world in a shirt with some basketball shorts and people would stare and keep on moving. If the teen went out in the same garb, they would stop to gawk and that's where the problem flew in.

The old man fixated at the spectacle beside his wife, tensing with a worried look on his wrinkly, freckled expression. Under the counter, he reached for something, probably his concealed weapon. Nero stopped walking, reading the desolate language on the white-haired woman's face and the stern countenance on her husband's. Before he assumed the worst, a swoosh of air trailed next to him, a hard hand grasping his shoulder.

Dante stepped in front and to the side of the youth, ever so slightly to protect him; the one thing Nero knew how to do himself. Dante's quick movement swept his scent by the teen's nose, the elder's heavy musk bringing a comforting smell Nero liked being around.

"So... what's going on?" Dante spoke with a cool air added to his persona. Rarely did he have to exert such intimidation onto anyone because he succeeded the first time. The couple drew cautious curiosity about the kid's glowing appendix, but the chieftain made sure Nero didn't feel insecure or threatened by an individual's ignorant notions. Well, the being-scared-of-demons-thing floated around, but this was different.

The gray-haired man spoke first. "Now, you know the deal we got going on. You people get what you came here for and move along. We don't want no trouble."
The elderly woman explained, "Your boss said she would spare us if we keep quiet," she mumbled, her voice trembling from stress and fear.

"Boss?" Both slayers questioned in unison, exchanging confused glances. If they spoke about the Scorpion Queen, then their sorrows and fears would be no more.

"In case you hadn't noticed, our clothes are not fitting for this rural area." In actuality, their clothing should have told them from the get-go that they weren't from this part of the world.

"You mean-" Now the couple exchanged visages, faces lighting up with ease and hope. "-the both of you aren't with Ramona?"

"No, we are not. In fact, we are demon hunters who've been sent out here by that bit... ah, that lunatic lady. Quite a mess over there, I tell ya what." Dante reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, white business card. The name 'Devil May Cry' in big, bold red letters and the words 'Odd Jobs Extraordinaire' written underneath in black subscript. He extended the thin rectangle to the male who hesitated to take it. "What's going on around here exactly?"

The woman spoke. "This community is dead, killed and slaughtered by Ramona and her thugs. The only reason they kept us, our son and our daughter alive was to keep people from gaining suspicion to everyone's disappearance. Obviously a very dumb explanation, but I was too shocked to speak." She finished the sentence with a noticeable break in her voice, her husband putting a comforting arm around her. "If you are who you say you are, we could have used this about four months back."

Dante's eyebrows narrowed to mask his full aggravation. The gang presumed this increased demonic activity went on for a few weeks, but their beliefs proved false. This Ramona girl put in some work, making sure the operation progressed without hiccups. He briefly wondered if that blond guy phoned her and told her what happened.

"How many people survived after the attacks?"

"Four. Out of a quiet little town of about 600. Four."

"Damn." The devil hunter looked away, eyes clouding over to what the teenager interpreted as anger. He roved deep in speculation, searching for his next words. If the convert's organization prevailed as a strong union, then the hunters needed to put in work too.

A low growling timbre filled the place, sending the woman to hide behind her husband and for him to pull out a 12-gauge shotgun. Nero alerted to the noise... but for an entirely different account. His widened eyes and apple-tinted cheeks said it all.

"Ha ha! That's one monster that's gonna have to be put down tonight," Dante lifted a supporting arm around the shoulder of an abashed Nero, who wanted to bury his head inside a hole and stay there yet the sound echoed again, making his stomach tremble from within...

"That yunggin' there looks as if he could use some grub." The old timer looked eased, fear and relief mixing on his face.

"That he can sir, that he can," teased the veteran.

"Well, don't let the food go to waste, eat up!" The elder man reassured his wife as he put his shotgun away, flashing a warm smile to the boy to tell him he meant him no harm. She went to the back of the store somewhere to calm her frazzled nerves.
The red hunter gave the kid an assuring squeeze before nudging him towards the plate. The quick-change attitude of the elderly set stayed fresh in Nero's mind. He guessed the recruits of Ramona or the she-bitch must've harassed and threatened the couple to veer on edge ever since all of this started.

Also not lost on Nero exhibited their belief in the chieftain's words. What if he was one of her followers and he came to test them? They had been far too trusting too quickly. Yet Nero surmised they hung onto their last thread of hope. Why didn't they just up and leave?

With timid steps, he trudged forward and grabbed his meal, gripping the plate in his human hand. He held his worries about showing his devil bringer as it is. Though he couldn't grab his drink still...

"I will go on a limb and say that's not a fancy glove, and that baby can pack a punch." The old timer jested to make the youngster a bit more comfortable, seeing how tensed and embarrassed he is.

Nero glanced into the eyes of the man to take in his appearance. Gray irises, a dented nose, visible laugh lines, puffy cheeks, an age-appropriate beard, and a hefty mustache gave off the image of a friendly person... or someone who terrified small children.

Withal, looks can be very deceiving.

In a move to appear nice and calm, he grabbed the drink with his right hand and offered the guy a nod and a half smirk, retreating to his table, averting the red one's gaze. He set the plate down and reached into the bag with the salted onion rings and shoved a few in his mouth. Half of the onions planted themselves in his stomach when he glanced over to the veteran, who smirked at the floor before moving closer to resume talking to the duo.

Okay, so he may have chomped down on his food in an excessive manner, but who cares? He was hungry. His rear kissed the seat, digging in to grab his chili-cheese bacon burger to munch on that, in a slow fashion this time, while the chief talked away.

"Why haven't you guys left?"

"They trapped us here so we have to stay. They took all of our I. D's and social security numbers, credit cards, bank cards, and money. If we leave, they'll track us down."

"Do you know who stole them or who forced you to give them up?"

"Ramona."

That word must be popular around here. He didn't hear a repeated name too often and when he did, it meant the person infamously became a celebrity... until they got a load of him.

"This Ramona you speak of... tell me more about her."

"Before her parents mysteriously died, her nickname was 'Caramel Caroline' around here."

"Caramel Caroline, huh? Why, because she was sticky?"

A noticeable snort listened in across the room, followed by a short but sarcastic titter originating from the area where the twerp ate. Who gave a damn that the joke classified as awful. He made an effort trying to lighten the mood.
Soundless boots tip-toed to a nearby table and grabbed a ketchup packet before launching it right at the back of Nero's skull. Luckily for the punk, the contents didn't open and splatter on him. Dante turned so the youth couldn't retaliate.

The old timer chuckled at the display and continued, "No, that was the color of her skin and it lit up every time she stepped in the sun, right along with her sweet smile." He disappeared to the back and reappeared moments later, with a bottle of Jack Daniels and two shot glasses to accompany his storytelling.

"Her pops and I used to go down to the lake each Saturday and fish the day away. Good times, I tell ya." The man took the glasses and filled them up with the burning content, pushing one towards Dante as he swallowed the other.

The half-devil wasn't exactly a 'whiskey' man if you will. He mastered the art of drinking beer and substituted it as a thirst quencher without feeling the side effects, too much. But once he got his hands on some liquor... things eventually went downhill from there.

Shrugging off the sordid memories after he regained control from his alcohol-induced state, he tossed back the drink. Cool, acidic liquid scorched his throat on its way to his insides, scrunching his face in the absence of drinking bourbon.

"After our last fishing bout, I hadn't seen or heard from him for at least two weeks. I assumed something happened 'cause Peter just doesn't disappear without calling. When I got in the car to go up there-" The man's hands visibly shook, refilling the glasses as he struggled to describe what he saw."-these... monsters came out of nowhere and started killing everybody... slaughtering them like animals. You would have thought Halloween came early it was so unreal, but the smell..."

The elderly man zoned out, having difficulty recalling what transpired. He refilled the glasses and attempted to drink but some of the amber liquid spilled out, forcing him to set it down.

"Was everyone here at a certain point or something?"

Shaking fingers lifted the glass, but Dante reached forward and placed his hand on the man's arm, setting it down on the counter. "The townsfolk stop here on their way to work before going to the city, since this really ain't a job-friendly area. And that's when the massacre began."

He tossed his back with such vigor that the glass nearly slipped from his grasp. The halfling drank his, though his facial expression didn't sour.

"You say you exterminate demons, son?" Hard gray eyes focused on him with conviction, preparing to request the hunter to share his burden.

Dante glanced over at Nero, more than half way through his sandwich, sipping in delight from his drink. He declined ordering anything from here because burgers weren't his thing. If they somehow made pizza into a burger then...

"I will give you whatever amount you ask for if you claim, if you can... get rid of all of those bastards around here," he mentioned, regaining the hybrid's attention.

He's been down this road before. Humans and vengeance bedded each other when families lost their loved ones outside of natural causes, willing to pay anything to avenge their family. But in cases such as this where the casualty level peaked for no logical explanation, he'll be happy to exterminate the demons without payment.

Besides, he wouldn't feel right if he accepted money from them in a situation like this. The people
here will need all the help they could get to rebuild their history; physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially.

"I have a better proposition for you and your family."

"And that would be?"

"Grab the wife and kids and scram the hell outta here-"

"That's not possible."

"-while we do a clean scope of the area."

"We can't hide anywhere we go."

"What's your name if you don't mind me asking."

"... You know how long it's been since somebody asked me my name... eight years. Eight long, happy-living years 'cause everybody knows everybody in the town of Whetstone... and now they're gone."

Tears pricked the edges of his eyes, the elder man looking upwards to stop their flow. He took a lengthy swig of the whiskey, forcing Dante to yank it from him, spilling the drink across the counter.

"As much fun it is to drown your sorrows with this, it gets shittier when you let up."

"You know how powerful that thing is?"

"Believe me, more than you can imagine. But I want you sober when you make this decision." No matter if the man didn't want to move him and his family out of here, Dante would force him if they didn't reach a valid agreement.

"If it's the same question from earlier, then my answer remains the same."

You stubborn fool. "Well, I don't see how you can say no after their 'headquarters' in the middle of the damn jungle has been ravished. And I'm pretty confident they'll come after the rest of you once they find it that way."

Wrinkled, silent charcoals looked on with a pained profile, Dante's meaning sinking in with a clear outcome. If these "demon hunters" vandalized the Barnes' estate, then her followers will charge straight after them and kill them, whether they noticed what happened or not. Just as much, what if they weren't who they say they are and they looted the house? And even scarier, what if Ramona sent them to make sure they behaved?

Realizing any of this could be true, brittle hands cradled a pounding head, letting watery trails flow freely. He can't keep fighting a losing battle anymore, living as prisoners in their own town. Constantly stressing over the damned and their harassing tendencies; it proved too heavy a burden to deal with.

A slinky, black object caught Dante's attention, looking into a slim mirror in the back of the establishment, thinking its time to get the man and his children out of here.

"Would a demonstration help in your decision?"

Dante brought the man's focus to him. He didn't really know what he had to go through, though he
guessed constant paranoia weighed down on his shoulders. The continuing pressure of knowing that death lied upon them had to have his family on edge, anxiety and depression hanging thick over their heads daily.

"You know, I bet after you see this you'll jump at the opportunity to leave." He beckoned his finger for the elder to follow once he cleared his watery tracks, making his way out to the front porch. Ever since those thoughts popped into the old timer's head, his guard was on high, reaching under the counter to grab a hold of the shotgun again.

The blue-clad hunter peeked over his shoulder as the two men headed outside; Dante with a confident stroll and the senior with a slight, dragging gait in his left leg. The captain walked without a care in the world and the man looked ready to kill. As if reading his thoughts, gray eyes pressed over to Nero, providing a blank, empty stare as if the elder might harm his counterpart if he tried anything funny.

Something in his vacant glare unnerved the teen, an unwanted sensation rising to protect himself and if possible, Dante. While the man and his family had no reason to fear them, Nero didn't reciprocate the feeling. It seemed like there was a trap to be sprung.

He didn't realize how quick he stood up, savory burger still in his hand while bee-lining out the door onto the front porch. His inner demon must've temporarily stolen the reigns to his conscious being, driving the possessed body right back into Dante's form.

The veteran's back muscles tensed, brown boots taking two giant steps to Dante's right, eyes staring ahead into the darkened night while placing his hamburger up to his mouth.

For ten solid seconds, silence crept through the area. No slight breeze blew in the air, no crickets chirped, no owls hooted, nothing. Nature stopped the wilderness from doing the task at hand to see what would unfold next; to watch a confrontation between the hunters.

Heated tendrils wormed its way up Nero's back despite the chilly wind. Nero chomped a piece of the burger off but he didn't chew, depositing the food in the left side of his cheek, cursing his inner nightmare with every derogatory word he thought of. Maybe the men stared at him so hard his clothes caught on fire, but that paled compared to the vibrant shade flushing his cheeks.

Devils by nature are possessive creatures, maintaining an awful habit of claiming things as theirs without consciously knowing the full understanding at first. He bumped into his backside twice now, avoiding a motive.

It wasn't to where he walked directly behind them and he wasn't standing in front of the door to make Nero run into him either. He would have to confront him about this later, and if he struck out on the third swing...

He cleared his throat once, breaking eye contact from the teen's back, glowering over to the startled man. A brief yet fake smile twitched his lips to reel himself to the situation at present.

Knitted eyebrows gave way to confusion on Edward's face, trying to decipher what he just saw.

"All right then, uh... ignore him over there, he's a bit-" The hybrid pointed his trigger finger at his temple, creating small circular movements while crisscrossing his eyes.

"No, I'm not." Nero whispered, resuming to chew his food, protesting what Dante said about him.

Dante turned towards his smaller counterpart with bright, twinkling eyes. The kid strived to fight through his embarrassment, strengthening his stance to appear calm but his quivering voice gave
away his emotions.

"Okay... but he got knocked around the noggin today." He waited to hear Nero object, which he didn't before he continued, "Which brings me to the reason you will do this. Now," Dante took one step down the front stair and gestured to the hesitant old timer to follow, "You sir, step off the porch and onto the ground so you'll believe me."

The man's doubtful stare must've told the red slayer he wasn't entirely sold on the idea. Nero turned halfway to see what the men did. As far as he could tell no demons lurked in the vicinity, so exactly what is he doing exactly?

"What am I doing here, son?"

"You're supposed to step off the porch, onto the ground, and step back on the porch."

"... And where do we go from here?"

"It will lead me to show you what's down there."

With hesitant trepidation registering across his weathered features he nodded, cocking his shotgun as he stepped down and touched the soil with one foot. After looking around the area for anything suspicious or out of place, which wasn't much since it's desertion, he joined his other one. The old timer glimpsed over his shoulder to Nero then to Dante, who gave him a firm nod.

"How long has it been since you went outside without fear?" Dante laid a hand on the man's shoulder, seeing how he didn't know what else to do when he stepped back onto the porch. Collateral damage will remain a mainstay when a war waged on, and often the innocent bystanders caught the worst of the suffering.

So what provided the source why they stayed alive? Why not just wipe out everyone and be done with it? Perhaps this Ramona still had some emotional attachment to the old coot... or maybe even play off the ghost town vibe.

Which brings him to his initial question after he heard about the town's extinction. Did any of the relatives of the townspeople try to reach out to them and if so, did they come out here to see what happened?

It's highly improbable that everyone here was an orphan or had no kin so something didn't sit right with this. At best, he could save the chit-chat for later.

He and his children needed to head to a more secure location; Dante just knew Mr. Blond phoned it in to his shitty partners.

"My turn!" The red-clad hunter jumped off the porch and landed a few meters from the stairs. As soon as his soles touched solid dirt, a Fault appeared underneath him, eight neon blue 'limbs' surrounding the slayer from all sides. A frightened, loud gasp escaped the senior's mouth, pointing the gun at Dante's feet.

When Dante met these things back in Fortuna, a single shot from the shotgun did him no good. Heavy weaponry, like Ms. Pandora, killed these little fuckers quick. Alas, he didn't have the suitcase on him so wasting ammo would be useless.

"Move the hell away from that thing!" The older man shouted, aiming the weapon to shoot at the creature if it attacked.
Dante side-stepped to the left as the Fault's appendages closed to form that hideous face. When he moved to his new place, it reappeared to ensnare Dante in its legs but to no avail.

The old man busied himself looking in the eyes of said fiend, frightened and amazed that something could exist of that nature. The octopus-like creature locked up its limbs... and it formed into a semi-face, one with large, bulging eyeballs glaring over missing the swallowing of the big guy.

Visceral monsters combed through his sight since their unwanted welcome in the small town, and the human skin they wore to conceal what they truly are on the inside. However, why did the stranger in red act so damn calm about it?

Dante walked in even gaits towards the steps, ignoring the pointed shotgun and Nero's confused leer. When his foot touched the second stair, the Fault closed its appendages, capturing the end of Dante's jacket in its... mouth and refused to let go.

The hybrid stopped, moving his right limb to the bottom of his jacket and tugged. He repeated the yanking three more times and the result proved fruitless. He glimpsed over his shoulder to gaze at the offensive foe but from the angle of the entrapment, he had to look under his coat.

"Hang on, I'll get it!" Gray eyes swiveled to the idle youngster, looking at his partner with a sneer.

He finished his food when he made his way to the outside trash canister to throw the wrapper away. The blue hunter stood a few feet from the hybrid, crossing his arms over his chest.

"See if you can try and help him!" An old coot of his caliber and age shouldn't be this stressed about anything except his family and his health. However at this rate, both steered towards a grave compromise.

"What for?" The youth gave a loud snort. "He can get himself out of it."

"What he meant to say was that in showing you why you should leave," Dante pointed to the Fault behind him, "I have gotten myself caught in its hold and it is up to me to get myself out."

"That's not what I meant to say, it's what I said."

Dante's lips quirked upwards in a grimace before trying to snatch the jacket away from the demon with more force. He turned around to face the ugly thing when a loud BANG! echoed through the night, breaking the silent stillness engulfing the three men since they stepped outside.

Dante scrutinized the hideous enemy again and noticed a medium-sized hole at the top of its head. The smoke from the shotgun's barrel confirmed the noise, and that it didn't injure the bastard in the slightest. Shortly after, the wife came out the door, similar weapon occupying her hands to see what her husband shot at.

"It's all right ma'am, just trying to rid of your pest problem." The chieftain gave her a reassuring smirk but it didn't reach her eyes, seeing her trigger finger twitching, gripping the lever while pointing the gun at him. She positioned herself behind her husband, looking at the red hunter's jacket floating mysteriously in the air.

"What did you shoot at, Edward?"

"It's nothing Grace. Go back inside, call the kids, and tell them to pack up. We're leaving."

"Leaving for... what in Mary's name is that!?" Her features contorted into enlarged eyes and a
widened mouth after recognizing a face that seemed to be eating the man's coat... only that its mouth sat on top of its head. She glanced from Dante to the fiend, then at Dante to her husband before readying her shotgun to blast the thing.

"That's not going to help much."

He carried a double-barreled shotgun capable of firing demonically charged pellets, and that took nearly three to four shots to down the fiend. This duo had a single shotgun with no magical abilities, so it would take twice as many attempts to bring the Fault down, wasting needed ammo.

"Get over here and try to maul this asshole before I maul you!" He gritted a whispered command to Nero while the elderly item argued about how this foe is something they should heed worry to. It raised the question of why the damn thing didn't sink back into the ground yet with him in tow. Maybe the monstrosity wanted to make sure it had a solid grip on him?

Nero rolled his eyes, strolling his way to Dante's side, not knowing where to start to rescue him from his predicament. His stashed weapons waited in the pickup and he didn't feel like fetching them just to get Dante out of his trap. He could pull his coat off and yank the damn thing from its mouth and that would be that. And what exactly can he do huh? Wave his arm in the front of the beast and hope the fiend would savor his limb as bait?

"What am I supposed to do?" the teen scratched his head, peering around both sides of the chieftain's lengthy legs.

"Shoot it and get me out of here."

"With what, my looks?"

Dante face blanked out.

"Well?"

"Get your ass over to the truck and grab your sword."

"No."

"Then grab mine."

"I'm not walking over there just to get that."

"What... is with all the lip you're giving me all of a sudden?"

"Don't you have any guns on you?"

"Not enough firepower. I'll be here all night waiting for it to die."

Nero's face blanked out.

Nero didn't see why he had to help out since Dante knowingly got himself caught in its clutches. He knew these things are troublesome to evade and kill, and now warranted the time not to joke because the elderly pair was already old and fragile.

"You play around too much." The teen voiced in hurried words before the couple stopped their minor bickering to listen in. Then again, they should listen because he was sure they would agree with him in this case.
"What are you talking about?"

"What-are-you-talking-about," Nero mimicked him in a sing-song like voice. "Don't you think you should have moved quicker to avoid being where you are now, given what we are dealing with at the moment?"

The veteran hunter stuck his tongue in the left side of his cheek, begrudgingly knowing him to be in the right.

Before the brat further berated him as if he was the child, he needed to get himself free from his demonic bear trap to explain what he did... and maybe slap the fledgling for his smart mouth.

The couple finished their panicked argument and turned towards the hunters, guns still armed as they looked to their trapped, potential help and the trapped, potential helper's friend. Grace stepped forward, aiming at the Fault but Dante stopped her long before she continued, seeing her shaky form holding the weapon. An aim that weak can go terribly wrong and he didn't feel like having his legs shot off... or worse.

"Hang on, Grace." The woman halted her movements. "And Edward... can I call you Edward?" The man gave him a solid nod. "Okay, me and my partner run into these things all the time, so there is no need to get all worked up."

The soft, yet firm voice Dante used eased the creased wrinkles off the elder couple's faces but not much else. Edward made a move to speak in spite of Dante cutting him off. "We didn't bring our special weaponry with us today, so if you don't mind, again, can he use your shotgun?"

The old timer glanced over to Nero, skepticism displaying across his features as to what he meant by giving the boy his hardware. There is a high chance they knew any and everything about demons, but why give up the gun to him if he didn't rescue his ally?

"His arm... got a bit of a punch to it, if you get my drift," said Dante in an annoyed tone.

Edward gave a silent 'oh' as he understood what had to be done. He shifted over to the teen who held his eyes downcast on the floor. It seemed obvious he didn't like to have his appendage talked about or displayed.

Personally, he wanted to see what the funky looking thing could do, but the lad looked somewhat ashamed of it. He waged small steps to where the young man stood, handing the shotgun out to him with caution, not wanting to startle the boy.

Nero raised his head to look at it then took the weapon. He, for some time here and after, will always hold reservations just showing his devil bringer to the world at a moment's notice. The teenager got enough critiques and stares and assumptions from people who didn't know him or heard rumors about him, and he wasn't in the mood to add more idiots to his "fuck you" list.

Once the gun was in his hands, he looked over at Dante, who crossed his arms in expectance.

"Well?" Dante asked.

"Well what?"

"Do that thing you do."

"Like?"
"Oh I don't know. How about making something blow up by shooting it? That seemed to work marvelously that last time you did it." A bitter smirk crossed his face in remembrance to the bodily debris taking him by surprise earlier. "Come on, we ain't got all day."

Truth be told, the teen didn't specialize in powerful artillery because its handling couldn't match the speed of his movements. Both his weapons were designed to flow with his quick motions to attack his opponents in rapid succession. Shotguns took too long to fire and they possessed a wide target range.

His inexperience with the weapon just by holding it showed clear in Dante's dubious eyes. Nero held the piece on his left side with his left hand awkwardly on the trigger and his devil bringer a little too close towards the nozzle; the tool slightly tucked under his arm and the butt of the shotgun aligned with his shoulder.

From Dante's point of view, the brat looked crooked... or even crippled; the gun appearing too big for him to handle. He knew the kid could utilize both hands with no problem, except in this situation... no.

"See from this angle Nero, honestly, it looks like you're gonna mess around and shoot me in the face."

Nero agreed on that part. "Okay, but I'm aiming at that thing."

"Yeah but... can you hold it on your right?"

"You can always take the gun and shoot yourself." An edge laced his voice after the youngster responded. His proficiency didn't lie in guns, it belonged in swords; heavy artillery like this would delay him in battle.

Speaking of delaying, what's Dante going to do once he shot the demon with concentrated energy? It was about a three second layover until the target blew up to pieces, and he was sure to get caught in the blast. Oh well, he shouldn't be so lazy.

"I would, but you're at a better angle to kill it. Now if you please..."

While the chieftain babbled on about nonsense, Nero imagined said slayer getting mixed up in the explosion. He envisioned his backside erupting into flames, rolling around in the dirt to put himself out. Once the fire died, his clothes would have awful burn marks and holes along his back. Say hello to rawhide flesh!

That sentence alone almost made him not want to do it. Almost.

Nero readied the shotgun again, despite Dante claiming he should hold it on his other side, and charged the weapon; the demonic energy from his devil branch gaining in intensity the longer he channeled the magic into the gun. Edward and Grace took two large steps back, watching Nero's rough limb brighten, looking on in terror and awe at the spectacle.

In all honesty, this sight shouldn't have been a surprise to them, since the human-turned-demons that came through there had slimy arms and scaly legs they didn't hesitate to scare and prank the couple and their kids with. But this held quite the view.

Dante shuffled over to the right as much as possible so the youth can have an increased chance of hitting the correct target. He wondered, because the Fault could "see" its surroundings with those big, ugly red eyes, if it would move since the shotgun pointed at it.
Nero fired off a single shot, taking a full half-step, half-jump from the recoil bucking into his left shoulder. Dante looked down at the monstrosity and observed a gaping hole nestled right between its bulging orbs, looking as if nothing perturbed it.

Only a matter of seconds remained before the head exploded and he needed to haul ass. The lovers stood a safe enough distance from the explosion, though he should still warn them about the shock.

"Did it work?" Edward asked with caution, still seeing the red-clad man trapped.

"It's going to, just don't mind the explosion when it hap-"

BOOM!... BANG!

Interesting...

Interesting indeed...

Nero always wanted to be the cause of Dante's demise, well he surmised his indecisive devil side did, but someone beat him to it.

Everything with a positive effect on Nero, from staying with Dante to having the friendly bantering to slashing rogues to his overall company with the man vanished, replaced with a sudden, horrifying realization.

The idea of Dante catching on fire or even him being blasted away seemed to be the worst concept Nero ever thought of. Except that didn't befall the red one.

A tightness grew in his chest upon seeing his fellow demon, his friend, lying on the ground with a gaping hole in his forehead, mangled skin decorating the surface. The Fault died, but in its place lay the unconscious half-human, lifeless to the world.

Nero's body stayed rigid, letting the anxiety of what happened in mere seconds seep into his mind and settle into his memory. His eyes however, couldn't look at the sight anymore, moving incrementally to the left, settling on the smoky vapors rising from the barrel of a shotgun the old woman held.
Was he dying? The thought drifted light as an autumn leaf floating in his mind. Vaguely Dante reasoned if that were so, then the pain would cease and nothing else mattered. Gradually the waves of torment seemed to lessen, to lose their anger. He sensed a coming calm. Dare he hope that the aches receded or would it tempt the dark gods to increase it? No, there was no longer any doubt. The stinging slowly withdrew from his body.

Eventually, Dante knew the almost forgotten luxury of no pain. Little by little his form relaxed, but still he dared not move in fear of again inviting those searing stabs of agony.

For what reason he remained above ground after taking a bullet with that much force and power to the brain went beyond his logical reasoning. A lucky perk of having the best of both worlds? But the demons he shot in the skull died from the fatal wound, and very few cases existed in which humans survived any head trauma, so what gives?

While on the subject of cranial injuries...

Though Dante did not yet try to move, he retained his listening and smelling skills. Concentrating, he could distinguish the rapid, steady lapping of heartbeats against the rib cages of what he presumed to be his stunned viewers. He inhaled the increased perspiration coming off in thick waves from his audience.

At first his eyelids seemed too heavy to lift; but slowly and with great effort Dante opened them a little, registering the frozen side view of Nero's face and the fear ridden ones in the couple.

Perhaps he should have given her that warning quicker. The explosive surprise flexed her twitchy trigger finger to accidentally (maybe, maybe not) fire one off straight into his head. Luckily, his healing abilities pushed the slug out after five seconds. If only he healed himself without feeling the damned pain hitching a ride.

Every nerve, tendon, muscle, and bone knitted itself back together with the oversensitive receptors making sure he sensed it all. His lips parted to talk, but he figured he should stay still to ensure his eyeballs didn't pop out when he tried to sit up.

Looking at his spectators through heavily slitted eyes, he wondered how long it would take them to panic or come out of their shocked stupor... and then panic once he revealed a shocking truth.

“Grace... what have you done!”

Quicker than he expected.

A hard breath expanded Nero’s lungs, shuddering to calm the sudden urgency of rage nestling within his core. The sinking feeling that something was wrong from here on out wrapped around Nero's soul and constricted it; corroding it with its dark, atmospheric presence.

Not even fucking fifteen seconds ago he stood in front of Dante, wearing his trademark creepy grin and spewing out jabbing remarks. Now he lied on the ground, upper half of his face unrecognizable, a waterfall of blood blanketed his features.
Nero's mind failed to grasp onto the situation. He could see Dante lying motionless on the ground, but he couldn't see Dante lying motionless on the ground. In some judgment he wouldn't fathom, he just knew Dante played some trick on him, he had to be. This idiot survived his own damn sword piercing through his heart, so a trivial pop to the head can't be the end of him, right?

But that's it. A head wound. One of the many omnipotent things that kills demons. Yet in place of the hybrid dying because of such an injury seemed... a bit impossible.

Notwithstanding, none of this shit would have happened if she didn't squeeze the trigger. But Dante should have moved a bit faster. All of this pointed towards Dante's fault, but he couldn't help but want to blame the woman.

Hell, she probably wanted to kill following the stress her and her family went through. Who knew her reason in pulling the lever. Nero didn't think she 'accidentally' shot him because the explosion scared the fuck outta her; it was flames and fire with a small 'poof' of a blast.

How frazzled will her nerves be if he had to stretch his hand out to snatch something? What would she do then? Yank a rocket launcher out her ass and “accidentally” shoot him?

“It was an accident!” Grace stepped backwards until she hit the front door.

**Accident my ass!**

The words his devil side righteously proclaimed revealed his sentiments in rightful causation. Nevertheless, its logic landed on the side of reason. He could see her shooting Dante in the legs, his crotch even, but to shoot him right in his skull's center required practice; none of the slippy trigger finger or of the recoil status kind.

The red hunter, with his happy-go-help ass, should've watched her hands instead of his derriere catching on fire. The thought still hung in the air about the foul act, his grip tightening on the gun in response. His friend just got his brains blown out, and all he received in return was an indirect “oops”?

“Grace!” Edward cried out, looking from the corpse to his wife and back again. His erratic breathing increased; images flashed across his mind, having to do with the unseen actions of the boy with the scaly arm. He's the one that had to deal with his partner's death; the guilt would eventually roll off of their shoulders while he carried the emotional turmoil on his.

The tightened palm around the weapon conveyed to the senior about his contemplation to act out on that rage. As far as he discerned, the guy in red maintained much more sympathy to their cause than the youth.

He didn't assist his friend when that monster grabbed a hold of his jacket. He just stood there with an annoyed look while the man clearly asked for help. And judging him by his looks alone, it looked like he can do away with the both of them without trying, since he still held their gun.

Explaining what transpired probably wasn't going to convey anything to the boy at all. He had trouble himself deciphering why his wife shot the man.

“I-I don't know how...” she said. Nero expected saddened tears to pool out the corner of her eyes, but nothing happened. Her tone lacked any real traumatic emotion; after all, her responsibility fell on what occurred now.

Grace's grip on the shotgun steeled solid, she couldn't pry her fingers off of it. And by the angered rage on the youngster's face, she wasn’t sure she wanted to either.
“I do. You shot him,” came the youth's flat voice.

Edward stepped ever so slightly in front of Grace to protect her from whatever the young man planned on doing. It wouldn't help much since he didn't have a gun, but he had no desire to surrender without a fight.

“I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to—God it was an accident—”

“Shooting him in the balls would've been an accident. You pulled off that shot perfectly.”

“Now, wait just a minute, son—”

“Stop calling me 'son' and it ain't nothing to wait on. If we affiliated ourselves with this Ramona broad, you'd be dead on the spot.”

His brash and cold tone swept towards the couple and upon seeing the color leave their faces, he thought he might have gone too far in his word choice. Well, his partner personified the state of the dead. How should he react?

Remorse wormed its way into his insides, gnawing at him at a steady pace. He knew what he should do to rid of that nagging feeling and redeem himself in the elderly couple's eyes, but his mind forced the notion to go somewhere else.

There existed something more important at the moment than their sentiments.

As if to reprimand him with spite after his insensitivity, his heart crumbled in on itself, inducing a sharper tug on the muscle. Maybe he should express his outrage in a more convincing manner, though he assumed they got the memo the first time he opened his mouth.

The young man fixed to apologize about his quick tongue when his feet moved on their own accord to the red devil's limp body. A saddened, hurt look met the couple's eyes, Nero hoping they'll understand his disposition. They still had their family while the teen had no one out here.

Sluggish feet approached the crimson slayer's right side, taking in the surface of what used to be his forehead. The hole in the center reminded him of a dormant volcano; once thought to be at peace with its violent activity until it sprang forth, unexpectedly spreading turmoil and devastation to anyone near it.

He dared not look into the gape because he knew his previous entrée would erupt out of his stomach. Though the attention did not go unnoticed that the gun wound resembled a mangled opening to form from the shot of impact. If anything, the bullet's force should've mutilated his head inwards, not shaping his cranium to have a protruding crater.

Which also raised the question of why Dante didn't move out of the way. The man could tilt his head to dodge bullets and knives... and words if he wanted to tune someone out.

In his hometown when he first fought the hybrid, he threw “Sparda's” twenty foot iron-clad sword right at him at full force, and the bastard leaned back a little as the sword flew past him. So why didn't the jackass evade when he heard the bullet discharge from the gun?

Nero knelt by his companion, not knowing what to do since his shock stilted his movements. Even in his deceased state, Dante appeared to have some life in him, begging to have one more go at it before he really went away.

Flashing memories of the times they spent together bombarded his mind, evoking emotional grief
to evict his remorse and take up vacancy in Nero's being, stabbing his heart in all its fury. It just seemed like they had so much left to live and do; almost as if somebody cut him off a support he had enjoyed.

His eye ducts filled with the saline liquid he had no intention of reuniting with, if only his grief didn't assault his heart. His mind helped none in the matter either, images reflecting on staying with the veteran and seeing the environment surrounding him.

When he initially arrived there, he wanted to ask the hybrid if any cheap motels lingered in his neighborhood. His excuse in traveling so far out was, he begrudgingly rationalized, if he ran into trouble he could be near the old prune and, with annoyance, call him to help should a problem arise. Yet the dork told him to go upstairs and wait until he got off the phone to see how well he fared.

He didn't have to let Nero stay there with him, give him missions, or a temporary home. The chieftain didn't need to do anything nice or genuine for him, yet the elder allowed him as his roommate.

At first, it seemed too awkward to be given goods when he endured a lifetime of earning stuff on his own. And in consequence, he avoided Dante as much as possible because, in so many words, he didn't meaningfully say thank you and he didn't know how to take the situation as a whole. Yes, he said “thanks,” but he didn't feel it had weight behind its meaning. He gave the red one half of whatever earnings he made, not that Dante mentioned he had to but it was the honorable thing to do.

Yet if the shoe were on the other foot, Dante would rack up quite a tab before Nero even saw a penny.

But now, those ‘thank yous’ are going on a permanent hold, either that or he can save it at Dante's funeral.

A lone tear snuck its way out of its watery nest, wiped away after a stubborn will settled in Nero's core. Resolute to prove to his mental state that Dante is alive and well. If only he had something tangible to go on...

His right hand wrapped around the back of Dante's neck, heart rate spiking as he cradled him to sit him up. He dared not to even look at his sagging skull in fear that his determination would sour.

When someone loses blood or they died, the body's temperature drops. And upon touching him, Nero noticed Dante's warm skin, actually a little warmer than normal following his “death.” Human fingers roved over the veteran's face, Dante's flesh seeming to grow hotter the longer he held him, with his devil bringer gently pulsing.

It wasn't the loud vibrations he felt whenever the elder neared the partial-hybrid, but it acted as a subtle hum shooting throughout his demonic arm. Could it be that Dante isn't dead, or his damned limb insisted on telling him he hung onto his last threads of life?

To be honest, the youth was never this near to him. He didn't believe this situation compared to his earlier confrontations because Nero voluntarily got close to him instead of Dante popping his personal space bubble. Since he had a front row seat, at the elder's expense to his face, he figured he'd take a mental picture of his angles and curves, considering this the only way to remember his facial characteristics.

Soft cerulean hues couldn't take in what his mind directed him to do, his left hand hovering over
the gash in Dante's skull. He considered wiping the blood off his forehead or touching the wound to see if it remained warm. His eyes trained on the blue digits holding the red hunter up in a slack, sitting position, knowing he'd have to eventually look at Dante before it ended.

His brain ignored his pondering thoughts and shifted over to scrutinize the crater in Dante's head... or rather at the spot it should have been.

Nero blinked in repetition, making sure the darkened night played no tricks on him with its lacking light. He looked at Dante's face with more encouragement this time, looking on in pure amazement because the clotting, dark mound... disappeared?

“What the hell?” The youth's eyes widened, the blood splattered over the majority of the halfling's features slowly receded, as water would do from a shoreline. But this red “stream” seemed to suck back towards the elder's forehead, disappearing into a small hole remaining open in his skull.

Hope rose in his heart as Nero's left hand followed up the elder's face, chasing a thick droplet of ruby liquid traveling upwards. Is time rewinding itself to prevent this action from occurring? “Wait a sec... is time turning around or is he just healing?” Nero mulled this over in his mind while the bead continued on its journey.

Wholesome devils healed, given a chance they scooted away from whatever their attacker harmfully administered to them. However, lessers did not reclaim their health unless they triggered into their devil forms.

Dante and Trish are different in this case and Nero, but not so much. Dante could rehabilitate and regenerate should someone get the better of him, as did Trish, but her powers lacked depth. Nero's time to seal his wounds was quicker than that of a normal demon, but he developed welts and bruises accompanying him a little longer than usual.

The droplet finished its way to its designated spot, leaving the youngster to ponder what happened. Never in his life has he witnessed such a peculiar event. Whenever he got cut or scraped, his blood didn't pool together and seek refuge back in his body, he bled until the bleeding stopped.

Dante still contained a moderate amount of scarlet fluid all over his face after the hole completely closed, so did that mean he's alive?

The teenager wiped away some of the metallic liquid off Dante's forehead, three of his fingers touching an uneven lump where the wound sealed. He speculated the injury hadn't mended all the way.

If his wounds closed up, then... he lives. If he was alive, he could withstand severe injuries. If he withstood severe injuries, then he can deal with this couple and their bootleg weapons. But to make sure he can gloat to his concerns later after jumping to conclusions, he must validate the life of his friend.

Two fingers pressed to the elder's pulse on his neck, moving them around to find that beating throb to confirm his belief that Dante survived. Nero resumed to move his digits; up and down, back and forth until he found that bumping thump. His heart pounded, searching for a beat of any sort and disappointing, didn't recover one.

“Oh, come on Dante. Don't leave me hanging like this,” Nero strained in a whisper. His head trauma had healed, but he sensed no throbbing vibrations on his throat.

Injuries didn't knit together after someone died. So is he non-alive or not? Nero shook him, giving
up his search and attacked his cheeks instead.

“Let me know you're breathing, you big lump of stupid.” Light slaps hit a stubbled, bloody face before he poked him in various spots. “Just wake up you creepy geezer.” The longer Dante remained unconscious, the harder the partial-hybrid hit the half-breed to render him conscious. In the midst of slapping him, Nero noticed the elder's skin temperature returning to a normal setting; no more feeling as if he raged on fire.

Grace took one step forward and away from Edward, gun still in her hand looking upon the duo on the ground. As grotesque and wrong as it may have sounded... her aim landed a pretty good shot. She barely moved to a suitable position to do such a thing and the bullet planted dead center in his skull.

Never before has she pulled off a mark so perfectly, and she relished in her gruesome defeat; semi-sure it might happen again if the youth took his frustrations out on them. But in case it didn't, she would store this moment in the deepest recesses of her mind.

“It's no use in trying to save him. He's gone.” Grace talked in a stern tone; it isn't possible that his friend is even close to alive.

From her standpoint, a thick portion of red matter violently exploded from the big man's head, so attempting to rouse him up from his eternal slumber destined to be a fruitless endeavor.

“It wasn't meant to go down like that, and for that I'm sorry.” She turned to her husband and offered him a sympathetic look, in which he gave a reassuring squeeze to comfort her.

Though by the vibes the young man projected, she wasn't so positive of his acceptance towards his friend's accidental passing.

“Heat to her, youngster. Trust her when she says there's nothing you can do when a loved one is taken from you.”

Nero looked at the both of them; sulfur emerging in his eyes, anger searing away any sympathy about their dilemma. “Are the both of you fucking morons?”

He didn't hear them right. How in the world can they say that shit to him when the fault lied with them?

Hmph, 'It's no use in trying to save him.' Who the fuck do she think she is? She said those words like she meant to harm him. And what in the deuces did she mean by 'It wasn't supposed to go down like that?' How in the hell could that be explained?

His inside demon growled in defense at her words, instinct telling him that one, or both of them, may not be the 'poor and defenseless' couple they played themselves in the beginning. Especially the older woman. Something about her didn't sit right by him; like she purposely lacked sympathy for shooting Dante. Her weak ass apology doubling as proof.

“Hey, you watch your mouth boy!”

Obviously Nero hit a nerve with Edward but Grace's aura seemed to darken, Nero's inner devil rattling the cages containing the beast to combat this becoming threat.

Maybe she remained shell-shocked about what she had done or perhaps she didn't give a fuck. She lost everyone she knew, and there stood a chance she didn't care who else bereaved anyone they lost. Or possibly she just... dammit what did she mean by 'not going down like that'?
“You tell her that! What do you mean by 'not going down like that?' As if you wanted to hurt him.”

“It would not matter because you wouldn't understand.”

The fuck?

“What the fuck is there to understand!” Nero snarled in venomous anger, ready to drop Dante on the ground and violently shake some sense into the old woman.

“Watch your mouth!” Edward took two steps forward to warn the boy again.

Yelling at him or his wife would not bring his friend back, and appearing like he planned on harming them sure wouldn't do the deed either. Though, once he looked down at the docile man, he figured his best course of action succeeded in trying to empathize with him.

He didn't want to think about the body's grim handling and its explanation to the authorities. Truthfully speaking, the weight of reality hadn't hit him full force. He felt shocked, unable to decipher what happened.

In all honesty, what could he do?

He paced back and forth, staring at the evil glare from the young boy. Whetstone went extinct of human life, humanity's traitors plaguing the town. Only one notion existed why Edward and his family were kept alive by Ramona: to alert the few neophytes nestled in the vicinity that a fresh supply of food arrived. The damned inhabiting the community needed him to direct any passer-bys towards its township center, and then the monsters would do their dirty deeds there.

Anyone who ventured up here never returned.

The converts destroyed the evidence of the person ever being here; the explanation why this tiny dwelling became successful into becoming a ghostly boondocks. And Edward helped with the rest.

At first, he refused to aid in such a heinous act; telling their devil-worshiping asses to go to Hell, pun intended. But when Ramona, that sweet little girl he knew since the age of four, threatened to have his innocent daughter raped and killed in front of him he relented, even rushing to say he would vacation there just to ensure his brood's safety. Though as a measure to make sure he didn't play the good Samaritan, she had a minion of hers keep a close eye on her.

When he heard these two travelers say they're from out of town and worked an anti-demonic occupation, he sensed a calming elation; like someone threw him a lifeline to get him and his family out of there. Actually, he didn't think he would go somewhere heavenly after the acts he committed when he passed on.

He directed men, women, and children to meet their cruel fates at the claws of those disgusting monsters plaguing this earth. But the more he tried to convince himself he sacrificed those people in the name of his kin, the shittier he felt. He should have fought back; stretching himself beyond his means to do what he knew was right in his heart. He showed weakness to an even weaker enemy, and for his loved ones he would gladly trade places with the man in red.

“I know how you feel-”

“No you don't! If you did, you would be screaming and yelling at your wife about killing off your only help!” Nero fumed.

“Son, I've messed things up by leading my family down this road. You got every right to feel the
way you do now. The consequences I've rendered will be accepted by me and me al-alone.”

A hoarse sob escaped his lips, the weight of everything that's been occurring reached its limit, weighing down on him until his knees gave out from under him. How many more lives had to be taken away due to his foolishness?

Over the past few months, he grew accustomed to the deaths surrounding him on a weekly, if not daily basis. Guilt ate at his consciousness, rolling over blind in letting these atrocious acts continue. A numbing, black void settling in his being permitted escape from reality; a means to deny the truth. When he saw his potential help evade this world, he caved into that abyss.

“Crying tears won't bring him back because you missed playing the superhero,” the teen said in an even voice, looking into Dante's serene face.

“Edward,” Grace ran over and knelt by her husband to comfort him. She let go of the gun, encircling both arms around her fallen man, placing little kisses on the back of his neck to calm his frazzled nerves.

The child should reflect his negative emotions unto himself. They wouldn't be in this situation if the youngster didn't just stand there and observe his friend being eaten by that fiend, so it served him right.

“You don't have to explain anything to me Eddie. You did everything you could to save this family. After all, they say bad things happen for a reason.”

If this lady pushed to piss Nero off subsequent to snapping at them: mission accomplished.

“Who knows, perhaps they were with Ramona and this was a set-up.”

A surging pitch riled him in anger. “Get bent, Lady!” Nero bellowed, temporarily forgetting he held Dante in his embrace.

Dusted jeans stood to his full height, pointing a neon blue finger at the woman. Edward tuned out long ago, cradling his head and silently weeping. “Are you trying to say that by accidentally shooting him you're trying to see if we're with this broad?”

“It's logical.”

The small hairs on his forearm rose, all alarms going off in his mind after hearing her voice dip three octaves lower. No female possessed that calm of a natural tone flow so smoothly, yet so deadly into another speech. This situation gyrated towards the eerie the longer it waged. Her cold demeanor and startling words hid something, and by the mere presence of the devil hunters being there threatened her secret.

“You shouldn't have dropped your gun,” Nero said lowly. He tested the grounds to see if his suspicions ran wild or if he needed to prepare to strike.

“Why is that young man?” The lowered octaves in her voice vanished, but that low timbre remained, reverberating in her chest. “You wouldn't dream of killing a poor, old dame would you?”

Honey-brown eyes blinked twice, but what the teenager saw in between the blinks made him gasp. Her pupils enlarged to giant, jade-toned circles, her irises no longer visible in the flash of a second.

“Nobody's doing any more shooting tonight!” Edward lifted his head, wiping his tears and standing up shakily, holding an assertive stance. “There is nothing we can do, son. And believe me when I say I lost out on something great.” He looked to his wife, Grace quirked her lips into a sweet smile
before turning her gaze back to Nero, piercing him to the spot with those pea-green rings.

There goes that 'son' word again.

“Get away from her,” demanded the teen, readjusting the awkward weapon in his hand, pointing at the woman. Earlier it seemed the light, or lack thereof, tricked his mind over her face. There weren't any shadows or flickering lights to play tricks on him. He wasn't aware of people's eyes changing to that drastic of a color within seconds of each other, so she had to be a demon in disguise.

“No, please no!” Edward exclaimed, moving over to stand in front of Grace in a defensive gesture. Nero admired his courage, but not enough to stop him from exposing her nature, he hoped.

“Take me instead. Kill me, shoot me, do whatever you want, but let my wife and my children go! Please, I beg of you!”

“No problem,” the partial-hybrid stated with casual ease, “if only those words came from her.”

“She's sorry! I'm sorry! None of this should have happened to your friend—”

“I'm over that. I thought he no longer needed any training wheels to steer him through life, and I was dead wrong to assume that, wasn't I? Get away from her, I will not say it again.” Nero paused, replaying his words laced in a cold tone.

“Then shoot me. I'm tired of running from devils with no hearts. Look at where it’s gotten me! Everything I've ever known is gone; whittling away as time passes... but not my wife, not my family. I'm. Not. Moving.”

“I wonder why your wife isn't speaking for herself?”

“My husband is trying to protect me, you ingrater!” Grace shouted from behind the security of Edward.

That voice again. Is he avoiding her changing tone or is he used to it?

“Funny how you say you're not running from demons when there is one you should be running from.”

Nero dropped the shotgun to his side because his left shoulder bristled with aches. The recoil hadn't been pleasant, and his arms didn't feel like dealing with its handling just yet, if not any more.

“The only demon here is you and your unstable behavior! Did someone teach you to respect your elders?” She mocked in laughter, inching closer to the gun she ditched on the ground.

“Yup. This bozo right here,” Nero kicked the black boots beside him. “Obviously his lesson didn't stick.”

“You're a monster!” The old woman snarled, emerald hues staring at him with frigid malice, pointing an accusing finger at the youth.

If that wasn't a tell-tale sign she disguised herself as a demon, then nothing would... other than if she revealed her true form.

“Heh, that may be, but it takes one to know one. After all, I'm not the idiot who has—Ow!”

The teen fell, landing his weight on his right knee after a rough kick sent it inwards from behind.
Punctuated spikes throbbed in his patella, dropping down onto his side with his devil bringer clutching the injured bone. He threw the weapon away from him as if that became the root of his troubles.

The cocking of a gun alerted Nero of his little slip-up, but he didn't pay attention to the woman, his leg conquered his importance than her wretched attitude. Is it possible his legs tired, unable to support his mass? Dante didn't do it, he was dead as a brick.

“I have suffered much during my time here, but to be threatened by a snot-nosed brat like you is where I draw the line.”

Nero rolled over on his back to view the lady's rigid stance.

She pointed the gun at his head, eyes (for now) back to their brown color coupled with a sour face. He could have grabbed the shotgun with his devil bringer in a moment's notice, but the blue and red appendage wanted to console his knee. If he played his taunting cards right, he can stall her enough to get out of her line of sight.

“Grace, sweetheart... I know you're agitated that he upset you... but this ain't the way.”

Or Eddie can do the stalling.

“Our lives are at stake here, Edward.”

“I don't need a reminder-”

“You know what will happen if they found out about this; they'll come after your children.”

“It doesn't have to be this way, honey. Put the gun down!”

“You would trust these strangers over me?”

_That_ damn voice.

“I think you should go alert them and tell them we have more visitors, Eddie. What's two more people gonna do, huh?”

“What's... what's gotten into you?” Edward said with nervous jitters, stepping towards the stairs to slightly move away from her.

It was terrifying what happened to the man in red, though the damned terrified him more. His wife seemed to plot something corruptive, like she wanted to rid her conscious of any wrongdoing by eliminating the strangers as if they never existed. Wait...

“Grace... you don't mean to-”

“Call the demons—It's not possible!”

_Bang!_

Nero barely registered the woman's bulging eyes before she dropped to the ground, a nasty splash of the visceral substance splattered over the restaurant's door. The weapon slipped from her hands, discharging a shot that whizzed by Nero's ear if he didn't tilt his head. The slug rang off somewhere in the distance, making the youth follow the sound to its last destination. Midway on
his journey did he stop to witness the feat firing the gun.

In his line of vision, he noticed Ivory raised in a heightened right arm, the nozzle sizzling from where the bullet left its trajectory. He looked towards the chest of the hybrid to see if it shallowly rose and fell, and yet again Dante remained still. If Dante pulled the trigger, then that meant that Dante is alive and well!

But, why did he feel the need to ’play possum?’ Nero scooted by the stiff demon, knee spasming the whole way over. He took a quick glance at Edward, cowering in fear on the porch; either from seeing his wife's brains blown out, the dead man in red seemingly joining the living again, or the two scenes mixing. Needless to say that the roles reversed, so now Eddie-boy can walk in his shoes and share his sentiments.

“Dante... you alive or some-”

“You have got to take some classes in sensitivity, you brat,” Dante's heavily throated, raspy voice spoke. Nero breathed in deeply, relief and triumph simmering inside his soul over having a non-dead comrade.

It felt like the pressing weight on his heart lifted, a welcoming sensation replacing the negative emotion with happiness. He, in a fit of paranoia, placed his two fingers under Dante's chin to find a pulse, which throbbed this time.

“Don't touch me... you boob.”

“You are welcome,” the teenager uttered a nervous, but welcomed laugh, internally telling his emotions to capture those sad feelings and shove it somewhere far and deep.

“Why? What did... you do besides scream and whine at the old folk over half the night.”

“Hmph, I did not. … Hold on, you heard everything?”

“Yup.”

“Starting from when?”

Interesting... if Dante listened in at a certain point, then why did he wait so long to make his re-appearance? Maybe he underwent the regenerating spectrum from the blast to his brains. Anyone taking that much damage to the head and healing within moments proved a feat.

“It started with whoever shouted 'Grace' the first—FUCK!”

Uh-oh... perhaps pulling the halfling up by the lapels of his coat hadn't been such a brilliant idea. Nero had this strong curiosity to see how the back of Dante's skull looked after it healed, or not, and he briefly caught Dante's pained expression. He should have let the captain stay as is. Besides, he didn't think he wanted to release him now in fear of actually killing him, seeing what rested underneath his noggin.

If the crimson slayer held out while his demonic lifeblood repaired his wound, it sure did a botch-ass job. Clotted blood pooled where the dirt lay, forming a ring around Dante's head as if it cushioned it. Nero didn't recall seeing this much gore the first time he lifted him up, but maybe he overdid it by letting Dante hit his cranium when he made that outburst at that old woman.

Shit!
Was dropping the elder the outcome in him re-opening the fresh injury?

Shit! Shit!

Hitting the man all over his face seemed awful, half-knowing and half not knowing the chief attempted to close up his wounds. Nero stared at the conglomerate of bloody excrement and soil before he struggled to throw the chief's arm over his shoulder to hoist him up.

Shit! Shit! Triple Shit!

The partial-hybrid stopped his movement when he saw something cream-colored protruding from the red mass on the ground.

“Please let this be a shiny rock... or a shark tooth,” he whispered aloud, reaching his right arm down to pick up the slightly jagged ‘rock.’ When he picked up the thing a sharp, ragged exhale resounded throughout his mouth, disbelieving what he held in his hand was actually a piece of Dante's skull.

“This is impossible.” Nero shuddered, holding the widget up to his nose. A darker shade covered the edges, probably a sign of Dante's age or even how his hexed heritage affected him... or how the blast to the forehead impacted the bone. Little globs of gooey, red mass held on, as if afraid to let go whatfor.

Attentive ceruleans traveled upwards to Dante's back, churning his stomach.

Reds and browns matted up his otherwise pristine white hair, looking like he mashed his locks into some meat loaf. Nero scrunched his face, lips turning downwards because the fault pointed towards him dropping the slayer. His tummy turned acrobatic flips holding the object, disbelieving he held... a piece of someone's skull. Swallowing the bile threatening to rise up and out of his throat, he tucked the missing chunk of Dante's anatomy in his jacket.

“I'm so sleepy...”

“Please say nothing remotely close to that!”

“You suck... ass as my partner... you ass.” The teen didn't fail to notice the sluggish speech pouring out of Dante's mouth, and he bet whatever his worth that his mind fixed on recuperating from the onslaught.

A sanguine trickle descended the back of Dante's neck, disappearing into his shirt, a gloved hand feeling behind his brain case. His flinching fingers let Nero know his stance seemed dire, verifying his assumption by sinking in on himself and lolling his head to one side.

The youth looked at where the elder touched himself, gazing into the slightly open wound spewing out trickles of the red liquid. His blood leaked out little by little, as if in tune with his heart beat. Maybe he could rally the hybrid to speed up his healing process to get out of this shit-hole.

“Hey uh, Dante... you won't stop bleeding.”

So much for being convincing.

“Blood is infected.” Dante's tone took on a more sluggish, monotonous one; words slurring and slowing the more he talked. But he had to keep him talking, unless he wanted him to lose consciousness... permanently.
“How? From the gun wound?”

“Yup... and the-the d... brown shit...”

“Hey, hey, HEY! Stay with me, you dupe!”

“I wanna get... away from you.”

“Yeah, well you're stuck with me whether you like it or not.”

“... Eww.”

Nero needed to move Dante to the truck. At least if he passed out or died, Nero could try to drive him until he reached a hospital or something of the sort. “Just stay awake man. Don't die on me now.” He grabbed the elder's left arm and lifted it over and around his shoulder, never letting go since Dante seemed incapable of grabbing onto him.

He placed his left knee on the ground, deciding to use his bad knee to support him and the captain's mass. Cold air expanded his lungs before aligning himself hip to waist (because of the small height difference) and pulled him upwards.

“Thisain'tgonnawork!”

His spasming patella malfunctioned, starting him at step one again. The partial-hybrid glanced towards the old timer and saw him kneeling besides his wife, which gave the demonic duo even less time to gain their footing, literally. Reaching around Dante's side to grasp onto his belt, Nero inhaled again to give the man a lift; succeeding in lifting the elder's hips from the ground and failing because his knee stopped working.

If only the elder lost about twenty-five pounds...

“Looks like someone needs training wheels,” Dante wheezed out, looking up at the fledgling, supplying him with a sly grin.

Had he not known better, he would have believed it was Dante who punted him in the back of his leg in his delirious state. Well no matter, he had to hurry up and move... wait, what?

“You!”

“Boob.”

“You kicked me in the leg, you ass!”

“I didn’t approve of those pet names you gave me.”

“Tch. Whatever, you bozo—OW!”

The red hunter may be half-dead, but he still packed a lot of bite in that bitch-slap he gave to Nero’s nose.

“What was that for?” Nero whined, touching his nose to make sure it didn't break.

“You did a shitty job at defending my honor—”

“When did you ever-?”
“-but since you cried... over me, I guess that makes us even.”

“I didn’t cry over you.”

“Oh no?” Dante gazed into Nero with darkened, glazed eyes, head leaning to the left to peer into those ocean blue peepers, daring the little runt to tell a lie. His olfactory networks tuned into the environment as he lay there recuperating, and no one else near him smelled like saline and chili cheese except the brat. Edward couldn’t form a sentence and the witch spilled no water out of her tear ducts, so it garnered no problem to figure out the culprit.

The hybrid felt Nero’s sentiments course through him, like… he channeled the stress and discomfort he went through in a freaky, spiritual sense. All though listening to him screech and complain about Grace’s bitchy demeanor worked too.

Nero wouldn’t cave in to his question, no matter how intimidating he appeared. For the record, he didn’t cry; he shed a tear. A single, lonesome teardrop did not qualify him as crying.

“You’re still bleeding,” whispered Nero.

He attempted a third try to hoist the stout devil up, and this time the elder helped out by using his own limbs to help out. The half-human slouched once he reached his full height, stumbling into Nero’s side, the youngster nearly dropping the staggering flesh.

“You have got to lay off the pizza,” Nero grumbled, readjusting his hold, walking to the truck but the half-zombie stilled his legs into the ground, unwilling to advance any further.

“You need to eat more.”

“I thought you were just pulling my leg; that you really couldn’t move.”

“If I was pulling your leg, you wouldn’t be moving at all.”

“Oh, real funny!” His cheeks inflamed over reading too much into the double entendre, quickly blaming it on Dante's disorientation.

“Oh, shut up.”

“Why don’t you wanna go to the truck?”

“Need to flush... all the dirt out the wound so it can finish closing.”

“Hmm.” Turns out the elder retained some smarts. He should remember that for future reference. The teen imagined it to be unpleasant, hosing water on an open sore to swish out the particles embedded in there. He visibly shivered, never wanting to know what that felt like. Ever.

“Oh, so why’d you shoot the old lady… that was you right?”

“Yes. Demon.”

“How’d you figure?”

“She smelled like one.”

“… Okay?”

“That and she licked her lips with... a big ass tongue. Humans ain’t got tongues three feet long and
they sure as hell don’t have ‘em with a black underside, do they little Nero?”

He sneered at the nickname but said nothing else. “She tried to… flirt with you or something?”

“There was a mirror in the back, angled to… where I saw her but she couldn’t see me.”

“Great, what do we do now?”

“We, of course meaning you, have to kill her and get that old coot away from her… and the kids even if they’re… alive. Whether that’s his wife or woman-turned-demon or… fuck I’m tired of talking, you get the picture.”

“All right, but what do you mean kill her; she looks pretty dead to me.”

“Let’s play possum.”

“Never mind then.”

Squelching skin tearing apart reached their ears, followed by a piercing screech. Both hunters looked towards the noise, almost falling to the ground because Nero’s not accustomed to Dante's bulky weight leaning against him.

A quick snarl flowed from their mouths; Nero because he had to deal with another humanoid demon, and Dante because the old man had lifted into the air, a taloned tail piercing through his heart.

Her body morphed into a dark, mossy shade, scales covering her form from head to toe, a spiked tail swaying to and fro behind her. Her gray locks changed to orange; the waves mimicking that of a roaring fire. Neon orange claws extended from her fingernails, eyes turning into that creepy green hue again. A black tongue flicked in and out of her sharpened mouth, tasting their scent through the air.

“You pathetic weaklingsss. How dare you even try to help thiss poor fool. Your dayssss ass the Legendary Devil Hunter are over!” Her laugh expressed it likeness on par of a cackling hyena. She flicked her tail once, sending Edward flying to the other side of the porch, landing with a dull thump.

“You want to know what happened to hisss wife?”

Thinned lips kept silent, each thinking of strategic ways to kill her quick; no time to fool around and split up. This situation turned ugly, and there was no telling how many more of these set-ups lingered.

“SSShe tried to grab her children and essscape, ssso I caught her and her worthlesssss cretinsss and had them killed jusssst before you came. And I had to “borrow” her ssskin and act the pitiful wife ssshe wasss. Isssn’t that wonderful?”

“SSSounds like a load of ssshit if you asssk me,” Nero taunted back, earning a gracious chuckle from his half-dead friend.

“Ah yesss, the brat. I believe I ssshalll take great pride in killing you after I turn Dante into mincccce meat.”

“Do we really have to go through this again?” The chieftain asked peeved, slowly reaching his hand down to reach ebony.
“If we want to get home? Yup, we do.”

“You wanna ‘chop down whatever we lay eyes on’ or would you rather fly solo?”

A widened grin spread across his face, remembering their heated conversation when they first encountered lechers at the mansion. He had a feeling he would do most of the fighting since one hit to Dante and he would be down for the count. But just to lead the man to think they would work together, he agreed that using teamwork would be their best bet to defeat this ugly reptile.

“Keep up with me old man. Don’t need you falling down and taking a dirt nap. Carrying you around is not fun.”

“Hey, you’re speaking my language, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: It's really fun to just have them bicker with one another, and then create an accident where they will think about being nicer to each other. But alas, they wouldn't be who they are without having those ginormous egos of theirs.

P.S. I have got to stop watching Quentin Tarantino movies. I think they are bad for my health.

P.S.S Thank you guys for the comments and the kudos! It's really been awesome receiving them. :D
The fight with the female lizard passed by in a blur.

Her screech attack polarized their hearing, swinging her spiked tail around to pierce them. Since Dante swayed with a weakened balance, the teenager handled most of the taunting and direct blows so she wouldn’t kill Dante, for real this time. Rapid bullets chipped her hide, exposing soft flesh to allow Nero to deal the final blow.

The battle abruptly ended when Nero charged up the shotgun he threw away from him, taking off the hardened shell protecting her heart. Fired pellets entered the over-sized muscle, igniting on fire with each slug. The she-reptilian fell down hard, howling to the world of her easy defeat.

To their surprise, she wasn’t talkative throughout the scuffle, the duo welcoming her silent tenure, yet they still needed evidence about this demonic town. What little details she babbled about and what he heard while he ate left a shit load of questions in need of answers.

The half-demon staggered to his left, shaking his head once then wincing, lifting his hand to his open wound after more blood had pooled out. The teen saw the man jerk, holding a grimace on his face because he didn't know Dante's pain tolerance limit.

When he thought on it, compared to his punctured chest by Dante's broadsword, he'd been very lucky. If he got shot, it seemed reasonable he wouldn’t even be standing, never mind up and walking about.

He didn’t know how far his injuries extended, but if they ran alongside the elder's, he did not want to go through the experience of it.

Dante made his way to the front porch and knelt down, leaning against one of his knees to look upon the dying man. In short, he wondered if the old timer knew about the black-mailing demon with her telling him to zip it, but their loving gestures told otherwise.

Nero briefly gave him some twisted version of comfort… assistance… or some shit before dropping him on his gash to cry foul at the she-monster’s rebuttal. It felt as if someone hit his skull with a lead baseball bat.

He had to school the brat in keeping his exorbitant sentiments under a lid, especially concerning heated disputes. Speaking of which, Edward wound himself in a circumstance which provided no benefit to anyone. Whether his actions sought forgiveness in sending people to their early deaths concerned Dante none, but getting him to deliver information to prevent this from further escalating was.

“You’re a demon, aren’t you?” Edward wheezed out, covering his injury with his right hand.

“Yes, I am.”

“And yet you hunt your own kind?”

“Yup.”
“Why?”

“Long story… not really interesting.”

Edward nodded, coughing up blood shortly after. The veteran knew he had little time to live, so he needed to get him talking else he remained in the dark about this growing problem.

“Where are the relatives of the people that live here?”

“In their homes… with their loving families until the… the end… end the-”

“Hey, stay with me for a while, old timer. Until the end of what?”

“The month. Officer Scott… told anyone who… had family up here that communication will be unavailable to their families.”

Dante scrunched his face in annoyance. That would have been a nice detail to know before all this happened. “Now, who’s Officer Scott?”

“A lackey employed by Caramel Caroline.”

Great. More fantastic news. When he thought one situation to be done and solved, here comes another twice as bad. Not only are humans hopping on this thing like a hot, new trend but demons jumped into authoritative positions.

His mind, at least the functioning part of it, said to go to every dive along the road and kill any lurking lechers surrounding the area. Is it better to stop somewhere and sleep overnight, preferably in this region to finish off the demons?

No sense in going all the way home and then backtracking out here. But he needed to add extra weapons to his arsenal and drop off all this stuff in the trunk, not to mention the errand of putting his car in the shop.

Where was Trish when he needed her?

The devil hunting gang all agreed to divide their territory to respond quicker to demonic reports. Dante and Nero handled the local jobs and when necessary, the ones way out of town. Lady took the missions in the suburban-city area, and Trish adventured to the outskirts of the district.

The blond demoness is the first to know about oddities that were demon-like in nature, so it garnered little surprise if she knew about the happenings going on around the neighborhood. He wondered if she pursued anything close to what they did now. After all, she mingled with the in-crowd, of the underworld that is.

“Can you promise me some things, my boy?”

“If it’s within my will to do so.”

“If my children are somehow alive, but I think they’re not-” Edward closed his eyes to keep his tears at bay, but a few watery droplets spilled out. He continued, “Can you ensure they’re put up somewhere safe, far from demons… including, including you ‘cause my daughter’s quite a looker?”

Both elderly men of different eras shared a genuine chuckle, lifting the thickened tension away from them. Dante touched behind his head, strands slicked together by his bloody hair.
Unfortunately, the gesture dismantled the peaceful ambiance they tried to create and settled back to its grim reality.

“If it’s in my power to do so, then I will. Is that all?”

“No. Promise me you'll bring Caramel Caroline’s faulty... corporation down. It’s ruining a lot of lives, you know.”

“Guaranteed, but it’ll be a problem if she has a pretty face.”

“I’m sure you can conquer that obstacle along with that young problem over there as well.” Edward motioned with his chin to the other white-haired being. “Quite a mouth on him, I tell ya what.”

“Oh, he’s already getting his behind sautéed by me later. He’s got something coming to him, so don’t worry. He’s not the only one that’s been giving you any lip.”

The old man smiled, closing his eyes; he looked at peace with himself. Maybe he felt this burden lift off of him, able to leave this situation in capable hands, at least that’s what Dante assumed.

Even facing his own demise, Edward kept his emotions under a cool mask. He wasn’t pleading for his life or babbling into hysterics about death wrapping its claws around him. More than likely he remembered the positive and joyful times he went through, or thinking about how badly he fucked up.

The hunter placed a comforting hand on Edward’s shoulder, telling him everything was going to be okay from here on out.

“It’s only going to be okay if I get a chance to see my family again, but I doubt that-”

“Trust me, you will see them again.”

“How do you know? What makes you so sure?” Edward strained his eyelids open, hesitant to know the answer.

“The final good-bye... doesn't always stop at death.”

The crimson hunter almost face-planted on his way to the restaurant's bathroom, Nero rushing to his side after Dante's head dove under the sink, hitting the faucet coming down. Nero, in so many words, had to physically convince the elder to accept his assistance, roving a bit clueless why the injured man kept shoving him away.

“Cooperating with me will make this go a lot smoother.”

“Since when do you want to help or share anything?” Dante retorted, but allowed the runt to work his fingers through his locks.

Nero sported a grimace on his face, gently running both hands through Dante’s scalp, washing away the browns and reds.

“Beats me. Maybe when I saw the back of your skull blown out? I think that did it.”

“So you wanted to help me, but you didn’t need to?”

Is that a rhetorical question? “You just had to have help, okay?”
“Whatever you say, kid.”

“No, I mean it. Where would you be if I wasn’t right here on this mission with you?”

“Probably with my eardrums still intact—dammit!” Dante hissed through gritted teeth when the fledgling brushed his clawed fingers over the wound’s outer edges.

“You did that on purpose.” Dante mumbled.

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes you did.”

“Negative.”

“Positive.”

“... What are you Dante, twelve?”

“No, but I can act like it.”

“Like you are now?”

“I’m not acting twelve.”

“Yes you are.”

“No I’m not.”

“Yes you are.”

“I know you are but what am I?”

“... Okay, we need a shower or a sink. Either this basin is too small or your head is humongous. Leaving that scar open is messing with your mental capabilities.”

“And he uses big words, too!”

“See what I mean?”

Soft fingers wove through Dante’s scalp, thinking to occupy the brat’s thoughts with senseless chatter. His eyelids drooped, shivering at the comforting sensation. If the kid kept this up, he didn’t doubt to fall asleep, taking a much needed nap.

As inviting as the idea sounded, he had to stay up long enough to trudge on home, to rejuvenate themselves and trek back tomorrow to rendezvous with the demonic inhabitants. That is if Nero replenished his vitalities.

“I saw a bigger sink in the kitchen. We should move there since it has more space.” Nero withdrew his hands from the white locks and moved towards the kitchenette, appreciating its old but clean appearance.

To the left of the youth resided the scented condiments and three deep fryers still bubbling with hot
grease. Two stoves, four ovens built into the wall, two refrigerators, a large basin, and a silver rack
upholding diversified skillets and pans sat to his right.

His hunger rose as the thought of food tickled his taste buds. Because no one stopped him, Nero
decided to raid the fridge for a little snack.

Yet his appetite plummeted after he saw the contents held within.

A foul stench penetrated his nostrils, recoiling in disgust over the various oddly-shaped hearts
sealed away in jars. Distinct stains of browns and reds spotted and stained its shelves.

“Did the old man know about this?” Nero wondered, taking in about seventy cases of the cardiac
organs swamped in what looked like thick, orange liquid. Just exactly what were these things doing
in here, and what were they used for? He doubted they used said flesh to cook meat with it, and it
didn’t...

A shirtless Dante walked over to the youth, Nero's saliva catching in his throat, hacking up his guts.
Dante had the upper portion of his clothes off in the bathroom, but his back faced the youngster
then. Now, he displayed his strong torso without shame, muscles stretching and rippling with his
slow but steady walk.

Dante overall had a bulky, muscular frame but in no way did that hinder him in combat. Frankly,
the added weight worked to his advantage. Wet droplets kissed his smooth, alabaster skin, doing
nothing to deter the few warrior scars housing a permanent residence upon his body; the drips
high-lighting those battle memories.

White tresses hung down heavily over the veteran's eyes; the section where his hair parted no
longer visible, gazing at the coughing punk. When he waltzed into the kitchen, he smelled the
unmistakable decay of rot in the fridge, hence why Nero had his hand over his nose.

Though, the twerp did not start hacking his lungs out until cerlueans laid sight upon him, which
flattered him so. Chuckling lowly to himself, he went over to Nero and graciously patted his back.

“What's in your throat?” Dante asked, amusement tinging his voice.

“I-” He coughed. “I think I just ate a chili-cheese-” He coughed again. “-heart burger.”

“Eh, huh?”

“I think I ate a heart burger.” Nero thanked the opened fridge, using that as an excuse.

Dante looked from his counterpart to the open refrigerator, face impassive at the multitude of
hearts in the icebox. There bound to be something gross placed in here, so it didn't bring forth
much of a surprise. Personally, this run-down shack gave him the creeps and he wouldn't attempt to
eat or drink anything from here. Too bad he forgot to mention the warning to Nero earlier.

“You're the one who loves trying out new shit.”

“Well... that was before I knew a bunch of hearts sat in the fridge!”

“Same thing in the freezer, a thing of hearts?” Dante moved towards the sink and turned the faucet
to the left, grabbing some orange-scented dish washing liquid to aid in cleansing his skull.

“I don't think it matters at this point!” Nero's tone rose, hitting his chest with a fist to calm his
breathing. He could use a drink of water or juice, but after seeing the contents within the icebox, he
didn't want to ingest anything else in this place.

Curiosity got the better of him though, looking inside the freezer to find... beef. Packaged cutlets of various animals, or parts of them, lined the shelves; relief rolling through his being over his consumption of actual meat... safe meat, that didn't derive from a human's organs.

_Consume. Regardless of the source._

His stomach churned, uncertainty dancing around his mind that the possibility could be true. And the notion his inner devil saying the first intelligent thing to him all day... okay the second.

Soft periwinkles took note of the kid's lightening complexion the longer he stood there. As much as he wanted to clown the partial-demon at his misfortune, they had to wrap up this little adventure just to come here tomorrow and repeat what they did today. “If it makes you feel any better, maybe you should go in there and do the super model diet trick.”

“... I'm not sure what that means, but I'll take a gander.” The teenager stuck his demonic forefinger down his throat to see if he and the elder agreed on something. When Dante nodded in approval, Nero jogged back to the bathroom, thinking to how he and Dante guessed on like terms, for once.

The hybrid stuck his head under the sink, turning to the left at an angle to let the water run over the gash. It provided no comfort, destined to hurt like a bitch once he put the soap in the gaping wound.

He ran his fingers through his scalp until he found the hole, lightly tapping around to dictate the torture he'd have to undergo. Make no mistake, he could take vast amounts of pain, it's just he wrangled to measure how much he had to administer to himself. In contrast, the anticipation made it worse when he expected the stinging.

A few feet away from him, dry heaving noises reached his ears, making choking sounds and trying to cough up ingested junk that might _not_ be actual food. There stood a chance that Nero wasn't delighted in cannibalism, whereas the average demon would tear through the hearts without hesitation.

The sadistic urges rose every once in a while within Dante himself, but he knew how to curb those desires until he got his hands on something to quench it. The runt had his episodes too, except his were less severe, lacking demonic blood lessening his blood thirst.

Speaking of feeling a little sadistic...

Quiet steps crept up behind Nero, wet droplets jumping down his torso to situate himself to the youth's back; to _help_ him along in his quest to purge the doubtful food.

His inner devil sought retribution after the punk dropped him on his head. He knew it wasn't intentional, but he wouldn't be in this situation, as badly, if his injury didn't clot over with dirt. So, cheers to the twat for pissing of his inside demon.

“It's hacking time!”

Nero only had a moment to breathe before Dante grabbed his jaw and held the bone open, sticking his long middle finger down his throat and keeping it there. The young slayer gripped the elder's hand in alarm, eyes welling up with water, choking through shortened breaths.

Nausea naturally took course in his belly, rousing the organ to eject the vile food from the safety of his stomach acids. He moved along in a calm atmosphere on his own until Dante dropped in and
disrupted the ambiance he set up for himself.

Coughing, gagging, and burping sounds brewed together in a disturbing symphony, bodies twitching and jerking, dancing to the odd rhythm. His lungs begged to scream when the lengthy digit swayed in circular rotations, thumping against his uvula in a harsh manner the longer it stayed there.

“Here comes the sushi train,” Dante jested, removing his finger in time to let Nero's digested meal, along with chunks of the forgotten tamale, erupt into the toilet. Now that he thought about it, it seemed he would venture here solo tomorrow. The youth would probably bow under his rising sickness and it might be a good thing.

Taking missions alone maintained a mainstay in his life. Trish and Lady tag teamed with him, but they went their separate ways to complete solo missions. Nero lingered in the lone wolf category and he spent much of his years in solitude, in a socially inept society at that. Understandable, but inasmuch he had to learn to pull away from the excitement and assess the situation... or else he would end up bent over the john again.

The veteran reached up and flushed the toilet after the youth finished emptying his gut, patting the kid on his shoulder as his method of showing support. In secret, his inner devil triumphantly howled at the youth's dismay; his human side pressed a bit remorseful because now Nero's services were on hold for a few days.

A shaky hand grabbed a piece of toilet paper, wiping the remaining splatter off his lips, sitting back on his haunches to steady his breathing.

He heard the half-breed leave the bathroom, only to return again and tap something cold against his head. Glazed ceruleans rolled up, settling on a glass of water, along with the elder's creepy smirk.

The punk's hesitation confused the elder, turning it around each way to determine why the brat didn't want to take it. He had enough brain cells to wash the cup out before he filled it up with water, so it was safe to drink. All though, the water not being up to standards posed a problem...

“How do you know the water isn't contaminated?” Nero questioned in a gruff tone, skepticism dancing across his features, looking upon the cup as if it bubbled with acid. He pushed it away with a sneer.

“You really think it's tainted,” Dante said, raising a slim eyebrow to counter Nero's accusation.

“Uh, yeah.”

“Seems fine to me.”

“Looks can be deceiving.”

“I don't see nothing strange floating in here.” The hybrid brought the glass up to his nose and sniffed, detecting no foul play in the water.

“Then you drink it. Ain't no tellin' what that stuff is made out of.”

“Water, Nero? Really?”

“Yes, really, Dante.”
A deep sigh stretched Dante's lungs, bringing the cup up to his lips. A long tongue darted into the liquid, swirling it around in figure eights, eyes looking from side to side in absent focus. The water tasted like any other solvent from the faucet; a little metallic, dry, and rubbery.

Said glass could have spilled all over the partial-hybrid if his right hand connected directly into the halfling's crotch, but Dante caught the swinging arm in his grip.

“I wouldn't hit you in the balls.”

“What did you do that for?!”

“When?”

“Forcing me to throw up? What the hell, man?”

“Nothing came out. You just chucked up air... and it bothered my ears.” Dante set the glass down on the bathroom sink, turning around to head back to the kitchen to finish cleaning his wound. “Besides, you're the one forcing yourself to throw up by dry-heaving like that.”

The end part to his sentence fell on deaf ears, the youth zoning in on the smooth way the clothing style covered Dante's ass when he walked.

Dante's whole outfit materialized out of leather. A red trench coat, his belted hostler on his black shirt, chaps and shoes emerged as the staple of his work gear. Why he wore so much of it escaped Nero's judgment, but perhaps he needed to don it similar to Superman needing his cape. Maybe it acted as power source or something; if he didn't wear it he wouldn't feel so invincible.

A desirable confidence exudes from his clothing.

… Okay, so that detail he could agree on. The smooth material slimmed him everywhere while adding bulk in all the right places. His ass-less chaps purposely clouded him in an enigmatic aura. Like a mysterious darkness wrapped around the hybrid and the piece of red denim showing his ass warned people to stay away, all the while drawing you into his mystery.

A crimson trail pooled down the bottom of the elder's spine, prompting the teenager to shake away his daydream. Dante's nape turned scarlet again, telling him that one of them inhabited diminishing health.

“You're still bleeding?” Nero erected himself on wobbly legs, leaning against the door frame, letting his stomach settle from its nauseating rouse. An urge to hunch over the toilet surged the longer he stood there, but the need to help out his comrade exhibited a pressing matter. He wanted to make sure he didn't die on him and that hollow feeling returned, like a blooming friendship that withered and perished.

And he had no other way to get home.

The veteran reached his hand up and rubbed his neck, bringing his gloved finger forward to inspect the smeared, red substance. He looked at Nero and shrugged, positioning himself over the sink to rid of those problematic dirt spots.

Nero inhaled strong and deep, steeling his nerves to calm long enough to make sure the dope lived. He glanced back to the toilet, remembering the scene so vividly not less than a minute ago.

Nobody, family or friend alike, would violate his privacy to get something out of his system. His stomach progressed nicely at shooting up the dubious food without any boost. The quicker done
the better yes, but he didn't feel right because Dante caught him in a state of vulnerability. Purging the meal should have improved his disposition, yet his health wasn't functioning at full capacity.

Ceruleans stared on in silence, wondering if he should go on and assist or let him suffer for catching him in surprise. As tempting the idea, it wasn't as appealing as watching him possibly dying; stuck out here in the middle of nowhere with rabid demons lurking in the town.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Sorry if the chapter seemed a bit...stopped, but all that writing made this chapter come out to 25 pages. The last chapter was 18 pages. I couldn't bring myself to let you guys read all that! So I broke it into two chapters and give it to you that way, lol. I know some stories on here that have 20+ pages to read in one setting, though!
"You need some help?"

"No. Just stand there and look pretty for Big Daddy."

The youngster's eyes widened, not expecting that response yet he kept his composure. Had the sentence taken on a more flirtatious tone, his face would have inflamed. Except nothing seemed "cheerful" or "flirty" in the elder's speech. More than anything, he sounded pestered with his open wound or with the teen's ridiculous question.

Nero peeked in the mirror, seeing a less-healthier version of himself; thus the 'pretty' part of Dante's statement was false. Salmon-tinted lips smacked in rebuttal and moved over to Dante's right, aligning his hands to assist him but needing a vocal affirmation.

"So you do or don't want my help?"

"Nero, my darling little Nero..." the youth scowled. He wasn't anyone's darling or dear or sweetheart, at least not Dante's. Not even his brown-eyed beauty called him that.

The red one continued, "If my brain functioned right, I would tell you to go and be eye candy in the car. But alas, I don't physically have eyes in the back of my head, so-"

"I'll take that answer as a yes."

"Yes, you should."

His tongue planted into the side of his cheek, leaning over to look at the bloody hole. Thankfully, he saw no bone showing in the gap. A small, thick red mound visibly greeted his sight. Small, dirt granules prevented the gash from closing, the claim why Dante couldn't clean the breach. Nevertheless... where would he start with this?

"What am I supposed to do here?" Nero closed his eyelids, inhaling deep before he stared at the damage head on. After washing out the gunk in the hunter's locks, it didn't appear as bad... still looked pretty gross because of the remaining gap. "Cause I am clueless on what I'm doing. Helping you clean your hair from looking like you dipped it in shit is one thing, but acting as your nurse isn't really—Ow!"

Brown boots shuffled back a few feet, warm fingers cradling his injured flank, furrowed eyebrows glared at Dante's right leg.

The black-clad knee lifted up and inwards, his booted foot connecting with the youth's bum. It's possible the hybrid lost the rational part of his logic; resorting to senseless violence instead of talking.

Ice blue eyes turned and frowned at the stunned youth, snorting in a haughty gesture before turning back and resuming to aid himself.

"You look surprised," came the smooth voice that hissed after sticking a finger into the opening.

"What the fuck is your problem?"

"You have been spewing nothing but shit out of your mouth the entire day. In respect to the old
man and one of his wishes, consider that a minimal ass-kicking to the whole one you're gonna get-
"Says who-
"-from me."

Arms of different heritage crossed, soon dropping his left hand to soothe his aching muscle. Dante didn't have to punt him that hard; a simple shove sufficed to steer him towards focus. Did the end tails on his leather chaps give him super leg power or something? That shit hurt.

A clearing of the throat reached his ears, drawing the youngster's sight in time to see the shirtless man point to the back of his cranium, but Nero remained stoic.

The chief turned to the unmoving twat, rolling his eyes because the youth practiced uncertainty about being close to him... and maybe taking any more physical abuse. If he wanted to ravage Nero's backside, there wouldn't be any objections on the youth's part; he guaranteed it.

"If I wanted to harm you, I would have done it already. Now if you don't mind, there's a couple of checkpoints I need to check out before the night is through."

Easy for him to say. He wasn't on the receiving end of physical abuse, by someone he trusted... on purpose. Dante could be plotting to hit him just for not coming when he called. The partial-demon already felt nauseous and exhausted, and the aspect of going along with it so he can take a nap in the truck sounded very relaxing.

"Will a friendly slap encourage you to finish?" The slight edge tainting his voice left little room for arguments.

"Pretty sure that will make me stay away from you."

"Nero," he all but growled, turning his head to glare at the teen.

"All right, already. Don't twist your panties in a bunch."

Quelling the rising animosity laced in Dante's voice pulled Nero's face into a frown. As far as his concerns stretched, Dante could keep those pessimistic emotions to himself or go into town and use it on the lechers in his weakened state. All he wanted to do is take a little nap while the hunter did... whatever.

Being in Dante's presence proved enough of a battle as it is.

With a final resolve, and some found luck he would take no more abuse from the shirtless man, he resumed helping Dante out with his healing... if only he wasn't shirtless. It maddened him. No matter the effort, his eyes glued themselves to Dante's blood-stained back.

He wasn't enthralled in how toned and muscled the palette looked. He held no interest in the warrior scars sparsely riddled across the expanse of the albino-like flesh. Nor his fascination in how well and developed each muscle appeared, with that long spiny bone disappearing into the bottom layer of his pants. No, none of those images caught his attention consciously.

"Stop looking at my ass Nero."

Said person refocused to Dante's skull, cheeks reddening after the veteran caught him in the act, sort of. The elder didn't turn his face to see Nero staring at this back, so the only explanation pointed to Dante having extra eyes behind his head.
He didn't directly gaze at his derriere because males didn't do that. Young, respectable males don't go around ogling at grown males' asses. It's always the perverts who fashioned this feat.

"No one's gawking at your ass."

Dante harrumphed. "Then why are you stalling?"

"This gross hole is disgusting to look at."

"Oh."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, oh."

"That's all you have to say?"

"Am I supposed to say something else?"

"Where's my apology?"

"About what?"

"The ass comment."

"I don't need to apologize for that."

Nero stopped, making sure he misheard nothing.

"Aw kid, why'd you stop again?" Lithe fingers roaming through his scalp comforted him, his head lolling and drooping down further into the sink to enjoy the relaxing feeling. As much as he wanted to prolong the little massage, he needed to close up the wound before it stayed that way.

"What do you mean there's no need for an apology?"

"Well, what the hell am I supposed to think?" Dante's voice had taken on a higher pitch, adding in an incredulous tone to complete his feeling. "You're back there and I can't see what you're doing. It was either you taking a peek or you turning green from looking-"

The hybrid stood up, shaking a wave of water into Nero's face, scrutinizing the youth with caution. His main concern wore on to see if Nero geared to throw up again, or more disturbing, into his hole.

A cool, lime tint coated the teen's face, conveying his depreciating health. Lily-white bangs stuck to Nero's forehead from Dante whipping his head and adding layers of fatigue on his visage.

"You're not gonna puke anymore, are ya?" The halfling demanded to know, preparing to steer clear if the brat did.

"I'm a survivor," Nero muttered with his eyelids closed, not opening them just yet after the water stung his eyes. He wouldn't doubt if the water was infected or contaminated, considering everything else wrong with the place.

A warm, damp cloth settled on his face, lightly scented oranges tingled his nostrils the longer he breathed it in. Soothing vibes grabbed control of his thoughts; the towelette's heat smoothing over his nauseated skin welcomed a great relief...
Where did that towel come from?

Reddened eyes shot open underneath a rag, paranoia washing over his features, not knowing where it had been. There aren't any towels in the bathroom, and he didn't see any when he walked into the kitchen; very unlikely that the thing just "appeared" out of nowhere.

"Where did you get this?" Nero demanded, peeling the towel off of him, holding the cotton cloth a good distance away.

"The sink. I had the decency to wash it before I gave it to you. Ain't I nice? Oh and by the way, I apologize for whipping the water in your face, had too much weighing me down."

What did it clean originally and how long has it been before the rag's been washed? Being in this abandoned place tightened his nerves. He couldn't distinguish between the tidy and the dirty; the lines between the two merging. Even touching the surface of something can prove to harbor contaminating germs.

"If I kissed it, would that make you get over your fear of bacteria?"

"No."

"Time's a wastin' kid. Are you helping me before you pass out?"

"You're not doing so hot yourself, Dante." The teen said deadpanned, blinking when he threw the blue rag into the trash can.

The chieftain feigned a look of hurt on his face, wondering why Nero discarded his 'support.' "I cleaned that for you."

"I'm not taking any chances in this place, you bozo."

"Psh, I even offered to kiss away the cooties."

"And end up receiving your disease on me as well?"

Shoving the man lightly in the shoulder, he moved over to the kitchen sink, sticking his eyes under the warm running water, sighing in relief.

"Not taking any chances, yet you willingly stuck your head under the tainted water-"

"Shut up." The youth stood back up to his full height, pulling up the bottom of his red sweater to wipe away the excess water dripping on his face.

The burning sensation gradually melted but the redness in his eyes remained, looking upon the faucet's reflective surface. Dark circles posed under his lower lids. His skin paled, pupils dilated larger than normal and lips a lighter pink rather than their natural salmon color.

Being ill never sustained an issue due to his superb immune system and on the days he felt sick, some good sleep set him straight.

"Stand there a bit longer and you'll look like a beauty queen," the red slayer said, wiping the water off his face with his gloved hand. He wouldn't be standing here watching Nero's well-being steer from bad to worse if the brat didn't stop his task. And because Nero hasn't had any proper nourishment (all of it now in the sewers) his regenerating qualities are on hold.

"You can even go on to win the pageant in the car if you get through this." Dante grabbed Nero by
the shoulders and lightly shook him.

Nero pulled his face in his hands, taking a deep breath to still his nerves. "Is this all I have to do?"
the teen pointed to Dante's head.

"Yes Nero, this is all you have to do."

"… What am I supposed to do?"

Why is this dragging on?

"Gently, as much as you can, put some soap on your finger and wriggle it around in the gap so the
dirt can glue itself to the soap."

"Okay."

The young hunter descended his finger to the designated spot, preparing to insert his knuckle into
the red cave when he stopped, mind sorting through the mental fog to let Dante's words sink in. 
"You want me to do what now?"

"Nero!" Dante moaned aloud, knees almost crumbling down in disbelief, edging no closer to
closing his skull's opening. An urge to push the kid away and do it himself grew stronger with each
passing second, but he couldn't see what needed to be cleaned and Nero had the better angle.

"No, I know what you want me to do, it's just that I don't know what to do."

"Just rub your finger in there and wash all the shit out."

"Uh, okay... I guess." The youngster took a deep breath, placing a hand on either side of the wound,
brushing as much hair away from it as possible. The gash didn't look that serious, but a
considerable amount of dirt lodged around the opening, creating goosebumps up and down his
spine.

"You can't do this by yourself?" Nero asked with caution, giving himself a full shake to steer his
nerves solid.

"Nope. Don't have eyes in the back of my brain."

Nero questioned that notion.

"Besides, this is all your fault so get in there and clean up your mess."

"What're talking about?"


"No I—oh."

The flashback of lifting Dante and leaning him against his knee and then dropping him back onto
his head... reminded him of his faulting judgment. True, he forgot he cradled Dante, yet at the same
time he had to protect the halfling's exposed carcass from receiving any damage; that lizard bitch
slithered through her dual personalities, showboating as the old woman.

"Why so little soap?"

"The dirt needs to catch on the finger so it can break the clump."
"… It's in a clump?" Nero's scowl hardened, face growing a little greener over taking a small roll of muck out of Dante's skull.

"I guess. Maybe it healed up a bit weird and it's angled somehow."

"What do you mean angled?"

"I don't know, get to scrubbin' and find out."

"This is fucking disgusting-"

"Now Nero!"

"Screw this!" The youth shoved the veteran's skull under the warm water, grabbing the orange soap and pouring half the liquid into his hair.

"Hey! What are you doing?"

"Cleaning out this filthy head of yours... and not throw up on you."

His muscles clenched to shift away but Nero forcefully held his neck down, letting him know he wasn't about to do that yet. "I'm not going to splatter my stomach acids all over you. I should, but I'll move to the side or something first."

The statement seemed to settle him down, though still uneasy about the youth being so sick. Oh well, if the twerp somehow passed out from his illness then they would stay here until the kid woke up and did it right. "My hair's already clean. Why are you doing it again?"

"Yeah, but your head isn't."

No matter how delusional he felt or how hard the dope forced him, he wasn't about to stick his finger in any hole. Bad enough he had to look at the offending gape, but to inject his knuckle inside the creepy opening while sick? Not in this life.

Soaping up the infected area and gradually working to getting the dirt out seemed like a better idea. Protruding his digit in the half-breed's skull just sounded foul. He entertained uncertainty if his brain remained exposed or if the bone covered the soft matter. What would happen if he inserted his pointer into his cerebrum and one of Dante's limbs went lame, or he had a seizure or even go blind?

As much as he repressed the craze to kill Dante on some days, he couldn't bring himself to intentionally hurt the man when he was down.

"You treat me so mean."

"No, I don't. Saying 'fuck off and do it yourself' might make me though." Timid fingers scrubbed around the wound, using his left hand to apply a small pressure the closer he veered to the hole. The grotesque thing equaled the size of a fifty-cent piece, dirt and caked blood mixing about and resting inside. Luckily, he didn't see the white bone, yet it stayed too deep of an opening nevertheless.

He wondered how much pain the dope could take. Having a sword embedded in your chest tortured his nerve receptors sure, but Dante never let on to his discomfort concerning the time when he pulled the blade out of himself. Thus far, the veteran hadn't twitched or grunted in veiled ache.
How anyone can suffer this volume of trauma to the head and be so still and quiet perplexed him. If the shoe were on the other foot, he would have snarled and grumbled throughout the entire process. He isn't... dead, right?

He tilted his head, looking down the length of Dante's cheeks to see shut eyes. Enclosed eyelids didn't twitch from the water running over them. His heart thumped a tad faster because that told him something was off. Any liquid pelting down on closed lids doesn't make them stay still.

Nero leaned down, face sitting several inches from Dante's docile one. Under the water, the red one's skin tone adopted a more pallid hue; the fluid high-lighting his chiseled cheeks and defined jawline. He looked so placid and serene, like he took a small nap until the teen finished with his job.

Dante turned his head to the right, opening a single ice blue eye to stare at the youth; nose almost touching the kid's lips.

"Uh... hello." the halfling mumbled.

"Hi."

"Something wrong?"

"You hanging in there?"

"Yeah, I'm hanging in there."

"Ah, okay then. I thought you died."

"If I was dead, wouldn't I be slumped over or something?"

"Who knows, you... thing."

"Oh, name calling now are we?"

"Just stay alive, will ya? I don't feel like driving home if you croak."

"Can you drive?"

"No, but that's besides the point. If I do decide to drive, I'll run people off the road."

The chief snorted but said nothing else. Lathering around the wound held out okay for what it's worth, yet the soapy tendrils slipped past the dirt and grime, stabbing itself along the bloody walls. He wasn't in a great deal of pain, it just stung like hell.

Dante guessed the teen grew uncomfortable with his silence, in this situation. His soundless tenure fetched on by him weeding through this demonic mess. An abundance of questions hung in the air. The most puzzling of them all; the motive why no one bothered to come up here after the whole "communications out" thing, excluding the relatives who did. If he had received that notice, he would have left. Period.

What sense did it make to stay up here without communication? And those who had escaped, were they hunted down too? Yet Mr. Edward said some dipshit name Scott involved himself in the affairs, disguising himself as a police officer; no doubt playing a big part in this shit storm.

Relatives of the locals couldn't have been that cruel to not come up here and check on family. Whoever rode into town met their ends in an untimely manner, not entirely to Edward's mercy, but
this policeman knew how to construct a plan. He must've relayed the messages to the families of the civilians.

This must be a small community to set up their demonic operation here, disabling anyone from calling for help. Just how many roamed here and what purpose did they carry to do this? He hated fighting humans who converted to demonhood. They irked him more than the natural-born ones.

"There, all done." Nero stepped back, shaking his hands before wiping them dry on his jeans. The red cave healed up centimeter by centimeter; the dirt washing away when Nero made deep, circular movements throughout the cleaning operation.

The partial-hybrid felt more than relieved to see the hole close, now presenting the time to let lazy ass look out for him while Dante got them home safely. He needed to shake off his nausea, and they had more than an hour and a half to make it there.

A sagging body leaned against the counter, arms crossing with his tilted head towards the ceiling. Nostrils expanded, taking in the orange-scented aroma and the unique, leathery scent of Dante's, moreso than the soapy one. He thought the hybrid busied himself with finding a cloth to parch his silver locks, however he seemed inclined to bother him instead.

Lukewarm hands touched his face and neck, spreading warmth to his shoulders. The youth just stayed there and relaxed, about ready to fall over and use the tiled floor as a bed. Upon remembering where he was, that idea soon flew out of his head.

"You feel a little cold."

"Then warm me up."

*Bask in his soothing touch.*

Did he say that aloud? Oops. His mind's delirium spoke in his place, words coated with insinuating hints. If the red one understood his faltering situation, which he failed to properly address, perhaps he would at least sympathize with him on his condition... hopefully.

"Body heat can warm you up." The halfling stood in front of the punk, staring at the kid's exposed throat. A dark voice echoed in his head, telling him to suckle and gnaw on it but he silenced the talker.

"I wish someone would share theirs with me... not you though, you're disgusting."

A great heat enveloped him then, squeezed against something hard and warm. A strong arm clung to his shoulders as the other crossed his upper back, wet droplets of water splashing onto the side of his forearm. Rock-solid abs pressed against his clothed self, arms hanging limply by their sides. A green-tinted nose peeked over a smooth, broad shoulder, lips closed and smashed against a steel-like bone.

The teen's mind almost shut off. Soothing vibes poured through his form, threatening to bask in the good sensation; save for a beating heart underneath all that hardness.

Dante was holding him. Dante was *touching* him. This couldn't be happening.

*It is happening.*

“And yet I'm hugged by the disgusting monkey,” he mumbled into his shoulder.
"There now, you won't die of frostbite before we—fuck!"

Nero popped open an eye to see the captain cradling his collarbone, a small scowl marring his soaked features, rubbing the blossoming red mark.

"You bit me!"

"I did not." He took no fault in that, his common sense submitted to his delirious mindset.

"Yes you did, you little runt!"

"You can't put that on me, I didn't see myself do it," Nero proclaimed in sluggish words. Trained, slitted eyes could not tear themselves away from the hair hanging down the veteran's face, giving him a youthful, almost childish bearing.

Twenty-five pounds of muscle loss and a shaven beard would entail the red one to look just as young as him. Not to say Dante looked elderly (somewhere in his mid-twenties to early thirties), but his locks made his profile appear different, depending on where it parted. Though he wondered how _old_ Dante is. Did he age in human terms or slower than the average human?

Then the skull fragment's discoloration roved fresh in his mind... but that seemed doubtful. Hmph, he would have to check up on that later on.

Satisfied he didn't drift past Dante's neck on down, Nero tugged at his lips with lazy grace, leaning to the right and slightly losing his footing. A light pulse formed behind his eyes, queasy motions beginning to turn its gears to make him sick again. Malnutrition must have taken his nutrients from his body, leaving him clumsy in the wake of Dante's immature advances.

Blinking weighted down his eyelids, akin to sagging onto his cheeks. Sweat, or maybe water, formed to the left of his head, descending the side of his face to run along his jawline. No point in going to the bathroom to see how he looked; he felt like shit. Thankfully, Dante realized they outlived their welcome in this charming place.

"And you say I've lost my marbles."

"You never had them to begin with," he groaned, cradling his forehead with his sudden, spinning vision. "Rolling around and sinking balls in your... for yee..."

"Nero? Hey Nero!"

The hybrid moved forward, cradling the rascal in his arms. From the time he threw up to now, his health deteriorated in continued succession, and Dante stood by and watched with a twisted fascination. It wasn't common to see the devil-blooded throw up anything since they ate everything, but he had to remember the youth carried more human than demon blood.

Actually, the kid brought this whole sickness upon himself. He ordered the food. He looked in the fridge and he believed he ate a heart burger. So why did Dante have to take custody of the runt? Wasn't he the one hoopin' and hollerin' all day about his ability to care for himself, and that he didn't need any help?

Dante picked up the unconscious brat, feeling his cooled skin temperature settling against his normal one. Warm temperatures indicated a fever while cold ones suggested the same... or death.

Oh. Maybe that's why he looked a little green. Nero ate a heart burger, and the sandwich might be poisoned since it sat in this amber-like liquid.
The veteran leaned over, nearing his nose by Nero's mouth and taking a brief whiff. Though unpleasant to sniff, he detected nothing foul-smelling in there, other than his rancid breath. Withal, the acidic stench could cover up any scents that might reveal vulgar play.

As messed up as it sounded, he lacked worry about Nero's health, yet for good reason. A relaxing night's rest will have him better, and if that wouldn't work then his bedeviled blood would straighten him out.

"You know, I don't know why you harped and hounded me when you're the one not being careful," he murmured, sweeping over the fledgling's form as he carried the youngster over and placed him down on the bathroom floor. After he finished dressing himself and finding a few, clean rags to dry his hair off he hoisted Nero back in his arms, shaking his head over the youth's lack of attention.

Once he glanced down though, Nero did look a bit dead; the steady but slow heartbeat said otherwise. "I told you you'd regret it. Now I gotta do all this shit alone. Thanks a lot, you helpful ass!"

Dante heard incoherent mumbling from the partial-demon's mouth, enticing the elder to chuckle loudly to wake the boy up. Despite him looking like he woke up from the dead and returned to being that way, Dante guessed it better to just let him rest.

The hybrid strolled over to the refrigerator, balancing Nero in a lone arm and on a raised knee while he grabbed two jars out of the fridge, putting each of them on Nero's chest. Might as well take a couple in case things took a turn for the worse. Perhaps he could find a remedy from it and use it as a potion, or maybe even as a weapon.

Shivers coursed throughout the youngster's body, the teen subconsciously drawing closer to the warmth on his left side.

"I can take care of myself. Let me do what I gotta do. We cut down what we lay eyes on. Stop calling me 'kid' old man." The veteran said in a sing-song voice, carrying the delirious youth back to the truck. "Baby-sitting was not part of the agreement as roommates."

The teen shivered once again, curling up into the elder's side and mumbled something like "punk ass" into his chest. He'd probably piss bricks if he realized Dante laid those hearts on him. Oh well, brat should have paid attention to his surroundings.

He sighed heavily, placing the sick hunter in the passenger seat and the jars on the floor. Only a matter of hours remained before he had to do a turnaround; torn between finishing this place up and getting Nero to safety wore thin on his nerves.

Who knew if the Grace-demon lady called in back-up and they headed this way to attack them. And what would he do with Edward's body? What about checking on his children?

This wouldn't be a problem if Nero carried on well enough to watch himself, but he couldn't be blamed if anything happened to him. Thinking about it, why did the teenager depend on him to look out for the both of them? Being a lone warrior entitled him to protect him and himself alone.

Who knows, maybe this is a sign to go home and recuperate. Nevertheless, Hell's dwellers ran rampant in this town and he needed to rectify the situation before anyone endangered themselves. Whatever course of action he arranged to take called for a quick decision, unless the undead residents of Whetstone came running into them.

A/N: So that completes the two-part chapter, and I hope you guys enjoyed it! Dante turned out to
fight his drawback and Nero fell into a drawback.

Speaking of a drawback, I don't have a clue how Dante ages. You can miss me with the head canon that's he's in his late 30's/early 40's in DMC4. Capcom screwed up with making Nero fit into the timelines and the ages don't add up. Actually, I wrote a small article on tumblr called 'Nero, what are you' explaining Capcom and their inconsistent stories.

In interviews, still to this day, Mr. Dante aka Reuben Langdon, keeps saying that Dante is 2000 years old (implying Sparda boinked Eva after he sealed off the underworld) and that Dante "acts" a certain age. But there are fan websites that are adamant that Dante ages like a human. Then there are other websites that argue that he's still aging, but not as fast as a human. I'm so confused so I'll just blindly pick one or...something and go from there.
Blood.

The scent flooded his senses so much he thought he bathed in it. The coppery odor enveloped him no matter which way he turned his head. Strange though, why did he sniff blood if none surrounded him?

Washing out the substances in Dante's hair remained the last thing on his mind, so did he taint himself with the half-human's vital fluid? True, little spots had touched him from the exchange, but he shouldn't be reeking of it.

Pale eyelids opened, moving his head to one side with the sun beaming high and bright through tan curtains. From the looks of it, he lied in a room; Dante probably too tired to make a turn-around trip and bought them a room to rest up.

The teen exhaled in annoyance looking back on yesterday. That was the worst job he ever took on due to the demons and their shitty agendas. The unwanted taunts spewed from Dante's mouth helped none.

More than half the things that went wrong rested on the veteran, seeing how he stalled and chatted with everything that moved. Nero understood something dark and sinister brewed and they needed to investigate, but the chieftain always had to go about his method of doing it, which squandered time of the utmost importance. Stopping there may have been a blessing in disguise. They exposed a plot brewing, and hopefully put an end to this issue before it spread through the city.

Nero shielded his hands over his face, looking around a bit more vividly to see its décor, unlike the other shit hole he dreamt about. Nightmares like that only happened when exhaustion ran its course. He closed his eyes, mentally preparing himself to confirm that this space harkened a real environment and not some demented dream.

"Is there a door in here?" he questioned aloud, opening his left eyelid, a cerulean iris roaming through the room.

His vision picked up another bed; the purple and red bedspread holding something on top of the cover. He could look at that later. Next object his sight laid upon was a long mahogany dresser, a TV resting on top and a black plastic bag. Maybe Dante left him some food? Yet one thing he verified was the brown entrance trailing to the outside, then again it might lead to the bathroom.

The youth switched irises to view the other side. On the furniture stood a white microwave and beside it, a small refrigerator. It turned out to be a normal dwelling, thankfully.

"Okay, now is there a window?" Both eyes opened, scanning the room to ensure nothing delved in the amiss. After finding all as it should be, including a closed window, Nero rolled the covers off of him, sitting up straight while his hands covered his face.

He glanced down to see his shirtless torso, his jeans missing the unique thigh holster which fitted like a second glove. Hmm, how... nice... of Dante to give him extra comfort to rest up. Relief washed over him, failing to find weird "bite marks" or red welts appearing on him out of nowhere. He lived no dream, only reality.
With that problem resolved, the coppery aroma remained an issue.

The teen tilted his head back, inhaling the air for clues to where the smell originated from. A tad difficult to do since the odor engulfed him from all sides.

Bare soles touched the frosted-feeling carpet. Nero stopped his movements, glancing towards his thin toes to see if he stepped in water.

Shaggy brown flooring greeted him, calming his curiosity as to why the floor was like a freezer. Warmth and comfort smothered over his naked feet, and when devoid of said sensations the frost took over.

Perhaps an extraordinary draft came in underneath the door. With his confidence soaring from his musings, he proceeded to the entryway on the left. Before he went to it though, it wouldn't hurt to view what area they stopped in. And find his missing weapons.

"Damn truck better be outside. My shit better be in this room or in that car outside somewhere."

Wherever they traveled, their hardwares stayed right behind them. Dante concealed Rebellion in this big, double bass case and Nero opted to wait at the office. He took issue with leaving his Red Queen just to go out anywhere in that dump of a city.

Devilish rogues polluted the metropolis with their presence alone. Yamato lingered in his reach if he needed it, but his own lady won over his battle heart whenever he called on her. If she required a partner to help her out, the priceless o-katana enjoined to lend her hand, same notion for Blue Rose. The youngster kept a tight hold on his stock, and he always knew of their location.

Except for now.

His valuables should be in the backseat, safely tucked away yet accessible if need be. The elder would not be that dumb to go off somewhere and leave with his armaments when he had his own to help him out.

Taloned blue fingers grasped around a brass knob, intent on notifying Dante of the smell if he was here. Opening the wooden square expressed a myriad of confused sentiments, Nero surveying a small but clean bathroom. He could have sworn he heard the thriving commotion of a world outside.

"So if the bathroom is here, then where's the front door?" His mind pondered when he looked over his right shoulder, and sure enough a brown doorway appeared... that wasn't there before when his right eye combed through the room. His consciousness raised alarming flags, alerting Nero to be on guard in case he slept in la-la land.

"I'm not dreaming," he tried to reassure himself. "This looks pretty normal so far."

He continued on to the bathroom mirror, looking at his chest in scrutiny; fascinated he didn't wake up with those sores and bites on him. All viewed healthy and sealed up to his eyes. His pecs had strengthened since living with the captain, as with his shoulders, arms, waist and legs.

Dante challenged him in various ways, some intentional and some not, and Nero fell for the sometimes-pointless banter. Yet he received the better deal out of it, so there wasn't much to complain about.

The line running between his sternum down to his upper stomach piqued his full interest because it shouldn't be there. Rebellion didn't stay inside of his torso as long as the Cutlass a few months ago,
and after that incident happened, no mark settled on his skin.

Now that an imprint showed because of the magical broadsword, is that blemish going to stay there permanently, or did he have to get his hands on one of those vital gems to restore him? Compared to the red hunter, he bruised and welted more easily because of how much, or lack of, tainted blood flowed in him. His injuries did heal after, it just took time.

Next blotch under his investigation presented his appearance. That nap he seized rejuvenated his body, exactly what he needed to calm down from yesterday's affairs. Most of his time involved picking up Dante's slack. Like the situation dragged on to the point of exhaustion, well at least on his part. The demonic discoveries might keep adding to his fatigue unless he approached the issue in a different manner; preferably taking on solo missions.

Ocean blue irises directed their attention towards the rectangular mirror, willing to gauge how much he recovered from his "beauty queen" look... if only his eyes can concentrate into the polished metal.

No matter how hard he strained, they could not convene on his sight. Why? His eyesight wasn't blurred when he scanned the room nor when he checked himself out. As far as the youth's awareness, he didn't sleep on his face.

"What the fuck is wrong with me?" Nero looked at his reflection again but the outcome remained the same. No fog stained the glass from a recent shower. Just how long did he black out for?

To test if his eyesight had gone blurry, the youngster turned his head, cerulean optics resting on a small shower situated to his right. From this angle, the cubicle held a caddy holding a green bar of soap, a pink razor, some red shampoo, and a gold package reading the words 'XL Magnum' written all over it. He saw those objects without a problem. When he glanced back to the glass however, he couldn't fixate on anything but the outline of his appearance.

"There's a condom in here." Nero said, returning to the shower to pick the package up. Refusing to acknowledge that Dante took a little 'detour' on their trip, he threw the square wrapper onto the floor. They were in a damn near emergency, and he only thought about blowing his load?

That asshole wouldn't lack the smarts to bring a tramp into their room and screw her while he dozed mere inches in the next bed. Oh, the bloody cheek of that bastard! Whatever skanky mess walked through here must have used the red bottle to wash herself off after the deed completed.

Honestly, he couldn't grasp how people paraded around with “free reign” in choosing who they had relations with. From the stuff he had seen, not much of an exchange went down before they trotted off and coupled somewhere.

Just how close are they to the office since the hybrid picked up a dancer working there? Is she still here somewhere on account of her crap remaining in the shower? Questioning the actions of the man got him nowhere, leading him to ask more questions to stay unanswered.

"Does that idiot know no bounds? Leave it to him to fool around while we're on a mission." He stepped out the bathroom, inhaling to clear his thoughts. Secretly, sleeping the day in sounded delightful. Let Dante leave and kill whoever he wanted to with his anger. Being near the red dope started to affect the...

Where's the other door?

Eyeballs bulged from their sockets, a startling revelation sent shivers crawling down his form in
thick waves. His sickness ran rampant through his head, yeah that's all. That (probably poisoned) heart burger must've played tricks on his restless mind. A lacking logic arose behind a door not showing where it should be.

Stiff feet moved over to his bed, intending to go back to sleep to reclaim his vigilant mind. He isn't dreaming; all carried on as normal. Dante got them a room and... that's it. The wind pricked his skin and the carpet was cold, though he didn't recall the bathroom floor's texture. Then again, he didn't need to remember because he investigated something important. Other than that, everything stayed real.

Giving himself a firm nod, the young man turned to plant himself in the comfy blanket when a loud crash resounded behind him. Muscles locked up at the noise, ears straining to hear movement. Did the shower caddy fall in the tub? Nero brushed it off until the same sound repeated itself, only louder.

His stomach tightened, body temperature growing hotter with the unknown force in the bathroom and his missing weapons. Revisiting his memories of the last dream resurfaced, telling him to wake up before the nightmare escalated any further. Originally he knew he wasn't dreaming, however his inner conscious forced him to think otherwise, as much as he didn't want to.

The youth shifted from the side of the bed, glancing toward the disappearing door to find the wooden rectangle there again. Eyes blinked in confusion, disbelieving his faulty eyesight. Moments before a wall took its place, and now it just appeared?

Pale feet moved in hesitant steps towards the door, senses on high alert to discern if anything else remained amiss in the air. His wracked and blown apart mind tried to attach itself together. In the process, a bunch of random images he did or didn't remember flooded to the surface, while his brain pieced itself with those pictures.

An echoing bang rang loudly throughout the room, originating on the other side of the magical door. If someone knocked, it meant he wasn't dreaming then, right?

Nero refocused his thoughts, taking jerky steps closer to the new door; wondering if he should call out to whomever or open it. His conscious urged him to check if the scarlet idiot knocked, but years of caution told him to stay alert.

"Who is it?" The youth stopped behind the entrance, looking at his scaly arm for any indications of life. Usually when the chief neared, the demonic limb pulsed a few times and then died down to a low hum. And why did he knock if he had his own key to the room, if it was him?

Murmured words touched his hearing, prompting the teen to draw nearer to the passage to better hear the voice. Perhaps the chieftain knocked to see if he had awakened before he barged in, or maybe he did forget his key and asked to be let in.

Nero moved closer, pressing his ear against the wood to determine who or what the fuck lurked on the outside.

More mumbled speech filtered through the door; muffled words rushing in a higher pitch, finally ending the sentence with the loathsome term 'kid.'

The irritating nickname sent a barrage of elated emotions fleeting throughout his body; relief that his being wasn't left alone in the middle of nowhere. Now that the hybrid returned from his endeavors, Nero could rightfully chew his ass out for taking the teen's possessions, along with telling the red dork to investigate the creature in the bathroom, if one inhabited the space.
"Where's your key at, old man?" He approached the door, encircling his devil bringer around the brass knob a single knuckle at a time.

"Looks like someone is still asleep," spoke the voice resounding clear as day, but slightly more bitter sounding.

"What're talking about, I'm wide awake..." His uttered words softened with each syllable until all became silent. His mouth fell agape, refusing to register what his vision picked up. One bare foot stepped behind the other, a heated sensation spiking through his core to the brim.

A brick wall lied in front of him, trapping him from the inside. Jilted breaths hovered in his lungs, muscles freezing up to prevent movement. The restroom door concealing the unknown force flew from its hinges, Nero whipping around with a forced gasp.

Good thing this maintained a dream or else he really would have been fucked. He had to wake himself up (he soon realized); skipping the impending battle with the stranger in the bathroom practiced the best option.

"Ow, dammit! What the hell?"

Maybe a little later.

Spiking jolts ebbed in his foot, looking down at his soles to see no objects around to bump into, so what gives? Did he step on an invisible nail or something?

Ocean blue peepers glanced towards the bathroom, body recoiling into a tight spring in preparation to defend himself against an onslaught. Glancing into the door-less space, everything could be seen in the tiny cubicle. There wasn't a window anyone can go out or come in at. Nothing suspicious lingered in the shower nor was there an enemy on the ceiling... if such an animate being resided there to begin with. If push comes to shove, he can always jump out the polished glass.

"I gotta get the hell outta here." The youth finished caressing his foot, finding it strange that the thrumming pain felt realistic. Nerve receptors sent tingling spikes to his brain in complaint of his foot falling under attack. He considered it odd however, to distinguish something like that while dreaming.

In essence, why are his dreams involving Dante in questionable manners? The dream before last involved the red warrior in intimate positions while the previous one embroiled his pacification by the hybrid's demon form. Clearly a message hid behind its meaning, and further analysis will happen before he formed a conclusion about these visions.

All though he gained more than a few bruises and bumps to the head, so maybe that had something to do with it.

By the time he finished his scrutiny of the situation, his ears tuned into wings flapping roughly, bumping against the bricked-in door. If an entity hit that wall, it sure wasn't something as light as the wind.

Wings flapped louder in the distance; the air swooshing and separating along with the fluttering feathers. This stone barricade kept him protected from whatever force loitered outside of it, and exposing him to the potential adversary this side of the blockade. He wondered if allowing the creature to come into the room bid to jump-start his wake-up process. Sitting all the way through a hallucination retained a feat he'd probably never accomplish. Who in their functioning mind would?
Taking deep, slow breaths the partial-hybrid inched over to the bricked wall, balling his devil bringer into a fist before reaching a focal point to shove his clenched hand through. The "wing" sound grew quieter the nearer he came to the bricks, prompting him to think a large bird scuttled away or maybe the wind tricked his hearing?

Still, he couldn't deny this freakish encounter, like a premonition pointing towards imprisonment, with or by something, and escaping proved futile. Is this what the wall symbolized? An inescapable foreshadowing? Will Dante latch onto him and disallow him to leave?

"Bullshit. He doesn't own me," Nero said out loud, knocking on the cemented block and finding the perfect spot to break through.

"Who doesn't own you?"

His body's lead messenger halted in sending messages throughout its vessel, freezing the mobile muscles to stay in neutral. Eyes stilled on the sight before them, looking at nothing and everything at the same time. His throat ran dry after the liquid to moisten the cavity stopped its flow. Sensitive ears physically tried to close themselves when it wasn't possible to do so. His heart rate increased after he heard the voice behind him. The window is closed, how did it get inside?

Nero turned his head to the side, eyeballs at the far right corner peeking at the thing making the voice to his back. Did the freak decide to come out of hiding and introduce itself at last?

Only he wished it hadn't.

An ashen gray, tentacle-like limb exposed itself from the bathroom to the ceiling wall, teeth-like ridges lining the edge of its arm. More limbs soon followed after, taking its time to slide out to mold into something reminiscent of an eight-legged star.

"Wait a minute," he recalled back to the field battle with the crazy sculpture and the naked she-devil. "Those are those fucking face-eaters."

How did those get here? There wasn't a place for them to hide in the bathroom, at least not where he saw it. Those 'bumps' in the restroom must have come from that ugly mongrel and the beast went through puberty. The sheer mass took over more than half of the room along with changing from its blue color.

As if to verify Nero's observations, the tentacles slowly lifted itself up, off, and away from the roof, each stem closing in towards the middle to form that partial-face not even a mother could love. The re-colored Fault swiveled around to confront the youth, colossal obsidian pits gazed at him, unspoken promises of agony and torture to be exercised.

The soulless gaze ignited Nero into moving and breathing again from his motionless state, thinking now the perfect opportunity to wake up before he did so by screaming. These things are best killed by a bullet to the head and his double revolver... had not shown herself ever since this debacle started. No, he would not be deterred or defeated by some figment of his imagination.

As long as he had two fists to fight with, nothing was too big or little to challenge him.

However, if the monster intended on swallowing him, how might the brute do so if it hung on the roof? He needed to stand in the heart of the monster's... mouth before it attempted to swallow him whole. And if the fucker did try to eat him while hanging upside down, he could just duck under the damn thing.

"Heh, that's a nice bluff you got going on."
A small smirk showed up on the right side of his lips, confidence soaring because he readied to exploit the Fault's weakness. Nero raised his devil bringer, summoning the ghostly limb to snatch the fiend off the ceiling and plop it onto the floor.

The demonic branch shot forward, intending on doing just that when the blue specter stopped in midair; the appendage touching the area under the Fault's eyes. Tingles cascaded inside his forearm, leaving him in a mix of relief and panic.

Firstly, where had that voice come from? Those things held no interest in talking to him in that backyard, so what changed? Since it wasn't around its buddies, did the freak wish to converse with him?

"Fat chance in hell buddy!"

Nero wrangled to tug his arm, finding the harder he tried the longer it wouldn't budge. The Fault glared in triumph at the youth's dilemma, face narrowing as the edges of its legs peeled open. Two of the tentacles shot out, trapping the blue specter in between the limbs and curling the tip of a leg to mimic the shape of a hook.

On the field, he'd have pegged this creep as a complete, mental moron with the purpose to consume those with magical energy. He wondered if the demon emitted the sanguine scent from what it ate. Might explain why the smell marinated the room.

The prickling sensitivity increased in his devil bringer. Ugly face stood by him, but his right arm didn't have to tell him that. The extended limb still hung straight out in the air, clawed fingers unable to flex and bend at will.

Ashen gray limbs suddenly took a hold of the scaly blue branch, lightly tugging said body part to wage how hard it had to grip it. Nero had the same idea, pulling away with an equal amount of strength when the arm jerked him forward.

All though the Fault didn't have lips, he could almost see the repulsive thing mocking his attempt to flee. As slow of a pace the Fault pulled him, he sought for anything to latch onto. Perchance it may open and throw him into its core?

Eyes looked to the right, resting on the black plastic bag he didn't investigate from earlier. Seeing this also reminded him of the object sitting on the other bed, yet it proved futile to grab it. What did the bag contain? Despite how useless it seemed at the moment, he had to ponder. A med kit, or maybe a stupid note explaining the elder's whereabouts?

Spiking tendrils shot down just below his right thigh; the twitching motion initiating the final stages of him awakening. As twisted and sardonic his dreams became, he at least knew what it harbored, a dream. Someone doesn't have voices whispering to one's back or sealed off doors from the inside. No bottomless views of the world (he missed glancing out the window) below or no bad eyesight. And certainly no ogres appearing on the ceiling. As long as he convinced himself of that, there wasn't an urgency to worry... too much.

About halfway under the beast's form, the teen swung his left appendage around and dove inside the bag, fingers touching something squishy and throbbing at the same time. "What the hell is in here?" With a solid grip, Nero brought his hand back, temporarily forgetting the demon dragging him, focusing on the lump he held.

Every second blood oozed out of the valves, forming several crimson streams running down the length of his arm. The fist-sized muscle smothered in the red, coppery scent pumped at a steady
beat, the pulse increasing along with the youth's anxiety.

His insides wrenched into a tight knot, forcing him to gasp for more air. More fluid spurted from the cardiac valve, syncing with his uneven breathing. Apparently the dope, in Nero's subconscious mind, swam in the mood to joke but this bordered on cruelty. Did the organ belong to a demon Dante had killed?

The vascular orifice throbbed quietly in his grip, chills running through his chest over what he actually held. He didn't see the bag move when he first noticed it so why is it beating now? This was to blame for the bloody scent...

"… No, this isn't happening!" The youth's stress-filled voice cried out, body visibly shaking upon his vision resting on where that vital pump came from. Vocal cords struggled to produce the anguished scream fighting to let out.

Bloodied trickles ran down his torso, mangled and torn flesh formed a hole in his chest, in direct alignment where his vascular tool once sat. Inhales huffed out short and shallow, trying to intake as much air to calm his person yet the effort proved futile. Fingers spread in a drawn-out fashion, letting the fleshy commodity fall into the heart of his palm.

What if he died in his slumber right then? The thing symbolizing the boundary between life and death and his mitt the lifeline? Shame really, he always imagined himself going out with a bitchin' fight; not running away from trippy shit his thoughts conjured up.

Ignoring the Fault and its agenda wasn't a good combination. The face gave a harsh tug, lifting the youth and whipping him haphazardly into the air. Walls cracked and crumbled beneath him, Nero thinking of a way and why his devil bringer could not detach itself from its imaginary hold. The scaly arm grasped nothing; just stuck frozen in a heightened position under the monster's eye.

Another blow landed on the youngster, eliciting a grunt after he collided with the sturdy, brick wall. Pain roved absent where his back hit, but the damage originated where his vascular organ lay. He clutched onto the fist-sized object, afraid of what it permitted if he let go of it.

The jittery sensation on his right side enticed the teenager to thrash around long enough to escape out that window. Concurrently, the Fault stilled its actions, tentacles spreading to lie straight against the ceiling. In its core, he saw a suction-like crevice opening up to a range of darkness.

"Fuck that, you'll never get me," the youth growled in dark vengeance, trying with all his willpower to wrench himself free, failing in this attempt like he did so many others.

Being hurled about affected his hearing; he swore he heard someone say, "I already do." Perhaps, rather absurdly, the ghoul talked?

Voicing his retort declined to receive the light of day when the Fault lifted Nero into the air, the black hole widening to accommodate its larger prey.

He wasn't one to bow down under his shivery skin when fear coursed through him. However, the uncertainty weighing in since he went into the bathroom until now made him question that emotion. Howbeit for the umpteenth time, this sustained a dream. Why is he pondering this when it'll be forgotten within the first five minutes of him waking up?

Regardless of an enemy showing up in his world, why can't he kill it? Did he need to unleash some inner strength to conquer this feat? If so, then where...

"Yamato." Nero whispered her name as if he'd been searching for the artifact his whole life. If he
can't use his own abilities to defeat this adversary, then he would have to dig a little deeper to bring forth a power that should. If it swallowed him, he could at least go out with a bang. He can call on the powerful blade and she accepted the response whenever he requested, though sometimes she urged to respond to her own will, to spread her wings without permission.

"Okay, you got me." The youth closed his eyes, weighing the probability of the air spider throwing him into that black hole and him getting what he needed to get out. Instead, the scoundrel left him dangling, allowing him to take advantage of its hesitance.

Raw vitality poured into his being, taking in a deep breath, sensing the dark essence fill his soul. Yamato's energy projection began to awaken, summoning his demonic hand to form the grasping hold he grew accustomed to.

Blue light encased around him, moments from completing the final touches into his damned side when a throbbing pain emanated from his right cheek. Blackness consumed his vision, like he traveled through a void and there wasn't a sense of place or time; a different darkness than when he shut his eyelids. Did the Fault throw him into its core while he conjured his devil trigger?

What a bitch move.

Still, smart thinking on the goblin's part. If the o-katana appeared sooner, the thing would have been shredded into confetti.

Behind fair eyelids, red-orange light covered the expanse of his skin, senses becoming attuned because the plane of darkness dissipated. Except the stinging on the right side of his cheek didn't.

His left hand reached up to touch the sore spot, exhaling deeply in content after he had yet another fucked up dream... and he didn't have to do any fighting. Inhaling the aroma allowed him to distinguish his location.

His room held the minty perfume in this place of a pigsty, prompting him to keep all his belongings neat and clean; forcing him into cleaning the office since Dante blatantly refused to do so. Taking a whiff of the room also brought back the sanguine scent smothering his perceptions in la-la land.

Eyes bolted open, the rays from the spacious blinds piercing his pupils, demanding him to turn his head. His nose scrunched up with the increased coppery aroma, as if someone held a bucket of plasma under his nasal cavity.

"What the fuck is that smell from?" No matter which way he turned, he couldn't determine the source, starting from his demented snooze until the present. No worries, now wide awake, he could investigate and eliminate that odor. But his comfy mattress beckoned him to stay there and lull himself back to sleep, but duty calls.

"Duty my ass, probably spilled some blood somewhere." Nero yanked the soft covers off of his tired body when his gaze unfurled, glancing to the right to resolve the metallic-scented issue.

Sitting in a chair was the hybrid himself, expression splotched with dingy browns and reds. His irises stared straight ahead, hard and focused on the blank wall before him. The same colors on his face covered his threads, though one wouldn't be able to tell since his jacket was already a scarlet shade.

Nero traveled down the length of the red hunter's arm, a light gasp escaping his lips after seeing him clutch a heart in his hand; the vascular ticker pumping out this dark purple liquid from its valves. Questions ran rampant throughout his brain, forming accusatory words yet lacking the will
to voice them.

The youth inched himself to the other side of his bed, optics alert and enlarged to read every movement and action Dante did. Images flashed from the fake reality he dreamt about not too long ago. Self-doubt ran its course; the pep talk he gave himself while asleep doing nothing to comfort him.

When his back touched the headboard he exhaled, not due to the cold barrier, but Dante's eyes transitioning from the wall to him. The half-devil looked tired and not all together there, like something terrible happened and he blanked out. Thumping pangs ebbed at his cheek, the youth raising his scaly branch to touch it. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a spot on his blue index finger.

Glancing down the length of it, he could see more stains trailing down his arm, as if he had been holding the heart, or even bleeding. More red caught his attention until he scanned the whole of his body, vision picking up on a large red circle that had formed in the middle of his chest, ending in the exact position of where his beating organ rested.

Nero let out a shock-wrenching scream that never left his vocal cords, thinking now wasn't such a bad time to go to sleep and stay that way.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I've been out of college and I still have dreams that my speech report is due or I have some test in accounting. What pisses me off is when I wake up out of my sleep and think that I am late to school. :C I wonder how many of ya'll can control your dreams and turn it around for the better? I know I can, except when it comes to school!

Now that Dante has his goodies with him, what will he do with him or better yet, how long will he be able to hold onto them? Poor Nero, always getting the ass-end of something he doesn't want, lol. It's about time that Dante starts to share his sentiments.
Her face was almost ugly with anger, willing her physique to succumb to the scalding heat swamping her from all sides. Scars of different ages marred her ivory-toned flesh, each one telling of battles hard fought and the remnants she carried wherever she went. Sleepy eyes scrunched closed, nostrils expanding to inhale the green-apple scented aroma flooding the room.

Once fully settled, she laid her head against the makeshift pillow, stilling her body from any movement but not before turning on the jazz station, Sadè’s 'Mermaid' vibrating through the speakers. The recent welts embedded on her skin burned with intensity, dying off into a low pulse the longer she stayed motionless.

A foul premonition loomed on the horizon, sensing its inevitable presence growing in strength. Her oppressors grew aggressive, attacks and strategies implemented that weren't the norm for their usual routine. She had been unprepared as such, charging into battle with the same 'they'll die easily' shtick and never mulling over it. A dangerous procedure to underestimate her enemies no matter how weak and repetitive they became. Still, it wasn't that bad of a challenge; she came out the victor.

The woman crossed her arms, each hand caressing the opposite arm to cool down the stinging sensation burning her, exhaling in bliss because that little tactic worked wonders. Orange manicured toes wiggled in a lazy movement, digits spreading to let the liquid flow in between them. Skin tinged a light salmon pink, though died down to her natural tone the more she stayed neutral. The music eased through the speakers, lulling her to sink further into the water to soak up the relaxation.

This room persuaded her to kill off a few hours in here, leaving a forlorn look on her face when she sadly rejected the offer. Now that she received a break in cutting down her foes, she would milk this vacation for all its worth. Her cellular had rung non-stop, hopefully it could wait until she finished her self-massage before...

RIIIIIIIING!

… someone called for her services.

Her hand lifted up and over to reach the phone resting on top of her discarded clothes, mustering up her cordial tone, the caller interrupted her "me" time. Before she could greet her caller, their voice came through first, albeit a bit angry.

"You like being a bitch, don't you Lady."

Her eyebrows rose. "I'm glad you're alive too, hotshot." The brunette answered back, readying to hang up since the half-breed spoke through his agitation, which he had no reason to.

"Why the fuck did you take my money?"

Oh... now she remembered.

"I thought it was for me, Dante."
"Bullshit! You know damn well that was mine-"

"You're the one who had it lying on the desk. I thought it was for me, can you blame me?" She pulled her left knee in, clutching the phone between her ear and her shoulder, lifting the leg straight into the air and running her hands down the length.

The majority of her recent scars bought residence there, needing to wash them out before she medicated herself. She lowered her limb. "Besides, consider this to be your late fees paid-"

"What!"

Lady snatched the receiver from her hearing, holding it away after the half-devil kept screaming and spewing about his chump change. The last mission she went on produced money he never gave her. That was her job to do and he claimed ownership, why... she didn't know, but she willed to gamble his ego took fault.

And... since the green stack lied there for the taking when she visited the office, she grabbed what he owed her. May have been excessive in the amount acquired, ($2400) however he didn't have to worry about ever paying her back; his debt no longer existed with her.

"Are you done bitching? I'm trying to bathe here."

"Fuck you and your damn bath-"

Again the phone moved away from her ear, rolling her eyes because his rant fell on deaf ears. Nothing he said can anger her, her strong mental barriers stopping his words from reaching the core of her brain.

He would get over it eventually; more than enough demons prowled the area. If he received no calls about the damned, then he can go kill them with his rage. As fun as it is to continue this chat, her relaxing experience seduced her to fall back into its embrace—and she would comply.

"Of all the times I've had to lie around broke because of your money-hungry, grubbing ass! Trish too! The both of you probably make three times as much as me yet you'll always come for my money when I don't have it! Could buy one piece of clothing and that shit ain't even cute! You gold-diggers pawn all of your expenses on me then gripe when I can't pay them! Of all the shit I let you off with, this... this has got to be the worst-"

"Okay, I love you, bye-bye!"

"Don't even think about-"

Click.

"Crybaby." She set the phone on top of her clothes, inhaling the green-apple scented bubbles and exhaling further into the tub, letting the hot water take away her worries momentarily. Dante can moan and complain all he wanted to, because the truth of the matter embodied his inability to return the money he borrowed. If he asked to have some then she would have said no. Yet since he needed a loan, she lived under the impression he will pay her back.

And to keep Dante debt free, in her case, she wouldn't allow him to borrow any cash from her. He should consider it a favor so his deficit wouldn't increase again with her. Nero stayed there now. Build up a tab with him and quit barking down her neck about it. With that resolution, Lady continued on with her bath, ideas popping up as to where she desired to spend her Benjamins.
Fortune slipped through his fingers.

As quick as he received his payment, it escaped him. The money he put aside to give to Lady remained his own to have. My, how the tables turned. It's his own fault setting the money down on the desk after he unloaded everything, however he didn't believe either of the girls would stop by so early in the morning.

Yes, he found spare dollar bills around the mansion, but the total didn't equal his contract. Asking for Nero's half didn't sit right with him; the runt deserved his share despite him whining like a little child throughout the day.

When he returned from his turnaround trip and realized his cash went missing, he threw a small hissy fit—okay a temper tantrum. The first thing to go; his beloved desk, punting the wood with such force it hit the wall and shattered into different sizes. Cursing up a storm filled his mouth, punching through walls and doors to vent out his anger.

"What the fuck did she do that for!" Teeth clenched in rage with those words on repeat, wooden splinters embedding themselves in his knuckles after he kept throwing wild punches. A lost cause to get it back from her, she evinced the word 'she-devil.'

Nostrils inhaled an abundance of air to breathe because he clamped his jaws shut, preventing any of the vital substance from entering his lungs through that route. He needed to calm down, knowing he'll do more harm than good. What will destroying his home be if he had to replace the things he obliterated? He already decimated his oak desk, and that furniture cost a penny to have.

Eyelids closed over pale blue orbs, forcing himself to cool down unless he desired to spend what finances he didn't have on renovations. Glove-covered fists clenched and unclenched, nails digging into his palm to ease his pressing nerves. The sanguine liquid pooled a little in his mouth, teeth hard-pressed into each other to prevent his tongue from lashing out.

He set his heart on taking his vehicular babe to the shop, a guaranteed settlement he agreed upon with the mechanic to give the muscle car a full check-up for $1400. A quarter of the total he paid beforehand, and he wanted to drop the rest of the money and the vehicle off to him. How is he going to accomplish that with $600 (he threw in another $100 to stall Lady)? Now he had to scrimp and scrape up extra change just to get his ride fixed.

A vintage beauty of automotive like that probably costs $600 a piece for maintenance and upkeep, and that bargain price is a deal to hold on to. He should call her again, or at least go over to her place of residence and take something worth his amount back. No matter how much money he owed her, she had no right to grab the whole stack. Just thinking about it made him want to cry.

"Why is it me?" Dante groaned, face carved in sorrow, agitation pummeling his insides. Money sustained something he gained in abundance, yet lost the shit twice as quickly. He helped out his co-workers a few times so they could be "women."

With the first incident, they pawned shopping charges on him, garnering bitter chuckles on his part. However, the more they pushed those expenses on him, the more agitated he grew—and the more they pursued the action, especially Lady. He wasn't her man, therefore he isn't obligated to splurge on her in that manner. And Trish... eh, passed as so-so in her spending capabilities. As far as he knew, he only had one body to look after, loosely; that sick little fledgling upstairs, who'd rather sleep out on the porch than admit to being taken care of.

His heart grew heavy; losing stolen property weighing down on the beating organ the longer he mused on his current dilemma. That cash should have stretched him a couple days after this, and
now he'd have to compromise.

When he thought about it, *some* currency came out of the suitcase Nero couldn't pack in the car right, and there should be a set of bills in that other case too. Perhaps it wasn't in vain, allowing him to handle his errands as he saw fit.

And speaking thus, where did his green-skinned companion go anyway? He did a lot of shit following the brat's temporary stay in sand-man land, and he discovered some important things he needed to discuss. Perhaps talking to him might get his mind off of being wrongfully robbed?

The red hunter ran his fingers down his face, walking back into the living room to grimace at the sight; assessing the damage he would have to replace. He walked over to his chair, bending to pick up objects that once rested on the desk, taking them over to the couch he had in the corner.

His rear end followed suit, resting his elbows on each knee as his hands cradled each side of his cheek. A heated feeling ate at him, pining over the money earned on this job. And for what? A few bills owed to that she-demon and she had to take way over the amount?

"No, no think of something else," he chided himself. Dwelling on the negative personified to steer him towards negativity, especially since nothing could be gained after the debacle.

"No... it's some shit you borrowed on your trip. Just settle down before you look at them, that's all." He voiced his problems as a means to quiet his nerves, toes tapping on the floor rocking back and forth, muscles tight with irritation.

Hardened periwinkles shifted to the spare bedroom upstairs, wondering if the youth had awakened or still dived under the effects of his sickness. As much as the kid convinced himself of eating a heart burger, Dante found evidence that proved otherwise, hopefully.

9 hours earlier...

After he nestled the unconscious brat in the seat, he ignited the engine and ventured over to the small gas station, getting out and locking Nero inside the truck in case anything jumped in to get him.

"Hello," Dante called out, entering the mini-mart, glancing about the business with focused senses. Deathly silence filled the store, the luminescent lights internally buzzing on its last leg of life. A cigarette lay in the ashtray with the vapors floating away, walking towards the counter. "I'm pretty sure smoking here is prohibited," the elder complained, regarding the cancer stick to recognize if any feminine colors left lip prints.

Alert eyes strayed to the assorted novelties behind the stand, looking at the switches to the gas pumps so readily available at his touch. "Hello," he called out again, voice shouting out the greeting before his thoughts led astray to getting free gasoline. Though he decided against it, might screw up and ignite the gas station.

He rotated through the store, gazing over various edibles and drinks. From the looks of it, no one had been in here for some time, besides Edward and his family.

Imagine if someone came in here and took all this stuff to their content. No legit forces could stop him, no cashier to ring the red buzzer under the counter at the market being robbed. Like his compulsive urges tempted him to take anything he wanted...

No, no, no. He wouldn't succumb to temptation. Financial corporations spent their hard-earned
money providing their customers with these goodies. It isn't fair to steal profit away from them, which would be wrong.

Dante strolled down the first aisle, scanning the variety of cookies, chips, crackers, canned foods and cereal boxes; products of big companies that made them. Then again, the company didn't necessarily make these items, more like the laborers and farmers who did the work, probably underselling the ingredients to these greedy businesses and getting the short end of the stick.

Maybe he would take a pack of gum.

He reached the end of the aisle; various bottled drinks running around the store behind enclosed glass. His parched throat called to them, especially the ones that had strawberry flavoring in them. Oh, how he wished to take just one to quench his becoming thirst, but the temptation he would not fall for; he would prevail.

Dante walked on to the back, gazing longingly at the tempting liquors, wishing his resolve would crumble and loot what he damn well pleased. He got all he could from the mansion, no telling how long those items might last though, but he didn't think of it as stealing. The toys he acquired weren't in use much, so why let them collect dust? Plus, he can't risk humans crossing the goods. They didn't need to go scrambling about with powers not belonging to them anyway.

"Marco," his voice echoed, intending on trying another approach to get a response out of someone. "Anybody here? Kinda gettin' boring just talkin' to my—hellooo what's this?"

Oak-hued stains of varying lengths met his eyesight, a sticky substance drawing a trail around the lane. He withdrew Ivory, taking light steps before veering out the aisle. He glanced up at the circular mirror in the corner, looking in it to see if anything suspicious resonated from his vantage point.

"All this stuff is up for grabs, it makes no damn sense to be this way." He continued on with his investigation, coming upon a dried puddle of beer, broken bottles littering the space of where the alcohol section lay.

Facial muscles settled into neutrality, eyes soaking up the disturbing scene before him. Something cracked within his being, mind drifting somewhere a little dark and dreary to block out what lied to his front.

For three minutes he talked about almost everything and said nothing, thoughts going after him with new questions; probing, circling, suggesting, letting silences stretch out, then switching to a different tact all together.

Ten minutes later, Dante found himself with a truck load full of groceries, placing the items in the pickup's trunk in case the added weight unhitched the Camaro; comprising of various beers and liquors.

He told himself he wouldn't take anything from here, probably just a pack of gum. Except a five minute interval occurred where he felt disoriented, almost as if he flew into a rage and completely blacked out afterwards, not remembering what he did or destroyed. Only when he looked back into the store, viewing it stand as healthy as before, he knew the thought held no merit. But what made him grab all that junk?

He wanted to say he did it for Nero, seeing how he delighted in eating everything under the sun, yet he didn't believe his intuition. Regardless of the excuse of why, he at least had a week's worth of beer. On a good day, he could ingest about four cans, downing the stuff like water. Obviously,
someone didn't care for the precious liquid since its handling presented a careless slacker, and he took it upon himself to save its dignity.

Hmm, maybe that's why he went on a "shopping" spree.

6 hours earlier...

Before he unloaded everything back at the office, he swooped over to Nero's side to transfer him to his bed. The teen slept like the dead; it would be a complete exhaust of energy to wake him. In doing so, one of the jars shattered onto the floor, the vapors from the amber juice rising up to the red one's nostrils. He prepared to identify the scent when a sparkling shine caught his eye.

Curiosity perked, he threw the youth fireman's carry style, bending to pick the heart up, stopping his hand right above it. The sight engrossed him, the muscle pumping regularly with a black gem inside the center. Careful fingers picked up the vascular orifice and sniffed its odorless smell; dark fluid oozing out of the valves when he touched it.

Saturated liquid spilled on the asphalt floor, Dante tempted to scoop up what he could but thought against it. He had an extra jar to study or glance at later. It concerned him a little, that the ticker pumped stuff out when a body didn't surround the object. Is the solvent keeping the heart alive? If so, then how long would the organ keep thriving until it stopped?

Mentally sighing, Dante picked it up, grimacing over its firmly gelatinous texture. He moved forward with Nero in tow, unlocking and opening the front door to lay the placid teen on the nearby couch.

He walked into the kitchen, searching through the almost bare cabinets to find something to set the muscle in. His search turned up empty, realizing he had no dishes to put the heart on. He refused to place that gross shit in the few bowls he kept, knowing he'll lose his appetite upon remembering. Both hunters had a knack for eating the food straight out of the packaging anyway.

The next conquest focused on his refrigerator, rummaging through the old storage compartment to see if he had luck there. However, nothing stood big enough to hold the heart, save for a jar of pickles.

He grabbed the green jug, taking the lid off to empty the juice in the sink. His nose twitched, nostrils exhaling out the prickly scent to keep his nasal cavity from tingling. Dante emptied the pickles, eating one after he dumped the batch into the trash can. Time passed swiftly since he ate this early afternoon, the tangy flavor wasn't something beneficial to his taste buds. He ran the water in the tart-smelling holder, swishing the jar out three times before he stuffed the organ in there and replaced the top. He wondered if any changes should come out of its liquid element.

5 hours earlier...

The next hour belonged to unloading everything, by himself, and placing the items into their new residence; parking the rental into the stall. His old fridge turned over on its back, placed in the garage and the modern one took its place. The food and drinks set inside according to their designated temperatures. Dante looked at each item with a slight sneer on his face, knowing these consumables stood no chance of acknowledgment before his beloved pizza.

Next object to go in the car port inhered the ATV. The little runt can ride to his local destinations without pegging him to be his taxi. Not that he minded it though, but gas was high as a bitch these
days.

The motorcycle he 'permanently' borrowed rested outside, intending on waking her up and riding her all the way to Whetstone. Something told him he should take the truck in case he ran into more goodies to bring with him. The cases stayed in the pickup, wanting to look at them with Nero once he awoke from his slumber.

He pulled out his wad of cash, sitting on the edge of his desk counting the bills. Money rolled in steady now that Nero helped him out. The youth seemed to save his funds, Dante assumed to pay him back, so he never really ran out of it.

By some means, his paycheck escaped him faster than it could stay in his hands. He knew the reason though. That stubborn brunette always sucked him dry when he depended on his payment from a job, or when he barely had any to scrape off of.

Hmm, perhaps he should throw in an extra $100 just to keep her off of him. Bad enough he paid off his debt to her, but she still asked him for money. Yeah, this amount should be adequate to quiet her, especially since the jobs have been coming in.

He moved around the office, picking things up and placing things down in preparation to return to Whetstone. His being wanted to steal a few hours of shut-eye, but time was crucial and he could not partake in that luxury.

His head felt a little... tingly after what happened earlier, and he still didn't function at 100% yet. As such, in the scuffle of him organizing himself, or trying to, he accidentally placed the bills he planned to give to Lady in his back pocket, and set his money on the table.

His mind pondered which weapons to bring as he trotted up to the youth's room to get the bed ready for him, taking a moment to take in the neatness of it. Nostrils snorted out the strong scent of fresh mint, cracking the window open slightly to let some of the smell out.

He admitted he scoffed at the idea of cleaning. After all, what use would it be to disinfect when it threatened to collect dirt again? Being repetitive in that department didn't sit too well with him. In spite of that, Nero deduced the reason the hybrid never cleaned up had to do with the word 'lazy.' And so, the tidying fell solely on the brat.

Originally this room rested as his storage space; items, books and weaponry he collected over the years rested away until needed. When the teen first visited, Dante directed him to the warehouse upstairs, failing to remember it held his collectibles and... he didn't feel like moving all that shit to a different location.

In all honesty, he expected no one to stop by, and he had no vacancy. Trish occupied the room downstairs and even she stayed gone most of the time. Nero didn't flat out ask him to stay there (except his face and body language did) and Dante didn't really look for the added guests. The aspect of Trish coming back to find her spot taken he pondered little about, and his bedroom didn't enter the equation. But then he got to thinking...

Calls bustled in on overdrive and he just knew he missed a few while out. The girls had their own agendas to deal with, and they didn't seem too keen about staying there and delivering messages to him. Maybe he can see, for a few days, if the punk could act as his secretary.

Who knows, the kid might take on a few missions while he lazed about. The majority of his livelihood lingered in the company with females: eye-rolling, head snapping, narrow-eyed, hormone changing, headache-inducing, snatch-bleeding women. Perchance having another male
around would ease his mind when those two showed up and started one of those female actions to pluck his nerves raw.

As time went by, he likened the brat being there.

Bantering became something of a hobby that blossomed within the first week, and their friendship grew with their sparring egos. Yeah, having the kid around kept his agitation at bay, having someone to match that aggression with purposeful intention or not.

Chuckling to himself at the playful memories shared between the two, Dante made his way back downstairs, lifting the unconscious youth bridal style to his room. Despite the chilly night air, Nero sported a high temperature feeling past his clothed person. Whether the illness faulted with his choice of food or the punk (Dante's fault, mostly) forcing everything out of his stomach, some good rest should have him right again. However, he noticed how quickly they drew in fatigue more than usual.

He could take on a day like this and do it three times over before the burnout exhausted his energy. And he bet money those engraved shards took the blame; must've had some debilitating poison inside them. Plus that heart thing... well, he would wing it and say it's poisoned too.

While Dante sampled the water a few hours ago, he refused to do the same for the liquid the organ set in. It isn't worth the risk of him getting sick when all this stuff began to happen. He'll just let the runt sleep until he knocked the sickness off, and if he needed extra items to aid him in his road to recovery, he'd have to eat soup or take a few Tylenol.

The elder lacked experience in taking care of the sick, helping out with deep cuts or injuries though, yes. His superb genetics kept human ailments away, only catching sniffles or sneezes when out in cold, wet weather after long durations. Usually when those little buggers bothered him, he warmed himself up with a nice hot box of chicken, pepperoni, and sausage pizza. The twerp, on the other hand, might take longer to get right again; most likely with the aid of medicine. He would be fine; nothing to worry about, nothing at all.

"Hey kid, not sure if you're gonna die or not, but if you can hear me, mumble or something."

The kid's silent acknowledgment left him to just shrug the whole thing off, finishing carrying him to his bed. If the poison somehow got to him, his demonic essence should filter it with no trouble. He honestly didn't know what else to do if things had worsened. He set Nero down, drawing back to look at him in his entirety.

Nero looked like shit.

Tired, exhausted, sweaty, beat-up, run-down shit.

Dante's hand reached out to sweep Nero's bangs to the side, looking at the bluish-green bruise kissing the middle of his forehead. Black semi-circles housed under his eyes, wrinkles set underneath to measure his level of weakness. Beads of sweat formed under his hair line; the droplets used to cool down his high temperature. His chest rose and fell at a slightly faster rate, mouth a little open to allow the flow of air to continue at its pace. Dante looked further down his form, noticing another darker color under the tear in his navy blue t-shirt.

Opening the slit further with two fingers, he saw a long, deep pink scar scaling down the length of his chest. Around the wound, as if cuddling it, lied a stringy, purple blemish emphasizing the mark.
"Sorry 'bout that kiddo." A lone finger ran down the imprint, feeling how the tissue scarred over. That shouldn't even be there. Bruises and welts they got from time to time, though they gradually disappeared. Their injuries shouldn't be scarring over like that. He had a couple plastered on his torso and back, but those stayed that way because his opponents cheated, adding magical elements to their weapons and battle techniques. If he could do the same with his gear, then they would fall...

*Oh...* Ah, is that what happened to the punk?

Rebellion had some witchy magic in her, and the stab to his chest left that mark? Well then, the responsibility fell on him... sort of. He didn't have to ask Nero if he used Yamato to mend himself, thanks to that blue flash of light to hit the titty queen. Maybe he could absorb one of those healing gems above his scar and it would heal all the way?

He finished his scrutiny, walking over to his feet and gently pulling the boots off. Dirt and bloodied demonic splotches stained various parts on his jeans. Being the little neat freak he showed himself to be, perhaps he'd wake up complaining about how dirty his sheets were. Hmm, what if he took off his pants to spare him from whining? Dante imagined it would make for a chuckle here or there, but Nero might think he tried to molest him or some shit like that.

Actions like those he rose above; all that nonsense he wouldn't stoop to. Unless he had his sexual deviant's full consent, then... it would be in their interest not to tempt him.

Laughing to himself if he were to actually "pants" Nero, he moved onto his thigh holster, knowing the contraption wasn't comfortable to sleep in. Yet the more he stared at it, the more difficult the leather seemed to undo. Alas, it appeared like he contended to take advantage of the youth, but he made an effort to make him as relaxed as possible, scouts honor.

He went out of his way to ease his discomfort because courtesy of such magnitude from him doesn't happen often. Now encountered a bad time to slack off from poor dietary consumption. He needed everyone on board to combat this large threat, and he wanted no one sick going into it.

He should prank the kid.

Just one good prank and then he'd be okay. Nero still had his beat down coming and his sickness won't excuse him. Those young hormones were a lethal force, bursting out of their confinement when least expected, and devastating those close to it. Only they tried to devastate him. If he took combat to this threat as his instincts told him to, the situation would have turned out much worse.

Nevertheless, he should put a toy snake on his pillow.

A thick, green comforter pulled over a shivering form, the owner's body subconsciously burrowing deeper into the warmth; the sound of heavy, even sleep taking effect within seconds. Dante stood over him, looking at how peaceful and at ease he appeared. He couldn't quite explain it; like a sense of belonging that made Nero so comfortable being there. Whenever the twerp and him harbored hostility, the kid always said he'd return to Fortuna.

Except Dante wondered who he wrangled to convince. To be honest, it might feel empty if the youth left... and didn't come back to stay. Definitely would miss out on some cash rolling in, but it was more than that.

Something deep inflated between them, and it'll be weird if that sensation vanished. Friendship. Yes, that's it. Their bond had grown stronger since Nero's visit, and the bonding would be a factor he may miss should he leave. The girls stuck around, though he had more in common with the
youngster. Man-handling the women were off-limits, and the teen sparred with him anytime. Hmph, he should try keeping those near and dear by him; it grew tiring to have that hollow, empty feeling every time someone left him.

The veteran took another look at his form, vision resting upon the bruise on his forehead. He already knew the kid will have surreal, fucked-up dreams. Always seemed to happen when they suffered from head trauma. After all that, once the teen awakened from the delusional dysfunction of his slumber, he would be right as rain again, hopefully.

With a slight ruffling of the kid's hair he left him to his sleep, knowing he would need all the rest he could retain to regain his composure; using all of it when the main enemy came into the spotlight. Though, if this Ramona chick acted alone, then Nero can watch from the sidelines.

His next course of action called to figure out which weapons to use to interrogate his foes, and which hardwares to kill them with. It's been a while since he needed extra arsenal because his skills with Rebellion and his pistols were enough. The majority of his devil arms slept in the attic, although some stayed behind his desk, in his room, and in Nero's.

He hopped over the stairs and landed on the floor to go into the garage, flicking on the light switch to find the large trunk where he stashed his old gears. Before he checked that out, he went to the truck and opened one case, finding those quirky, tofana scissors he wanted to try again.

Sparkling periwinkles stayed glued to the boxes' contents, taking in the various swords and firearms they collected. Or more specifically, the spare bills his eyes rested on; the twenty dollar bills his gaze laid on. He shoveled the money into his back pocket, thinking his total escalated to $2520 when the amount lowered to much less. He finished his search by retrieving Rebellion, leaving Nero's tools inside until he woke up to get them.

He lifted a large chest, the purple-black Doppelganger's malevolent sphere lying on top of his other collectibles. Ah, those were some memories to relive. Enemies had wracked their brains in trying to figure out how there were two identical hunters attacking them at the same time. He had a feeling he might exercise the devil's spirit sooner rather than later, so those visual thoughts could be seen and saved up again.

Strong hands searched through the demonic pickings, deciding to pull Agni and Rudra out and give them a spin for old times' sake. The red and blue serrated-styled swords gave out a joyful "Yea!" before Dante drew back, clanking the heads together, throwing in a stern look. He looked at each of them, taking in their repressed smiles before he absorbed them into his body. He closed the crate with the flick of his wrist, heading upstairs to his bedroom to retrieve Pandora.

Without a doubt that thing possessed a magnitude of raw power, never trusting it for shit. The suitcase radiated in pure demonic energy, possessing enough potency to kill a room full of demons when he opened the case. He wouldn't place his confidence to anyone with it either so it remained in the safety of his closet, only to be used when allowed.

On his way out, he averted his luxurious bed beckoning him to come hither. Dante barely spent time in here in the last few weeks, and he believed it'll continue to be that way until all this hoopla died down. In seriousness, he readied to dive into his bed even if he took one glance in its direction.

Satisfied he didn't find himself embraced in his warm covers, he rushed his way over to Nero's room once more, opening the door to hear the silently loud sound of someone sleeping good. Should have been him in that spot right about now, but it would be all the more rewarding when his turn came. Might be nice if the brat could tag along to Whetstone with him but circumstances
presenting, he would be the lone warrior this go around; even though the blame pointed at Nero to begin with.

He should be sitting at his desk with a frosty beer and a hot pizza, looking over the items he gained, yet the runt made them travel the longest route possible to get home and they weren't finished with the mission. Which settled the reason he headed towards the new fridge, stopping to take in the metallic beauty before diving inside, grabbing three beers to bring on his excursion to cleansing the small town.

"Rest up all you can, you punk ass. 'Cause when I come back, I'm dragging your sick ass out of bed to finish whatever trash you failed to clean up." Upon the final words leaving his lips, he went out the garage door, mind focused on setting Whetstone straight from her tragic environment.

At the Moment

Large hands raked down a solemn face to cover over a mouth and nose, eyes trailing to the spot where the cash should be. When he saw the total missing from the table, he figured Lady stopped by and picked up her tab. Only when he dove into his pocket and pulled out the change did he realize his grave mistake.

If he added his funds right, he had exactly $720 to his name. Add that to the quarter amount paid to the mechanic and he would have his car fixed... with twenty dollars left do whatever he wished with it, or tried to; if he had some spare bills to get in the truck.

His trip back to the small town proved as one enlightening yet bloody escapade, wishing to vent his current frustrations out through his mouth rather than his fists. He couldn't wait to tell Nero about it.

Now.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dante paid the mechanic $350 in advance and the $600 that was his already had shot up to $720 when he found an extra $120 in the case (600+120=720). Add that to the $350 and that comes out to $1,070. The total auto check-up costs $1,400 and the advance in payment made it go down to $1,050. When all was said and done, Dante came out the victor (loser) with $20.00 he could play with ($1070-$1050). And if that wracks your brain...blame Lady, lol. Yet I did tell ya'll he was going to lose some of that stuff didn't I? (Laughs evilly.)

Well, at least Nero is getting all nice and pampered. Wasn't that nice of Dante to do before he knew he was robbed?

The time frame (9, 6, 5) was basically Dante remembering what he did after he put Nero in the car up until he had to go on the turnaround trip. When he got back, he found out his mistake, called Lady, she blew him off, and now he's moping. I wanted to chop it up like that because I wanted to explain some of the stuff that went on in each little section. Otherwise you guys probably would have been asking me "Wait, how did he get that?" or "When did that happen?" I hope the ordering didn't confuse any of you too much!
I feel like I'm just getting started with the story since there's still so much to tell. Til'
Next Time
The kitchen table housed the second heart jar, picking up the container before he stomped upstairs into Nero's room. When he opened the door his brows furrowed, peeved that the minty scent wavered strong still. Heavy feet marched over to the window, pulling it all the way open as a forceful breeze settled into the clean-smelling chamber.

The teen's sleeping quarters had undergone interior decorating changes the both of them (mainly Nero) decided it should have, though nothing too serious.

A full sized bed laid against the same wall the window rested. A brown dresser sat to its opposite side along with a wooden chair adjacent to it. Across from the bed was the closet, objects of varied trinkets stashed inside when nothing else had a place to go. A fresh coat of milky white paint adorned the walls after they aged to a light beige color. Plenty of things needed an upgrade, but as broke as his lifestyle made him, renovations didn't concern him. Especially now since his finances headed straight towards finding a new desk.

In actuality, he didn't give a fuck what his house looked like.

As long as he had a roof over his head and a dry area to retreat to when it rained, he didn't care what broke, leaked, cracked, or fizzled. It's his abode and he could piss in the open if he felt inclined. If the kid wanted to add this or upgrade that, then fine; financially staying away from his pockets though.

Curiosity got the better of him, striding to the closet, banging on it a few times to startle the youth awake. A lone eyebrow arched high into white hair upon opening the door, viewing the small but clean space stuffed with the kid's possessions. Books lined the upper shelf while some of his weapons resided on the ground. Last he remembered, everything toppled over each other without a second glance.

Was this—this was what Nero did in his spare time? Trying to get rid of his semi-OCD outbreaks by straightening the thing? It didn't bother him, really, because he wasn't about to lift a finger. At the bottom of the storage lay a stuffed black and green duffel bag. Two sweaters hung from hangers and a pair of blue sneakers rested on the floor.

"Why is the duffel bag full?" he muttered with a sneer. After living in a certain place for some time, one intended to settle down with their surroundings. Nero inhabited more than that here, judging by the food, electronics, and small home furnishings he purchased over the months. The only rationale to keep a suitcase ready reposed an unexpected trip, and there wasn't anywhere they would stay in the future.

Nero didn't have to worry about the hybrid kicking him out since there wasn't a reason to...unless he sided with Lady because she climbed to the top of his shit-list. In the meantime however, that sack wasn't going nowhere and neither was the owner of the items in it. He picked up the tote, unzipping the zipper to let the clothes fall in a soft clump on the floor.

Incoherent mumbles tumbled from the youth's lips, tootsies sliding out to show wiggling toes beneath black socks. That little display reminded him of yesterday when a specific someone moved his feet from its resting spot while he dozed away.
"Payback's a bitch, kid." He'd exert the same treatment the runt gave him yesterday. With that in mind though, Dante wanted him alert when he showed him his findings.

It's been almost eleven hours since he first fell asleep in the truck, and his demonic side should have knocked that sickness out already. Lazy periwinkles noticed those dark circles had disappeared, the bruise under his forehead lessening from its bold color. Eyelashes fanned out over pale cheeks, chest rising up then falling down deeply.

Nero wasn't waking up any time soon.

Impatience bit at his core. He used his thumb and forefinger to open Nero's left eyelid, staring straight into the enlarged pupil, and asked him to get up.

Tempted. He withheld his temptation to blow a gush of wind into his eye and jump him awake, but he restrained himself. It seemed too good to pass up the moment, yet he practiced effort to rouse him by more subtle means. He would try to.

Something bugged him about the teen's sleeping though.

Being the “breed” of their biological nature, they were “conscious sleepers.” Any subtle feeling or disruption in the atmosphere while asleep made them to tune into the change, albeit subconsciously, before waking up to investigate. It often came with the territory, constantly watching out for enemies who preyed on an opportunity to strike when guards are down.

He didn't know why the youth didn't wake up when a presence infiltrated his room, regardless if it's his or not. No matter how injured or how weak they were, if their surrounded environment had a hitch in it, they classified the interruption. Or it might've sustained that notion. Maybe Nero sensed nothing wrong in his vicinity, and he deemed his proximity safe to continue on with his rest.

Aww, how sweet. But he didn't care about that right now.

The teen warbled a bunch of mutters together in his slumber, the final word rhyming with something akin to knee, or maybe a key? Dante sighed, moving away from him as he shuffled the jar to open it.

"Looks like someone is still asleep."

He took the heart out, turning it around so the gem in the middle reflected in the dark room. "Dark room, eh?"

Some light needed to filter through the blinds, knowing it would wake the youngster up... if he wasn't burrowed within those covers to block those rays from hitting him.

The chieftain looked at the black sock, seeing the thing twitch twice before he grabbed the hem of it and pulled it off, exposing thin toes with lint in between them. He curled his hand into a half-fist, knuckles pointing at the front of Nero's foot before he drove the clenched fingers forward.

An abrupt jerk followed, preceded by more mumbling, ending with words said like "doesn't own me." To which the elder naturally responded with, "Who doesn't own you?"

White bangs shook across his head, deciding the sickness had a little more kick than he imagined. Violating the teen's foot while he snoozed should make him awaken with his reflexes springing into action.
He stayed near the window this time, looking down and taking in the "pinkness" of the heart under the new light. Green and blue veins littered the muscle, the same purple liquid oozing out when taken from its amber home. So many of these things stood proud in that refrigerator, and even more venturing farther into town.

He discovered something specific there though, and he had a hunch that the fledgling, at one point, might know info on it. After all, he was affiliated with the Order of the Sword a while ago, wasn't he?

A strong breeze penetrated the room, prompting him to close the window a little, startling a small wave of birds from their spot on the roof. Their wings knocked heavily against the air's current, scurrying to get away from the abrupt noise in the silent morning. A few minutes passed and the same sound echoed again, the feathered animals coming back to reclaim their position. The flying rats sounded huge with their hard feathers flapping.

The heart continued beating in his palm, looking at the abnormal vessel, moving over to sit in the chair. Obviously another hand provided assistance in this; the operation proved way too successful.

Whenever a strange occurrence displayed itself in a neighborhood, word got out and the gossip eventually came to them. Never once did he go to a town and there wasn't a living soul to be there. He stumbled upon ghost towns after the people moved out from a devastation, not because they were trapped in one.

His attention returned to the organ, focusing on the black stone stealing his interest. He wondered if it was a weapon, or maybe the object contained a healing agent for the damned. Better yet, it could be a "heart" for demons. If they struggled on their last limb of existence they can eat the vessel, or some other weird shit, then they can be revitalized. However, he sustained his doubts about the smell.

Hearts, just like everything else on a body, decay and rot as time moves on. This beating muscle showed no signs of either, going strong as if it thrived in the healthiest stages of its vitality. Little pools of liquid ran down his hand, opening his nostrils to inhale the scent.

Blood has a natural coppery, metallic flavor to it, and this thing endured an odorless presence. The fluid surrounding it must have acted as a protective seal, stopping its decay.

Hmm, what might happen should the gem came off?

Boots dragged on the floor until they stopped by the bed. Dante leaned over the sleeping beauty, using his right hand to land on the youth's shoulder, shaking him roughly a few times to wake him up. A change in breathing occurred before the youth continued on with his deep siesta.

Dante narrowed his eyebrows before repeating the same action, only rougher this time. When he saw no progress rewarding his actions he grunted, diving under the cover and pulling out the devil bringer to "use" it.

A lot of weird stuff went into and came out of that forearm, and more than once he exhibited enticement to ask Nero if he could borrow it as a storehouse. His own storage got a little crowded, and it may be a good idea to keep a few spare items in there. Hey, if the kid wanted or needed to, he can play with those gadgets for fun or on an enemy; a win-win scenario in his eyes. Despite the notion, he knew that Nero remained sore about his arm's appearance.

Well, being "shy" wasn't in Dante's vocabulary, so if the twerp didn't want his arm, give it to him... somehow.
Perhaps that's the reason he felt so inclined to use it.

The heart changed its calm setting, increasing its beating tempo, or did it start performing normal? Two fingers tugged the black stone out and set it on the dresser, looking at the gem once before he placed the heart on the demonic palm.

Spilled dark liquid lightened up to the familiar red, revealing its pungent odor. But was it a coincidence that the cardiac organ bled when he put it in his hand or when he took the gem out? Shit, he should have waited a few more seconds to see what it did, but the devil bringer showcased itself for the taking since Nero was dead.

Dead asleep. Yes, Nero snoozed really hard and he'd be okay. He wasn't suffering from an illness anymore nor did he live on in a coma. Concussion yes, coma... no. They can catch colds but to fall into a complete sickness, nope. He'd be fine. Getting in all his rest topped his priority list because he got his ass tossed from demon to demon yesterday.

“If you'd listen to me from the get-go, then you wouldn't be in this situation.”

How odd is it that he slept so hard. He suffered an injury the teen couldn't even fathom of experiencing, pain-wise of course. The fledgling rolled around on the ground a couple of times from attacks, and he drowned into this heavy of a snooze?

A tongue stuck hard in the side of his cheek, folding Nero's hand in his and squeezing the heart tightly. Sanguine fluid gushed out of the valves, trailing down the partial-hybrid's arm; still snoozing like he had no care in the world.

Honestly though, the kid took a fall for the team, but it wasn't that serious. Waking him up in the most non-violent manner wore thin on his nerves with the lacking results. So he had one more chance to awaken peacefully before the chieftain started fucking up his face.

All this time, the organ prevailed strong, pumping a little faster since the removal of the gem. With a devilish glee in his eyes, he placed the bleeding heart right over Nero's calm one, waiting for the youth to jump when the blood began to seep into his t-shirt. Surely that would do the trick and then they could move forward about what was happening.

Nero was oblivious to even that.

Dante just stood there expectantly, the devilish glee in his eyes diminishing until a great annoyance replaced his happiness, seeping down into his core. This abided something he didn't know how to deal with, that wasn't common in his life and the only natural response was to treat the problem with violence. Wasn't that the issue to resolve almost all of life's problems? It's not like he could regret his actions if the kid received a bunch of fresh marks to wake him up, but would he?

Raking his hands over his face, smearing more blood on him in the process, he steeled his determination before mumbling out, "I already do." He leaned over again lightly, finding a good spot to start whacking him when his willpower cracked a little, wondering if an ensnaring force "trapped" Nero in his forty winks due to what he ate. As if the amber liquid had some type of affecting agent within and the symptoms caused Nero to remain asleep, as if he lived in a coma.

Well, that wasn't anything to set his mind on.

"Stop sleeping. Now." The hybrid bordered on trying to rouse him when the hairs on his arm started to rise, jolts of awareness coming to the forefront after a familiar aura coursed throughout his body.
A dark, pure power he would know and feel as if it were his own. A blue light began to encase Nero, tendrils of white energy growing the longer it progressed.

Dante didn't want to start imagining that the worst happened, like the teenager fighting his way from his possibly enforced sack time, but triggering while asleep held an action he couldn't allow.

The devil-side exemplified a ferocious nature, the conscious psyche going into a controlled, subconscious state where bad shit would happen. Almost akin to something within springing to focus and dominating without any rational logic. Through patience and dedication he gained control of his, at times, and effectively terminated whatever pissed him off. Nero on the other hand; he wasn't so sure about and he didn't need him destroying the room... or himself.

He drew back once and threw his fist down, effectively punching Nero on the side of his cheek and stopping the triggered transformation. The punch hit hard enough to stop it from occurring, but not to the point of leaving any permanent damage, he hoped.

The youngster's face twitched in response, mouth opening as his breathing changed pace. He moved over to the chair, taking the heart with him and plopped down in it, needing a moment to think about what transpired, yet it would be even better if Nero woke up to explain himself. Triggering while resting endured a dangerous maneuver. The demonic persona had the ability to take complete control and have a field day doing very naughty, sadistic things. If the kid fought an internal battle then that was understandable, albeit a bit stupid because this whole sick thing could've been avoided.

At present, the sanguine scent pummeled his nostrils, causing him to snort quietly despite the air coming in through the window. When finished, something started stirring to rise beneath a green comforter, to which Dante immediately looked away from... and got mad.

After banging on a door, calling out to him, opening the window, talking to him, slapping him, grabbing him, shaking him, putting a heart on his chest, pulling his eye open... after doing all of that shit, now came the time he decided to join the world of the living? Awakening all peaceful as if there weren't any bad dreams or any poison keeping him in his snoozing state? Nothing troubled him at all? Those loud ass sounds reverberated around him, and now resided the chance to wake up?

Oh Nero, Nero, Nero, such a peculiar being you are.

Dante shifted his eyes over to the partial-hybrid, seeing him with his back against the wall, doubt and confusion mixing in with the scent of the room. He spent a lot of energy trying to awaken him in the most sensible manner, and a weak snort did the trick?

Canines enlarged inside his mouth, running a tongue over them with self-restraint that that simple little sound roused him out of his endless slumber... and the urge to willingly put a few more scars on him. He should be happy that Nero lived, but he couldn't help the feeling of being played. That wasn't the case since he saw firsthand the deterioration of the youngster's health, but what he just went through... totally uncalled for. He didn't have a great amount of patience and he frowned upon wasting time. He hoped Nero got all the rest in the universe, because he probably wasn't going to sleep like that again until the target has been silenced.

Chapter End Notes
A/N: Okay, I hope I don't lose any of you in this.

1. When Nero heard the knocking/banging sound in his sleep, it was Dante hitting the closet door and moving around the room purposefully making noise

2. When Nero asked where was Dante's "key" in la-la land, Dante heard him say "key" so he knew that he was still delirious and responded as such.

3. Remember Nero hitting his foot on the bed? That was actually a response to Dante punching his foot.

4. The sound of wings flapping in Nero's sleep was the result of the birds flying away when Dante opened up the window, and then coming back later.

5. Nero getting flung around like a doll in his dream was the action of Dante roughly shaking him in his sleep in the real world.

Do you guys get it now? Like the specific things that occurred in Nero's dreams were the actions that Dante did to him to get him to wake up. You know how you set the alarm at night, and if you are having a dream, you can hear the alarm ringing in your dream before you wake up? And then the other things( not able to look in the mirror and the Fault) blame it on the sickness.
Caught in the Act

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Long, manicured fingernails tapped in rapid succession on a wooden desk, the other hand cradling a forehead marred with worry. Four bare glasses sat across from her; the white wine bottle laying shattered on the floor. Dark brown, doe eyes stared aimlessly at the wall before her, mouth pressed into a firm line after the weight of the Queen's death settled in.

A large burden fell upon her shoulders, an overwhelming obstacle settling in her chest. No, not burden. The task. She inherited control of completing the Queen's envisioning of her world, and now she had to fulfill it. Though, how would she be able to do that when those devil hunting pests killed the people she collaborated with?

Her Queen was murdered like the other castoffs on the hunter's list. The call from her blond convert, Keith, sent her into a delicate yet indecisive place.

For the longest, she lived under the Queen's shadow but she was comfortable in that position. She had the perfect amount of freedom to do as she pleased, and the orders she received met with little resistance. Her life couldn't be any more joyful. In bereft of that happiness came a stern realization. An understanding that she had to step up to the plate and take charge of the operation. But how would she do that?

Sure, she commanded a group in her own right, picking and deciding who she deemed worthy, but the Queen accepted everyone, if they passed their tests. Despite many of the demonic claiming they could take over in leadership, she already knew what had to be done, just remained clueless to the proper way to proceed with it.

Apparently, these hunters are smarter than they appeared, able to fight and defeat someone as strong as the Queen. Rushing an all-out attack on them pursued an evident duty, only she had to find the right time to do so. Might be good to strike them when they least expected it, or give them everything full force. So what they handled a single demon, but what if their numbers reached over 100? How about 300? Even 500?

Eyelids closed in discomposure, imagining the hunter's blood tainting the air when she avenged her master. Weeks after those goons destroyed those fountains, Eusimalkia had been driven to her last resort of trying to capture the son of Sparda, claiming his life so hers ascended to greatness.

Ramona herself knew little about him, but rumors told of his ruthless nature, slaying down his own kind with such hatred his brethren blindly attacked him without thinking it through by instant retaliation. If so, then how can she use that wrath against him? From heard rumors, he had no family or a significant other to threaten him with. Surely an influx of rogues should be enough to overwhelm him if confined to a small space or something similar.

Hey, she should probably enact that soon.

When Keith called her and explained what happened, her policeman in disguise hauled ass to get back to the mansion to confirm it true, finding the blond convert dead in the middle of the road on his travel. Further investigation proved the beheaded Queen's tragic fate, and some specific items went missing.
The sensible thing, she told herself, said to forget about him momentarily and focus on moving forward with the operation. Just the same, there prevailed her pressing credo of not shrinking responsibility; the process of removing the half-breed from the equation so he can't interfere.

And interfere he would no more.

Another wine bottle clutched into her hand from the bar, opening the top while the glass turned upside down, the bubbly liquid emptying into an awaiting mouth.

Nero stared at Dante with heavy caution, his sweaty human palm clenching the sheets in a death grip. Eyelids barely blinked while his eyesight followed the chieftain's form. Time seemed to slow down, remaining in their stilled state; the youth ever conscious of the veteran's every motion and Dante's penetrating glare never leaving the fledgling's sight. Silence fell throughout the room; the pounding beat of a steady heart dominating their hearing.

The teen blinked twice when the veteran looked away, relishing a deep inhale before Dante threw the vascular ticker into the air. Pale blues returned to Nero to watch the brat focus on the device. He caught it in his fingers again, giving a small grunt before chucking it at the punk with great speed.

The partial-hybrid produced a tiny frightened gasp, his head tilting to the side just in time to watch the organ trail down the wall. The muscle sputtered out blood from its casing, the flow growing slower and slower until it stopped. A blue gaze fixated on the spectacle, flinching when the elder stood from his chair.

Nero steadied himself when his hand felt a pulse on his chest, awareness lightly tuning into this discovery with his vision landing upon Dante once again. That thumping belonged to him; his own heart beating under his red-soaked shirt. So, if that thing wasn't his that Dante hurled at him, where did he get it from?

"What's going... " A dry mouth snapped shut, swallowing a few times to moisten a parched throat. "What's the problem, man?"

Dante took heed to him for a moment, popping the bones in his neck before answering. "I should have just pulled your ass out of bed-"

"What are you talking about?"

"-to save me a lot of trouble."

The teenager sat with his eyebrows pulled downwards, wanting to ask him to clarify his statement but decided against the idea. He wasn't familiar with the veteran's state of mind, or what happened while he snoozed away. The throbbing resumed on the side of his face, going back to cradling his injury.

"I slapped you around because you would not wake up, and you started to trigger in your sleep. Why you did... I don't even want to know, now." Dante walked over and leaned against the door frame, sans jacket folded in his arms. Legs crossed over one another as he regarded the scared youth through lidded eyes.

He stood still to let his agitation wane through his body, however his stolen money brought his aggravation full circle.

"I never thought someone could doze harder than me, but I'm about to do it, so it doesn't matter.
Any calls come in, you take them."

He started moving from his spot but stopped when he saw the kid open his mouth, closing it soon after. Dante assumed waking Nero up and discussing the matters in full perceived a mandatory issue but... it can wait for a while.

Human life deserted Whetstone and allowed the accursed to roam without law, especially those damned Cutlasses infesting the place. They died much easier this time, but still. He didn't know if the blond convert or "Grace" phoned anybody beforehand, and that's what made it so imperative to tell him.

On his tour through the city, he went once more to the gas station and investigated in thorough scrutiny. Heading towards the back end of the store he followed a decaying smell to a rusty, beaten-down truck, finding Edward's children dead inside. Police couldn't be called or trusted since Officer Scott probably kept tabs on the area.

Wasn't anything to do for them out there like that anyway, and leaving them there to rot beyond reason unnerved him greatly. After little duration to what he should do, he rounded the old man and set him in the pickup, lighting the vehicle on fire as he paid his unknown respects to the triplet.

Things just bothered him after that; reminded him of his own dysfunctional family and its tragic ending. A deep, unwanted regret filled him. It should have been different, he mused involuntarily; Edward and his children's fate and his own, but that lived long in the past. He held no fault that the old man chanced upon a shitty situation, yet what he did lacked ethics no matter whom the antagonist.

Over the years, Dante learned that life has a way of kicking one along like a football. Destiny never dealt him a particularly easy time but that was normal, given his heritage. Some people, in his eyes, took their turn to be a football. Most survived the kick to the end zone, some didn't. In the elder man's case, he commanded both the football and the kicker, controlling everyone else's fortune while letting his fly.

"What happened while you were gone?" Nero asked, moving his legs up and over to rest on the floor. He stole a glance at the muscle thrown at him and then at the blotch on his shirt, vision narrowing in suspicion when he looked back at the veteran.

"If you're wondering about that spot on your shirt, well that's from our hearts beating in sync." The chieftain added emphasis by tapping his own thumping organ, but he said it in a light, snide tone. "And it's also from you getting on my damn nerves."

Nero stepped back mentally, expression going blank in thought, striving to ignore his body constricting on the inside over the statement.

Very troublesome and strange.

Dante turned and left without another word, leaving Nero to jump out of the bed, howbeit wobbly and weak thanks to his forced sickness, to trail after him. Legs stopped right outside his room to assess the state of downstairs.

A deep scowl settled onto his face, tension riling up to lash out at the dope since he knew who butchered this place, namely him.

"What the fuck happened?" Nero held out his arms, gesturing to his confusion.

Old magazines and papers littered the floor's expanse. The oak desk suffered deficient injuries with
the drawers pulled apart by its hinges. Various splinters mixed with the conglomerate mess of the supposed office. Upside down chairs donned missing legs while others seemed to be broken off or split in half. Bottles of empty liquor spread far and near the area, making it—wait, never mind. Those were already there since the dork drank that shit like water, yet everything else shouldn't be there.

"How did... why is the office like this?" To Dante, he didn't care how this place looked because he didn't clean, but Nero did. He hated disorganization; the concept serving him no positive purpose. Spending precious energy searching for shit in junky, unkempt places would waste time of the utmost importance, especially when it should be found and located originally. Plus, who would want to live in their own filth?

Nero's fists tightened on the stair railing, teeth clenching because he knew he would soon be reacquainted with a broom and dustpan. What angered him though; the lack of explanation why the main area looked like this. Yeah, he heard banging and thumping in his slumber, but that came from Dante stating he attempted to wake him up. If he registered this thunderous shit happening, he inclined to jump out of his sleep.

"My efforts are unappreciated," he said in a bitter tone, taking slow steps down the stairs, looking over the damage. "I'm pretty sure this sight would add to your debt by La-"

A gush of wind crept by him when a heavy palm whipped him around, coming within centimeters of touching the chieftain's lips with his nose. The abrupt turn loosened the youth's footing to stumble into Dante's chest, bringing his hands forward to steady himself. Dante didn't give the impression to notice, or even care, and grabbed the teen by the shoulders, applying light pressure as he spoke.

"I like you, Nero. I do. You are someone who I want to know from here well beyond my expiration date... whenever that may be. But. If you want me to continue, I suggest you not utter that name in my presence again. Or at least until I deem it safe to do so, 'kay?"

Blue eyes blinked, dazzled from the first few sentences spoken. That... kind of warmed him inside a little. He felt moved by the flattery and appreciated by this compliment, seeing how he barely received them.

Snide and snubbed remarks came gift-wrapped as compliments. Many people forced the need to say cordial things to him when hard-pressed to or as a duty out of fear. Yet rarely did it come with such genuine and mirth other than from Kyrie. And the liking him thing? He cared less one way or the other, but he wouldn't deny the nice gesture to hear it rarely said about him.

Fine, okay. Nero admitted Dante had his compassionate and generous ways worthy of praise. His laughter gave a roar; his vivacious, quicksilver charm subsisted difficult to resist. Behind this front of camaraderie, the half-breed was shrewdly persuasive; he marshaled his arguments logically... at times, presented them skillfully... sometimes, and seemed able to rationalize any situation to suit himself while persuading everyone else he acted for the general good.

In spite of his agreeable persuasiveness, Nero could see Dante hid something dark and sinister beneath his charm. When he expressed his serious side, his voice's chilling tone revealed potential violence waiting to be unleashed should he be provoked beyond his limit, as Nero witnessed glimpses of it yesterday.

Through all that happened between the two, good and bad, a reputable respect brewed between them. Each one coming to know enough of the other's capabilities to admire their strengths, and help each other on their weaknesses—in their own manner of punch-lines and taunts.
Notwithstanding, he'd have to give the man more credit in his actions. He would try to... despite those comforting words and those feelings about him, Dante is still an ass.

The red hunter gave an affirming squeeze before moving towards the stairs, exhaustion coming through in a hard sigh. There had to have been a dispute with—the brunette—and he fell out with her, badly. And what happened to the town? Did he go back out there himself to investigate? Any findings he needed to combat later on? How many-

Where are his weapons?

"Hey." Dante kept on trudging up the steps. "Hey, where's the truck?"

"Garage."

"Where are my weapons?"

"In the truck." Dante gave answers as un-emotive as possible, his aura bathed in a trance-like state.

The hell is he moody about? Items filled the cases to the brim; books, weaponry, hardware, and money. Speaking of which...

"Where's all the stuff at?"

"In the truck in the garage."

Now, what in the world happened while in la-la land? Someone must have super-pissed on the elder's parade if he stayed this distant. Even if something didn't work out in his favor, he didn't stay this pouty. But he told himself he would act nicer to him, he had to make sense of what transpired.

"Are you having trouble wi-"

"Just... " He cut him off with a dismissive wave of his wrist. "... handle the front of the office okay. I'm gonna go... rest for a minute.” With that, his door closed followed by a soft thump soon after.

Nero stood there stumped, blinking at how Dante brushed him off. A rare occurrence it stood to show someone his sympathy and generosity, and he didn't like his efforts thrown back in his face, no matter by who. At least he could have said he'll talk later.

With a glare sent towards his door, he trudged to the garage, shivering from the cold air ghosting over his skin. It seems he unloaded the important stuff and settled them into their proper place.

One thing he found troubling though; the "rental" of the ride. Surely this Ramona chick will discover things missing, and her policeman would find out. Isn't the dummy worried about that? Especially since they (Dante really) took a lot of their valuables?

The youth decided not to think further on it, going to the truck and pulling his weapons out. Sorting through the items in the cases came next on the list. All though he should wait probably; he didn't know what the red one wanted to throw out or keep. Pfft, whatever, he had other things on his agenda to complete.

His stomach grumbled, absently rubbing the spot on his shirt where Dante laid that putrid muscle. It came as shock when the hybrid explained he slept longer than he did. To him nonetheless, he was ill and required rest to get his strength back. So what important matters needed discussion at that moment? What did Dante need to say? On his way to the kitchen, he placed his tools by the couch, mind focusing on stuffing his face.
Perhaps with the money the dope had, he could afford to update the décor to this kitchen because the refrigerator looked dreadful in this dated decor. Dare he look inside though, knowing it'll be empty? Maybe he should call the pizza place to keep his disappointment from showing. The only thing bound to be in there are the accessories that added flavor to foods.

He went over by the sink, looking in the cabinet to grab a cup, running it under the tap. Cool water flowed down a dried throat, trotting towards the icebox in temptation. He knew it would be bleak and barren, but he would indulge his mind to get rid of his curiosity.

Five minutes later, Nero found himself munching on a breakfast croissant, two more resting on a plate complete with some fruit punch to down the sandwich to his starved stomach. Opening the fridge might have been the best surprise this morning.

Unknown to him whether Dante shopped at a store or not, but the fridge chocked up on edibles and drinkable liquids. Further investigation had Nero discovering more foods in the cabinets, placing a twitching smirk on his lips since the uncovering.

As he wolfed down his heartening meal, the memories popped up about the nice things the dope helped him with. There voided an explanation for going above his means to comfort Nero. Make no mistake, he enjoyed the appreciation because he didn't receive it often. Just that he neglected to reciprocate the appreciation back.

He gave the captain money, taken on jobs and cleaned up his office, but it didn't feel the same; almost like he had to go out of his style to give his thanks to receive that genuine gratitude. Dante didn't have to do what he did for him. For that, he would bump up his 'be nicer to the dummy' meter a few notches.

But what could he do?

A loud rapping of the door brought him out of his musings, taking a large bite out of his second sandwich and gulping down his juice, going over towards the opening. He wondered who could be knocking during this time in the late afternoon. Trish had her own key and the—other—just barged in when she deemed it so.

Mobile jaws clamped shut upon seeing three patrol cars out the window. Two of the police officers geared up, strapping automatics to their holsters as the other checked his handgun.

His heartbeat quickened, a million theories scrambling about how they ventured here so quickly. What if the mansion had cameras or over at the burger stand? What about the gas station? Did the truck have a tracker on it? Are they here to ask questions or take them in for vandalizing property?

Nero's first response propositioned to yell for the elder and tell him about his guests, but then decided against it; assuming that the badges would panic and try to barge in thinking... who knows what. They busted in on people's property—at least that's what they showed on the cop shows.

He had to notify Dante, howbeit his instructions said to watch the front of the house while Dante rested, but this deemed as an emergency. Opening the passage and asking about their pressing issues looked to be prevalent, yet their firearms teetered him on edge.

This time, the officers banged on the door, a light baritone voice shouted a demand to enter the premises, but it sounded like a pure threat in its deliverance.

Screw it, he would see what issue they held. No need to alert the chief if this provided a minor concern. And if it turned out to be something major, then the elder would have to come his ass
down here.

Soft footsteps padded to the entrance, lightly stomping the floor boards to make sure they heard him coming. Just then he realized his mistake; his exposed arm remained in plain view. They couldn't see it, giving a negative reaction toward his devil bringer's appearance. Shit, what can he do?

"I heard you. Open the door!"

"Wait a damn minute!" Nero uttered back, turning to find something to cover his limb. If one thing egged him to no end, it personified those 'law people' with a bit of authority who presumed they had all the power.

On his ninth step away from the wooden door it bolted open; the bolts clanking to the floor with the police officers coming over the threshold. Large guns zeroed in on Nero freezing his movements while hiding his bicep, assault rifles aimed at the ready. S.W.A.T gear swarthed the two outer men.

Middle man must have been the ring leader, standing close to, or above, his own height. He donned a bald head with piercing light green eyes. And he wore the same outfit, sans mask giving the office a silent once over. A skull earring hung from the right ear; the makings of red roses and black skulls tatted on the left side of his neck.

Whether the law enforcement ran low on people to protect and serve or their standards dropped had him lost, however he knew any patrol force wouldn't let their employees go out looking like that.

The shaved deputy stared at Nero, focused eyes sizing him up. He stepped further into the room, the youngster stepping back on alert. He saw no battering ram used to knock down the entrance, and as far as Nero guessed the front door should have been locked, at least he believed it so.

And speaking of being locked away from the world, shouldn't ass-wipe have heard the loud crash and ran to investigate the ruckus? Even if Dante slept, his senses tuned into whom ever had entered his premises. A doubt bloomed he would be in that deep of a sleep that quickly.

"That was a dangerous maneuver; you being rude and moving away from the door. Got something to hide, kid?" His speech poured out smooth as liquid honey against his svelte but built stature. Nero originally thought his voice to be real heavy and strong. And just who gave him the nerve to call him 'kid' when he looked to be a youngster himself; age dancing between early to mid-20's.

Paying no mind to their imposing and dominant stances, Nero had to keep a calm head. From the looks of it, these men held the auras to commit damage.

The partial-demon shifted his sight between bodies, gaze narrowed in reading their vibes and how soon they would attack. Intuition stirred his inner devil; the looming presence of imminent danger sending tingles crawling over his nerves.

They didn't look so threatening, projecting this false, hard-bitten attitude to strike fear into him. If bad went to worse, he could take these three on easy, dodging the bullets and disarming them all; taking care of baldy last.

"Well, isn't this place suspicious-" The leader moved towards his left, eyes fascinated with the demonic skulls on the walls, still leaking fresh with blood. It surprised him it didn't drip on the floor; like it circulated in a cycle back into its skull. He went on, ",-having the bloodied heads of demons as interior decorum. You know demons exist, right kiddo?"
"What're doing here," demanded the youth, now realizing there must have been a defect in these so-called "protective" wards to enable these three to barge in so easily.

"That's none of your concern. Where's Dante?"

"Considering you barged in here without authority to do so, I think-"

"You'd better keep that tongue inside your mouth before I give you something to make you."

The teen bristled, teeth gnashing at the bold, smug words said. He roved moments away from striking out and giving Mr. Baldy something to shut his trap, shaped as his fist.

"So then," he stated, arms behind his back, resuming his position by his two grunts. "Where's the one called Dante at?"

"What'chu want him for?"

"Again, I don't see how that's any of-"

"I'm making it my concern, now answer my question."

The mask-less man advanced upon him, head tilted to the side in challenge over the mouthy brat. Obviously this punk must've skipped charm school, or else those lips would have remained sealed.

This 'Dante' fellow needed to answer on his whereabouts yesterday, but if this little twerp kept it up he might make a nice prison bitch for someone. The lead officer believed that some discipline called to order.

He slanted his head the other way, pretending to focus on the strange looking swords on the wall, only he did tune into their odd shapes; drawing the mouthy fucker towards his friends for a surprise. He dove into this pocket, withdrawing a pair of handcuffs. "Well, look at this big ass-"

Nero swatted away the cuffs thrown at him, ready to counterattack with one of his own moves when he heard a gun cock. Shit, he forgot about the other two, turning around to assess his space.

No need to call down the captain; these bozos are easy to take care of... if only he trained his eye on them.

Aw, screw it. He shaped his mouth to shout to Dante to save these three asses from his wrath, instincts honing in to the shaved man coming near him. Nero didn't hurry enough in his reflexes to see him.

Expertly the hairless deputy thrust his left index and middle fingers up the youth's nostrils, jerking his head in reverse. In the same breath, he hooked his right foot around Nero's left foot and tugged it forward, Nero's arms circled, slipping on the pieces of wood strewn about. Desperately, he tried to regain his balance but fell. He crashed backwards.

The two officers forced Nero to his feet, twisting him to hoist him in midair. His elbows pinioned to his body, dragged to the entrance with the lead officer looking self-satisfied behind him. One of the masked men held interest in his arm, fixated with a severe fascination while pulled against his will.

Coppery-tasting trails flowed down his nose, teeth bared in anguish at being handled so easily. These assholes should be easy to dominate without a single care in the world. Logically, he held off attacking them because they're human (he assumed). Is that how they came through the wards? He couldn't care less to hit people if they deserved it, but he reached to bide his time to wage their
motives.

Inhaling a deep breath, he wrenched his devil bringer free. The pull's force made the masked man lean into him; Nero delivering a satisfying back hand sending the assailant into a crumbling heap. The second one pointed the assault rifle at him, letting go of his arm while Nero delivered a punch to his mask, the bottom half of it shattered. The gunman pulled on the trigger; the bullets pelting holes into the wall.

An audible crack flowed throughout the teenager's being, eyes swirling in a haze when he fell to the floor. Pain resounded the expanse of his skull, body feeling numb in a moment of stasis. Through that numbness beckoned the power of Yamato; her powers pushing to vanquish this threat. Only he kept her restrained, barely; he called upon her when his injuries got the better of him or when beyond fury. Since he strayed close to neither, she'll have to curb her enthusiasm until later.

"You're a feisty little fucker, I'll give you that much." The green-eyed man stated, holding a standard baton he cracked the punk's head with.

What intrigued him even more when he glanced down on him possessed that arm; so exotic and peculiar, yet extraordinary and powerful at the same time. There held a heavy doubt it was a glove for a theater prop. He didn't know what the appendage harnessed, but he deemed it would look, act, and feel twice as good if he took control of it. Who this freak inhered to be he dared not to care, but if he offered this brat as a pet to his boss as a bonus to capturing Dante; well with a few strings pulled, he would gain inheritance of the blue sleeve.

He raised the night stick high, intending on beating the fucker senseless when a strong palm grabbed a hold of him. Jade eyes flashed into angry ice berg blues, neither wavering their gaze while the bodies on the floor collected themselves to consciousness. The two men repositioned their guns at the hybrid, the kid sitting on his haunches with a bloody face.

The half-devil looked over at the youngster, nodding once to let him realize he'll be okay. Not in the sense of the cavalry arriving, but in the sense that Nero could relax some. And his tasks stayed the same; he still had to handle the front of the house since he hastily decided to leave for a bit.

"Something tells me you don't have a warrant for my arrest. That's gonna cost you a pretty penny to fix all the damage in here," the hybrid said, squeezing the man's grip a little tighter, "Officer Scott."

"How do you know my name?" He ignored giving a response to the break-in of his property.

Dante guided his chin to the man's name tag on his shirt, refraining from rolling his eyes at the stupidity of the rookie's question. And Dante just had a hunch that something might come here and cause trouble. His intuition told him these troubles only started... and his assumption proved right. Should have at least given Nero a head's up about it as soon as he woke up..."Okay, you got me." His arm tugged from Dante's hold, taking a few steps away to take in this hyped-about, marvel of a man.

Didn't look all that menacing and threatening from the rumors.

A black tank top and long gray sweatpants covered his frame, coupled with matching black socks. Brown spots and streaks blotted his face, thinking he didn't bother to wash up from whatever he ate. Seriously, he looked like a jobless, broke slob. And many told him to fear this; to heed his power?
“What's this about?” Dante asked, expression blank with focus.

“Under specific orders, I'm not allowed to say. If you want answers, we're gonna have to take you down to headquarters.”

“And what's with him?” Dante pointed towards the bleeding sack of flesh with the flick of his head.

“He... got a little violent and-”

"You bastard!" The hybrid swiveled around and repelled the youth from launching an attack after that snarl. Whatever lack of drive Nero had earlier returned in full, damage to the other person clearly a priority on his list. Dante didn't want to restrict him by using added force, but he had to calm him enough to listen to reason.

He needed Nero to have a clear head, devoid of that gunk on his face as well, because the elder decided to go undercover to do a little "investigating." A spur of the moment type thing; deciding to be "arrested" as soon as he heard them kick down the door. He waited to see what the brat's reaction would be and... he improved a bit since his last outing. Kind of.

"Better keep your look-alike at a safe-"

"Better figure out how you're gonna replace the items you broke in here, instead." The red hunter looked over his shoulder, giving the deputy a meaningful, cold glare to keep him from saying anything foolish before he authorized to unleash the kid on them.

Officer Scott, either unfazed by the threat or trying to test his luck, continued to act in a haughty manner. "Again, not our fault. Just trying to protect ourselves from-"

"Go fuck yourself!" Nero roared, striving to push past the chieftain and rip those lips off of that talking cue ball. "Fucker tried to kidnap me-"

"Arrest is more of the common term used, nowadays."

Dante pulled Nero away from the bunch, noticing baby blues never leaving ol' Scotty boy. He didn't know what formed the reason the teen neglected to wipe his bloody nose, but that thing needed some special attention. One of them must have damaged the punk's little sniffer, and it probably made the area tender to touch.

Still needed to wipe it, though. Ew.

The youngster swatted the elder's hand away, eyes focusing on him to see what they'll do about their visitors. Dante folded his arms across his chest, biceps bulging with piercing eyes staring at the youth's nose. He must've been hit hard for that much of an amount to dribble out.

Nero caught on to what he stared at and turned to the side, using the end of his t-shirt to rub the sticky mass off of him. Heat rose to his cheeks at his rising anger; the urge to fight something growing stronger by the second.

"You all right?"

"The fuck do you think? I'm just peachy, Dante."

Not bothered by his foul attitude, his lips moved low and quick to let him in on his plan.

"I need you to guard this place. Go in the garage, find all the weapons, and hide them. Same thing
with the ones in the truck-"

"What are you talking about?" Nero, taking the hint, lowered his voice as well, confusion lacing his voice looking upon the elder.

"Call Trish and tell her to come over here and ward the place up-"

"How did they get in here?"

"-Tidy up too... should put all the weapons in the attic and then create an extra seal-"

"Why? Who's coming over here?"

"-But leave Lady... shit. Tell her to scope out the club. Should keep her away-"

"Why are you mad at her?"

"-And tell Trish to hide my pop's sword. That will be a focus-"

"What's coming after it!"

"The only way," the hybrid resumed talking in his normal tone, hands coming up to rest on his head in a surrendering stance. He continued, "-I'm getting any answers is if I go with Mr. Scotty, so watch the office for me, will ya?" He gave a wink in Nero's direction, lips dancing into a smirk.

"You're going where." The teen said deadpanned, sight switching over to the masked assailants pointing their guns at Dante while baldy pulled out another set of handcuffs. What could he do if he went away and the officer called in people to raid the place?

If they're vermin, then Nero didn't have to hesitate about hurting them. In any event, if he guarded this business from threatening attacks, humans weren't off his 'to injure' list, seeing how these assholes barged inside. If someone busted into his home he would be up in arms, defending his fort and demanding an explanation after some violence ensued. Why isn't the elder mad about this?

Reflecting on it further, Dante always kept an aloof calmness whenever a situation arose. He toyed with his detractors, allowing them to live as long as he allowed it to his amusement. Perhaps that was his layout all along. He had to trick his enemies into believing they had him in their clutches before he dealt the finishing blows... Hey, wait a minute!

"You're not leaving, Dante."

"Sorry, but I gotta go-"

"Do you not see what the fuck they did?"

"Yeah, which is why I told you-"

"Why are you so calm about it?"

"My place has been damaged before and-"

"Everything is up for grabs-"

"I already took that in-"

"-and yet you expect me to make sure-"
"Well, that's what I told you and you'd better-"

"-everything is still in place with these assholes having the nerve to call in back up-"

"Nero." Dante warned, hoping to shut the kid up from giving Scotty any ideas.

"-and see what else-"

"Nero..."

"-they can scrounge and break-"

"Nero-

"-in to get what the hell-"

Lips cut off his next words as cerulean blues widened, shock registered on his face as his senses sharpened to the scene in front of him. Vision locked into those pale blues staring so strongly back at him. Nose inhaled the scents of sweat, copper, and beer mixing in to Dante's signature scent. Ears heard the clicking of handcuffs locking into place along with the quiet breathing of the man before him. Slight, chapped peckers had gently forced themselves against his own blood-stained ones, tasting those exotic flavors rolled into one before he took a slow step backwards.

Those same eyes watched him, rooting him to the ground with his penetrating gaze. Nero factioned too stumped to do anything but breathe, taking in his musky smell and animalistic aura. The world seemed a little smaller, revolving around those two trapped in the moment.

A heavy feeling pitted itself in the youth's stomach, rising up every few moments to travel to his limbs; the fleshy branches tingling to splay out their nervousness, then the sensation fleeting to its original spot. It was indescribable; unexpected and titillating, leaving him with an odd mixture of anticipation and disappointment. Of what and why though remained unsolved.

Visiting what he regarded earlier, the veteran had a feeling that someone or something may voyage here and trash the place, much to that of his trip in Whetstone. While the objects there had questionable values, his possessions are priceless and to die for, literally.

Dante blinked twice, a small smile stretching across his features being led away. As he explained to the brat before, he needed to be focused and on alert in his absence. He moved nowhere with the runt cutting him off at every question asked, and he still seemed angered by the... brutality forced upon him. He needed to put that on hold and pay attention to his orders.

Might not go as planned nonetheless if he concentrated on "that" situation.

"Like I said, kid," the two grunts came and grabbed him by the arm, leading him outside. "I come back and find shit missing, your ass is mine!"

The partial-hybrid swallowed thickly before licking his lips, mind trying to adjust to the present to reel in his thoughts. He wished the reason the veteran cut him off like that corresponded to setting him straight. Any rationale other than that defined to confuse him, and he had a problem with being uncertain about his environment.

Officer Scott stayed near the rascal after the half-breed's detainment, looking into his dubious face at the vision of his friend leaving. He didn't hear much of the exchange between the two, but he assumed the slob gave the punk a head butt to shut him up. After the unspecified comments shared amongst them, who's to say he wouldn't jail the bitch as well?
The grand catch of Dante in and of itself contained a feat no one proved to accomplish, so maybe there wasn't a need to be bothered with the brat. All though he would come back for that arm. Surprising really, he didn't imagine the hunter giving up so easily. Added force stood on standby if he resisted; regardless it would be a waste if they couldn't use their newfound talents...

The head officer took advantage of the little man's open state, delivering a solid punch to his gut. The kid doubled over from the hit; the protest from the hunter made the two henchmen buckle down on their captive and pull him to the exit. Only his weight appeared to be rooted to the floor with his eyes trained on Scott.

After a moment his gaze softened on the broken youth, resuming his trek once he saw the lagging deputy trail after them. When Dante made it down the steps, Scott turned around, looking into the fallen brat's death glare, taking a grip through the space where the lock once rested.

"Be a good boy now, I'd hate to have to come back here to teach you a lesson." With that, he roughly slammed the door, mind roving on his prize after bringing in the son of Sparda to his boss.

Nero, enraged and troubled, moved slowly to pull himself up to not upset his already aching physique. The barrel of information rolled out had him spinning around, deciding a way to understand it all. Everything happened too fast to decipher; threats and demands woven together to keep him in his doubtful state. The cars outside roared to life, speeding down the street to leave him thinking about his next course of action.

He once thought he knew his body as well as his own feelings, reactions, and needs. Yet the joining of the lips left him unsure about something he'd been confident in for the longest; the ability to not be turned on by another man. It was longer than chaste, but deep in its meaning. Couldn't the elder have just given him a swift kick in the knee or something similar to stop him from rambling?

If Dante held interest in him, then that was fine as long as he kept his distance. Even if, as a slim possibility, he walked down this route with the half-human being his lover, it couldn't be possible. He cannot abandon Kyrie just because he had change of heart, if he had one. He knew her longer, and a natural connection brewed between them.

However, would he be willing to break that kinship if his heart told a different story? If he found out who he had to betray to make himself happy? It's normal to go through these confusing, hormonal changes when in the stages of youth anyway, he hoped.

Hands ran down a tired face, needing a moment to think things through when a shrill screech erupted from outside; the sickly sweet stench of decay infiltrating his nostrils to let him remember some added enforcements required his attention.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Well, they finally did something...I think...or Dante did...I don't remember XD! I know some of you want them to jump each other's bones, but they aren't all the way ready yet...or Nero isn't...I forget.

This jail thing came up to me while I was watching "Pineapple Express". That movie is just horrible (in a good way!) and I couldn't help but to have Dante locked up for some weird reason I can't explain.
Once again, as always, I thank you guys for taking time out to stop and review. It really means a lot to me.
Dante kicked the back of the passenger's seat in boredom. No matter how many times Dante taunted, goaded, or insulted the man, he remained quiet. The other two policemen followed them, but they soon split off to head in different directions.

His view out the window allowed a slight sneer to creep onto his face, not too fond of liking the area driven in. This part of town wasn't his favorite because the snobs thrived in droves. The district didn't possess the same "homey" feeling his own territory held, never mind how dirty the place viewed visually.

He paid special attention to certain landmarks and buildings in case something bad came about. "Bad" meaning the cop took him to some dark and dank location; probably into a dungeon to torture him because of who he is. If matters steered in that direction, he held the capacity to get himself out of the predicament just fine. What worried him though endured Nero's failure to catch up on current events.

His possessions are of top quality, ranging from the vast array of books owned to weaponry to magic-imbued trinkets. The opposing members of his existence can't lay their hands on these items, wanting to use their properties to awaken some summoned devil lord.

Nero needed to guard the fort down until he returned, or at least until Trish arrived to secure everything. Then either one of them, preferably Trish, could leave and kick ass to their delight. As of late, he didn't trust leaving her there with stuff as it is.

A problem existed with her rummaging through the things he brought from Whetstone, including spare money still left in the cases, to which she would claim without hesitation. No telling if she would keep certain objects to her liking, give them to enemies to foil their plans or worse yet, call Lady over and they plow through it together.

Oh no.

The urge to snap the handcuffs off and escape just for those reasons alone persuaded him enough to forfeit this investigative mission, but what would be the end result, other than Scotty boy calling it in and Ramona sending a shit load of goons to attack?

No, there had to be time to complain to them later if they went through his junk. What he needed to do is keep focus and find out what their main objective turned out to be... other than the obvious of causing mindless destruction.

“Same story, different cast,” he thought to himself.

Back to the matter at hand, Nero had to buck up and settle down, preparing for the onslaught of the cunning kind; having been prepared for the physical one bound to follow. Much worry would be forgone about his abilities. He's a sturdy fighter and can handle himself pretty well in battle; Dante bitterly remembered the youth attacking him after he presumed his little what's-her-name had been attacked. That part of the teen carried out okay. His critical thinking skills however, lacked. Period.

Dante was the 'kill now, never ponder on it until much later' type of guy. But he knew better than to jump into things without having some cautionary scope.
Throughout his life, specifically about his battles hard fought, he realized that strategies applied mostly to the combat of new enemies and threats. When their stupidity err... weaknesses opened, then cognitive reasoning no longer needed to be utilized and he obliterated his foes.

Nero, however, thought more along the lines of his involvement rather than the situation he dealt with as a whole. In other words, he cared less about what currently happened, but grew concerned about his role; in what part did he have significance in than the bigger picture. It stood to be dangerous to think that way when odd events occurred on the norm.

In a way to open the youth's eyes to the broader spectrum at home, he held back on defending his own house from the “police.” Initially, he needed to gauge the identities of these men, and what balls they had to crash down the locks on his door; which they would pay in full because no warrant provided proof of his arrest. He assumed they tracked him down after Grace or that blond ass phoned in, and after they arrived did he ponder what to do in retaliation.

Of course he should have gone down there and interrogated them, however at any point they could tell him lies, sending him on a chase should he follow their confession. Then he would have to hunt them down and show them what happens when they lie to him.

Besides, he liked being a 'hands on' guy anyway, would be better to scope out their lair of oblivion and make his move from there. Withal, he can't really trot off and take a gander around if Nero had his mind elsewhere.

Granted, it signified he locked the youth's inattention on a particular distraction ever since he surprised him with that little peck.

“Poor reflexes will be the death of you, kid,” he mused to himself.

Having a plan didn't give him the full, exciting rush coupled with the option to “go with the flow.” Part of the time it lacked the adrenaline to get the job done, often leaving him bored or disappointed from the anticipating desire.

In order to stop that runt from nagging, he leaned forward and silenced him through their connecting lips, doubt growing at the last second, expecting a violent reaction. The episode kinda just... happened, serving on the 'spur of the moment' principle.

He didn't want to injure Nero more on his person, and talking to him proved to be uneventful; when Dante tried to answer him his words went unnoticed. Rendering the punk speechless waged his best bet, all though it seems like the move may have rendered him without a voice permanently.

“Well, at least in talking to me for a bit,” he said in silence.

Coming from his POV the kiss was a kiss and nothing more, with no meaning or weighty significance behind it. Surely once the brat realized this tidbit, he'd be back to himself. Their relationship may or may not be a little altered because of the small... mishap, but the kid would understand the situation if any more clarification needed further elaboration.

After all, he didn't particularly take a liking to men. Sure, a few snuck a tickle to his fancy, but his admiration observed them from a distance.

In his line of work, romantic relationships didn't last; the risk far outweighed the certainty of his lover's life. People came and went, birthed and died, stayed and left him in a constant state of flux. It's so much easier to have a few trysts to keep him sane than from going insane for being in a domestic partnership.
Moreover, he didn't think the teen would be the type to pursue somebody of his caliber, even though if Dante had his way with the male breed, someone like Nero had to charm his buttons. Someone with an uncontrollable amount of vivacity and raw talent, bravado and wits about him can make him consider walking on the wild side.

Well, a man can fantasize and drift away in his own perverted mind, right?

Now, if he can explain that very detailed vision with Nero that popped up out of nowhere from yesterday, then he could get back on track.

Women flooded his thoughts daily; the too-casual approach certain females spoke to him and the way his blue eyes twinkled when they do so, and how theirs burned with lust when he smiled. A magnetic attraction made him to gravitate towards that. The chemistry a dangerous flame only to be tamed by a luscious liquid to cool it down; he ignited the fire, and a sexy little thang came along and quelled the fiery passion.

Perhaps since he hadn't had a good lay in a minute, his sex-starved mind interjected Nero in a woman's place, and the notion is what his psyche placed being comfortable, or insane, displaying. Why it chose the youth instead of the girls he didn't have an answer.

Maybe his increased time with the youngster fighting, bonding, playing... fighting warped his subconscious. Logically, it reasoned a sound conclusion; it made sense and likely nothing to fret over. A trip to his favorite dancing palace would have him right again soon.

Only the teenager indirectly hinted his anxious feelings too. His resolution called to dive in between those legs of Kaylee and satiate his nerves that way... or play footsie with her because Dante knew the kid wasn't sexual.

Though he possessed a walk that, to the layman, proved otherwise. Same thing goes for his combative style. Kid hacked and slashed away with a finesse all his own, but those moves couldn't be conveyed in the bedroom.

Dante let his mind drift again, absently remembering left and right turns the patrol car headed in, his musings swaying on Nero; howbeit drifting into more "freelance" territory.

On the chance of matters presenting itself, in a long shot, of Dante and Nero getting "together", somehow, he would... be open to show the punk a few moves in the sack; the fitting touches to comfort a lover enough to melt away all lingering inhibitions.

He perfected the ways around the sensitive points on an anatomy and which areas produced a soft moan or a sharp gasp; eliciting him to press against those hot spots to further deteriorate their sanity. Oh, the things he would do to that little body of his.

But the probability of a matter such as that happening were slim to none. The teen had his perky girlfriend to ravish, soon as he stopped being afraid of not being a virgin, and he had his sideline h-... cheerleaders who knew all the tantalizing strokes to initiate his cheering.

Still, that didn't prevent him from reminiscing about the dream playing in his head. Just for kicks, he should tease the kid, give him the juicy details, predicting the teenager to gape in surprise like a fish. Yeah, that'll be entertaining.

He could imagine himself boasting about the way he caressed Nero's exhausted body until it wearily responded to his touch, with increasing willingness, and finally with a passionate abandon he had not perceived possible, spent as he was from a good sparring. And the 'dream' took on a
lustful trip from there... until the brat's big raging bitch face came through and woke him up yesterday.

Labiums stretched over closed teeth, a sly tongue venturing out to lick the corner of a mouth, ivories soon sticking in his bottom lip to gnaw on it before a smile appeared. That typified an event on his list once all the hoopla died down.

"What're smiling for?" Officer Scott peered in his rear view mirror to check on his prisoner, taking in his disturbing display of sudden happiness.

Nothing surrounding him warranted such an emotion, or perhaps he experienced an amusing revelation at the situation he gotten himself into. Is he trying to comfort himself? Only someone without wits would laugh en route to jail.

How disappointing.

From the stories and rumors he'd heard about this legendary force, he felt let down at the possibility it emerged as hyped-up bullshit to scare the local denizens of the Underworld. Where's the supposed devil hunter feared by those far and wide? Where's the man who killed thousands in an instant when his blade connected with his hand? Where's the man of the son who took on Hell itself… and won?

It couldn't be this dump sitting in the back seat? If nothing else, he looked like a frat boy who dropped out of college, still trying to hold on to his partying ways; tired and sloppy and gruff-looking. Seriously, many informed him to beware of this devil hunter?

"Where you're going, smiles aren't welcome in that place."

"Oh, now you want to talk?"

"I'm not saying anything to you about your arrest, that's for the Commissioner-"

"How's old Foster anyway..."

"-which I am promoted to, so wait til' we get there to ask anything."

Oh really? Well, what a surprise.

Commissioner Foster grew to be a gentle old man, proud and stern over the years he led the charge against crime. He knew that strange occurrences took place around the city, and that a certain white-haired individual came up and solved the majority of these incidents before the hysteria reached the public. In turn, these happenings turned out as rumors to the masses; Foster forming a loose relationship with the hunter to throw supernatural cases in his direction.

News of his death or retirement would travel its way to him. Someone would have had the decency to call and tell him of the message. But if what this punk said proved to be true, then the Captain might be dead. Could these lechers have taken over territories right under his nose? Perchance this went on longer than he expected; the rogues probably sent out those waves of pawns to distract them while they issued tasks for others to set.

Son of a bitch. This didn't make any sense. Someone had to be pulling the strings other than Ramona; this turned out to be something too precise to be planned by a lone organization... and properly executed.

Why, of all the things possible in this world, did the brutes go around messing with the balance of
shit? It's one thing to trespass onto human territories and create a plethora of fear, yet it's a whole different ball game when the enemies encroach to... persuade... those people to strike terror into their own kind.

Usually it's done to bribe humans to come into the darkness, as the case with Scotty boy here, so they can wreak lives on their own. Dante's stance stayed the same, however. He remained neutral in the silent war between humanity and Hell, but when one group gained leverage, unfairly, over the other side preceding stupid purposes, he felt the need to neutralize the situation all together.

"Don't fret over old man Foster, he's taking a long vacation-"

"Vacation where?" Dante's skin pricked, goose bumps spotting his arm. A sudden urge to snap submerged his logic. Senses sharpened a degree higher, pupils dilating because his cognizance acutely tuned in to his surroundings.

Outside the car environmental sounds awakened; tires crunched against loose gravel, engines hummed a quiet roar cruising down the street. A thousand footsteps echoed in his ears, pounding against the pavement in unrelenting force.

Out his side of the window, dozens of colors melted into a vibrant concoction of life. Dark green leaves stood out against pale-colored buildings, adorned with bright words to advertise the store's significance. Clothes decorated with bold prints, dots, stripes, and plaid battled for attention against their solid-toned counterparts.

Brunettes, redheads, blonds and everything in between mingled and marched across the expanse of the streets, traveling to and from places to get to their next destination. Fresh breads and sweet aromas danced along his nostrils, stomach starting to awaken with a precious purr in expectance of an upcoming meal; mouth salivating to savor the feast to come.

Elevated senses brought a snivel of his hexed powers out, just enough to sort out who were off limits in the circumstance of him lashing out, and still in complete control of his mind. Albeit, his devil needed some kinks worked out, and not yet all together figured out yet.

Releasing his Hell-half posed a high risk around civilians, they becoming ensnared in his hatred meant for his foes. And if Scott had to have done something fiddling with the demonic, well...

Scott's heart beat with a strong and steady pulse, remaining calm in spite of the apparent tone Dante took with him. "You sound testy." The deputy sounded a little bold when he spoke, flicking back and forth between his rear view mirror and the road. His prisoner had a smug smirk gracing his features, eyes flashing brighter than their original color, the effect of his heritage no doubt.

Despite him knowing the hunter is impure from his human bloodline, Ramona told him not to lead him on to what they knew he is in full. A select few members of the veteran law force knew about Dante and his special abilities, but one of those individuals stayed on a "permanent" vacation.

"You can at least answer my question about Foster." The hybrid ground his teeth back and forth, feeling his canines lengthening, an urge to enact harm to this punk building inside his core. If he wanted to fool around with information, then Dante could play around with his life until he flared up.

He imagined the innocent people going about their day, existences changed because an unruly bunch of fucks wreaked havoc, only concerned about their unimportant agendas. These assholes created a satisfying pleasure in halting their aspirations and goals right before their deaths. Dante reminded them of the way they treated their victims, having the same actions repeated on them in
"He's on vacation, and that's all you need to know."

"It's a shame old man Foster's away at the moment. I thought he would have shown you how to detain someone properly."

The officer stopped driving, slamming on his brakes in the middle of traffic, cars honking because the stoplight signal showed green. Scott gave his full attention to Dante this time, a perplexed display staying on his face as the words sank in.

Slowly, the detainee raised a single arm from behind his back, bringing forth the other one that had the handcuffs hanging loosely off of his wrist. The cuffs stayed connected in the central link, but broke in the area where the wrists are restrained. "You kinda suck at your job, buddy. A five year old could have done this."

A heart rate leapt from its calm pace, eyes bulging wider from their normal stance. Mind raced with endless possibilities how it happened, and how this threat needed to be combated. He can't break out of those unless he had a bobby pin hidden somewhere.

And he heard the restrainers click into place on those thick wrists of his. How did he unlock them? Maybe this was some of his devil powers at play? He wasn't exactly privy to the extent of his abilities, but it sure seemed he could do more than fighting Hell-spawn.

"This is 3B-14 requesting backup on... Blige and South. I got the suspect resisting arrest. He broke out of his handcuffs, over." He waited for a response through the radio, running a hand down his face after he called the situation in to HQ.

The ego-boosting barrier he set up for himself crumbled with the sight of his captor out of his confinement, filling his resolve with uncertainty, looking like a fool in doing so for the fool clowned him.

"What do you mean?" A gruff, scratchy voice shouted through the speakers, sounding tight-spoken over the information he just received.

"Just what I said, he's out of his handcuffs I put on him and... hey. Hey! What are you doing?!

Tampering with the locks diverted his attention from his colleague, almost popping his lid off when the back door flew open. Scott jumped out of his seat, a truck swerving to avoid hitting him.

Dante casually strolled to the sidewalk, a multitude of eyes falling on his form to see this man break out of a police car. Some backed away in fear while some, notably the women, stayed rooted in their spots. A sedan parked alongside the curb served as a post he leaned against, crossing his arms to the crowd, biceps large and bulging to the ladies.

Two blonds stood before him, one in a backless blue summer dress and the other in a bathing suit top and short shorts, gazing at him with eyes cast downward and sensual. The dressy chick played with the ends of her curly hair, biting on her lower lip swaying her body. The other woman appeared as if she wanted to pounce on him right then. Sights such as these he chanced upon often, and currently, needed to get his mind off of other things and a person.

"Stop where you are and put your hands up!" Scott directed, aiming a standard .45 pistol at Dante.

He, in turn, glanced over his shoulder with an eyebrow raised, emerging calm and uninterested at the gun pointed at him. More bystanders crowded around this time, cameras and phones ready to return.
As much as he craved to show out a little, people hovered at risk of getting a bullet lodged in some part of their fragile shell. It would be their fault for standing so close to him, but he had to prevent the usage of violence if he could help it, unless if he caused it.

"Stop right where?" Dante gave him a perplexed view, rotating his head this way and that to emphasize his point.

"Right where you are!"

"I never moved from this spot." Dante shrugged, turning his attention back to the two blonds. Traffic passed by slowly, drivers eager and nosy to see the situation unfold in front of them.

"All right, put your hands up!"

Geez, the police academy had some of the most cringe-worthy expressions when it came to apprehending a suspect.

The hybrid did as told, raising his hands above his head before dropping them a second later, the girls giggling at his obvious defiance.

"Dammit, stop playing and put them up to where I can see them!" Scott grew annoyed at the man's showcase, mindful to keep a lid on his temper given how many civilians gathered around. Personally, he wanted to fire some shots at the citizens to make them scram, however he had to uphold that shitty motto policeman swore to go by.

He needed to remain professional to prevent blowing his operation's cover, all those videos and cameras provided unnecessary exposure. They practiced caution about keeping people away from HQ; didn't need rumors that the original line-up took some time off voluntarily.

"Ooh, someone's getting angry. Tsk, tsk. That's very unprofessional of you." Dante shook his head in mock disbelief, amusement growing at how easy it is to piss the officer off. "Don't get mad at me because your directions aren't clear."

About a good thirty people crowded around the scene, half of them with electronic devices out and the rest gawking with interest. Maybe this will catch Ramona's thugs' attention to come down here and try to detain the problem.

He can handle the lot of them, though it may be a little hard to walk out of the situation with the same clothes intact. Leather upheld greater damage because the material didn't tear that easily and it's highly durable for fighting. A cotton tank top and cotton-spandex sweatpants wouldn't hold out for long if fists came to faces. Now he pondered about it, he felt slightly exposed without his usual garb.

Scott had taken two steps nearer to him, this time cocking the pistol to prove his serious nature. A brief but surprised shout cut through the air, followed by a commotion of murmured excitement.

The half-human would be lying to himself if he didn't think this situation excited him, giving him a slow rush of adrenaline sure to escalate above what it currently held. But he couldn't get too carried away. Last time he checked, humans aren't impervious to bullet wounds. He hoped Scott would be smart enough not to use the .45 in such a close area, but oh how he'd been wrong.

"This is your final warning."
"Why you got ya gun cocked?"

"Don't test me, Dante."

"I'm asking you a question, Scotty."

"You're asking for it-"

"What exactly am I asking for 'cause I didn't ask you for anything yet."

Apparently the crowd wanted in on the action too, several men heckling the officer at being told off by his suspect.

"Dang, and I thought the person in uniform supposed to be the law!" A group of three young males high-fived it's likely leader, dressed in a green screen tee and khaki pants, sporting a tanned complexion with a short buzz cut. People caught drift of the joke and tittered with little fits of laughter, glancing back to the escaped detainee, a silent request to keep the excitement going.

Scott had taken a brief glimpse around the area, glaring at a few of the spectators in their ignorance. The proud souls drawn to the confrontation didn't know better; lacking common sense to realize he could shoot them if he felt so inclined. His conscious wouldn't be bothered when a slug penetrated into their weak, fleshy forms, reveling in the sight of horror once the blood started to flow from the wound.

The punk opened his mouth to spew out more verbal insults when the bald man spoke, arrogance laced in his tone. "We'll see who's laughing when a bullet passes through your heart, how 'bout that?"

Nearly instantaneous the area welcomed silence, shocked and feared visages appearing on faces once holding bemused and eager traits. A few bystanders grew frightened, departing the scene in case he followed through. Others pocketed their devices, backing from the young group to expose them in full.

Fear reached in the teen's eyes at first, gradually melting into resolution, almost in a dare to challenge those words. His buddies however, started tugging him away in which he shouldered them off. It only worked when a petite brunette shoved through his friends, grabbing his shirt and yanked him from the action. A triumphant smile pulled at the corners of Scott's lips, confidence soaring in gaining the upper hand again. Now to get the hybrid back under control.

He resumed his position of aiming the gun at the half-breed, down-turned lips revealing his sentiments. Those unnatural blues trained harshly on him, looking full of contempt and malice. Oh yes, how could he have forgotten? Dante's purpose in life belonged to protecting these hapless minions from the everyday terrors plaguing their existence. But something caught him off guard with that though.

When mortals crossed over into accursed territory, here comes Dante to vanquish them soon after they gained it. Yet when a *demon* wants to live its days out as a human, then it's okay?

To put the icing on the cake, humans are often ten times worse than the average Hellion; killing, murdering, raping, controlling, fighting, and deceiving their own for selfish, twisted purposes. Really now, demons used humans for their natural talents. Evidently, the legendary devil hunter had his priorities mixed up. Still, they served as an amusing piece of entertainment resulting from the sheer stupidity of their actions.

Plus, their large volume made them expendable.
"For the final time, put your fucking hands in the air!"

Dante moved from the car, turning his back to him while putting his palms on top of his head. Scott shifted over to him, keeping his finger on the trigger in case he made any sudden movement. This time, for real, he would make sure he secured the restraints, much tighter than their previous hold.

He pulled a spare set of handcuffs out, grabbing Dante's left arm to test his stance. When all appeared calm, he brought the same hand down and behind Dante's back, ready to snap the cuffs into place when thick fingers grabbed his own, too slow to react to the oncoming fist connecting squarely to his nose.

A crimson stream gushed out, eyes staring into the blue sky of the afternoon before blackness overcame his vision. Something hard smacked into his skull, pain throbbing where it made contact with the pavement.

A mixture of gasps, surprised quips, encouraging words, and scattered applause met the hunter's ears, moving towards the cop to reach for his firearm, ejecting the clip and tossing the gun under the cop car.

Dante gazed around to see even more electronic objects facing him, feeling awkward as if the crowd expected him to do something else other than what he did. The attention didn't deter him any, it seemed weird because he did nothing spectacular to deserve it. He punched the shit outta that guy yeah, but they must have assumed it to be the best thing ever. He pocketed the bullet casing in case anyone got any bright ideas.

Some young man, leaning on the skinny side, nearly collided into him with his cell phone, eager to interview him.

"Dude! That was some epic, awesomeness shit! What—why did he serve you the momentum to do what you did?"

The boy held a slight country accent, a bit nasal as an undertone. Black hair scattered around the top of his head in some stylish cut, lip piercing placed on the underside of his left lip. A black v-neck shirt, gray skinny jeans and black combat boots didn't help his waifish, olive-flushed skin either, but Dante provided his input.

"Well-" He looked over to the patrolman trying to gather himself. "A buddy of mine back home got unfairly... treated so-"

"By that guy?" The teen pointed to the officer, steadying the camera to where Scott approached his car with blood running down his nose. The phone focused on him again.

"Yup."

"Aw man, did you break his pride?" The phone moved around him once more, taping the officer groping for something under the seat. Meanwhile, its cameraman targeted Dante's white hair, staring with curiosity as if it embodied a force of an ethereal value. And like most people who gazed at it, Dante already felt the question forming in their head.

3... 2... 1...

"Is—"

"Yes..." The hunter said before his interviewer could spill out the words.
Just as the cameraman occupied himself with filming the officer, the two blonds busied themselves filming him with their eyes. He threw them one of his trademark smirks, they in turn taking that as an invitation to approach him. The teen decided to focus back on his defiant starlet, presently accompanied by a couple of svelte creatures. "... my hair color is all natural."

"Oh, so what now? Punch a po-po and babes appear on your arms?"

The two women exchanged faces briefly, smiling wide to the other as they finished scurrying on each side of Dante, feeling a strong arm wrap around their waist in return. They smiled again, giggling like little school girls finally being attended to by their schoolboy crush.

Dante sensed his ego soaring. Plush bodies leaned against his own, pheromones elevating higher as their own natural scents mingled with the exotic perfumes they wore. The wind further helped those aromas sink into his sensory memory, remembering who they were in case he, somehow, had to leave their presence.

The one with the dress exhibited a much softer form, breast wise, than her friend. But the bathing suit beauty had a killer body under the silhouette of clothes, or lack of them. Either chickadee looked do-able, so it all wound down to a matter of time and location to have a closer observation of them...

"You ladies hanging onto the grand prize or what?"

"Who wouldn't! I'm Rachel by the way."

"And I'm Amber!" The women bounced in small movements while telling their names, playing with the ends of their locks, acting like innocent dames. Rachel, in the bathing suit top, brushed her straight hair behind her shoulder before nonchalantly placing her hand on Dante's abs, keeping it there while her aura focused into the camera.

"Whoa! I can see you're not letting him go! You look awesome by the way," said the interviewer.

"Oh, thank you!" She bathed in the comment, moving to palm her hip and giving a flirty shimmy, then replacing the same hand back on his stomach.

Out the corner of his eye, Dante saw the other girl bristle, obvious to dislike being ignored, especially if the friend received all the fame. Amber gave a subtle flick of her seductive waves, leaning into him while a pink tongue ran alongside an upper lip, eyes boring into his own with a desire dared to be met. Her perfume held blends of fruity, scented concoctions, matching her playful appearance but heavily undermining the horny pheromones damn near desperate to smother him.

Sensing the main source of recognition leaving her, the straight-haired blond gently grasped his chin, giggling with a squeal meant to convey her sexiness. With the prize reclaimed at the moment, her attention returned to the camera, irises expectant for the boy to continue interviewing and asking questions about her.

Amber, not one to be done up by her companion, fingered with the shirt's hem, pulling it upwards to glance at his killer abs, if his cut up arms gave any sign.

Rachel wasn't ready to shift away just yet, pressing ever so slightly against his tank top to prevent it from lifting without her permission.

And Amber, undeterred by the blockade, shifted her hand to the bottom right side of his shirt, lifting it up that way to make Rachel move her hand.
"Oh, looks like the lil' lady's tryna see what's hiding under there." The boy zoomed in on the bit of skin showing, forgetting about the other blond since the curly one wanted to spice things up a little.

Feeling the competition rising, Rachel lifted her side of his shirt first, giving a long whistle at the thick, taut abs showcasing on display. She stood still a moment, taking in the view of this... this hunkified specimen that appeared out of nowhere, resolve coming forward to know what this man is about... to claim this man...

Well, shit. To have this man.

Dante didn't mind the subtle way the women argued over him. He didn't dare interfere when the storm started to brew into a damn hurricane, except with his co-workers.

Lady and Trish were... frenemies at best. Trish had this 'I'm-A-Diva-Demon' thing going on and it sometimes clashed with Lady's 'I'm-An-Undercover-Diva-Human-Hunter' shtick. Given the "iffy" war between devils and humans and those two belonging to the other species, a slice of tension lingered and it amused him— for the length of about four seconds.

It remained crucial to diffuse any beef the duo would cook up, bound to drag him into it to eat at their table. He remembered, on a couple different occasions, when he sided with one of the girls, enduring the silent wrath of the other all the while. A memorable lesson to keep in mind; he wouldn't be doing that shit anymore. But these beauties could kill each other softly, that he found amusement in.

"What in the— whoa man! What is that?" The cameraman zoomed in to his torso, slightly gawking at his built stature, and maybe envious, compared to his frail physique. "You must be like a gym junkie, right? How many hours do you spend at the gym?"

Dante brought his fingers together to form a circle, holding it out and away from him so the guy could have a clear indication of his "gym junkie" routine. Really, who had time to do crap like that when the body conditioned better while moving, as in not standing on a confined machine until that part of the frame grew weary.

His basement contained a few pieces of workout equipment, but they served as a mere distraction if boredom reached its peak. Nero fiddled with the contraptions here and there, but he ignored them... until he lost at one of their friendly wagers. Then he spent about a good three hours down there.

"Oh yeah right, that's impossible. So what do you do to keep your bod in shape, man?"

"Pizza."

A dark eyebrow raised in suspicion, disbelief registering on his features before a broad smile showed up, thinking to go along with the joke. Of course the guy joked about his regimen, perhaps wanting to keep it a mystery or maintain the good vibe. But he still wanted to know how his stature came to be; a single bite from a pizza would send that physique crashing down.

"Naw really, dude. What's your secret? Surely there's some bench presses, maybe a few arm curls, squats and lunges in there?" The two girls resumed their fascination with him, running manicured hands over any exposed skin they could find.

Amber appeared to take it a step forward, rubbing her hand across Dante's torso, stopping every so often to apply slight pressure to that spot, then repeating the action. Needless to say the mini-massage loosened his grip on Rachel and tightened on Amber. However, the bathing suit blond noticed this change of pace and upped the ante.
"Nothing like that, just smack the taste outta dumbasses like this one—whooa!... and move on."

Rachel hopped onto his hip, holding her legs straight out on either side of him, her limbs touching her friend to where she had to move, afraid to dirty her dress from the shoe prints. Rachel wrapped her arms around his neck, reeling in her stilts once her companion scooted away, pressing her cheek into Dante's while giving a wide grin to the camera. Dante cradled her back so she wouldn't fall, not even daring to instigate any social interactions lest he wanted to be caught in a scuffle; if these two fought, then fine as long as they kept him out the middle.

But he was a prisoner in the center of this silent fight, so that defeated the purpose of what he intended to avoid.

"She seems ready to have fun with you right now." The cameraman took a brief glance at the curly-haired woman, taking in obvious irritation through a carefully hidden smile. Apparently, these two competed for attention, one always trying to outdo the other whatever the circumstances presented.

The annoyed blond moved behind the infamous hero, roaming her hands from his chest. Her arm snaked between the snug bodies, down past his navel, lifting the shirt up to run her nails across the washboard abs then repeating. Her friend caught wind of this, reaching a hand up to massage through his white locks, swinging her front leg out.

"Enjoying yourself?" The teen commented, evidently amused.

"No complaints here!" Dante snuck a quick peek at either beauty, exhilarated to be climbed all over and just as afraid; memories resurfacing of a time where his co-workers expected him to choose a side in their argument. If that happened between Raquel and Annie, as hot as they were, he would have to run away. When females bickered, his vexation grew into a headache. Sure, it created a sexy display, but it egged on his nerves when it involved him. Despite their soundless war, one thing out of this entertaining piece became clear.

He didn't think about Nero. Not even once.

The dream he had about him ruled the way he viewed the twerp, raising concern over its meaning. Turns out, it seems, he grew horny at the lack of knocking pumps and it said... well he didn't know what the fuck his mind conveyed to him, but it said that he needed to slip fun in in-between adventures.

Why his brain induced the teen as the object to have an escapade with he didn't have a reason, but it all steered right again. Two beauties had the potential to temporarily satiate his lust, and he'll achieve the moves he did with the brat to them and... err... he can do things to them that he didn't with Nero—shit.

He could fuck them, okay. He could fuck him and—them. He could screw them and be done in him—the girls! He and babes and sex and—yes.

Well... how useless. Hmph, two hot ladies on either side of him made him think about boinking another dude.

A vacation he would take soon if this condition worsened.

"You sure know how to make..." The teen's words trailed off as an uproar started, Annie and Rochelle stepping away from him, rivalry forgotten to clutch to each other, backing away in fright. The boy also sought distance, along with the watchful crowd opening to reveal him all on his lonesome.
Cars screeched to a stop, tires scratching against the pavement to drive in the opposite direction. Some even ditched their rides, running and screaming far and fast from where he stood.

Dante, confused at the terror-induced residents, and relieved that they distanced themselves (howbeit sad the chickadees left) turned around to glance at what the ruckus stemmed from, imagining Scott attaching a horde of C4 to himself. What he did not expect to see of the officer presented a gray-skinned, blue and orange-veined humanoid standing in his place.

Eyes and nose disappeared from Scott's face, mouth enlarging to the length of small butcher knives, creating a ghastly under bite no amount of dentist work can fix. His height grew to well over eight feet, its shadow looming over Dante's form. Instead of a hand, he had this Venus fly trap-like appendage on his right arm, the left one possessing an over-sized clamp similarly used to grab stuffed animals out of vending machines, but this thing had sharp claws.

A weird secretion covered his body, shining like baby oil before stepping out into the sun. An armored-like rib cage protruded through his torso, guarding its heart from direct attacks. Scattered pieces of the officer's clothing surrounded the creature.

Screams and clacking shoes echoed through his ears, all previous, happy thoughts melting away before a stern, focused face shone through. What new species of demon is this? Are these creeps strong enough to challenge him or is he over-thinking their abilities? It could be an easy opponent and it bluffed its appearance.

Those still lingering exposed themselves to injuries, especially with fiends relying on their senses to strike. The excited commotion from the group left him the choice to keep the monster, its physical assaults, and projectiles (if he had them) concentrated on him as much as possible. The smart ones fled the scene, replaced by an audience twice the original size to see these outcomes unfold. A clearing showed itself around him, but the spectators enveloped him in a spaced out circle, leaving him with a limited option of attacks to implement.

Shit. This wouldn't work.

"Everyone get out of here!" Dante turned around and barked the command, flipping out of the way a couple feet as "Scott" thrusted forward, the right arm closing up from its rapid opening. The crowd scattered back, surprised at how quickly the beast struck out.

Dante heard a 'thunk' on a nearby car, looking to see a silver barb sticking out the side of a door, glowing a neon orange before an explosive blast catapulted him through a store window, mannequins flying apart from the impact.

He exhaled sharply, underestimating the dart as a lame projectile and not a volatile rig. A piercing ring tuned out his hearing, taking a second to compose himself before he recovered, assessing the damage to his body.

Ash and sulfur filled his lungs, hurting to breathe in, slowly turning over on his flank because the elements stung his insides. Shards of glass embedded into his back; skin blistering with debris particles rubbing against him. His demonic abilities sensed injury to his person, coming along to aid in his speedy recovery, pushing the fragments out to heal him.

Wails and shouts grew in volume as his auditory range reverted to normal, panic filling the streets of its citizens scurrying. Breathy shrills of the unholy kind ventured closer to him, Dante slow to stand on his feet after the detonation had him dizzy.

He took a once-over down the length of his torso, burnt hole marks littering the shirt to be damn
near useless. Fighting shirtless would have to do but he could hold out a little longer; the ladies might come rushing to him and he couldn’t bear to watch them get hurt.

He stood up to his full height, popping the muscles in his back to coordinate themselves into alignment, dusting off what he could before he sparred with this abomination. His primary weapons stayed at the office because he didn’t think this situation might escalate to this problem so soon, assuming he’d be home after a little snooping; such a rookie mistake.

Outside the store flourished a bevy of blurs, people running to and fro in escaping the monster. The car which catapulted him blazed a roaring fire, licking around the space it set in to ensnare everything else into its trap. Scott the beast drew more attention to himself, barbs shooting out to blow up anything in its immediate vicinity. At least the audience, logically this time, fled from this Hell-terror before they died for being mere bystanders. At last the area was clear, just that...

The blame would be put on him to pay the property damage in the debacle; he knew it would.

They didn’t seem to know his identity, and there was another white-haired denizen floating around here. However, like a dummy, he remembered the talking cue ball saying his name.

Dirtied fingers touched his lips. An ear splitting whistle reverberated off the walls surrounding them, the mutated officer turning around to tune into the source of the noise.

Dante stepped out of the store window to face him, noticing a glimmer underneath the armored rib cage in the shape of a black square. His vision squinted to zone in on the object reflecting beneath the bony frame, immediately enlarging afterward. Dante recognized the symbol; the same gem set inside that heart he placed on Nero’s own.

So… if Scott got a hold of the organ and it turned him into that thing, did it mean anyone can come into contact with it and change into this monstrosity? Or is this an exclusive trophy to those ass-wipe converts?

"Aw, fuck me." He scrunched his eyes closed, breathing in a heavy sigh positioning into a battle stance, wishing Nero could be right here to combat this threat, would have left him a lot more time to play the damsel in distress role with Randi and Ariel.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I know some of you want them to get it on and whatnot right now, but the way that it’s written would throw the story out of whack, and I just can’t give you guys just anything to read, now can I? You can’t rush love, my dearies :P
High-heeled black boots calmly strolled out of an alley, twirling a pair of customized, semi-automatic pistols before blowing the smoke from a gray barrel, putting the weapons away. A steady pace walked to a silver and black Diavel Ducati.

The air blew crisp and fresh compared to the rotten, sordid smell accompanying the back street, inhaling the refreshing atmosphere after feeling pleased with the exchange about an informant's whereabouts in the darker side of society.

My, it was quite a plethora of information "given" when "asked" about the news going on in the demonic neighborhood. Word through the grapevine said that a certain islander got his fingers on some taboo goodies, and sort of "shopped around" to the highest bidder in a trade for a higher calling of power.

With these mystical oddities now in the bidder's control, they created unique concoctions to use and indulged in a little ruckus when the opportunity presented itself. When the questions arose about the party planners organizing this crazy bash the informer quieted; sweat forming on his brow, like someone had a laser aimed at his head.

And he did have one aligned with his forehead as Luce wanted to make her acquaintance known. Even with the ivory beauty pointed at him, his eyes widened with doubt. Suffice to say if he wasn't in the mood to talk, Luce would be more than willing to do all the yapping for the both of them, and she did.

She struck a conversation to his knee but became bored with the dumb chat, and instead opted for a session with his shoulder. When that tired she moved towards his left foot, closing out with a quick "wave" to his skull.

Standing by the sleek motorcycle she pulled out a slim phone from her pocket, dialing the number to the main office where the rest of the demon hunting denizens congregated. It's been a while since a visit happened, but she stayed confident of Dante maintaining the calm city. He couldn't have screwed up any jobs after having added help. The youth owned this no-nonsense attitude, and she felt convinced that Nero would tell him to get on track if Dante needed it. Male egos aside however, they complement each other at keeping each other on their toes.

The object rung twice before it picked up, silence meeting her for a full ten seconds; believing Dante had his mouth stuffed with pizza but she couldn't hear any unruly smacking.

"Dante?"

"... Hello?"

A soft, shaky voice made it hard to recognize the recipient, yet the tone appeared much more familiar.

"Nero, is that you?"

"... T-Trish."
"Are you okay? Where's Dante?"

Displeased grunts met her ears, harsh exhales pressed through the receiver to transform into a drawn-out sigh, sounds of a rustling nature overtook her hearing until it quieted. Light blue eyes scanned across the area, noticing the lack of consumers that should have occupied these streets. However the district surrounding her wasn't a thriving community.

However, in spite of acquiring an grandeur away from the limp part the half-devil called home, it ceased to exist next to its downtown metropolis. Those who financially lacked shopped here usually, but it had some products proving more quality-driven than usual. Surprisingly, this section of the city didn't inhabit a name, so the locals named it Mid-Town.

"Nero, are you still there?" The blond leaned onto the bike, trying to retain contact with the youth. He had an assertive and confident way about him whenever he spoke, but now seemed unsure in bereft of those qualities.

Something sounding like a pouty moan shot through the phone, similar to a canceled trip disappointing a child. Or in this case his moodiness resulted in Dante winning a foolish bet and rubbing it in his face.

"Nero, is everything okay?"

A long sigh rushed through the device, followed by some indistinctive rattling. "Everything's fine on my end." His impatience coated his voice, but there sustained a note of alarm as well. "Is something wrong?"

"I just felt like calling," she said. "I meant to-"

"That's all? You just felt like calling?"

"That's what I said... why are you snapping at me?"

Forced air came through the gizmo again, sounding much more despondent this time. The teenager sniffed harshly, snorting out thick phlegm deep within his throat before spitting it out. Trish arched a manicured eyebrow at the odd behavior, thinking him to be in one of his fuming modes after a spar with the hybrid.

"Where's Dante, Nero?"

"Jail."

"What?" Her other eyebrow joined its twin in complete surprise. Perhaps the duo battled in public and he took the sparring a little too far, destroying property or accidentally harming a human? How in the world can Dante wind up in the slammer? How bad dwelled his crime to end up there? When did he go and how long would it be until his release?

"How did he go to jail?"

"By car," Nero answered in a dry voice.

"You know what I mean."

"It's... a long story." His tone seemed defeated, lost in a sea of frustrated purpose to even elaborate on a simple question.
The bike roared to life, Trish straddling the black machine en route to the office to receive detailed
answers. One may think that two capable men could take care of themselves, but stay gone a
couple weeks and the world burns.

"All right Nero, I'll be there in a few."

"I'm going nowhere."

She pressed the hang-up button, sliding the phone into her pocket, kicking down the pedal.
Indubitably, it appeared as if they ran into some trouble on their own. Might as well tell everyone
the happenings on their adventures to discover if anyone had a common correlation; to see if a
duplicate thread took charge with their enemies. And just how did that red rogue land in jail?

Her hand slid between her cleavage to pull out a set of black sunglasses, perching them on the
bridge of her nose. She settled the bulk of her weight on the back of the bike, the front end rising
high into the air. A tire spun, accompanied by the deep tremble of an awakened engine. The
immediate connection of rubber and asphalt chocked up debris behind her as she let go of the
clutch, speeding out into the streets hoping to understand these current events.

Trish slowed the motorcycle several yards away from the shop, a strong infiltration of demonic
presence sending unease throughout her being. Luce sought residence in her hand with a swift
notion, carefully edging towards the door while her senses scanned the area.

Gelatinous globs of a dark substance littered the cemented road, trailing all the way to the office's
entrance. She parked her bike along the curb, inhaling the smell of fleeting, rotten flesh and
smoldering ashes. Parts of gooey entrails lay glimmering in the darkened sky, the moon light
casting the neighborhood in a dusky atmosphere.

A battle of immense proportions took place here, if the stench of corpses carried anything to go by.
Hmm, did that pose the reason Nero seemed so agitated? Did a swarm of demons come by and he
had to fend them off? Did he make a wager with the hybrid and lost the bet? If so, then what
happened to Dante? Were humans involved in the scuffle and the blame came upon him? Might be
speculative of why he's in jail; he's real good at stirring up trouble.

She knocked on the door once after storing her glasses back in their "case", noticing how loose the
knob was, opening it to reveal a dirtied hunter sweeping the floor. Small piles of wooden splinters
awaited their chance to rest in the dustpan. So a fight did take place, but inside the office?

Sky blue eyes turned to look at the bullet holes in the wall, confusion settling on her face. Nero
looked over to her, irises laced with languor before he resumed with his cleaning. That little
movement brought her attention to the opposite end of the wall, vision growing slightly wider for a
certain oak décor turned up missing. "Hang on a sec." If these timber chips are in here, then that
meant...

"Who destroyed the desk?"

"Nice to see you too." Nero gave a bitter response, resuming the last bit of his tidying, brushing the
broom with force. The blond stared at his form, noting his dirtied, cut-up t-shirt and blood-stained
jeans.

Brown marks of dirt smudged his pallid skin, the same color showing light traces under his nose.
His usually pristine white hair had tendrils of varied reds, debris from outside adding to his
disarrayed appearance. "Dante did."
"How?"
He shrugged. "It was like this when I woke up."
She looked doubtful. "Were you here all day?"
"Yup."
"In your room upstairs?" Trish added as an afterthought, more as a means to joke. "You slept like the dead then?"
"Uh-huh."
"… Are you sure?"
Nero stopped sweeping, pointedly looking at her as if she dared to question his truth. What reason would he have to lie to her, especially concerning anything pertaining to the office? What other explanation could he have to give to her, other than he or Dante destroyed it? "Why wouldn't I be?"
"That's kind of difficult to not hear the desk dying. Just how hard did you sleep?" Trish raised an eyebrow walking further into the room. She sat down on the arm of the couch, glancing through the items that once situated themselves on the furniture.
"You don't know the half of it," he mumbled to himself, sweeping the litter up into the dustpan.
"I suppose a couple of your Fortuna friends came and visited you," she pursed her lips together in reflection, waiting to be filled in on what happened to him and Dante.
The conversation that followed began with the call yesterday morning and the voyage thereafter, carefully leaving out the part where he called the red hunter out of his name and of his usage as a devil arm. He told of the powerful she-witch, of her fountain, and her plan to become some unrighteous leader; of her second in command and her antagonizing convert. Careful again not to tell her of the close, physical interactions shared between the two hunters.
Talking about about the human captives gained her attention in full, Nero delving into detail about the blow to Dante's head, and the defeat of the elder's demon-turned wife. He skipped the specifics of his "down time", telling her of his pure exhaustion and his inability to wake up from the noise. He explained to her that Dante went back out there to the small town, but he neglected to explain to him of his findings.
Ceruleans looked at her, seeing her in silent rout upon absorbing the information. It felt like he gave her Intel on a need-to-know basis, yet he held doubt she cared to realize all the finer details.
Nero finished sweeping up the waste on the floor, emptying it out in the kitchen trash can, then taking the bag outside. When he returned, Trish had a troubled visage, scrunching her lips to one side deep in consideration.
"Well, I could see all of that happening, but what does this have to do with Dante in jail and all those guts in the road... and the gun holes in the wall?"
"I'm getting to that." Nero implanted his fingers into his hair, separating a few sticky strands, disgust consuming his features as white and brown particles floated down in front of his eyesight. His vision locked with hers; she holding the same face prior to a slow shaking of the head. He quickly wiped his dirtied hands on his jeans, a warm blush tinting his cheeks but letting that fly under him.
"While we were out there Dante... helped himself to some stuff and I guess Ramona's group found out about it. Some cops drove here and cuffed his dumb ass. One of them got punched and his gun pelted the wall." He sat on the edge of the pool table, swinging both legs as he elaborated further on his story; he wouldn't even dare tell her about the kiss.

First and foremost, he wasn't privy to telling people about his personal trivialities and secondly, it wasn't any of her business. He argued with himself that the lip lock was a distraction and it harmlessly meant anything significant. And he still had to understand what his relationship came to be with the elder.

Are they friends or are all these signs indirectly pushing him towards something else? Feelings and judgments of an emotional nature needed sorting out, and an outsider's opinion shouldn't be placed in this matter, at least until he felt comfortable of what he wanted for himself.

"When they left, these... things came by." The youth dug into his memory, recalling the human-type creatures that showed up in front of the office; all slimy and gross and new-looking to his eyes.

"Things?" Trish moved off the couch closer to him, intrigued about these unique monsters.

"Yeah these... humanoid freaks. Like they're people-demons or something."

"Description?"

"Okay," he stood up this time, walking over to the door to give a broader view on what he fought. "Say I grew over eight feet tall and my skin turned dark gray... and my clothes disappeared." He shifted his eyeballs back and forth, cheeks darkening a shade at the memory, pausing a moment to gather his wits. He held his right arm to where the indicated height resided.

On a quick side note, if there was another person he didn't mind being seen with his devil bringer unbound, it was her. She had this relaxed persona he developed comfort with, enabling him to lower his defenses some. "So, I'm here and my ey—"

"Do you lose your hair too?" She said, a ghost of a smirk showing on her lips.

"Uh, yeah." A pale eyebrow rose into dirty locks, blinking a few times at the unexpected question. "Anyway, my eyes and nose are gone, and my teeth are crookedly sharp." His mouth opened wide, motioning with his finger the length of the chompers the thing had. "My arms are all long and gangly, and I have a hook and a clamp for hands."

Trish nodded once in understanding, filing this information into her mind should she ever encounter this creature. "Fire seems to stop them quick, and they attack you as if you're smothered in blood."

Nero recalled the ferocious way they charged, like their movement swayed to and fro before lashing out; making it difficult to lock on to a target for more than three seconds at a time. Their arms extended from their normal range, their left arm shaped into a fisherman's hook. Curious of all about the monstrosity stood the gem situated outside of its rib cage.

The fridge back in Whetstone held a similar ornament; the hearts in closed jars sporting the same look as on the monster's chest. What did all of this mean? Did the stone act as a source of demonic power? Were average humans affected by this or did it belong to the exclusive members of Ramona's club?

"Hmm, what stuff did Dante take?"
"Follow me." Nero beckoned his finger, leading her towards the kitchenette to the recently "bought" items. After the bout with the humanoid creatures he collected the cases in the truck, placing them in his closet should the girls want to see the goodies.

He had this hunch the chieftain would be sorely upset if the ladies plowed, mostly Trish, through his junk and he didn't have time to do so first. However, it wasn't his to begin with, but since it "fell" into his possession, he might as well hold his accountability for it.

He scooted over to the side while crossing his arms, allowing Trish entry, keeping his eyes on her to gauge a reaction.

"This is his work?" She pointed to the silver refrigerator in disgust and awe, entranced that Dante would pull such a stint. She walked further in the kitchen, taking in the sleek food preserver and its out-of-place setting. More of the kitchen's objects settled on her mind; the microwave and toaster adding a metallic charm to the dreary room.

Somehow, the previous owners of this establishment speculated that a beige, rose printed, wall-papered backdrop went lovely with green cabinets. A major renovation would bring the décor up to date and fitting with the new appliances, but Dante gave one of his "if it ain't broke" speeches and nothing moved towards a resolve. Be that as it may, she assumed, the kitchen didn't appear as bad with the smaller devices, thanks in part to Nero's extra input.

Whether as an obligation or a responsibility to aid Dante she didn't know, but the added help benefited them in more ways than one, howbeit in the form of accompanying Dante. Trish sensed an "at ease" demeanor in the half-devil as of late.

Whenever Lady waltzed in with a job he always had a mind to say something snarky, but now he listened. He paid attention to what she described and only elaborated on a few inquiries, and then shared the petty remarks to Nero. Along with this calming mood came a growing bond between the two men.

At first, the partial-hybrid moved around quietly as a mouse, keeping to himself and rarely involving himself in group sessions. Not that he was a shy little creature, withal these new circumstances produced mild caution to branch out. A closed society like the small island town could've been detrimental to allowing him to create his own opinion of the world.

Through exposure to the dysfunctional bunch of the three Devil May Cry members did he slowly let his reserves down. And Dante's exclusive, gentle consideration had further lulled this uncertainty within him; that he halted to take pride in himself because of his arm.

"How's Dante been treating you?"

The simple question minimally enlarged his eyes. "Um... it's okay?"

"Well, he isn't modest in many areas, but it's nothing too serious, right?"

What would he tell her as a response? 'Oh, I had some weird, psycho-sexual dreams I had about him' or some 'touchy-feely' advances happened? He would not pry those details out before he knew what he himself felt secure in saying.

Lying came easy around the time of injury to his arm and thereafter, but Trish, Dante and—that woman—let their guards down (namely the former two) so he could feel more relaxed. It didn't seem fair, but would telling one more little lie hurt when concerning himself?

"It's... a work in progress." A partial fib will do. He didn't like being under the microscope, an
unknown fear of blurtting secret goods out made him a tad paranoid.

The direction refocused on the refrigerator once more, pointing his chin towards the woman to open it. An astonished expression met him not too long after—then narrowed with surprisingly vicious intent.

"What have you done with Dante?" Trish looked ready to kill with those blue orbs.

"Huh?" Nero's voice escaped him, sounding weak and small in response to her darkened aura. He cleared it, speaking out his statement much stronger this time. "What... what do you mean?"

"I couldn't get this Dante to fill up his fridge even if I paid him, so what charm did you weave on him to work this out?" she answered with an insinuating undertone; his cheeks coating to a darker tint.

He swiped the side of his nose in shame, looking shy to the left of her when the color drained from his face; anger replacing it soon after because that moron had the nerve to bring home a sample of the foul evidence... in a pickle jar.

She started from her spot, glancing into the refrigerator to lay eyes on the cause of Nero's sudden tiff. She grabbed the container and held it up to her face, turning it this way and that to examine the heart. Words from her "friend" flooded back, filling in the missing links about the recent increase in demonic activity.

It all began to make sense. Whatever the moron brought from Fortuna must have made these pretty trinkets, distributing the goods out so the immoral humans can have a little disastrous fun. A small trip to the island town may be voyaged upon in the future, just to ensure no more funny business took place or anyone planned on doing so.

The question remained of who would tag along with Nero out there; he wasn't going alone if he went right now. Something told her the peculiar bond with the hybrid couldn't be simmered off if he took a solo trek. So when will the opportunity arise to tell him of the heart's origin?

"That asshole!" The teenager said in a clipped manner, rubbing his forehead where he received that punch from the neophyte.

"You didn't see it in here at first?" Trish replaced it on the door.

"Nope. Looked straight in the freezer then on the shelf for something to drink." He crossed his arms again, feeling the familiar rise of bile trying to settle in his core. "I had a little... trouble... with it.

"The heart."

"Yeah. Thought the lady served it to me in meat form." Nero closed his eyes in disgust, shuddering the insight away before anything else from yesterday popped up, namely that dream.

"Which reminds me, La—uh... the brunette pissed Dante off pretty badly. Don't know what she did, but he told me not to say her name in his presence."

"But he's not here." Trish rumbled through the fridge, glad to eat something other than cold pizza. On the bottom shelf she saw a pack of wine coolers, grabbing a yellow bottle and popping off the lid to swallow it down.

"True, but I think these walls can talk, and they'd rat on me in a moment." The teen looked over
behind his right shoulder, several demonic heads staring back at him, as if they recorded his every move to show Dante later. When he turned around Trish was already downing her second drink, ignoring the surprised stare on his face.

The blond eyed him briefly, stopping her rapid swallowing to give a small shrug. "I'll get a reason from her."

"There's more food in the cabinets." Nero moved to the living room, glancing to the door leading to even more goodies that the captain "indefinitely" borrowed. "Oh yeah, Dante got more crap in the garage." He threw over his shoulder drawing nearer to the steps, mind urging him to take a shower to rid of the remnants of the past couple of days.

He had an inkling, knowing how Dante operated, he might be back here sooner than expected. He needed to prepare to return to the world and handle this unfolding situation, alone. No way in hell would he partner up with the dope after the possibility of that shit storm happening again.

"Really, wha' suff?" Trish came out of the kitchen, cavity stuffed with hot fries and went in the garage. She made an alarming sound, walking into the office to speak to the teen on the banister. How di-" She quickly chewed and swallowed the chips. "How did you charm the lazy bum to grab all this stuff?" She popped more of the red sticks in her mouth, waiting on Nero to explain.

What the hell? Why does she keep saying that? What made her assume he convinced Dante to do anything? He formed his own mind to collect this shit on his own, and he helped out some, that's it. And what was he going to say to him; try to steer him away from his amoral actions? Dante could light a match to those items for all he cared.

And even if he rested his charm on him, and that's a very big if, why would he tell her of the way he wooed him, if it ever happened? Just what did she imply? He felt calm around her enough to talk freely, but if this immature persistence continued he would start giving her the cold shoulder.

"I charmed no one, he took it of his own will." Nero answered with an edge to his voice, leaving her no space to taunt and assume about what she thinks he did to the hybrid. Trotting up the stairs to his bedroom, he garnered one more glance at the blond, morbidly smirking up at him as if she withheld information on a knowing secret.

Well, whatever she assumed she can chew on that. Content she didn't ask any further questions, he turned and readied himself for round two; in preparation to go on a hunt and acquire treasure to his liking, alone.

After a soothing shower, Nero hurried to his room, a towel wrapped around his waist and one drying off his damp hair. While looking at himself in the bathroom mirror, he noticed a faint pink scar in the center of his sternum.

Recalling that surreal dream he grew nervous, remembering how the mark seemed too vivid in his sleep to be real, yet it showed up in front of him; the impact it left forever embedded a reminder into his memory.

He finished toweling off, going to his duffel bag (mysteriously picked up after someone emptied it) and grabbed his spare clothes. His warrior garb needed major renovations, as a thorough washing. White socks with blue trimmings pulled over frosted feet, followed by gray boxers with a red waistband hanging loose on his hips.

*Such a fitting color to wear on the hips; might be even better if something red took it off.*
There goes that unwanted, Hellish conscious mouthing off again, expressing concerns of no relation to him. At the most inconvenient of times did it want to talk about absolutely nothing important. The hybrid’s absence allowed time to think on his demonic voice and the unusual behavior, concluding the reason this happened.

It all started with Kyrie.

Things went steady between them, it was slow but it steadied on. They grew close to each other and shared a few interests, like catching a bite to eat at the cafe and seeing whatever corny movie played at the matinee.

One day after helping to rebuild the main plaza, they took a stroll along the sandy line where the sand faded into the dark water. There they united in their first passionate yet reserved kiss. She held onto his shoulders, anchoring herself from floating up to the sky and beyond. He loosely held her hips, steeling himself from plummeting to the underworld to not flush her tight against his body.

Butterflies fluttered around in his stomach when their lips connected, transforming into bats sucking his insides dry in not taking their loving ministrations further. He guarded his self-control, concerned that laying it on too thick would bring out the devil in him and it may turn out disastrous results.

He assumed one of those carnivorous mammals crawled up into his head and tried to communicate to him, rather poorly, that some lovin’ needed to happen between him and the curvy brunette. What else could his mind attempt to tell him other than that? Simple: nothing.

Dark blue distressed jeans, a white v-neck shirt with navy-patterned stars, and matching dark blue Converse sneakers rested comfortably on his frame, grabbing a gray sweater to knock the chill off his arms. He traveled to the bathroom, picking up his apparel in lieu of washing them. Nero hoped to have enough time to suds his clothes and put them back on; somehow his current choice of fashion wouldn’t last long against this new class of enemy, should he run into them again.

Assessing his work gear didn’t take long; the red sweater and jeans thrown into the washer to rid of the sweat, blood, and dirt accumulated on them. However, the navy blue tank top he wore had cuts and holes all over, rendering the shirt useless. His jacket—well that couldn’t go in the appliance, given the state of it. Maybe he should soak it in the tub or find a hose to lessen up the particles wanting to glue themselves to the fabric.

"That dark-pink coat-wearing asshole!" He set his jacket on top of the dryer, deciding to wash it later. Next thing on his to-do list involved a basic sweep of his weapons, just to see if they were up to par.

"A lot on your mind?" Trish stood in the garage door, Oreo cookies in her hand this time, momentarily noticing his irked stance.

He scoffed. "Dante isn't good with plans."

"That he isn't." She looked from him to the truck, thinking of how they carried this gear without raising suspicions. "I'm surprised you guys could get all this stuff back here and they haven't raged into this place yet." She finished off the statement by separating the cookie in half, licking the
"Yeah they did, just not for their possessions. Those bullet holes belong to them."

"But they came for Dante."

"Yeah, but why they didn't reclaim their stuff... I don't know." Nero closed the washer's lid and shrugged. "Maybe he took the back way home or something. I was asleep."

"You sure are sleeping a lot."

"Yeah 'cause being around that guy is mentally and physically exhausting." He relented, leaning against the washer as he voiced his aggravation. "Sometimes it feels like I'm partnered up with a baboon—-with the lips of a baboon's ass!"

**You mean he has the ass of a baboon.**

The voice caught him by surprise, trying to conceal the rising blush to his cheeks by masking it with anger. Yet a feminine chuckle broke him away from the nagging sound, dissipating the pink on his face. Even though it felt nice that she thought on similar terms with him, he still pushed his words as truth; Dante possessed this immature charm that grated on his nerves a little.

The youngster could act as he damn well pleased given his youth; he had an excuse to signify his behavior and Dante didn't. With age and experience brought maturity, or so Nero once observed. Man, that know-it-all attitude irked him wherever the red dope decided to shed knowledge on what he considered he needed to know.

"So the cat's out of the bag. It isn't peaches and cream with him, is it?"

"Like I said, it's a work in progress."

"Well, you should take it as a good thing. Dante's quite the loner sometimes and he's rarely in the company of others, mostly by choice. His upbringing wasn't in a social environment and—the brunette—and I aren't the best conversationalists to him, with us being the dames; we lacking an interest in some of the things he does." Trish stopped to put a cookie in her mouth, enjoying the sweet bliss, allowing Nero to let her words sink in.

Maybe he needed a deeper understanding of how Dante operated so he could adjust to his mood, depending on the occasion. She continued, "Perhaps you, being who you are, can share experiences with him more than you do already. I mean, you both taunt each other with your spars and spats don't you?"

Nero nodded in absent focus, folding his arms in reasoning about her earlier statement. What did she mean by his lack of socializing growing up? Socializing as in he couldn't talk to anyone given his heritage, or he stayed secluded from people overall? Dante told him he had a brother; they talked and chatted up a storm together, right? He made a mental note to question Dante about his rearing, with respect, just to verify if his asshole-ish tendencies justified his actions.

He guessed his biological make-up played a part in his snippy attitude; one wasn't necessarily in a mentally secure state if darkness ran in their blood. However, where did his brash nature come from; with puns thrown to the enemy and his middle finger raised to the universe?

Perchance they weren't so different from each other.

"He probably enjoys hanging out with you, seeing how you two act around each other. I don't think
he means any harm; I guess he sees you as a close confidant," she said that last sentence more to herself, reminiscing on their male companionship and how they seemed to complement each other.

Both lived through hardships and hurdled over grand obstacles, and they weren't privy to fall under society's tricks; ridiculing many affronts to what society stood for.

Once in a while Dante complained of the shortage of sport he bluffed out, and that solution resolved itself rather quickly; Nero proved to be a diversion from the dull combatants. He added a spark to Dante's otherwise simplistic, yet odd life. This simplicity had been originally combated by dozing the world away and he became complacent, not even bothering with menial tasks because they were hardly worth his time, so he says

"Just think of yourself as his shiny new toy able to mend itself, and he as your regenerating punching bag. Sometimes to get through to Dante you have to play his game or tell him how you feel. He'll listen, just that he's not much of a talker when the spotlight is on him." The final cookie rested in her hands, splitting it in half before the one with less filling shot into her mouth. "Dante's not privy to letting people in, but once he does he's not letting them go, even though he has a strange way of showing it."

That was… insightful. To be honest, he didn't see it in that light. Formerly, he perceived that the hybrid was being a spiteful jerk to him, especially recently, but as Trish suggested he got a kick out of his company.

For brief moments, he forgot about the good that came from the elder, but his mood swings would override the decent times and Nero would focus on the exclusive negativity.

What she said about letting people in your life also struck home with him. Granted, he only gave a toss about two people in his existence, but from a young age he didn't let people wheedle into his heart; the significance of pain, misery, and betrayal too heavy of a burden to encounter. It seemed funny how close their interests are with each another, like they were lov... lo-lo-loving entities of... stubborn emotions. Yeah.

And Trish's statement about him being Dante's chew toy didn't sit right with him. He would take her offer of Dante being his punching bag, however.

"Thanks," he said after a moment, moving away from the machine after it began swishing the clothes around. "I'll keep that in mind when I'm bashing his face in."

"There you go!" Trish smiled jovially as the other half of the cookie plunked into her mouth, dusting her hand off of the excess crumbs. "Just make sure he doesn't bash yours in before you tell him what you need to say." She disappeared from the door's entrance, presumably to fiddle more in the fridge.

Nero walked out of the garage, heading towards his room to get the required items to clean his weapons. Sitting on the couch he draped a towel over his legs, setting the cleaning agents and screwdrivers on the table in front of him.

The double-barreled revolver ejected the remaining slugs from the slot, laying them on the table to recycle them. Succeeding the separation came dismembering the metallic beauty, taking apart the wooden panels, various bolts and pins, the cylinder, targeting sights and the barrels. All the pieces lying before him would've made the most professional gunsman sweat in doubt; the display before him looking like an ancient clock dismantled to the last nail. But he didn't mind the work; he personally customized the gun to take down enemies without hassle.
Forty minutes rolled by after he cleaned, lubed, and reassembled Blue Rose, wiping the perspiration off his hands with the towel and proud he had no solvents on him.

He grabbed the broadsword to assess her state. Red Queen had cerulean blues scanning over her, but she wasn't stripped to her naughty bits; she took her bath a week ago and she wasn't ready to have another until some time next week. Or at least until a friendly battle waged on between the duo.

It's something about the way Dante attacks that motivated him to giving his all, perhaps a bit too much. He'd seen Dante's altered devil come out and decimate his foes into nothing when aggravated, but he never exercised that form on him. Sure, the teen unleashed Yamato on him in an instant when one too many kicks or face slaps landed on him, but Dante refrained from using his demonic force on him.

And every sparring Nero anticipated on him doing so. He wanted to see how strong the veteran’s powers escalated to; judging how he would fare against such a threat. Maybe the reason he grew ecstatic with their sessions relied upon Dante taking a hit and not dying.

Demon-spawn had shitty stamina when licked by Red Queen's fire, but Dante could take punches and be good as new; his own regenerating punching bag indeed. It always gave him a goal to look forward to, a chance to better himself for the day when he defeated the hybrid fair and square. But until then, he'll take his little "losses" as a trial and error, a guide to discovering what made the captain vulnerable in battle; he'd have to find that vulnerability first.

But there's no rush; it'll end when he goes back to Fortuna, when the time arrived, so why do anything now? He's enjoying comfortable leisure in Dante's company, and Dante's fun to be around, when not in one of his asshole modes.

Yet that's part of the problem. Unknown to him, the hybrid's becoming a habit that might be awfully hard to break.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Aw, Nero. Now you get a glimpse as to why Dante likes to press your buttons :D I hope I got Trish's character okay; she doesn't really talk much does she?
Don't Play With Me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two Hours Earlier

Enough time passed to let the teen put on his work clothes. Instead of his navy-blue undershirt, a white t-shirt nested under his red sweater. Unfortunately, the dried mud caked into his jacket required a thorough cleaning, Nero opting to wrap his arm in a bandaged sleeve up to his shoulder, then don the arm brace. If he needed to leave, he could take his back harness to hold his blade.

The old rotary phone rang on the wooden table by the couch. Nero ran out the kitchen, chicken and rice burrito spilling on the floor to answer the call. Two chunks of warm goodness occupied his mouth before mumbling out “Hello” into the receiver, wanting to bite into the grub once more before his voice came through to his hearing.

A piece of poorly-chewed meat lodged in his throat from that jackass calling, coughing to clear his airway. His premature deductions made him believe the elder called to talk about the kiss instead of him possibly dialing for a ride, or to report his findings.

Oh... well—screw him.

Trish came out the kitchen with buffalo-flavored chips and a bowl of spinach dip, seeing the phone in his one hand and the burrito in the other.

“Howdy?” Dante's words rung clear into the receiver, puzzled why nobody answered him.

Trish juggled the bag and the container in one arm, patting the youth on his back to dislodge the food stuck in his throat.

It shouldn't shock him to hear the hybrid's voice, but his earlier actions formed a ball of wary unease within him.

“Howdy... anybody home?”

Nero catapulted the piece of chicken out his moist cavern, holding the phone against his shoulder. Deep breaths expanded his lungs, pushing out the used air through his scorched throat. A moment later when he calmed he handed the receiver to Trish, in which she took in her hand and placed it back between his neck and shoulder.

“Why'd you pick up if you're not gonna answer me?”

Salmon-tinted lips dropped open, blinking twice after her reciprocated actions. A pinched forehead responded to the act; taking the phone off his shoulder and returning it to her.

“I need to talk to someone now!” Traces of mounting annoyance shot through the gadget, but the listeners ignored him.

Trish gave an opened-palmed push against the handle where Nero clutched it, driving it back against him. He, in turn, gripped the gizmo harder and pressed it to her, her hand still placed against his.
“The hell is going on now, answer the phone!”

Both demon hunters of different origins held the receiver between them, each leaning the phone towards the other while, concurrently, keeping the device away from them.

“I swear if I have to come down there to get what I need...”

Viewing this as a friendly wager, they added a snivel of physical power to their push-pull tournament, Dante spewing out threats either party cared less to acknowledge.

Ceruleans stared into sky blues, pupils locked onto each other's visages; daring the other to give more force, a little more shove. Magical energy invisibly met in a stand-off, to challenge the other in lieu of victory.

“That's it, I'm coming down there...”

The blonde's lips opened and thinned prior to blowing a kiss at Nero, breaking his concentration to lose the pushing battle, having the phone pressed against him, muffling the hybrid's indignant cries.

“Hey... hey, what's going on? Trish? Is that you? I know it is. Nero can’t kiss even if you teach him.”

Trish looked on as Nero's cheeks morphed from a darkening pink to a splotchy red, settling on his forehead and his ears. She received a tell-tale glimpse of the problems Nero endured from Dante; she should know because she became fodder for his banter some time ago.

His best bet is to play Dante's game or ignore him, though their testosterone-induced nature said they'll keep challenging each other. She gave two sympathetic pats on his shoulder, heading into the garage, leaving Nero to deal with his present nightmare.

Oh, this carried on to be fun. Not only did it appear like Dante forgot about that kiss, but he reverted back to his dorky self, albeit there simmered a distant twang in his tone. But where did it leave him? Should he just... forget it happened; to scrap it into his memory bank?

All right... he'd be fine with it, kinda. But the question remained of this situation happening. Only then he could forget the circumstance... and increase his personal space away from the veteran.

“Hell-fucking-o!”

“Shut up!” Nero snapped into the phone. “You nag too much.”

“Me... ? Nag? I'm not the one with developing hormones—”

“What do you want, Dante?”

“Well, if someone would have answered—”

Hanging up took less than a second.

Maybe he wasn't over Dante's devil-may-care attitude. Or rather he wasn't over the idea that Dante was over their (the dope's) lip lock. Not that it should be a pressing matter in which he dwelled on, but he... he needed closure. What is Dante trying to open by kissing him?

The phone rung again, Nero's lips down-turned coupled with a hard sneer, letting it ring three times before he picked up.
“What.”

“And if I’m a customer? Shouldn’t you answer the phone with a bit of courtesy? Aft—”

“Did you call for something?”

Silence met him on the receiver, making him wonder if the elder expressed his surprise by his blunt attitude, or whether he forgot the reason he called. A clicking tongue resounded before a slight sigh escaped into the receiver.

“Okay... I get ya.” A small chuckle played into his ear. “Trish is there, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Has she been there long?”

“I'd say so.”

“Hmm. Did anything swing by the office?”

“Yup.”

“Oh, was it something that bleeds?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Did you kill it?”

“With fire.”

“Marco.”

“Polo.”

Click.

That red-wearing idiot. Where the hell did he get off on cracking jokes at a time like this knowing, Nero assumed, he wasn't in the best of moods? And to top it off, Dante didn't get to say what he called for. Too bad, his loss.

A piece of the chicken and rice burrito found its way into his mouth, scowling eyes boring at the old rotary phone in dispirit, daring it to let out a ring. Unfortunately, technological creations of an older era didn't possess the intellectual input humans commanded of them, and thus the shrilling contraption continued.

He let the thing jangle four times, glaring in disdain over this childish game continuing. The pause in Dante's monologue earlier told him Dante realized his... lack of enthusiasm, and he should have adjusted his attitude accordingly. He'd appreciate it if Dante kicked him in the shin or head-butted him, then he can treat the incident as a mere misdemeanor. But... kissing is a whole different matter.

Kissing involved a personal link belonging to those who wanted to express their longing for a deeper connection, usually between lovers. It can be even used as a joke for both parties to laugh at later. But what the veteran did reached passed a gag, almost feeling a personal affect come forward.
Nonetheless, Nero inhabited the same guilt; he could have snatched his peckers from the touch too. But he clamored in a state of shock so he had a reason to stay still; what occupied Dante's excuse?

On the sixth ring he picked up the receiver, holding the phone away from him before he frowned at it, mildly wondering if he could yell for Trish to handle this problem; he wasn't in the mood.

"Any reason why you keep hanging up on me?"

"Any reason you keep asking stupid questions?"

"Any reason you won't let me talk?"

"Any reason for you to say something important right now?"

"Any reason why you're still angry about that kiss?"

Nero remembered hanging the phone up after the elder mentioned his need of a purple book with silver lettering. He also recalled how the elder's question strangely... emboldened him.

At first, his words stunned him into silence at the bold inquiry. All the same, some invigorating force pulled away from his quiet and shocked demeanor, giving the youth a brazen zeal needed to respond with bravery. And his answer comprised a detailed but brief point.

He lowered his voice, peeping around to make sure Trish wasn't near. "I don't know, you tell me. The only time you kiss someone is when you want to main them with affection. And you shouldn't have kissed me because there was none to give."

The further he dwelled on it the more he bristled, growing uncomfortable that Dante did kiss him to shut him up instead of any other method. Surely, a headbutt would have been a refreshing step-up from that stint.

He continued on with a piece of info Dante could sink his teeth into, mindful to keep his voice low. "You have your priorities mixed up if you think your actions are law, and you can do as you please. Be careful now, might screw around and get your feelings hurt."

"We'll see, sweetheart." The hybrid spat the words out in mockery to Nero's cool tone, hanging up the phone as soon as he voiced out his request.

Nero... liked this new, vocal version of him—wherever it originated from. Or perchance he reverted to his old self after the blows he took to his ego. Whatever the case, his confidence bloomed in glory, able to stand up to the elder despite his blunt question. It hinted that Trish's advice rang true: play Dante's game or expect to be played. Funny how those words came to life, above all when Dante couldn't provide a better comeback to his bold answer.

If he went with this mindset to future interactions with Dante, then his feathers wouldn't ruffle so easily. A good notion to think of; he wondered how the femmes put up with the red one for so long, given his irritating ways.

After briefly asking Trish for directions to the police station, he scurried upstairs to his bedroom, closing it before looking in either suitcase for the keys to the four-wheeler. When he found them he quickly left and shut the room door, donning his work clothes and inventory to ride out there to deliver the goods. And the goods he will deliver via the all terrain vehicle.

A confidence-boosting high wrapped snugly around him since the chat with the elder, giving him a
suave bravado to ride up on the red hunter with a class all his own. Such a shame he didn't know how to maneuver one, but it appeared simple enough to operate, hence too much trouble shouldn't come about. And it didn't function like a motorcycle from the appearance alone; balance issues wouldn't pose a heavy problem.

Geared up and ready to go he ventured into the garage, lifting the handle up so he would have a clean break to drive.

Trish stood near the 2008 Yamaha Raptor 700, admiring its blue and black colors and detail; the ATV's 'hood' visually similar to a flashy mask worn by lethal mercenaries. Upon viewing the handles, there were a few buttons and switches to press, figuring out which button did what.

“This is all yours?” Trish asked as the chip bag emptied, the bowl of dip somewhere out of his view.

“Nope, but it is now,” Nero gloated with a gleam in his eye. “Oh yeah, do you know where that 'damned purple book' is, 'cause Dante needs it.”

“Over there at the bottom of the chest.”

“Well, someone got their groove back from being thrown off his mojo, Trish mused. It's good to see he knew how to adjust to Dante's attitude, but this self-boosting high could play karma on him; making him land on his ass before he knew what hit him.

To get one over on the hybrid felt gratifying, like finally beating the master after the student went through a series of trials and errors. Just that this particular master always had another trick up his sleeve, and the student might go through the teachings again.

Trish saw the feel-good nature the youth sported, and she knew his purpose aimed to throw this attitude against the hybrid, much to his chagrin. And despite the youth thinking that that will be enough to confront the red one, he would end up worse off than before.

So, being the good-hearted character she came to be, she took it upon herself to make sure Nero kept a sound mind deflated, slightly, of an enlarged ego when he went to meet up with the half-breed.

A rustic, cherry-wood chest rested in the garage's far corner, taking a moment to glance through the various tools of oddities before beginning his search. A time or two his devil bringer twitched, specific items in the box reacting to the magical properties within his limb, encasing the trunk in this eerie, bright blue light. He didn't contain the knowledge on whether Dante threw some stuff in here from the mansion, but certain objects called out to his arm.

Switching tactics, he moved junk about with his human hand, flipping and tossing things around until a purple binder crossed his line of vision. When he made a grab for it, it caught on something, like something underneath it pulled it down.

A slight crease marred his eyebrows, moving stuff to the side until the book showed itself. When he tugged a second time, it lifted from within the chest—accessorized with a decayed, human hand firmly attached to it. Nero held the thing above his head, mouth barely ajar and eyes wide open.

Four brown fingers settled on the front cover, skeletal digits corroded in strings of black dust and rusted decay. Ripped-off fingernails showcased rough-strewn bumps settling in its place. Behind the text rested a similar-looking thumb; its job seemingly to keep the book closed until deemed to
open. A dirtied, silver ring lied on the thumb, adorned with a bright red gem resting in the middle. An unknown feature as to how and who and what will open it, but letting Dante come here to retrieve this thing didn't seem like a bad idea. There were no spare areas on the ATV to carry the item, and his pockets didn't provide any space to—

“Oh shit,” Nero whispered in a hoarse tone, the skull fragment shooting to the front of his memory. He jogged to the washer, digging into his left coat pocket, then the other side.

In his right compartment he felt the object, pulling the piece out and inspecting it with scrutiny. The book “accidentally” dropped to the floor, Nero ignoring the creepy item after a flood of unexpected emotions rushed throughout his being.

He argued with himself of his forgetful nature with the whole episode back in that shanty town, thinking on how Dante's death ordained to impact him, and what his future might set out for him. His mind wouldn't be able to deal with the tragedy and heavy turmoil if it did happen.

Dante's aloofness probably played a part in Nero casting aside the fatal imagining. That ordeal's carefree treatment must've rubbed off on him, and his inattentive regard treated it as a 'this-happens-a-lot' incident.

But... it still affected him in a way he couldn't comprehend yet. He observed an extra extension, begrudgingly, of respect grow concerning the veteran's warrior capabilities. Dante is one tough son of a bitch, and it'll take more than a measly bullet to bring him down.

But the teenager wouldn't admit that out loud you know, pride and whatnot.

“Nero, you okay? The chest didn't eat you, did it?” Trish's voice rang out clear in the room.

He snapped out of his pondering at her voice, admiring the dried, black-edged, red-stained morsel before placing it back in his pocket, laying his jacket across the washer to dry. “Nope, I'm still here.” He glanced down at the creepy book, wondering if a mechanical arm lied around to touch the book while not touching it. “Just... I'm coming.”

The youngster grimaced at the thing, grabbing the top of the text with his thumb and forefinger, holding the object out in front of him, traveling into Trish's sight. “What am I going to do with that skull piece?” The thought slowly faded into the recesses of his mind, musing on keeping it a secret, and secretly keeping it for himself.

“Yup, that would be the one.” Trish said.

He stayed in the same position trancing back to the ATV, left hand awkwardly holding the hardcover, creeped out that a decayed ulna stuck out under the wrist. “What does this book do?”

“Calls out a heavy magical spell or demon to cut off a seal, plus create a few potions, if you're good at alchemy. A while back, we killed a sorcerer who used it to poison objects, then use those poisoned by it to do its bidding. We thought the book would be safer with us in the end.” Trish gazed upon his disgusted visage, the lightest hint of a smirk splaying on her face. Besides the priceless display, she pondered if she should explain to Nero about the insipid human responsible for this unnecessary mayhem.

She wasn't keen on withholding information, unless the event immensely piqued her interest, but she wondered that if by telling Nero, would it send him out to Fortuna in a frenzy? What if evidence floated around, and Nero trashed it in a fit of rage?
He reposed himself as a passionate fighter, and if there's any belief that his brunette treaded towards trouble, then he can get destructive to ensure Kyrie's safety. Hmm, perhaps she might call Dante to wage how much he knew, then she'd spill the beans.

"Why don't you take it to him?" he muttered, lips turned downwards in disgust.

"Dante could come here and get it himself."

"So, why—"

"But, he may need your help with something. And maybe by you going, you can see what he wanted to tell you earlier."

"I guess."

That puffed-up aura he waltzed into the garage with had a tell-tale dent, carrying a more focused intent the more he centered on the situation coming into fruition. Looks like she didn't have to re-direct his attention too much. Perchance the book dimmed his inflated persona some, might explain how creeped out he was by the 'hand' closing it.

“I'll be back.” Trish ran out the room to retrieve something (Nero deduced more food) and returned with a green drawstring bag. The youth wanted to show his gratitude with a hug, but decided against it; thinking how out of character that would seem, instead opting for a gracious 'thanks' as he took the bag. After nearly putting a hole through it from chucking the hardcover in there, he mounted the ATV, placing the knapsack on the handlebars... and stopped.

He didn't know what gave him the impression that it just turns on and rides, but its design viewed much more complex. To be honest, he always wanted to ride a motorcycle, to feel how riding something so sleek and dangerous would cater to his excitement.

The elder hunters made a show of it being fun, and he thought he could begin his training, by himself, then work up to the big leagues. Yet driving the all terrain vehicle shouldn't be that hard. He held the key and it required a simple task to start it up and ride.

She noticed the contemplation on his face, knowing his reality finally caught up to him, disengaging that tough guy attitude he showed. Which provided a good thing in great measure; he can listen to her instead of going on his own and crashing into the nearest light post.

“Hold the clutch on the left side and turn the key.”

Nero broke out of his ruminating to turn his attention to the woman, immediately taking in her crossed arms and penetrating gaze; that icy gaze. An ego wanted to tell her of his self-abilities; of his worth to seek challenges and complete them lacking the need of help.

Inasmuch, he'd seen that expression displayed on the two women before when Dante said too much or did nothing at all. It conveyed either their displeasure, or an obvious invitation to shut up and listen to them.

If there maintained one thing Nero learned from being here, it garnered the notion that the women reigned supreme when their presence graced this house. He knew better than to interrupt her flow.

Doing as instructed he grasped the clutch and turned the key, seeing an orange light flash on. Trish observed on too, nodding once to herself—she gave it a thorough inspection while he cleaned his weapons. And she kept her surprise hidden when he didn't do a basic check-up of the ATV; surveying if the bike had the correct fluids and gas to go prior to his journey.
Honestly, where would these males be without a woman's touch every now and... actually—forget about it. She didn't want to contemplate on that.

“See that little lever by your left foot?”

“Yeah.”

“Those are your gears to make you speed up or slow down. One, neutral, two, three, four and five. If you want to go faster, hold the clutch and tap the lever up, and for slower speeds click the lever down, you got that?”

“One, neutral, two through five. Hold-press up-go faster. Hold-press down-go slower.” He maintained his ability to learn quickly from an intellectual perspective, and saved his teachings in his memory for future reference. Well, the “intellect” he received from Fortuna constantly played on repeat there, but in this open society there lied so much to intake and view and judge, so he had to adjust his mind to study appropriately.

“Good. Kick the lifter down once to be in the first gear.” He complied accordingly. “The right handle holds the brake to the front wheels and this lever on the side—” Trish tapped her foot on the right side to a similar-looking lever “—are the brakes for the back tires.”

“Got it.”

She minded herself to be careful about the ever-present divinity of male individuality, making her answers succinct and to the point. Yet she took notice of how the teenager didn't seem to rush her or sensed any arrogant-like gestures coming from him. He proved himself an able-bodied individual, ergo he couldn't have too much trouble with it.

“Hold the brake down and turn on the switch on the left.”

When the bike roared to life Nero flinched, surprised at how loud it sounded in the closed vicinity. After the surprise, a grin threatened to reveal his ecstatic state, shaking the bangs in front of his eyes to conceal how giddy this gizmo made him.

Staring into the night revealed a midnight blue landscape missing the illuminated incandescence; light gray clouds obscured the moon from shining. A difficult challenge shouldn't arise to maneuver around in the dark hours; most residents in this city lived miles away from this shanty place.

All though, it made him wonder about the residential district the police station resided at. Wouldn't he garner suspicion on this vehicle while everyone else drove cars and trucks, even more so in populated areas?

Wary in venturing out now, he wondered if he'll draw more suspicion with his arm sling and sword.

Then again it was dark, wasn’t like he had to do much, judging by what Dante said. But when Dante—ugh, he needed to get used to expecting the unexpected with him.

“A little piece of advice next time-” Trish came up and turned the headlights on the ATV, moving closer to the door leading back into the main office area. “it might be beneficial to check if the bike has all the oils and gas it needs before trotting off; might save you from running into trouble.”

Ah... oh, well—oops.
With no time to ponder on this, she told him about the gas lever, to use that with the clutch to advance. With that, she disappeared into the house, leaving Nero on his lonesome to put everything together that she taught him.

Going over all she said, including instructions on how to get there, he made his move; still holding on the brake giving the vehicle a roar. The engine purred at his touch, sending chills shivering through his body; anticipating on the joy ride about to begin.

Slowly, he released the front brake, feeling himself roll just an inch, releasing any tension in the bike. Pulling the clutch all the way in, he lightly pressed the fuel, letting off of each lifter as the ATV gradually progressed forward. About midway out into the street Trish came back out, yelling to him of her warning about the elder from earlier.

“Make sure Dante doesn't give you the kiss of death when you meet up with him.”

“Huh... what?”

Nero involuntarily pressed the gas a bit harder than he meant to, shooting off into the street at a high velocity of speed, shaking the steering erratically to adjust to this newfound acceleration. Clamoring to remember which lever went for which function, his right foot held down the side brake; the back tires stopped, almost catapulting him from his seat. His fingers wove around the front brake, coming to a full stop nearly a block away from the house.

He chanced a glance backwards, seeing the garage door now closed from his unexpected, rapid departure. In his mind, he heeded Trish's former warning about not getting smacked in the face, but is this 'kiss of death' thing something to worry about? And what did this pucker entail? Did it stand as an ego-crusher or some other metaphor, because lips physically embracing would not come about again.

Vaguely recalling her instructions he continued on his journey, mind switching back and forth between functioning the ATV and her words.

Could it be that bad of an event happening if the topic elaborated further on the excuse the kiss occurred? They were two adults with mental capacities, (one stronger than the other) able to rationalize their surroundings' troubling actions, it didn't permit to escalate to a malevolent setting between them, right?

Nero breathed in the calm night air, increasing his speed on the way to play out the next scene in his life, absently wishing he contained the ability to control how the movie played out. It compelled to make him feel better if he prevented outside incidents from rearranging his production.

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Chapter End Notes

Yeah, for some reason, I just feel like reading a story with Dante's dark side just...being evil and bitter to people. And no, not in the sense of Vergil, but in the sense that he's a sadistic, disturbed asshole 0_0 And I did!! It's called 'Darkened Whispers' if you want to check it out.
Lana Del Rey...bitch, you are AWESOME!

Uh...yeah :D
The youth pulled up to a dull, beige-colored building, parking besides the steps. He didn't recall Trish telling him how to turn it off, but his left foot pressed the lever down into neutral, letting go of the gas and holding the front brake. The bike idled down from its rumbling engine, cutting off to leave him in the silent night.

He pocketed the key and switched off the lights, taking in the surroundings and how quiet the place seemed—for a police station. Shouldn't there be people coming out in days old clothes from their arrests? Shouldn't there be citizens walking inside in handcuffs? Weren't patrol cars supposed to be outside with overweight cops eating donuts? If anything it looked like a ghost town, reminiscent to that area where he ate that questionable burger.

On his way over here a few cars passed him by, some even slowed down to stare in disbelief at his choice of transportation.

The voyage on the speeding contraption thrilled him. The harsh breeze whipping across his face stung at first but he didn't care. He enjoyed himself too much on this exhilarating object to concern himself of a moot point.

As the bike roared and picked up speed, pressing the correct switches and levers, Nero began to savor... freedom. Like he hadn't a caution or worry in the world, and this ride he took on his own accord; to just enjoy an evening seeing the sights of the town. Only when he neared his destination did the reality of the situation crash down on him, like a cold wind accompanying already freezing temperatures; it made him wish he wasn't out here.

This part of the district would probably be the end of the metropolis city; the area in which one could tell it wasn't nurtured by taxes to improve its looks.

On the opposite side of the station lied a large park, visible by a few sparse streetlights highlighting a tennis court several yards away. From what he saw, varied pieces of white objects littered the grass, showing that nobody cared about keeping the place clean or delinquents lacked in crimes committed to repay debts.

Multiple mom and pop stores surrounded the section, all of them closed at the moment, leaving the teen without a single soul to look at. And anyone with a soul ought not to be out here during this time of night.

Speaking of lost souls, where in the world is the veteran? He derived that the man would at least meet him outside the place. Going inside didn't seem like a good idea, mainly with the weapons he carried.

Alert eyes surveyed his surroundings seeing no police cars in sight, so were they out on duty? Or perchance a few remained in there with the chieftain and he currently discussed the problems occurring.

Nero grabbed his equipment and the bag in slight disgust, carrying it on his left side climbing up the dark gray steps, opening the brown doors... to near darkness. He stopped in his tracks, looking into the nigh pitch-black room with cautious grace. As he walked further inside he noted a window
to his right, covered in plexiglass with a speaker-like device used to communicate between the
teller and the question-asker.

A fluorescent light flickered on and off in the enclosed space, papers strewn about as if someone
gathered the sheets in a pile then chucked them in the air. Far away from the threshold he saw a
row of green chairs resting adjacent to the wall, old magazines sitting on two of the seats and a clip
board on top of another. Burgundy carpet held scattered debris, reminding him of plaster that fell
from the ceiling. Dare he look up and confirm the sensation roiling in his gut that an enemy waited
there, or should he find Dante and leave when able to?

Deciding on the latter he went through the double doorway, acquainting his sight with another
batch of shaded light. The only brightness greeting him came from the windows, allowing shadows
to create crooked, cracked lines on the wall. It appeared he walked into a larger room with desks,
counters and chairs taking up the room's expanse. To the side of him was a door and one more lied
directly ahead.

He stilled his movements, listening for any detected sounds. The wind picked up in velocity
outside, the resonating air slapping across trees created delicate, dying whispers as it touched the
windows. He started on trying the entryway to the left, the whispering winds might have been
mistaken for an actual voice.

A soft thump stopped his feet from advancing to look at the opposite door, his hand switching the
bag to his devil bringer in case Blue Rose had to come out. But what did he have to worry about
(besides everything)?

By the fourth window branches with thick leaves rubbed along the pane, possibly creating that
noise; alarming him with false motives to investigate. Nero proceeded with the door on the left
when the same clatter passed by his hearing again, only louder.

"My mind's playing tricks on me," Nero envisioned back to his recent dream in bitter
remembrance, reliving all the strange noises he imagined he heard, only to find that, even in the
throses of slumber, that demon lurked beyond his reach. To say this was a case of déjà vu felt like
an understatement; the difference being he was wide awake at the moment.

The shadowy atmosphere made it harder to see monsters slithering in the veiled light, yet his devil
bringer will tell him of anything he approached; a malfunction wouldn't commence as it loves to do
in his sleep. Thinking to the room prior to this made him wonder if a Fault settled on the ceiling
akin to his snooze. Might be the reason the plaster is on the floor, but his demonic arm signaled no
alerts.

Carefully he headed straight, noggin rotating between the work area and outside, senses on aware
in the event of an attack. He always assumed that police stations stayed open 24/7, people of the
law working different shifts to respond to the demands of criminal activities. Apparently the
'protect and serve' motto applied to the city before nine at night.

His scaly arm lightly pulsed advancing to the door, dying off to a subtle hum when his hand
enclosed around the knob. The only time it pulsed on a low vibration was when Dante neared
him. Okay then, the elder must be behind this door—waiting to play a trick on him in his old
fashion of ways?

"Yeah right, you wish."

He turned the handle until it unlatched from its padding, kicking it open as a gush of metallic-
smelling zest assaulted his nostrils. Recovering from the sudden action he saw a long hallway
stretched before him, another flickering fluorescent cracking in and out of life.

Jerky fingers brought forth his double revolver, liquid electric shots of adrenaline coursing through his body at the scene on the floor. Smearred and splattered blood coated two torn bodies of law enforcement employees. The decaying stench grew into its beginning stages, the sickly sweet smell increasing in volume the nearer he walked towards the dead.

A bloody fingerprint plastered itself on the beige wall, several of them leading to the end of the hall. Both male officers lied face down, pools of crimson surrounding their torsos with weapons missing from their arsenal. Whatever ripped these people apart didn't give them a chance to retaliate.

"What the hell happened here?" His words were barely above a whisper, a tingling sensation churning in his stomach because this 'convert' situation took a turn towards the worse. "Why didn't you say something over the phone, old man?"

Further down the corridor streaked a path of blood around the corner to the right, making him think the culprit dragged his opponents to this spot to off them. Nero half-jogged to the edge of the wall, taking a sharp look at the trail to see it disappear beneath a door at the end. He inhaled a deep breath to calm his nerves, threatening to let the fear settle in the pit of his belly and expand.

It wasn't his loneliness that bothered him, it was the enemy that didn't seem to have a particular care in what it did to its foes. His solitary triasping through Fortuna Castle didn't give him much caution since he's been there plenty of times, but in this place with an unknown foe left him a bit uneasy.

He shifted off the wall to travel in the route of the sanguine substance, one foot stepping in front of the other to listen for any noises. This hallway held no lights, enveloping him in darkness the further he traveled. At the exact time his scaly appendage pulsed he heard a muffled voice in the back of a green doorway, the same door the streaking apple-hued liquid came from. His hand reached for the knob, intending on using the same tactic from earlier. The devil bringer brightened, illuminating beneath the surface of his arm brace.

His body whirled around, believing he recognized footsteps behind him, immediately aiming Blue Rose in that direction. The only rattle ticking in his ear resounded the fluorescence flickering on and off. However, at the opposite end of the corridor were two sets of stairs, one leading upstairs while the bottom led to the depths below.

Brown boots softly stepped forward, noticing how the strength of his arm's signal lost its power, dimming under the arm brace. Like he told himself earlier, the wind created unique noises to doubt what he actually heard. Might certify his reasoning if windows inhabited this walkway, nevertheless.

Deciding to go with the sensation in his limb he retreated two steps, eyes surveying the path for any suspicious deed when he turned around to face the green door... and found another void of complete darkness where somebody opened the previously closed door. It stared back at him as if threatening to swallow him whole. A spike in energy ran through his body, a quelling of dread rising deep within his nature that some thing fancied playing mind games with him.

The mind games continued when two fingers tapped his shoulder, rotating to see what opponent, or lack of, preyed on him for the worse. His devil bringer remained on a constant hum, either signaling that Dante drew near or an enemy cautiously approached him. He pressed towards the right wall, head pivoting from the dark room to the foyer; inching further down the hall away from the opaque niche.
"Someone forgot to pay the light bill around here," he muttered aloud, using his own joke to keep a leveled head. The fiend obviously wanted to test him; to gauge what course of action he might proceed with prior to attacking. Yeah, that must've been the rationale of somebody tapping him; the freak needed to have him occupied before it struck.

Now that the youth kept his eyes open to the sides of him, the attacker had no choice but to confront him. Yet he... could not contain the notion that the crossbreed somehow played hide-and-seek.

He continued sliding down the hall, hearing a peculiar clatter catching his attention in the distance. Short breaths sounding like a drawn-out hiccup touched his ears, followed by a series of popping thuds, similar to cracking knuckles or toes. Squelching echoes of a wet nature removed his focus from watching the black entrance, intrigued and frightened to this new noise.

Did the hybrid kill something and it struggled to crawl? Did it harken on a ghoul coming to approach him soon or even the enigma that killed those two men?

His feet traveled of their own accord towards the racket, left arm itching to withdraw his blade, eager for a fight to ensue.

So focused on the unknown host he failed to register a hand crossing his mouth; the other slipping a finger under Blue Rose's trigger, preventing Nero from firing it off. The palm firmly grasped his chin, the remaining fingers covering over his mouth, his physique dragging backwards into the dark room.

Right before the door closed a giant shadow came into his view from the top step, abruptly blocked by the body leading him away. Muscles tightened to struggle next to his attacker, dragging his feet hard into the floor to stop his movements. Lips twitched on their own accord, indignant cries smothered by the obscured hand. His devil bringer drew inwards to strike his captor, sensing the grip on his jaw tighten.

In the lightless room he felt his frame whirl around as the entrance slammed behind him, his back leaning against a form thriving stronger than his own. Confusion settled on his features, torn between defending his person and letting someone, hopefully, save him; even though he didn't need it.

A familiarity rose to the surface, recognizing a certain aura, nostrils inhaling a thick coppery smell coated by a hint of strawberries. Like it—hey, wait a minute.

Nero ceased his struggling, wondering why it took so long for him to recognize that Dante dragged him out of the passageway; his damn arm told him he was around somewhere.

"Meh-"

"Keep quiet or I'm throwing you out." Dante's chilled tone whispered harshly in his ear, making him blink twice at how cold, or cautious, he gritted out his demand. Now affirmed that he met up with the veteran he could focus on more important matters; like getting the book away from him, removing Dante's hand from his mouth, and removing himself off of Dante.

Deciding to go with option number three first he shifted forward, the red one keeping his grip on him and the gun. When Nero added more strength to disconnect from him Dante tightened his clutch, pressing harder to hold his trap closed and bringing their hands, oddly wrapped around the revolver, to rest on the youth's chest.
Since he knew to silence himself he didn't need a reminder again, about ready to elbow him in the gut when the elder murmured another command, voice laced with becoming impatience.

"Stop fucking moving," Dante rasped the venomous words, the teen slightly shrinking in on himself.

"Okay, I get it!" Nero voiced the internal words in befuddlement, thinking the hybrid wanted to take his anger out on him from their earlier conversation. If so, then Dante didn't have the privilege to be mad at him for telling him his sentiments. He can certainly be angry at the situation, but not at him.

It's his problem to deal with because he should have analyzed his actions and consequences beforehand. Just like now, instead of planting a kiss on him the half-breed held his mouth closed with his fist. Why didn't he do that when those officers came?

Red Queen stopped Nero's backside from fully pressing into the dope's front, trying to lean his hips away so the placement could be less unpleasant. Last time he checked, clothes didn't feel that 'thin' or conveyed the sensation of not existing there. Maybe his mind ran with the chieftain's tank top being flimsy because of the material. It's not like Dante walked around here shirtless, right?

His devil powers brought forth his night vision with the blinds shadowing the moon's radiance. A grand, red oak wooden desk lay littered with papers strewn about, seeing a private office they stood in. Situated in front of the desk were two padded mahogany chairs sitting side by side, and a large brown leather chair sat behind the work space. To his immediate right rested a water cooler, halfway gone as little plastic cups spread out lazily on the gray carpet.

Plaques and awards glimmered on a matching wall unit, undeterred in its display to yield to anyone to see how hard this person worked in life. Achievements in bold frames adorned the white wall behind the desk, bragging rights further shown to eyes probably lacking in the 'accomplishments' department. Just shy of the furniture showed another door, presumably leading to an extra room or a bathroom beyond it.

That same hiccup-inhaling echo met his hearing again, as if the freak stood outside their door. Light scratching increased in volume, pondering where its enemies are or to find its way in here.

Dante started wrangling the gun from his grip, intentions becoming clearer to borrow his weapon to kill or defend in opposition to the trespassers.

As far as Nero discerned, the hybrid's weapons were missing in action. A comforting gesture, knowing the chieftain didn't mind his hardware for combat, but... he carried his own equipment along so he could fight. If the idiot didn't have or forgot his own instruments of destruction, then too bad. He brought his shit so he can go to work doing the stuff he's good at; to do so, he needed to utilize all his fundamental fixtures, not share them.

The hand originally holding his mouth closed wrapped over his waist, raising worry in his nature when his backside pressed into Dante and raised up off the floor. He almost tumbled out a protesting shout, but he snapped his jaw shut. Dante quickly rushed them through the other door in the office, Nero hoisted like a child ready to fall out of an adult's arm.

A light-less, pissed out bathroom they resided in, the red hunter twirling around to close the door, setting him on the ground, and detaching him from Blue Rose all at once.

The teenager took a moment to regain his bearings, gearing up to ask precisely what the hell went on when the elder snatched the bag from his hold, yanking the book out with disinterest, gripping
the decomposed wrist.

"What are-"

"Be quiet." The hold on the decayed wrist cracked with noises from the pressure with which Dante applied, the singular ulna pushing out until the bone dropped to the floor. He took the ring off the thumb, seeing which one would fit on his finger until he placed it on his pinkie. He reached down and picked up the bone, setting it in the sink as the cursed book opened, the elder seemingly forgetting that another visitor accompanied him in the bathroom.

And he kind of wanted Dante to acknowledge his existence; it'll take his sights aside of the veteran's lack of attire. Correcting his eyesight to the dark again in the cramped rectangle, he saw the black tank top disappeared from his torso, revealing that muscular backside adorned with a few back scars. Lightly shredded, brown and red-stained gray sweatpants hung loose on sculpted hips, eyes trailing to the spine disappearing into the hem of the pants, curving out to a round posterior asking to be patted.

Immediately the picture shook out of his mind, dumping it into his mental trash can of useless junk. He guessed the hybrid went through a lot of physicalities and the cotton-made material didn't uphold its durability. Still, he didn't find spare clothes around here? And speaking more on clothes, where exactly are the men and women in uniform? They can't all be dead.

The stench of piss nearly singed his snout, worsened by the windowless room to air out the smell. Up above him lied a ventilation system, cracks in the ceiling giving way to old age or poor construction handling. The white tiled floor made sticky scratches under his boots, shifting from foot to foot to refrain the usage of his feet staying glued to the floor's surface.

Two switches sat next to the door, Nero flipping the left switch on to reveal a brightened cubicle, snapping his eyes shut to mend to the piercing brightness. When he opened his eyelids again, he found Dante's reflection glaring back at him in the mirror, appearing none too pleased with him… turning on the light?

What in the hell made him so moody? Not an hour ago he seemed chipper in talking to him and now he wore this cold, stern look with force. Did he take offense to being told off on the phone? Well, he did call him 'sweetheart' in a bitter-sounding temperament, but he conveyed it as a jesting tease. Unlikely the red one grew upset over the teen's discomfort with the kiss, but that frigid regard spoke of ill-will gestures—to what the youth didn't know.

"Play his game or be played," Trish's words rang through his conscious as a cautionary reminder, Nero nodding once internally to keep himself in check.

Dante returned to the book, face unreadable as the youngster looked on from behind.

"How-"

"Please shut up." His voice stood above a whisper, demanding his words take discretion to whom ever uttered them aloud: namely Nero.

The partial-hybrid's eyes narrowed at the request, not too fond of the attitude which Dante took with him.

"Why?" Nero asked in a regular tone, noticing the pause in his book reading, lips pressing to form a line.

The chief chuckled with dark mirth. "I'm not asking you again."
"Can you give me a reason to stay quiet?" He kept in mind whether he should continue asking questions oblivious to Dante's mood or keep quiet. "Obviously something's happened here, and whatever did is making your panties twist in a bunch—"

His back pressed towards the bathroom entry, Dante leaning his forearms on the door as he missed coming into contact with Nero's front. He tilted all his weight on his left hip, breathing in deeply before... smiling.

And it wasn't a happy smile or a joyous look that masked irritation. It reminded the youth of one of those freaky-looking clowns, concealing a hidden rage to consume those joyful stereotypes used to define them.

And the youngster resided disturbed by it.

Ceruleans shot downwards, doing a double take at the lack of shoes and socks missing from the veteran's feet. "I can only imagine how filthy those things are," he mused inwardly.

His peepers traveled upwards to his face, taking a small detour to fixate on the muscular pronounced V-shape connecting his chiseled torso, toned hips, and that... nether region many had the chance to sample.

To keep from staring at the rest of him he looked at the wall behind the chieftain, hands clenching and unclenching to rid of the nervousness ready to travel up to his cheeks. Through the corner of his eye he froze in unease, viewing Dante's face inching closer to his, that same creeped-out face staying rooted in his spot.

"Mission accomplished," he whispered, holding doubt if he should stay still or shove the elder away; his features widened in fear. Those iceberg blues captivated his own in a hypnotizing gaze, making him want to shake his bangs into his eyes to lose his focus beyond him.

"Play his game or be played." The helpful hint echoed in his mind again, soon vanishing into a tone much more masculine and distorted.

Play with him, play with him now.

Fucking chip tits.

At present, the conscious voice in his head braved the only 'friend' he could cling to after his inner nightmare awakened, surely focusing on some plan to make him look like a complete idiot.

"Nero, Nero, Nero, how you love to bite off more than you can chew."

The youth kept his lips sealed, trying to read Dante and his split personality.

"You see, if you fought those 'things' back home, you'd notice that... they're not a fan of fire, correct? I'm assuming you did, right?"

Nero nodded in silence, eyes slightly bugged out from how bothered Dante made him.

"Well, I had that same deduction, and I have a weapon with me that held the ability to burn shit, so I thought I was good to go." He waved his right hand around to emphasize his points. "But..." he fingered the hem of the white shirt he wore, pulling on it twice before placing his fingertips gently on his hips.

Nero, seeing the opening to depart, quickly rebelled the action, concerned he might get nipped or
something stupid like that. "… fire originating from a magical perspective makes them repel the attack, but regular fire—that does them in, doesn't it lil' Nero?"

Either Dante lost his marbles and he was feeling the effects, or waiting here made him do so.

"Now, I'm all about challenges and whatnot, given if there's a large volume of enemies, but when the same assholes keep popping up with no clear tactic of killing them quick when it calls for it, I gets a little..."

"Crazed, demented, masochistic, violent, angry... weird?" Nero mouthed the words a mile a minute in his mind, anticipating on which word he would choose.

"… tired."

Huh?

"And when I'm tired, I tend to get a little snippy or I end up doing shit out of spite, or so I'm told."

Well... when he put it in those terms it made sense; right now, he existed as one disturbed individual.

"Add that to these converts wearing skins and running around posing as the police, and the original line-up is soon to be kidnapped or dead—"

"Okay." Nero said in a low voice, realizing the hybrid's annoyance wasn't directed towards him, again, but rather at the situation he uncovered more of. Whew, at least he dodged a second bullet; the focus of the hybrid's emotions can steer to a clearer resolve.

"—and this infinite Aventurine-gem shit conjuring up the alpha version of that big bitch of a leech—"

"Dante, all right." What did he mean by the 'alpha' version? That humanoid, leech-like thingamabob he destroyed at the office wasn't even the main version? Was this variant bigger or did it act as a leader to its subordinates? And this jewel he talked about; he recalled seeing the stone (in a pickle jar no less) back in the fridge.

"—making me run around here trying to keep them out of the main office—"

"I get it, enough already."

"—because the source to their livelihood is situated under the desk."

"Dammit, Dante!"

"And that's why... " Dante re-positioned his forearm against the wall, trapping the fledgling between his arms once more, “… I need to hurry and find the dandy little 'DIY' kit to get rid of it in silence."

If he recoiled further into the door, he imagined he'll break off its hinges. The teen had a mind to push the veteran away from him; the bathroom was small and this enclosed area made him a bit territorial of his personal bubble.

Couldn't he have said what he wanted to say while reading the book?

And by reason of confusion, why in the hell did the elder read in the dark?
Determining enough time passed for a lackluster mission briefing, he started to nod in understanding when his eye drew to a particular spot on the right side of the chief's neck, a brown patch surrounding a blue oval-shaped bruise. The stain on his skin situated more towards the rear, making Nero tilt his noggin to see it more; the veteran redirecting cerulean orbs back into his ice-colored hues.

"While I fought those things one of them bit me, damn near ripped my head off my shoulders, like this..."

Nero's eyes widened, muscles too slow to move into a defensive stance to protect himself from Dante's apparent demonstration.

Razor sharp teeth punctured into the base of his throat, blood pooling down his front to blot his white t-shirt. His devil bringer flashed a bright turquoise; the right side of his body stunned into temporary, dazed agony. Human fingers twitched, attempting to come out of his shocked stupor to input some life into him; to knock some damn sense into Dante.

Some decrepit notion must've clogged his mental capabilities to do something that stupid. What benefit did this asshole think he called for from biting him, other than a nice blow to the balls?

A natural yelp tore through his lungs, soon hearing the entrance outside crash open, the supposed enemy belonging to the shadow appearing on the stairs breaking through. The brute bee-lined to the bathroom door, sniffing and rubbing along it to sense exactly where its prey stood. He guessed the opponent towered in the unnatural realm of heights, judging how the racket of its actions seemed to tower above them.

"Out of spite just about fits it," he gritted out. The scaly arm drew into a tight fist, driving forward to connect with that sturdy jaw line.

Dante's face whirled to one side, never removing his forearms off the wall or his stance away from the youth. His teeth didn't detach from beneath the piercing of his flesh either, dragging those sharp daggers across his skin until he let go.

Suffice to say the partial-demon could not explain the reasoning behind this act, thinking the situation's grim reality let the hybrid behave this way. Dante also said he barely outlasted a decapitation, so maybe his ruminate skills were all over the place; emotions helplessly twisting along in the mix.

For a moment, he anticipated that Dante would retaliate, but he stayed the position where he punched him. Jeez, he was bathing in a pile of weirdness right now.

"AAAAANNGGGGGGH," the high-pitched squeal reverberated through the entrance before it barged into it, nails and hinges pinging to the floor beside his feet. The second bump made the door open, forcing Nero's forehead to smash into the crook of the elder's neck. When Nero pulled away from the contact the door once again banged into his back, pushing him into Dante's mold.

His teeth gnashed; the malformed identity riling him up prior to him kicking its ass and the dope not even moving in distinction to blocking him. A final shove to the doorway and the youth flew into him again; the wooden rectangle removed from the frame, leaning into him, keeping him pressed into the half-human as the beast advanced.

Gray-taloned fingers wrapped around the side of the door, intending on moving it aside to reach its prey trapped inside the small arena. The enemy never saw what its meal looked like, a strong leg kicked the door away from him, sending it sprawling onto the floor in the office.
Pushing off the hybrid he turned to confront the savage, ready to engulf it in Red Queen's flames, deciding to direct his distress onto the monster. A body not of this world rose to stand, breathing and snorting as it stared down upon its foes. Nero's eyes trained on the predator, noticing the differences from his fights earlier at the office.

Once the humanoid stood up to its full eight feet of height, it unexpectedly lunged at him. The blue hunter gasped in surprise as he cartwheeled to safety, just shy of colliding with the desk. The beast swung at him, arm lengthening to have a better range to grab him.

The youth needed to keep a mind about his environment, realizing that running into the water cooler or bumping into the furniture can enable the grotesque mongrel to have him in its clutches.

The wind outside picked up in speed, pitching like a pack of wolves piercing the night with their howls. The peculiar pitch the monster heaved out disrupted the flow the breeze blew around the office, heightening the situation to a heavy resolve. Scarce light poured into the room from the distant corridor, shading the area in this eerie ambiance, making the partial-hybrid rely on his senses more to see it through.

Speaking thus on shadows, why did Dante stay out of sight again? Recalling his partner's disturbed mental state, he pondered the affairs leading him to act delusional. He stated he grew restless when he combated the same unrelenting enemy over and over again, but did he mean the 'sleepy' kind of tired or the 'demented' type?

And what drove him to think he'll shut up since the dope said to do so? Cornering him like a guilty suspect and coercing him to submit to his request probably wasn't going to silence him either.

The adversary threw another lunge, walking in this zig-zag motion, maintaining the difficulty to keep a proper aim on it. He jumped on top of the desk, withdrawing Red Queen to prepare to defeat the menace. It advanced to make a grab for his ankles, Nero scooting to the edge to avoid the swipe from its arm. Standing at this height gave him the urge to shoot the thing in its head, reaching out to his thigh holster to fire—

"AAAAANNGGG-EEEE," the fiend shrieked in agony, recoiling from the flames. The enemy pivoted its arms around, Nero dancing to the side to evade and counterattack when the opportunity opened.

Fighting in the darkness surrounded by cramped capacities gave him a determined intent to contend as he pleased; it energized him to explore new tactics he deemed worthy of excitement. His primary senses sharpened, allowing him to indulge himself to elaborately defeat his opponent.

No longer did he have to conquer a certain foe because he was told to, nor did he have to wait on anyone to co-partner with him. This method of combat suited him fine, he preferred this over partnering. Honestly, lazy ass probably blamed him for lolly-gagging on jobs when it was the
elder who killed off time.

Nero retreated two steps, revving Red Queen's handle since the rival's weakness showed itself to be a severe detriment to its health. When the rev limiter couldn't spike up any more fuel onto the sword he released it, shooting forward with lightning agility to attack.

At the last moment he pivoted on the left foot, blade soon following in the same fluid movement. The first swipe connected at the giant's torso, engulfing the flesh in molten fire corroding the brute's stamina. Two more sharp hits struck with biting flames across its abdomen, the brute screeching and falling to the ground as it writhed in injury, arms flailing in distress, desperate to cling to life.

As the thrust of the swings disappeared, he awkwardly leaned on the wall unit, the drive's force pulling him to land uncomfortably next to the wooden object. The chairs were nothing more than burnt and scattered splinters.

The pitch of glass cracking stole his attention, eyes adjusting in the darkness to view iridescent silver hair poking from underneath the desk. More snapping met his ears, wanting to see what the device he fiddled with looked like. Did that creepy hand have something to do with it, or did Dante find whatever hexed item to rid of the beaker under the desk? Was it even glass to begin with?

Instead of blurring out the questions forming in his head he proceeded to kill his pestering opponent, intent on moving on its side to get up again. Nero kicked it to its back, the foe suddenly grabbing his left leg with its left arm, piercing its claws into his lower thigh. After his initial grunt of affliction the fiend pulled his limb down, right knee resting on the floor as blood seeped into his jeans. With little effort Nero shouldered the brace off, quickly tugging the cloth to unravel his devil bringer.

The humanoid swiped at the youth's head but he caught the appendage with his right arm, molars gritted and grinding as the acute discomfort burned in intensity. Nero passed the gangly limb to his human hand, gripping it by the thick wrist, as he positioned himself to pummel it into the afterlife.

Yet the dim light with which he could barely see permitted the beast's face to take on this haunting silhouette, calling to mind of a terrifying ghost one glances upon, standing idly behind them in the mirror. Those raven-colored spheres looked at him with unblinking conviction, cold shivers spiking up and down his back after an unnerving perception gripped him.

It almost seemed like he geared to murder a human.

He needed to remind himself that it wasn't though. In spite of having the foundation of a human body, forgetful of the abnormal height, it still had the characteristics of a demon; with the six-inch nails, enlarged eyes and razor sharp teeth. An ashen-gray skin tone, incoherent speech, and its voracious need to kill further belied its nature; humans didn't indulge in these modifications... at least not on the days he strolled through town.

Steeling his nerves from letting wet tracks roll down his cheeks from the clenching torment in his thigh he balled his blue fist, punching the humanoid in between the juncture of its mouth and eye; viewing the antagonist's angered brow ridge twitching as it never blinked from the assault.

Long legs shifted to withhold him, the mongrel gearing to flip Nero over to overpower its defiant meal. The young hunter connected a final punch to its face, clawed fingertips wrapping around the gem on its sternum and pulled. Hard.

In his palm rested the bane of his stomach's existence, throbbing strongly in his scaly branch,
sitting undeterred from a torn-out rib cage. The heart lay smothered in dark liquid, now surrounded by this decayed odor threatening to scorch his sense of smell completely. Its owner flailed its arm in distress, blood gushing out of the torn hole.

The teen backed off and away from the screeching fiend, careful to lean his weight on his right leg. A shuddered breath filled the room before it lay motionless, the youth experiencing a sudden neutrality rise up towards the situation.

He stopped a monstrosity from leaving this area to terrorize people sure, yet the slight semblance of pity tugged briefly on his nerves. This entity he combated was a human once; a living, breathing, thinking human—who may or may not have been influenced to join this 'converting' fad.

Usually a triumphant aura washed over him after he crushed an enemy, but this 'limp' victory didn't give him that electric winning ambiance nor did it sullen his mood. Such a situation left him... neutral.

Focusing on the heart, he saw it went through a minor change. The jewel was attached to a thick vein about four inches long, connecting to the vascular organ to supply its donor. Almost a direct comparison to the gem acting as a plug and the heart as an outlet. Leaning on the desk he placed Red Queen between his legs, slanting on her handle as he held the bloody muscle in his hands.

Wet squelches stole his attention, the dead humanoid convulsing in a loose manner as it transferred to an original state—and then some. The height of the ogre diminished to somewhere under six feet, muscles decreasing out of their enlarged musculature to shrink to a figure of an anorexic man. His feet and hands retained the irregular large size, claws never lessening from their length. Those raven-opaque holes in its head didn't fill up with eyeballs, setting on staying as it did seconds ago.

"Ugh, buddy. Did you eat rotten eggs or something?" Whatever chemicals it released to transform into this state offended his olfactory senses to the highest level, reaching behind the blinds to throw the window open.

The young hunter mildly wondered what the differences embraced between the two versions. Those with the hook and Venus fly-trap hands disintegrated when fire engulfed them, however he didn't pull out the vital organ to see. Furthermore, why did this one seem like a stretched-out human, belly slightly protruding in the front of it? What did it contain in its DNA to look vaguely 'normal'? Did its features contribute to the magical gem that Dante said was here?

Probably might explain its different physical appearance and the aggressive stances it used in relation to what the chieftain explained about the other type. But as long as his blade oozed out gas to fry the sons of bitches, these things... didn't pose too much of a threat.

With the thigh injury closing he diverted his attention to the hybrid behind the desk, who, rather strangely, moved the leather chair and sat cross-legged on the floor. That purple book rested open on a particular page, sketches of an illustrated drawing of a wolf-like creature taking control of the halfling's focus.

One muscular elbow nested on his thigh as the hand connected to the elbow cradled his chin. The youth set the heart down on the desk, blinking twice and breathing in deeply because his vision strained to see properly; the light in the bathroom long since turned off to envelop the office in scarce illumination. He pushed to—why is this moron reading in the dark?

"What are you-"

"Shut it."
Half of Nero's body took warning while his other side stood in defiance, battling with probing questions as to Dante's irksome behavior. And even more puzzling came the brute's blatant ignorance to the other party in the same room; why did it only attack him?

Slowly the youth arose from his seat, lightly limping on his left leg, placing the red sword on his back. He took slow, deliberate steps until he stopped directly to Dante's side, crossing his arms in expectance for Dante to stop his reading and look at him. When his presence went unnoticed he decided to lean over him, eyes looking at the illustration in depth.

Upon further inspection he saw it wasn't a picture of a wolf, but an assembly of wolves made out of... wind. Or at least that's what it suggested, if the squiggly-drawn cloud ending their forms gave insight.

In front of the group stood a single hound carrying a little necklace around its neck, maybe it ventured as a fancy collar? Above the pack lied a large green boulder, blocking a circle, the blue hunter presumed as the moon, situated behind it. By the canines' stances and the half-surrounding formation, they seemed to either protect the green rock, or the relic existed as their theology.

"What is that ab-"
"Shut up."

Nero didn't like that answer.

"Why should I?" He challenged the man by lightly shoving his shoulder to get a reaction out of him. When his results proved stationary, his eyebrows furrowed in doubt.

The memory of a bitten neck almost made him walk away, deciding to increase his distance if he decided to chew on him again. However, in that moment, Trish's advice came back as a reminder to be on guard with Dante's ever changing personality. That subject seemed likely though; since he got off the phone he's been acting weird, as if he was angry with him. Yet Dante let his façade slip a little when he told the youth about the events at the station than his problem with his earlier words.

Oh, that sly bastard.

"Oh Dante, you think you're so clever," the teen whispered, a small smirk gracing his features; he figured out Dante's game.

At this, the veteran turned with his face, hand now cradling his side profile to look up at his obnoxious fledgling. He needed to find the right incantation to allow the demonic spirits to finish the job.

"I figured you were just... I knew it. What I said back at the office left you tongue-tied, and now you can't own up to your words-"

"Your boyfriend's about to snack on you." He rolled his eyes with a dismissive blink, returning to the book.

“... What?"

A strong grip yanked his injured leg, surprising him as he tumbled to the ground. A robust force crawled over him, nails pinning him down with abnormal groans pouring out from his mouth; the sickly sweet smell of decay invading his senses. The youth's vision swirled, vaguely catching a silver spectacle to his right; resting on top of nearly white skin sitting cross-legged on the floor,
oblivious to the commotion.

Baby blue irises enlarged when he recognized the shrunken carcass advancing upon him, jaws widening with attempted snaps at his flesh. On its way to chomp on his face it stopped, sensing another source of access for food: his thigh injury. Nero wrestled and wrangled the creature away from the bloody gash, concentrating his foot against his skull to send the bastard flying.

The malnourished goblin lied still after the kick stunned it, grasp never leaving from the hunter, crawling to make an effort to bite it off. The little dipshit was tough, unable to remain dazed. And the youngster possessed power behind his kicks. Nero made a grab for his revolver when he grasped the unfamiliar space of where she should have been.

He felt the pushing pinch of claws tearing into the fabric of his jeans, his devil bringer now coming into play to sucker punch the freak. And why in the hell didn't he rush into the bathroom to grab his weapon since the elder wasn't in need of it? Inasmuch, why did the hybrid take his gun if he didn't use it? It was the only reason he let him borrow the gun; to loan it out since he didn't have his.

When the dry-rotted human soared a few feet away he dashed into the restroom, gazing upon his hardware sitting idly in the basin. Such a condition she lied in briefly infuriated him after realizing his weapon portrayed a useless employment to Dante's merit. If he didn't require the thing, then why didn't he return it to him?

Planning on igniting the inhuman shell into oblivion, then shooting the crossbreed in the neck for his asshole-ish tendencies, never enacted the plan he conjured up. The decayed zombie returned for round two... and nearly won. As he turned to fight in the main office, the beast leapt up and semi-spearred him to the ground.

"Fuck, these things are fast," he voiced in a rush. On the way down, he cracked the back of his head on the sink, vision amplified to near unconsciousness when his noggin slammed on the tiled floor. The corpse advanced, Nero making a show to shift his limbs but the painful throbbing emanating behind his skull prohibited such movements.

A light build-up of shame clouded his intuition, scolding his lack of ability to watch his surroundings. When he fought between the zones of the wall unit, chairs, and desk he danced around the objects with ease; they splintered off a few pieces of wood but the sharp blade struck the opponent when prompted. And if he battled in tinier spaces, he should've expanded his awareness to his minuscule freedom to drift about.

And even more disturbing provided the chief not saying a word to him. Usually he'd spit out a snarky comment here or an idiotic taunt there, yet his quietness left him rather bothered now. When the chief's lips were sealed from his babbling, he took mild comfort in the silence, but this quiet demeanor deposited a cold swelling pitted in his gut.

One that spoke volumes of a focused nature overriding any notion of fuckery from either hunter in the future. Furthering his troubling thoughts maintained the immobile actions from the veteran. The man practically sat there while he countered his attacker's cannibalistic lust.

Somewhere in his mind, the small part still capable of rationality, he wanted Dante to say something irritating or joke about his abilities; to taunt or goad him into that moronic banter because at present, it seemed like it never existed.

He clung to consciousness in a frenzied measure to fend off his antagonist, yet the deafening sting was too great to bear. If he bumped his head once then he'd manage just fine. That second
bludgeon to his brain case did him in; skull roughly bouncing off the tiled floor from the pace he
descended.

A dark energy swelled up within his being, rising forth to urge its handler to use its strength to
conquer this threat to extinction, but darkness consumed him before such a power came to be
utilized. The last image he remembered were sharp claws running down his legs before all his
senses drowned in sea of obscurity.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Don't you love cliffhangers?

Well, it seems that Nero can't catch a break on Dante's ever changing personality. While the sexy hybrid is a carefree asshole the majority of the time, I wanted to give him a more serious tone for a bit, before changing back. But when will he do so?

And Nero...sorry boo but you are accident prone in here XD.
The remixed version of Scott kept him on his toes; ducking, dodging, and flipping as it switched between its clamp and the Venus-flytrap. When the veteran was close enough he delivered a fist full of punches, keeping the creature off-balance, tactical thoughts springing forward to defeat him. Scott swayed and feigned as he neared the elder, Dante pulling out his weapons when the opportunity presented itself.

Calling forth the efforts of Agni and Rudra, the serrated swords appeared in his hands, big goofy smiles plastered on their faces because their owner required their services. He twirled them once, stabbing them into the ground. A great bale of fire and a strong gust of wind formed; traveling in a straight line to hit the ex-officer. What Dante presumed to hurt the thing seemed to daze it mildly; the monster advancing undeterred as ever.

“Hmph. Option A didn't work.”

“Wait, master! Let me have a go at him!” Agni interjected, feeling his existence molding back into his landlord's body.

“Yes master. I command you to give me permission to finish this threat!” chided Rudra.

“Hey! Those are my words!”

“You said 'have a go at him' not finish him-”

“It is the same thing-”

“No it is not-”

“WAIT MAS-”

Dante exhaled with curt annoyance, viewing the ineffective move and the broken tactic implemented by the demonic warriors. Scott walked out of that attack practically unscathed.

The tofana scissors he decimated the scorpion booby lady with reappeared on his hands, squatting his legs to assume the light position for attacking. Beyond him he spied the crowd of onlookers creeping nearby, each civilian holding a device to remember this priceless scene of action.

The ex-officer must have been camera shy because he caught the audience encircling him, his head swiveling to their acrid-scented fears. His arm opened to reveal the explosive barb, aiming for a direct hit at the spectators.

They seemed forgetful, or rather idiotic, of its ability to shoot exploding projectiles. Instead of fearing the mystic fiend the humans were entranced with it, captured by the image of a monster believed to be real in mythological stories. Damn near oblivious that that thing focused to kill them.

“Shit! Rudra, form a ring of fire around us!”

“Yes, master!”
Dante materialized the red sword in his hand, twirling it twice before he thrust the demonic blade towards the people. Rudra planted himself before the watchers, screams and gasps erupting before a ring of fire blazed in front of them. He blocked their view from the scene and from Scott igniting them to ashes. The crowd scuttled back several feet, blinded from the surging heat scorching their bodies.

“Oh no! Somebody help him!” cried Rachel, grabbing onto Amber, blue-greens searching for a male who appeared competent enough to risk their life to save him.

“Someone help, please!” Amber screamed into the crowd, eyes wide with fright for that marvel of a specimen fought inside that raging inferno. Just beyond her she heard the foul beast roar and rampage, guttural growls mixing in with the unmistakable grunt of her suave bad-boy. “Please hurry!” Oh what torture and agony he must be going through; enclosed off from any route of escape.

“This is so unfair,” she nearly wailed.

“That was so fucking unfair.”

Since when are demons flameproof by their own kin? Sure, there may have been a few elemental denizens that thwarted other attacks from their brethren, but to harbor no damage whatsoever puzzled him. Even he wasn't safe from harm from his half-kind, but he knew to dodge when the time came.

The abandoned cars and trucks couldn't stand the flare up engulfing them, igniting and skyrocketing into the air to give an extra oomph to the viewer's devices. Also engulfed in a bale of molten embers—the once talking cue ball. It squirmed and squelched, howling in pain from the flames licking and searing the gray matter away from its bone.

Dante noted that regular gasoline left more than first degree burns, so he took some joy in escalating the marks to third degree blisters. After a humorous two minutes the ex-officer sizzled into a cast of ashes, the black gem burrowed on its rib cage standing glorious and bright in the sun.

The ring of fire still roared and raged, secluded from any spectators wanting another interview or babes eager to climb on him. Sad as it was to let the ladies go, he needed to focus on important matters, like trying to figure how Scott turned out this way.

The afternoon breeze whipped through his hair, light whispers of wind blew his white locks over his head, hauling ass to his next destination.

This is bad.

His feet picked up in speed to carry his fit form across a narrow ledge, seeing the aftermath of traffic backed up nearly a mile. He jumped from one structure to another, deciding to take the high road to avoid any questioning eyes.

All this happened right under my nose.

He side-flipped over a wall, using the extra momentum to roll on the ground, resuming his barefoot sprint pressing into the hardened, loose gravel. Small jolts of discomfort registered in his memory, but he can't stop now, nor do much about his torn clothing. What he wish he could do is call the office and tell someone to bring his standard arsenal.
He went into this situation with the mindset to put a noticeable dent in Ramona's operation. He just didn't realize the impression he made didn't leave that big of a mark... yet. What he did with Scott shouldn't have taken that long, and a heavy confrontation seemed imminent if anyone else possessed a modified heart.

*It's impossible that everyone is dead.*

Energy gathered beneath his feet, Dante pushing off another ledge as he soared through the sky, images of city life nothing but blurry lines continuing on his trek.

*Someone had to have seen something.*

The next leap he took made him use the fire escape, built arms and sculpted legs easily climbing the structure with grace, running up the wall the last few meters to keep to the schedule.

*Hearts turning people into demons. These assholes went too far this time.*

It's bad enough his town didn't maintain deputies to patrol every inch for normal disturbances, but any converted policemen spelled trouble that would take him a while to detect their presence. In other words they acted as gateway overseers, allowing heinous acts to commence under their misleading guise.

Furthermore, how were the officers' families acting? Surely they noticed the irregular-like behavior not befitting of their standard ways. The altered lawmen and women would perk up at the death of an innocent rather than withdrawing from the world. They would instead divulge in the details about a grisly murder; intent on revealing every last color, position, and expression on the victim's face. He held no doubt they practiced on the loved ones as well, if they hadn't already.

A bar-like trapeze hung high in the air, Dante hopping to clutch a firm grip on the iron, swinging around like a trained gymnast.

The world viewed as an upside down landscape when he rotated above it, where the sun rested at the bottom and a pile of polluted shit sat triumphant on top; similar to the problem at hand. Unnecessary deaths, rouge devils, flesh-wearing humans, and neophytes poisoned the surface; reigning with cunning tactics and sly leaders while the solar star kept carefree happiness under lock and key.

When Dante was below the bar did the scenario play out right for him; the sun raised and proud in the sky while the scum scrambled far below him. Externally, all seemed calm and normal, but he needed to fix the internal problems within the city to be whole again.

On his final swing he let go of the pole, flipping three times in the sky before he landed on a building a few blocks away from the police station. His cautious movements surveyed his surroundings, considering on how best to approach his attack. He leapt across the small spaces until he stopped on the roof of an old mom and pops store, crouching low behind a vent to have a VIP seat to these newfound “celebrities.”

“Grell is going to kill everyone as soon as he even suspects someone is plotting his downfall.”

Joanna Aguilar was a Mexican police officer; one of the two seasoned officers, besides Foster, who knew what he did for a living.

“What is that asshole going to do to me that I will do to him?” Dante said in a snide remark, on their way inside the precinct with another set of handcuffs keeping him in place—although
willingly this time.

“He's in charge of this place now. He's got eyes and ears everywhere,” she whispered in a harsh tone, sticking close to him as possible as they approached the building.

“We'll see how long he lasts until he reaches unemployment.”

“Don't go doing anything stupid now; the rest of us are in danger still.”

“You just make sure you round everybody up, and leave those assholes to me.”

“All right.”

While on top of the ledge he scanned the area, looking to the far end of the station's lot to see a patrol car pulling in. He gazed upon red-brown hair pulled back into a sleek bun, stepping out the car a little later.

Immediately he recognized the person, intent on reaching her to question the odd events surrounding the police force's interior. When he reached the woman, by jumping down the building, using parked cars as cover, and climbing over the fence to face her, did he receive the Intel he needed to know.

The story goes that the blond convert who tried to run him and Nero over kidnapped Foster, weakening the task force to allow Ramona’s goons to take control. Six converts held power over fifty officers, threatening and physically damaging them and their families to stay quiet.

At least some good news blossomed out of this shit storm; there survived a chance she could get all the policeman to safety while he cleaned house. Men and women of the law were constrained to change their biological nature; accommodating the lack of guards bullying the human ones to keep them in line.

Those vascular muscles serving as the bane of his current state of mind sought safe refuge in the department's basement. A well-stacked supply lined the shelves, Joanna explained the changes under new management.

Any reports pertaining to the area Ramona's base of operations settled received thorough detail. And circumstances where odd occurrences of strange figures attacking the public hardly received acknowledgment on purpose.

“How soon do you think you can round everyone up?”

“How soon can you create a distraction?” she whispered, anxious to escape the convert's clutches.

“Shove me in a jail, tell those four I'm here, and that's it.”

“Just that easy, huh?”

“Yup.”

“Is that a plan or you thought it up right now?”

“Improv, my lady.”

“Uh-huh. Was it also improv for you to lose half your clothes on the way over here too?” Her 5'6 stature dwarfed under his tall frame, but she scoured his state of dress without fear, mindful to keep her poker face on approaching the processing area.
Many of her human co-workers gawked at her with questioning glances, but she didn't dare give them any answer. Her hazel sight searched for any of the four figures keeping her and her people's lives in their hands.

“Oh no, I had a shirt and slippers to go with it. You can thank Chief Scott for my toplessness,” he said in a smug tone, currently standing inside an empty holding cell. Then added as an afterthought. “I guess that makes five left then.”

In an instant her eyes widened from caution to disbelief, breath barely escaping her mouth with the weight of his words settling in strong merit. He saw the heavy alarm plunge into her features, trying to formulate questions needing elaboration but nothing developed.

“What’chu got there, wretch?” A big, booming shout called off behind her, Joanna visibly blanching with an acerbic scent rising in volume as Dante inhaled her essence. He remembered that aggravated voice over the radio, sounding irritated that Scott radioed him about the devil hunter's unwillingness to cooperate. Now Dante viewed the pudgy face to match, staring in their direction with surprised elation.

“He was detained for... jaywalking—”

“Public Indecency.” Dante spoke over her, Joanna switching her head from the two males in perplexion, eyes resting on her captive after his sudden outburst. He advanced out the cell but she held up her hand, thinking he'd initiate the confrontation while others were still exposed to harm. Before she reached to close the jail another two officers appeared on either side of her, engulfing her petite frame with mounds of intimidation.

“Indecency, you say.” The obese captain waddled over to her, rubbing her bronzed cheek with a green-tinted, swollen hand. Jo moved her face from his touch, shooting Dante a nervous glance prior to walking out the way they came in. Short yet muscular legs almost bent to the floor after that same pudgy palm gave her an open-handed smack to her derriere, crude, thin lips licking in desire after she hastened an exit.

“I trust that Chief Scott made the ride over convenient, did he not?” The one in charge spoke, shifting his eyes to the hybrid.

“As much as he could stand, as shitty as it was.” Right before he turned into embers.

Those must have been the magic words for one of the officers grabbed him, roughly forcing him out of the cell as the chunky one and his soon to be twin led the way through a different passageway.

Dante glanced over to where Jo stood by the entryway, hard orbs in a silent plea for him to get her and the other members out of this mess before it was too late. In response, a bold wink aimed indiscreetly in her direction.

A nervous smile reached her eyes before the door closed, leaving her only a narrow amount of time to move everyone to safety prior to those three finding out what they planned.

The minute the deputy heads escorted their prisoner to the basement they attacked, bludgeoning him with hard blows from the batons. Ferocious, unrelenting assaults brought the hybrid down to one knee, audible cracks filling up the mute silence.

The clubs carried out the neophyte's malicious hatred with each stroke to his skull, each slam to his ribs, each hammer to his legs. With their modified strength they blew tendrils of blood from his
wounds, defaming his heritage and how the impurity of his human bloodline weakened him.

In his younger years Dante would have retaliated in an instant, giving the antagonist blow upon blow of raining fists as a suitable apology. Each sanguine drop tasted awakened the sinister side of his hexed bloodline, thirsting for the taboo nourishment to unleash the beast inside. Such low-life denizens did not require an effort to be wasted on them. And while he held on to his caged animal, there were still humans loitering around.

“Why don't we show him the way to salvation, boys?” the chunky one proclaimed, ordering one of his henchmen to grab something off the shelf. The familiar clinking of glass placed a smile on the hybrid, having a front-row seat to the effects the vascular organ intended to unfold.

“The hell are you laughing at?” the same man connected several kicks to Dante's ribs, puniting him harder with every sharp bite of laughter. A runt of his tossed him a jar, nearly ripping off the lid as the hunter's chortles grew louder in depth and volume. His powder-blue eyes stood emblazoned with a fiery ring encircling the iris, lips pulled upwards to reveal enlarged canines as his sniggers echoed.

“I'm just excited there are still idiots to slap around, that's all,” Dante mused, humored to no end by their overconfident air.

Upon closer observation of their rudimentary intellect, it was doomed to be a complete failure if he let his damned side out to play. The current equipment on the playground set out before him wouldn't uphold to his “roughhousing.”

“We'll see who's still excited after your ass is kicked, bitch.”

Maybe he'll lease him out for ten minutes.

Bones crunched and grounded on cemented floor. Body parts detached and swung from shattered sockets. Blood poured thick and free from torn wounds. Knuckles revealed blisters and bruises after connecting with mangled faces. Eyes enlarged with saturated rage boiled into scum undeserving of a fate crueler than death. Hands that were once clean and docile stained red with heated vengeance, mentally calming and relaxing the black taloned scales fighting for control, desperate to unleash its pent-up anger.

Dirty feet stepped over rotten corpses, faces contorted into a series of anguished howls as heavy scars tore deep into decayed flesh. A pallid neck rotated from left to right, working out the built-up stress eager to rest on top of him. Ice-chipped eyes scoured over the three ex-officers, taking in their ashen-gray skin tone and the holes where the demonic gems once rested.

He stood there in silence, letting his mind wander to the information he memorized on his second trip to Whetstone to reclaim his logic. Strong inhales calmed his twitchy nerves, remembering the deserted, bloody town.

Among the abandoned buildings, blood-stained streets, and infested demons was a post office, housing as the base of congregation for the scum of Hell. Sifting through the rubble, he found documents and photos with the Fortuna emblem, pertaining to the hearts and their reconstructive properties.

When the victims of senseless demon attacks (orchestrated by the converts) died, the sick fucks ripped their hearts out. They placed the organs in a magical preserving liquid created by a member of The Order. To complement the mystical fluid, a specific gem had completed the vascular muscle's transformation.
The positive, physical properties of the green Aventurine jewel was poisoned, turning the precious stone black with its negative characteristics, then embedded into the beating object. This “embalming” juice morphed an individual into this grotesque, humanoid savage. When the disfigured heart was consumed, the other-worldly beast it changed into carried this virus capable of reproducing, if it bit another human after it tasted fresh flesh.

The Venus fly-trap and the bootleg hook it had for arms were harmful side effects, if it was swallowed by converted humans. Remembering the description of the rock brought to mind the book of enchanted remedies he read a while back... and the lazy skimming he did through the text.

Pausing him from his assessment, a faint trace of cinnamon roamed through his nose, alerting him to a presence quietly tip-toeing towards the door. Prior to the person eavesdropping he opened the entrance, a small bundle of flesh falling straight into his build.

She jumped as if scalded by his touch, yet soon realized that the hunter stood before her. The visibility diminished the further she came down the stairs, straining to see into the darkened basement. Though happy that Dante retained life, she grew concerned of the red stench covering his body and the color staining his hair.

Her tapping feet told of her worry, wondering if those marks on his frame belonged to him or those petty monsters. With tentative steps, she extended her hand to rub a clotted mass of tissue, gasping in light breath when he grasped her wrist.

“Dante, what happened?” she peered at his hold, instinct telling her to pull away considering his tight grip. She heard a multitude of rumors pertaining to this white-haired enigma.

More than a few questioned the fragility of his psyche to hunt the damned, while others said that he shared the evil blood with them. Joanna didn't care for the finer details of his life, but she knew of extraordinary incidents decreasing due to his efforts. In the end that's all she cared about; keeping the city in stasis from psychos and the depraved.

He maintained his clutch on her advancing from the opaque cellar, the officer ready to reach for her gun; she thought to have recognized a monster coming out of the shadows. It’s just that this monstrosity... viewed as a mask on Dante's face? Or maybe it was the fault of the dimmed light, making it emerge as a black eye veil embroidered with red scales dissolving from his profile.

When he stepped out the basement the white incandescence revealed a chiseled, yet bloody visage. She shot a glare to the faulty illumination, fooling her with images belonging to abominations like those in the room.

“Are they dead?” she inquired as he led her up the stairs, trying to look into the murky space.

“As dead as dead can be.”

“You're injured...?”

“It's nothing.”

“So... are we safe?”

“Yup, for the moment.” His face kept the facial twitches to a minimum climbing to the top of the stairs. He let go of her hand; Joanna immediate to cradle her wrist, now sprinkled with becoming bruises. She wondered what that was about; his detached disposition ever since he opened the door. The officer assumed he wallowed in a pit of dejected remorse after he sacrificed his humanity to kill those once-humans.
It wasn't easy to take a life, the sorrow and grief mounting as the weight of ending an existence tolled heavy on the persecutor. Questions would plague the detective, wondering if there lied another option available to an alternative choice that didn't equate to death. The investigator would often try and get into the meddler's mind; to see what factors traumatized the individual to where they needed to be neutralized to benefit society. She guessed Dante withdrew himself to cope with murdering. What else could the reason be with his unconcerned temperament?

At one point in life, those men were average human males.

“Is everyone gone?” Dante's voice cut through the silence, walking into to a more productive area.

“Almost. It's about five others left gathering reports and transporting the prisoners,” she answered in absent focus, admiring how a man of his size moved with such fluidity. It's as if his aura oozed this graceful masculinity that bordered on brute savagery; the two concepts able to blend to produce this specimen.

“Speaking of documents, where's a phone to use? I need to read up on cleaning this... infestation you have, and I gotta get my instruction manual.”

“There's a number you can call... hang on, your place right?”

He nodded once approaching the female locker room, ever so discreet to notice a few pieces of negligee hanging out some of the lockers. Aromas of ripe peaches, mulberry blossom, and sweet-smelling hairspray redirected his antagonistic self-control to a more “happy” disposition. He didn't know what breed of women the police force had, but if the intimates hanging on the metal closet were able to contain the measurements they said it could...

Shoving his disgruntled heritage deeper into its half-broken cage, he asked her where the phone was again. His mood lightened a little, determined to see this situation to the end prior to anyone getting a hold of the accursed hearts.

And maybe get the digits to the owner of the 36C bra size.

After giving specific instructions to that hormonal twat of a teenager, he stood in the main office area. The dusky blue sky blanketed the afternoon, overshadowing the sunlit landscape with dense shadows seeping through the city cracks. The bright, gray crescent in the atmosphere hid behind thickened, white pillows, adding frail perceptibility to the land.

Dante stared out the window, watching as he saw a bevy of workers of the law leaving. Some carpooled together, the maximum seats it held occupied by the officers... of the slender variety. Those packing a little more muscle and “meat” piled up into S.W.A.T trucks, lifting boxes of files to the cargo. Another truck loaded on prisoners, wrists and ankles shackled tight while filling the occupancy.

This is what the task force should be doing, cleaning up the city streets from unruly delinquents disturbing the peace. Not shitting their pants from demons breathing down their necks; abusing their loved ones as collateral to make them obedient.

As dire of a case this presented, he had to give props to Ramona and her schemes. Converts infected the police corps, using its various exposed entrances to spread its infectious “germs” until it replicated. The microbes intended to corrode this place into uselessness, then sending out its messengers to pollute others to repeat the cycle. Lucky for the cells holding the nucleus in tact a stronger, more potent defense came through to eradicate the bacteria.
And speaking further on the unprotected, what did Joanna plan on doing by sneaking down to the basement?

“Don’t you think that was naïve to come down to the basement?” he asked in pinched cynicism, rubbing the gunk off his naked torso in swift wipes with a borrowed towel.

The bustle in the office stilled, silence stretching on as the few men quieted their motions. The hunter knew he caught Joanna in embarrassment, hearing the delicate clacking of teeth as shock simmered inside her.

“D— do you mean me?” she voiced her question in small words.

“You were the only one down there.”

Uneven footsteps drew closer to him, along with the increased heart beat giving away her surprise.

“I heard a noise and... and I n-needed to—”

“If there was someone standing outside that door on watch, you'd be dead right now.”

He didn't assume she'd be that thick in the skull after she told him there were only six freaks running the show, originally. He presumed her to fill her limited time rounding everyone up and escaping. What sense did she have, or lack thereof, to come down there and see whatever it is that she wanted to investigate? If one of those ignorant disciples kept watch while the other two fought him, she would be in trouble.

Did she doubt his abilities with his restricted hardware? Did she believe him to be dead and those dopey dumb-fucks were coming up to the main office to finish the job? If she moved for the latter it was a noble cause to defend herself, (without substantial weapons) but those three would overpower her within seconds.

“I'm not a child Dante-”

“That was a childish move.”

“I thought you were dead. Those noises I heard wasn't exactly human, you know.” A sudden forthcoming anger brought her back to her senses, feeling the need to explain to him that she supposed the inevitable happened, and she needed to defend herself or create a distraction to go get help.

Should she not come outside to leave with the group in ten minutes she appointed an officer to take charge, calling down to Devil May Cry to sort this shit out, if possible.

“You should have trusted me—”

“Trust you?” The pitch in her tone revealed her incredulity. “I don't know you like that or what you're capable of. If you failed, I had to make sure I got the rest of my troupe out of here and to safety! Who knows how long it would have taken them to figure out everyone left. It probably was a stupid idea to tread to the basement, but I needed to prepare myself for the worst.”

To open your legs and let them fuck you in a foursome? If he didn't bite his tongue, those words were primed to shoot out his cavity quicker than he could stop them. And if the statement did, she’d probably wallow in a state of disbelief previous to owning up to it in defiance.

There weren't many options available regarding sacrificing herself for her colleagues. The options
lied to join the converts, relinquish her body to satiate their pleasures, or strap herself with a bomb kamikaze style. At least she had the gusto and bravery to stand for the team.

Mistaking his silence as an understanding instead of focused drive she told her men to quicken their pace, sighing deeply after she walked away to help her co-workers. Her head hung a bit in dismay, a light pressure of a headache forming as the rage subsided into sensitive tranquility.

She didn't mean to snap at him like that, but he hadn't a clue the demeaning things forced onto her just to keep one of those sick fucks from killing off a member of her peers as their personal amusement. This man made them all a little safer, and she owed him something invaluable, she would do anything to pay him back.

“You don't know how much this means to all of us, Dante,” she started, crossing her arms and taking in the once prideful office. “My comrades and I wouldn't last another week. Our every move was monitored obsessively. If we even breathed wrong, we faced certain death. I owe you my life.”

“Where are you moving everyone?” Dante watched as a patrol car sped off into the street, swerving a little to avoid running into a stop sign.

Taking this as a signal of his hurt ego after her outburst, she answered without pining for forgiveness. “There's an abandoned building closer to the fire department, so we'll be locating there temporarily.

The area she specified marked as the metropolitan downtown, where businesses and consumers laid the foundation to sustain a thriving culture. Likewise, the location served as a hot spot for night clubs and diners, drawing tourists and sightseers to acquaint themselves with new hospitality. The district included a place he intended to visit soon, where those of a newly reformed religion congregated.

Men and women of the badge would operate in Desmond's territory.

“Aw, fucking hell,” he drawled, hands coming up to run down his face.

Joanna picked up on his distress. “What is it?”

He didn't answer, hands resting right under his nose, staring straight ahead.

“Dante, what's wrong?”

“Have you ever heard gossip of a 'Desmond' or something along the lines of that?”

“Yeah. Scott mentioned it a few times. Rumor has it he isn't anything nice and his club is home to the crooks of the town.

“Well he, in fact, owns a club in the city...”

“... And?”

“Your temporary residence is very close to his place of business.”

“... Oh my God,” she muttered in a short breath. She thought nothing else of this nature transpired elsewhere, but she practically sent her allies to their undeserving deaths. Since Foster's disappearance, she lead the team to their survival. If she didn't act on this information, she stood to lose her entire organization.
“Qué tengo que hacer. Ah, qué tengo que hacer![1]” Joanna paced back and forth, ideas springing to her next plan of attack. Two officers ran in to grab the last of the boxes, the woman running to her colleagues to tell them of their desperate situation.

Dante tuned out to her becoming, frantic nature, hearing groans of the decayed kind originating from the area they just left.

“Ah, what now?” Cautious steps trailed towards the door, listening to a terrible wheeze echoing behind it. Sorely pining for his weapons he yanked the entry open, falling to the floor in immediate reaction to another freak grabbing a hold of him.

Somewhere in the middle of widening the door and colliding to the ground, the beast bit him on the throat. Needle-like teeth tore into his flesh, seeming to secure a solid grip before it dug in further. To be honest, the hunter was startled at its ferocity, the creature conveying the desire to have his head severed from his body.

After his initial grunt he impaled the thing with hard blows, the savage determined to keep its pointy stubs embedded beneath his skin. With a final strike the monster flew away, taking a chunk of his neck along with him. By the time the three cops came over, the humanoid geared up for another round.

“What the hell is that thing!” a young, dark-skinned male called out to him, all three armed with pistols that wouldn't do squat to help. Jo reached the shirtless man, stopping short on her journey to view the space where a piece of his throat should have been.

Her muscles locked up, unable to react to anything except the scarlet waterfall pouring from his trachea. The firing gunshots startled her out of a shocked stupor, mind recalling the first-aid procedures in case a bystander needed treatment. Or if the injured wanted it.

“That's not helping,” Dante spoke the words in a wet, scratchy voice, standing tall and strong from his downed position. The woman stood there unsure of the severity of his injury. She didn't know if the blood smeared over his neck to give the appearance of a waterfall or if he truly bled that much.

“Those guns won't do shit,” the hunter walked closer to the inhuman fiend, tendrils of a dark liquid dripping down his chest.

“How... what... can you fight...” Her words came out clipped and unsure, seeing the beast rise well over her height. Her finger squeezed the trigger, bullet after bullet piercing into the dingy flesh, yet doing nothing to harm the foe. The other two men pulled out fresh clips, frustrated that the enemy seemed to have swallowed the slugs.

Her heart raced, faced with a new challenge no amount of training would ever prepare her for—mentally at least. With fingers trembling she shot the last shell of her glock, quakes routing through her form as the creature raised its arm to strike. Something flew past her peripheral vision, a glimmer of a silver object chucked right into the beast's neck.

It shrieked with foul rage, emitting a deafening shrill, forcing the officers to cover their ears. The windows rattled behind them, giving the imprint to shatter the longer the freak howled its misery. Dante eased their ear-splitting aches by silencing its cries—assisted by scissors slicing to the other side of its jugular.
Dark liquid flowed from the torn wound with strong steam flowing down its deformed mouth. It still twitched and waved its gangly arms, trying to claw the shears out from its insertion. The shirtless slayer moved to finish the creature's existence, ripping the blade from its neck to stab blunt holes around the gem. He ignored the talons digging into his stomach, pulling on the black jewel until it gave way.

The commotion brought three more deputies to the scene, all gun-toting wielders encircled the downed opponent, nervous shivers wracking their forms from this unknown enemy lying on the floor.

Panic-induced chatter erupted among the six members while the hunter focused on the organ, scrunching his nose after a mildewy, shit-like smell rose to the surface. As the frightened excitement wore on, the muscle shriveled up in his palm with the beast undergoing a similar transformation.

The hybrid moved to the window, opening the glass and chucking the dwindled thing away from his touch. Screeches flowed from the opened door, alerting him to the uprising trouble bound to escalate to casualties... of the human kind.

“Jo, hurry and get everyone out of here.”

“But what about you-”

“Don't worry about me, just go!” The hunter traveled to the noise, shutting the door soon afterwards.

Is there a chance a few neophytes slipped past him and they trailed towards the basement? What if a few hid in the shadows on purpose, then waited on an opportunity to strike? It's unlikely those three he decimated returned from the dead, so there were more snakes creeping around this lot, striking out in sneak attacks to infect others.

After this enigma's brave command she cursed, mind running rampant to the decisions she needed to produce to save her team. If there survived any informants to the demons, her troop was as good as dead since they temporarily relocated closer to the converts' territory.

And how would they continue to operate if the four of the six main antagonists are dead? Dante seemed to know more on this situation than he cared to lead on. For the best she didn't need the details, yet the lives of her and her comrades rested in his hands. Perhaps she should tell everyone to head on home, round up their families, and leave until it was safe to come here again.

However, guilt would gnaw her insides if she left ordinary citizens unprotected from everyday assaults and incidents. Problems would escalate to unresolved containment. She only had a limited time to execute her plan of attack.

“Hijo de puta![2]” she whispered. Her countdown started to begin. “All right everyone, let's go!”

Following her orders the remaining delegates scrambled to the desk, eyes wide and frantic as they gathered the scattered files.

Two of the men pretended to gather documents, waiting on their associates to leave before drawing nearer to the giant freak. They stood spellbound by its unbelievable presence, a heavy feeling pitted in their stomachs that a surreal, monstrous being lied right in front of them.

For weeks now, they've glimpsed at darkened critters prowling the area, but never ventured close enough to take in their full analysis. Scott and Grell invited peculiar individuals to trance around
the office, just not to this extent. With curiosities quelled the officers headed towards the table, never seeing the re-animated corpse heading in their direction...

Chapter End Notes

[2] “Son of a bitch” :D

I hope I got the Spanish okay, I'm very rusty from my high school classes.

I have my Dark Dante story posted if anyone wanted to check it out too. I also think that Dante isn't “right” in the head when he uses his DT, like he's a bit more pessimistic and blunt with his actions after he comes out of it in a sense and the more he uses it the longer he takes to get back to “being Dante.”

I felt this chapter was needed to be told in a choppy format since Dante did quite a bit in here, and if I went ahead with the next chapter without saying this there might have been some confusion. Oh, and if you guys are confused about anything just let me know :D

I also wanted to showcase Dante fighting without his weapons for once just to get a feel for how he might handle stuff. Though he's packing his goodies inside his soul? I wanted him with a little more hand to hand combat, if you know what I mean. I was going to do an ode to the cop scene in the anime, but it came out weird so, sorry peeps!
Fluttering lids unsealed the cerulean irises regaining clear vision, drifting from left to right to view his location. A warm glow filtered through his right hand, pulsing with increased strength the more consciousness returned to him.

Confused eyes stopped swirling, growing accustomed to a spinach-hued light stationed above his prostrate form. With his sight widened, Nero gazed upon the warmth in his devil bringer... entwined with Dante's left hand... rubbing against some green ball.

“The hell,” the teen mumbled, registering a numbing throb behind his skull, “The fuck are you doing?”

As per usual, Dante remained tight-lipped. With his newfound awkward position, Nero's upper body lay under the desk, giving him a full outline of the weird orb and his raised arm touching it. He squinted, catching a dark trail gluing their hands together with the elder rolling their palms on the circle. An airy, coppery scent digging inside his nose confirmed the object of his suspicion.

“Did you friggin' cut me!?”

Dante sat in the same position, cross-legged on the floor with his chin propped in his right hand. The book rested in his lap yet he appeared disinterested, eyelids closed in silent rout, bending forward under the desk.

Though the pressing ache lessened from where his head collided with the sink, it was still enough to make him hiss. Nero remembered the reanimated corpse and shifted, Dante pressing into his palm to stay still.

“It's dead,” the veteran mumbled.

“What are you doing?”

Dante provided no response.

“I'm talking to you.”

Dante continued ignoring him.

“Screw this!” Nero tugged his arm backward, eliciting a reaction from the elder.

“Can you be still for ten fucking seconds!”

“What are you doing!”

Ceruleans stared into powder blues, ignited flares piercing into the opposite gaze to challenge the other. And Nero might have won if their hands weren't moving in a ridiculous fashion. The veteran caught his faltering expression, thinking to use this time to jibe—albeit darkly.

“If I rip off your arm, will that make you stay still?”

Nero had trouble differentiating his mindset—if he joked or not.
“Can you just tell me what's going on?” Man, he would thank Trish double time for her advice. Instinct told him to flatten Dante into the ground, yet her guided input calmed him. The message reverted his words to a logical conclusion that wouldn't involve bitch slapping that red mongrel.

“What's wrong with your attitude, and why am I—er, we rubbing on this ball?”

Dante's eyes didn't soften from the glare, but at least he talked, somewhat.

“These Spiritual Guardians aren't doing shit.”

“... And?”

“So your arm is taking its place.”

“Okay...?” Nero hoisted his weight on his left elbow, mindful to keep the resistance from rising in his stolen devil bringer. “How am I of any help?” The youth grimaced, looking upon their connected hands still... doing whatever to the orb.

“After your dear friend had you in a vice grip, I came up with the idea to use your arm.”

“And how is that working out?”

“Shitty. Now that you're fully awake, fix it.”

And just like that, he released his hand, him and the book moving somewhere out of the youth's sight. Truth be told, Dante's split personality concerned him, raising his hackles to guard against possible, unforeseen attacks. There lingered this taut aura that Nero picked up on, a balmy string holding back the beast laying enraged under his skin. The teen wanted to vanquish threats on his lonesome, yet Dante's mentality needed supervision.

Glancing at the circle again he pondered what he, or rather, the powers within his arm could accomplish. What were they doing holding hands, and whose blood stained their fingers? Nero felt no injuries on him, other than a throbbing head, so did the chieftain cut himself?

With an unsure voice he called to Dante, hoping he'd get a full sentence with details.

“What am I supposed to do?”

“Break it.”

“Why do you think my arm will crack—”

“It glowed whenever it touched your hand.”

“You meant it glowed when you used my arm without permission? Tch, this is news to me.”

With furrowed brows, Nero wiped his scaly arm on his pants then gave the hardened gem a tentative touch, recognizing a small jolt from the appendage's interior. The youth reached out twice more prior to laying his open palm on the stone, letting the vibrations in his arm flow into the jewel. He relaxed his form, concentrating his energy when his devil bringer unexpectedly reacted to the object.

The shiny orb cracked into four lines, a neon-green cloud seeping out from within the mystic orifice to absorb into his blue limb. Caught in engrossment with the fiery swell in his arm, he took the physical brunt of the thunderous explosion; the desk imploding skywards and the gemstone
launching into his face.

Sharp fragments pierced into his profile, eyes snapping shut after a few pieces shot inside his eyelids. In his sightless escapade to sit up and recover his vision, large splinters of the destroyed wood landed on him, burying him beneath the rubble. Enraged with the blinding actions, he snarled his way out of the debris, dark mutters pouring thickly from his mouth.

“Guess you made the puppies come out and play.” Dante muttered somewhere in the distance.

“The hell are you talking about I, ugh, fuck!” Nero's eyelids twitched to see his surroundings, yet the particles irritated the sensitive eyeball; liquid freely dripping out his cornea to flush away the brittle pieces rubbing on his optic nerves. His immediate response called to run his sight under the bathroom sink... if only he could locate it.

Somewhere, a thirsted nature whispered to his deviant urges, to revel in the vulnerable and weakened display the fledgling created. There would be little resistance of course, damaging the other eye in absentia dark glee, watching him beg for reprieve or cry at his mistreatment. It would take nothing to follow through with it.

A heavy titter threatened to escape Dante's throat at the thought, taking three deep breaths to reign in the demented desires he'd never consciously yield to, leaving the image to fly around in his mental cavity without validation. With the brat's disgruntled groans rising, Dante steeled his focus before moving over to his incompetent companion to assist in his recovery. He'd be of no use to him if he had to poke out his infected eye—because of the physical damage it would leave, not because of the beast's visceral needs.

Grasping a firm grip on the youth's chin, his spare hand pried the affected orb open. Nero moved the intruding palm, waving his own around to guide his way to the restroom. Undeterred, Dante repeated his invasive selection of 'help.'

“I'd like to keep my damn vision, thank you!”

“Hold still-”

“No. If you want to help me, push me into the bathroom-”

A firm thumb swiped under the youth's lower lid, Nero's recoiling body copying the desperate movements of the average cat pelted with water. His grunts deepened in volume, frustration evident because his injury required immediate restoration.

Using his “good” eye, he pushed Dante away and trailed towards the sink, nearly ripping off the handle as the liquid spouted in full force. The veteran walked in after him, still intent on providing his method to get the damaging parts from their embedded position.

“Let me guess-” Nero stuck his head under the faucet, tilting it to where only his upper face touched the fluid. “You plan on sticking your finger in and scraping the rocks out for me?” It pained him to talk, the water doing jack shit to soothe the crystals resting comfortably inside his lids.

More or less he meant it as a warning for the scarlet idiot to stay away. If Dante even lifted a knuckle to him, he would beat him senseless, with or without the ability to see. “Dante, if you so much as touch me, I swear-”

“You swear you'll be washing your eyes for an hour?”
He snapped. “You dick! Why do you care all of a sudden?”

“If you do it your way, then fine. I hope you learned how to fight without your sight.”

“... There's more of those assholes?”

“I don't know.”

“Well, what do you know?” He griped, touching around his eye with the gentle padding of his fingertips.

Nero heard the man shift, inhaling a deep breath. “I want this bullshit to end.”

Sticky footsteps retreated from his hearing, Nero continuing to tap his foot as the pain skyrocketed to agony. Dante seemed intent to help after his harsh, lessened tone, yet uncertainty wavered over Dante residing in his delusional temperament, or if he returned to his cocky self. His pain veered to the point where actual tears from the frags simmered into his nerves. He assumed if Dante poked his sight out, it would be better than the glass sinking inside his eyeball.

“Fuck. All right. Ju—shit, dammit fine! I need to get this shit out.”

He heard the steps drawing nearer to him, muscles tightening in case Dante messed around.

“So now you require my services? What if I take-”

“I don't give a shit. Do you know how to take it out or not?”

Nero sensed the veteran to his left, chilled fingers gripping his shoulder, pulling him away from the basin to stand upright.

“What are you doing?” Nero whipped around and bumped into an equally cold chest, his body flinching from the abrupt touch with the sink stopping his retreat. The grip on his shoulder trailed to his face, holding his chin captive as the other pried his eye open... or tried to. The abrasion didn't seem to move closer to the eye's corner, as most particles do, and he wanted to rip it out himself.

Through his blurred vision, the chieftain's facial outline edged closer to his face; steely, pale blue irises focused to locate the shard inserted into the sclera's soft tissue. Holding his lids open, he instructed Nero to look downwards, the white part of his optical organ littered with red, bulging veins.

“All right, now look up... eh—there it is.” A tiny parcel presented itself in the lower left corner, scarcely implanted in the eyeball. Dante's first intuition wagered to blow into his socket, but the forceful air might damage the nerves, despite Nero's proclamation earlier. The bit should have flushed out in water, which meant that he'd have to do some scraping to remove the piece.

Nero gritted, gripping the sink in dismay. “Just rub it til' it comes out.”

“If I do, it'll go in deeper,” the veteran remarked, refraining from commenting on the wet linings trailing down the kid's cheek. A throaty growl erupted, teeth baring in anguish because the movements made the youth feel the particle move about.

He hoped it's increased shifting meant the remnant veered closer to loosening and falling from his cornea. If not, bashing Dante's skull in seemed like a proper way to relieve his stress. Then again, why not leave physical marks now?
“Almost got it, you clingy bastard.” Dante whispered in response to Nero's claws digging into his wrists. The up and down eye twitching helped, the elder gently running his thumb to the outer corner of his eyelid. He paid scant attention to the pressure Nero's nails applied to his hand; the trooper held strong under his torment.

The instruments of vision are delicate organs, needing fragile care no matter what species it belonged to...minus those freakish, humanoid things, they had no reason to have sight.

Pushing the youth back under the sink, the devil bringer retracted from his wrist, the buildup of blood showing under the indentations now disappearing from his skin.

After the piece skidded closer to an exit, he shoved Dante's hand away, taking the crumb out of his eye. Relief swelled in his being with the pain gradually decreasing, leaving him with an adjusted drive to attend to a more pressing matter: namely Dante's attitude.

“You done crying like a jet stream-”

“Don't start with me. Just drop it.” Teeth gnashed together to stop himself from yelling at the elder, quick to wipe the water off with the bottom of his sweater. After turning the faucet off he shifted to face Dante, casually leaning against a wall, his fingers hooked into his pockets staring straight ahead while Nero moved to stand in front of him. Blinking the sting away, he had a mind to throw a mild appreciation for Dante's help, but he couldn't bring himself to the task. He had to be wary however, the hybrid's disposition wasn't all together there.

“Are you done with your split personality?”

Dante's face softened, eyes never drifting from the wall.

Nero continued, “Please feel free to alert me when another one of your hissy fits come to light.”

Starting from the ill-timed kiss back at the office, his unfair actions towards the teen's treatment rivaled... an insignificant rag-doll, receiving the brunt of Dante's agitated frame of mind. Nero made multiple attempts to get an understanding on the situation and his mood change, yet the jackass blew him off with detached hostility. So fuck it, let Dante boil in his sentiments while he eliminated the threats. Only time will tell how much longer he would spend in the veteran's presence, anyhow.

Purposeful steps trudged out the bathroom, briefly searching for the animated corpse whom cracked his skull on the sink. Dante said it wasn't there anymore, but he had to confirm it himself.

After he re-checked his gear Nero, with heavy caution, strode out into the bloodied hallway to find more signs of the altered creatures. A tingling sensation spiked in his demonic arm... along with a cool voice spiking in his ear.

“Once these things latch onto you, it's mighty hard to fend them off.” Dante spoke in a calm tone, speaking behind him with a casual flair.

Nero threw an angry glare over his shoulder, yet kept walking. A dull throb pulsed behind his eye, blinking more than normal. He approached the end of the corridor, noticing the bodies once there vanished.

A deep inhale forced its way into his lungs, calming him from the sudden alarm swelling in his being. An aged, copper-lime smell roved thick in the hall, his senses focusing on his surroundings, scanning everything he laid eyes on while ignoring Dante's babbling trap.
“Those two were attacked, had their insides devoured after I came down here.”

Thin-pressed, down-turned lips gave his reaction, not realizing those fuckers were carnivorous fiends. He lived under the impression they killed for the purpose of it. He didn't think humans are on their edible menu.

Howbeit, he spared no attention to the hybrid. He decided however, to catalog any information he'd find useful though.

He moved past the area where the bodies once lied, coming to the end of the hall where the stairs led to an upper level and a basement. Assuming Dante already wiped out the lower section, the youth advanced upstairs.

Midway up the steps, the cacophony of squelching splatter and breaking bones flexed his finger to withdraw the double revolver in cautious security. Approaching the top floor stationed a bevy of interrogation rooms, red streaks and hand prints staining the windows and doors. At the end of the hall was another entryway; the visceral noises growing louder in depth and volume with added groans filling the empty corridor. Nero listened in... or would have if Dante had snapped his trap shut.

“In their first forms, they're just overgrown humans with an appetite to match. But do you notice how they're missing the weird arms and stuff?”

Legs wanting to shake out their nervous energy strolled to the left, peeking inside a window with tattered blinds for anything suspicious before moving on.

“Their beta forms are pretty straightforward, only roaming until they find some people to munch on. But once they sink their teeth into fresh flesh, the fun begins.”

Nero opened the door to another room, peeking inside the unlit space for any hiding demons. Fortunately, all remained quiet.

“The key difference belongs with their biological nature. If they're converts and they ingest the hearts, they change into those crazy folks with the freakish arm weapons. But if they're average humans, they gotta do a few favors to reach the main version.”

He looked down the corridor, Blue Rose ready to shoot in case he confronted another monster. Though to gather the differences between the demons welcomed vital details, he still had to eliminate them whether they were once human or not. He didn’t think it possible to revert to their original forms again.

“If the alpha variant bites a human, they turn into the betas. The newly-bitten fighters have to consume fresh DNA to mutate correctly. Licking that gemstone buffs up their stamina.”

Oh. Okay, now it made sense. The jade-hued sphere served as a power source, able to morph into something stronger by utilizing the jewel. And it seemed like the weaker versions can shift into their dominate structure by giving a tongue bath to their precious stone.

“That thing must be powerful,” the teenager mused to himself, remembering the strong vibrations roving inside his devil bringer when he broke the orb. However, if humans changed into these savages with a simple bite, where do their zombie-like forms come from?

Nero assumed they changed into the deformed man-eaters when the black gem is pulled from their chest, reverting to a decayed shell of their once-former selves. And fire destroys their entire bodies. Hm, what kind of virus do they have to alter people from a bite...
Which version bit Dante?

Jean-clad legs froze in place, eyes stern after his clawed fingers touched the area where the elder sunk his teeth into him. His palms twitched, panic sending tense shivers into his form as the information's weight settled in.

With one foot placed behind the other he swiveled around, fear and anger weaving a beautiful concoction of a glower sent in the shirtless man's direction. Neon-blue fingers clenched and unclenched in a jerky motion, ready to draw forth his blue arm and bash Dante's head in like a watermelon.

Forgetting about the peculiar rattling, he marched over to the hybrid after he holstered his revolver, itching for an explanation about the nip—through violence.

“Dante,” Nero heaved, palms reaching out to cradle the elder's skull, whether he intended to crush it he still had to determine.

Mr. Strong Abs raised a lone eyebrow as the youth's hands semi-held his head in a vice grip. “You said the alpha version-”

“Call them Enkindles.” Dante stated, just now thinking of a name for them.

“The Enkindles bite people...”

“Yeah.”

“And when they do, they turn average people into their beta versions-”

“Call those Delineates.”

“And those Delineates can morph into Enkindles by sucking on the gem-”

“Which you destroyed.”

“To repeat the cycle, correct?”

All the while, Nero shook Dante's head to punctuate his point, keeping his rage under lock while restraining from cracking his skull.

“They bite people-”

“That's already been established.”

“They bit you.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“You, in turn, bit me.”

“Of course.”

Hands belonging to different biological natures squeezed the elder hunter's skull, bared teeth showing on display at how aloof Dante made the situation. His calm face showed no signs of his actions. How long did it take to turn into one of those creatures after someone got infected? Is there a cure or was he out of luck?
“If you knew all of this, then why the hell did you bite me?”

Something gleamed in the hybrid's eyes, Nero squinting on the odd gesture, but it disappeared before he could figure it out. “I... kinda don't remember.”

He's playing around. He has to be.

“You have five seconds to give me a reason.” Nero's voice deepened, demonic claws about ready to pierce into his head, yet Dante maintained his nonchalant behavior.

“You're not turning into one of those creatures, kid.”

“Why not?”

“Recall what I said about the Delineates? If they don't taste fresh blood before they suck on that rock, then there's no worries. You'd think I'd be that cruel to infect you if I was poisoned?”

“You are that stupid, yes.”

Dante took his turn to stare down at the youth, pale blue eyes unblinking upon registering the teen's furrowed eyebrows, upturned nose, and twitching lips. The pressure surrounding the base of his skull failed to lessen from the tight grip which held him, seeing doubt display on Nero's face the longer he cradled his noggin.

To be honest, he didn't know why he chomped on Nero... that he remembered. Before the brat came, he fought four Enkindles and six Delineates. These enemies are tough, especially when the demonic weapons absorbed inside his body were ineffective. Pandora weakened the gemstone protecting the monster's frame, but these assholes regenerated. Fast. The only way to ensure absolute death over these fiends called to tap into his diabolical nature. He sustained his irritancy to refrain from the usage of his devil trigger, yet the more the beasts attacked, the more despondent he grew; his resolve crumbling to let his anger flow freely.

He managed to reign his bloodthirsty rage by the time the kid showed up, and he may have expelled the last of his frenzied hysterics on Nero... via the bite.

“If you arrived five minutes earlier, you'd probably have validity to say that about me.”

Dante clasped Nero's wrists and yanked them from squishing his head, walking closer towards the end of the hallway. The fluorescence flickered, as if Dante's presence alone robbed them of the light they gave to disappear into his darkness.

Nero reeled as the balance of power shifted, trying to decipher what he meant by the 'five minutes' thing. And he didn't like being tossed aside when he wanted an answer.

“What would’ve happened if I showed up earlier?”

“Just forget it, kid. Kill what's left so we can scram.”

Not good enough of a response.

“Can you stop with the veiled messages and be straight with me?”

The veteran gave a “not now” gesture with his hand, the youngster ready to confront him with physicality when something caught his eye with Dante's flicking wrist.

At first, the youth believed a brown patch of blood dirtied the elder's hand. Instead, the color was
his finger—his decomposed digit.

Enlarged eyes and a slack jaw settled across the teen's countenance, indecisive to assess Dante's not-there-knuckle.

“What happened to your finger?!”

Lazy eyes shifted to the topic in question, shrugging an answer. “A small price to pay to use any magical spells in that book. The ring is eating my flesh as insurance, so it's no big deal—”

“No big deal? What's wrong with you? You're not concerned you might lose your hand forever if that thing fails?"  

First the idiot lost a few brain cells, then came the mood swings, next the bite that may or may not affect him, and now Dante touched him with a decayed hand? When the time came to take another shower, he would make sure to use bleach for soap.

Dante knew better than to bullshit at a time like this, but it seemed like game time to him no matter the situation. Trish said to get through to him he'd have to play along, but he moved closer to throwing in the towel.

“Is that concern I detect in your voice?”

“No, it's your ability to make everything into a joke,” the blue hunter snarled, fed up with being in the elder's vicinity. He resumed his investigative trek, tuning in to the strange sounds around the corner again. “I'll beat you to a pulp before you ever have the chance to stress me out,” he muttered through closed teeth.

“That's a lie.”

Annoyance mounted in his core, doing an increasingly poor job ignoring the elder. “Forget him, Nero. Just leave him alone before you pummel him into the ground,” he told himself, aloud, so Dante could get the hint to shut up.

“That's a lie, too. You do stress out over simple shit.”

Oh, how he wanted to give that asshole a dose of his own medicine. Just a simple, meaningless gesture to turn those words back on him. He was being a spiteful jerk, and his assumptions called for evidence to silence those claims.

Dante continued. “See, like now. You're getting all riled up over—”

A downward tug connected his labiums to Nero's lips tucked inwards, pressing against the area under Nero's nose, but the elder knew what this signified.

Nice try, brat. Nero attempted statement contradicted the allegations said about him, to fight against what he knew to be true. Granted, Dante assumed a punch to the face would fly his way instead of the teen's version of a kiss, but he'd give him an 'A' for effort.

Now that the tables have turned in his favor, why didn't Nero attack him head on with his devil bringer? Why didn't he shoot him with his gun, or point his blade at him then, huh? A smooch, or a unique variant of it, should have been the last route to take in order to have the teen's retaliation affect him. So the elder's proclamation still reigned true.

The awkward and none-too-gentle lip lock ended abruptly. Not even an inch apart, Nero reared his
right fist and connected to a stubbly jaw line, gazing in slight triumph; he verbally stumped the veteran. In no manner to mention he made Dante swallow his words, literally.

“I don't get distracted over stupid shit. You, on the other hand, can roast in your feelings over those two meaningless gestures, you ass-”

Maybe taunting him wasn't the best idea.

Quicker than he could finish his sentence and react, Dante grabbed his face and planted those disgusting peckers against his own. A bright cherub flushed his cheeks after the bastard locked lips with him, his mouth slightly open.

Tingles skittered through his upper body, freezing his limbs from either pushing Dante away or kneeing him in the balls. It wasn't supposed to happen this way, or rather, he didn't anticipate the hybrid countering with such speed, and the notion angered him.

This went beyond any taunting displays, and reached into his personal comfort zone. Men didn't go around kissing other men to prove a point, or to stop them from talking. It's reserved for those who loved each other. And Nero certainly didn't retain those emotions in their entirety towards this half-breed.

If the elder desired to fasten lips with whomever, then he should leave him out of it. Who knows, it might be a sign of the veteran taking an interest in him; in which Nero wanted no part of.

Along with the retaliated action followed a sturdy punch he took the full brunt of, nearly knocking him off his feet to land against one of the doors.

“I'd say you kiss and hit like a girl, but that would be an insult to them.” Dante mocked, taking interest instead in his decayed, skeletal pinkie. As a trade to use the powers within the book, a small sacrifice had to be insured via the ring.

Once the ring is placed on its original location (the rotten hand that keeps the volume bolted) then his finger will return to normal. If ordinary humans used the text, they would lose whatever part of their body they set the ringlet on. It excluded him thanks to his healing abilities.

Make no mistake, the sensation bit at his nerves; Dante doing his best to ignore the scorching pain as his flesh melted away. But he wouldn't cry; the stinging wasn't to the point where his bottom lip quivered.

“Are you done fooling around...” Jesting words stopped short when morbid snarls erupted from all sides, rumbling louder as it neared the hunters. Nero straightened from his slack position, drawing Blue Rose from her slot. He desired to forget the becoming threat and pop a bullet in the red idiot's skull, but these growls commanded his full attention.

It irked him how... easily Dante shifted the balance back in his court. As soon as he gained a small victory on the half-breed, Dante does something so mundane the control relapses into his hold again.

At the end of the hall sounded off a metallic clink, tapping on the floor in a four-step rhythm. Above them, the lights flickered until one of them blew out, casting shadows in the corridor they stood in. Pitched wheezes bounced off the walls, the jangling noises echoing in their ears to the point where they shivered the shrill away.

“There's more of these things?” Nero huffed, ready to charge into this fight to dissolve this sudden animosity bubbling in his core. Withal, would it put him in danger to attack the hybrid first, just to
take the edge off of his nettled demeanor? Of course, it'll make him feel better, however proving the jackass wrong by centering his focus on the task consumed his concentration.

Dante was so going to get it later on.

From the hall appeared a timber wolf, a mixture of thick silver and black fur covering its body. Its shoulders stood about five feet from the ground, having a length of about seven feet. The wolf-like beast had bright green eyes and a necklace with a pendant of the same color dangling from its neck.

Shimmery fur waved every so often, like a blowing breeze the hunters neither heard or felt, sort of like a mirage even. Curious of all held the torn-off head of a Delineate secured tightly in its jaws. So that's what made those squelches not too long ago.

“Hey now, it's the little doggy out of the book,” Nero remembered to himself.

“Mm hmm...” Dante replied, sounding bereft of humor.

A frowning visage glanced at the hybrid, eyebrows morphing into one of slight confusion with the hard glower the veteran held—at the wolf. He followed in Dante's vision, his own eyesight looking upon the wolf, unnatural jade hues giving him a pointed leer as if... he counted as food. Didn't Dante say they protected that Aventurine gem, so why is it staring at him?

“This puppy looks a little hungry. Does it want a bone?” Nero spoke, voice a tad shaky because of the red one's sucker punch.

“It looks like it wants yours,” the hybrid replied in a tight, low tone.

A multitude of metallic clacking resounded around them; the duo surrounded in a circle of those elemental animals. Upon closer inspection, they were created from this wind-like structure. Two of the Guardians came through the walls, inching the hunters closer together.

“Something ain't right about this.”

“I thought you said they protected the stone,” Nero muttered in alarm, growing cautious over the hounds fixating on him.

“After you shattered it, they warped out of the book in this big cloud and left. I guess they killed the remaining bastards infesting this place and now... I don't know.” Eight of these massive wolves cornered them with murderous intent settled on their faces. Perhaps Nero absorbed something in his devil bringer he shouldn't have? “Did you absorb a heart in your arm?”

“Don't be stupid, you know I didn't!” Nero gritted out, back now unwillingly pressed against Dante's own to keep an eye on the animals. “You're the one who conjured them from that book.”

“And I'm gonna have to go get the damn thing. I left it in that room.”

How convenient. “So go get it. They shouldn't be too hard to train... even though they're made out of air. I'll manage, so step on it.”

At the moment, Dante had no choice but to. Yet the problem wasn't without notice of Nero's wobbly stature from the kiss and the 'love' tap a while ago. The youth hardly appreciated dishing in what he gave to others, and it might sidetrack him in this situation.

However, Nero's skills adjusted to any new enemy and he brought combat to them accordingly, but he read something about these Guardians and what the gem enabled them to do. But the kid should
be fine on his lonesome. With his enhanced abilities, it should take no more than ten seconds to sprint and close the book again.

“All right. Don't turn into dog chow, now.”

“Hmph, I'm not slow like you,” he bit back, the taunt missing the fire attached to it.

With that, Dante jumped into the air, side-stepping two of the canines nearly latching onto him with their sharp claws. He sprinted as soon as his soles touched the ground, confirming his suspicions when they didn't follow him, instead focused only on the teen.

Exactly what did Nero have on him the Guardians wanted? Or perhaps he absorbed something in the devil bringer he didn't detect?

A wolf's distorted howl vibrated through the precinct, followed by ravenous barks of thirsty canines. When the red hunter stepped inside the head office, a familiar dark energy fleeted throughout his form. Shit. The hounds overpowered him, resorting to the o-katana's power to drive Nero to victory.

He yanked the ring off, grabbed the book, and headed to the bathroom, heeding the distinct breaking of glass shattering and the injured growling in annoyance. Guttural snarls rose in volume while placing the ringlet back on the rotten thumb. A particularly high-pitched bellow echoed through the station, not identifying the species, elemental or partial-hybrid, the shriek belonged to. Dante positioned the ulna in the socket, driving the bone forward to see the text close.

Not waiting on his pinkie to heal he ran to Nero's location, hearing the last whispers of a howl disappearing from the hallway.

Broken glass spilled across the walkway, rooted grooves of blade marks embedded into the walls. Fresh streaks of crimson liquid lined the hall and floor, iceberg irises finally resting on Nero, who had his back to him. Yamato remained in his right hand, a solid grip ceasing to let go of her as he stood.

“Hey kid, you all right?”

Slowly, as if his balance was lost, did Nero face him. Dante's eyes widened, lips slightly ajar because the blue hunter took a beating. Badly.

His red sweater lied soaked in his own blood, claw imprints leaving deep, open tears in his clothes and skin. Trails of crimson seeped into his jeans, some of it leaking on the ground, intaking shallow breaths. Vital fluid trickled down his mouth, a weak smile forming to reveal ruby-stained teeth glittering boldly at him.

“I'm okay,” he gurgled, bubbles foaming at the mouth as he spoke, “I'm not dog chow.” He waved his left arm in a lazy manner, soon beginning to tilt over before falling to the floor, knocked unconscious preceding the attack.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I'm sorry, Nero. I don't mean to make you the fall guy, and it's a terrible habit I MUST break!
Dante slowly came out of his detached feelings and Nero is attaching to his anger to save for Dante :D

So about the creepy monsters, if anyone is wondering, the converts can change into the monsters (Enkindles) with the hook/Venus-fly trap by directly ingesting the heart. The humans that are bitten by the Enkindles change into Delineates who carry the virus and can change people after they've had some fresh blood.

We're kinda coming on the home stretch, not like the next three chapters or anything but we're getting there.

Le gasp, and the smooches have increased! And they'll only increase from here on out. Thank you guys for being patient with the story. I know they haven't been...more than flirtatious with each other, but that will soon change. Oh I have some ideas for what they might do. XD! See ya'll soon!
Nero had a strange dream.

He lounged on the steps outside of *Devil May Cry* with Kyrie sitting in a relaxed pose between his legs. The air blew a slight breeze, whipping through their hair as the sun beamed down. As he laid his hand on her shoulder she turned into him and smiled, nuzzling his touch then returning to stare in front of her. A certain calmness washed over him, sensing an elated sentiment blooming from within.

For so long this bond was safe, what proved a stable connection in his tumultuous life. He couldn't dare sever a link this strong just because his hormones remained indecisive concerning *who* it wanted. This secure relation withstood the strain placed upon it since his departure from his hometown. She offered stability, something he needed to counteract the constant problems plaguing his existence.

Dante... in contrast, was this wavering enigma. Period. It would be futile to keep up with him to analyze every element of his personality. One minute the hybrid displayed this confident, egotistic temperament with convincing morale. And the next he showcased this withdrawn hostility coupled with uncontrolled hunger for destruction.

An unknown force inside Nero stirred at this revelation, a need to confront this radical challenge blooming to the forefront. Whether it was to test his abilities or dominate against the half-breed he didn't know, yet Dante... filled a side of him that craved that strange opposition, where the teen had to be disputed.

Too bad they weren't in sparring mode right now, the reason Nero gave up opposing the events occurring in his slumber.

Sitting behind him was the red slayer himself, Nero resting between his legs in replica to the way Kyrie sat in his. When the teen tried to move, this painful spike shot through his chest, practically forcing him to stay pressed against him. Escaping proved unsuccessful, Nero glancing down to see the hybrid clutch his torso with his right, taloned forearm; the touch sending the sharp pulses of pain away. He didn't bother to look back, what would be the point?

It seemed fitting to have a dream where he felt trapped, giving an accurate representation to his thoughts.

Kyrie, the sweet and endearing childhood friend who comforted and supported him through rough times provided his human side with something to cling to.

Dante embodied this force that tapped into his virile energies, giving him a complex synergistic union invigorating his urges... except involving sex. He'd convince himself to go to other means if the day arrived where his libido overloaded rational reasoning.

But... what if that's all this was? What if his inner demon and the messages in his slumber told him he required a good romping? He recalled the pressing impulses lingering after a hard fight, and the way his body and mind grew restless preceding an energized dispute with demons or a heated brawl with the hybrid. It was the same feeling he had whenever he stopped the physical
ministrations on Kyrie. The desire to satiate this maddening, pent-up energy needed expulsion, and perhaps these hinted communications pushed towards that.

Obviously these memos of repressed virility came out in the form of... being horny.

“But with Dante,” he whispered to himself, face scrunching in confusion. He supposed he couldn’t release his eagerness with the brunette in full, and touching himself to relieve the anxiousness left after easy game or a peek a Kyrie’s figure did so much. Even if he indulged himself in a meaningless charade with a random woman, it would feel like a betrayal to the songstress.

Nonetheless, (on a severe side note) he and the hybrid weren't “normal” and they weren’t “ordinary” in their routine practices, perhaps the elder... Oh seriously!

Okay, so Dante can take a punch or two and he had experience in the sack (he surmised), but this was crazy. There is no way he fathomed to tell the guy to... “rub one out” for him. Ugh, that isn't a possible question. What would it be like if a man asked another man to fuck him to get his hormones in check?

What if he ran into more disappointing hunts and aggravating altercations, and then using the suppressed antagonism on his childhood friend? Not that he'd willingly let such an occurrence happen, but what if.

This is his dream. Anything goes. Perhaps a test drive should sample the waters.

“I wonder if I have bleach to wash myself after this.”

With timid fingers, he reached his devil bringer upwards, resting it on his shoulder. Not long after, he felt the surprisingly cold touch of the veteran's demonic forearm clutching his own. He forced himself to relax against his chest, craning his neck to one side to look up at the man behind him.

Sharp, obsidian-hued teeth graced a malevolent smile, a crimson trail oozing out the corner of the smiling mouth. His left eye glowed a bright yellow, Nero unable to fix his gaze on anything except the psychotic expression the half-demon sported.

Oh shit.

Instincts kicked in, telling him to move Kyrie from this crazed hunter when Dante bent forward and nipped him. His immobile devil bringer had been ensnared into the red and black forearm, as his other arm stayed locked in her hold. A hard fist gripped his hair, keeping him in place, his lips undergoing a bruising treatment. Opening a cerulean orb he noticed Kyrie sitting in the same spot, still clutching his hand as if he wasn't violated right behind her. Then he remembered, this is a dream.

Little by little he relaxed his form, allowing the half-triggered slayer to maul his mouth. So far this test lacked something. He planned to work his way up to spontaneous advances and proceed from there. However, maybe he needed this rough handling to filter the anxiousness out of him. Nothing else can explain his frisky 'condition.'

For the moment, he forgot why he was livid with the veteran.

“How... gross.”

Kissing a guy was different from smooching a girl. Granted, he can't compare the two because his lip-lock with the songstress was sweet and gentle, and the half-demon damn near ripped his peckers off. Added to the rugged treatment accompanied the blood trickling down his chin, though
he couldn't verify the temperature.

This uh.... interaction needed something. No spark or tingling sensation tickled his senses, just a neutral munching on the lips. That angsty attitude roved absent, leaving him trapped without a sense of purpose; he wasn't capable of giving this thing a thorough test drive.

In the next moment however, the mood changed.

Dante shifted to his neck, cradling his pulse between sharp teeth with Nero jerking in surprise, twitching his shoulder with the abrupt gesture. He felt that ministration. With the brunette still leaning on him and his upper body contorted and cradled, he was stuck and good.

Those tiny pincers bit through him, banishing the use of his arms to fight. Goose-pimply shivers wracked his form after the hybrid suckled on his throat, the youngster letting out small gasps with heat sprouting from the depths of his stomach.

“This is... better,” he expressed through murmured words, mouth falling ajar when the same warmth increased in vigor. His lower belly was a cesspool of molten flame, lightly squirming over the build up of heat craving heavier friction or a shivering release. The 'urges' he thought of earlier came to the forefront, having it sensually withdrawn out of him.

In his slumber, this method of discharging this pent-up energy worked fine, the sampling proving a proficient technique of expelling a pestering neediness. Nero told himself that sex would be an easy way to dispel his stress, but perhaps he needed a rigorous activity to occupy his time. Dream Dante may be consuming his body at the moment, but he held doubt the real Dante'll be so willing.

Dwelling on that note further, could a chance arrive where the both of them might... come together as something more than friends if a rare opportunity showcased itself? Like in some weird incident where the outcome is so extreme they have no choice but to?

“Nope,” Nero almost moaned, catching himself instead to let out a soft sigh. Once he'd be right again, there wouldn't be a need to go down this route.

Sobering up a little, he wondered what role the songstress played in this, never mind how bizarre it was that he was kissing the red slayer—er... he meant to say the man locked lips with him. The teen moved to push the half-demon away but the body holding him crushed him tighter, Nero squirming to release himself from the tightening clutch. Those cutting razors regained capture of his pulse, this time biting harder in response to the increased movements.

“Hold still,” Dante's distorted voice echoed, chilling him to the bone; this harmless experiment morphing into a nightmare. He lightly pressed his knees together to affirm if the brunette still sat there, surprised to see that his legs closed all the way.

“What the hell? Where did she go to I didn't sense her—fuck!” Defenses on high alert he pulled away leading with his feet, utilizing every bit of his strength to break free. As of now Dante seemed to have wanted to rip his head off, Nero using his human hand to punch, pull, and scratch the hybrid into oblivion.

The sky darkened, purple-black clouds thickening over the yellow rays once shining down on them. A harsh jerk to his chest stilled his actions, Nero taking a sudden breath as Dante released his devil bringer. With eyes narrowed he jumped up and stumbled to his side, feeling like a piece of his neck was missing.

A hardened glare stared at the half-demon, opting to start a fight with him instead of this sex shit.
Oh what a stupid move, annoyance overshadowing his exasperation to even think that a dose of flirting could be harmless while sleeping. Aw, fuck it then. He'll take all his rage out on that asshole, and if that anxiousness resided afterwards, he'll just bust a nut until he was normal again. There! Problem solved.

About to command the surreal imagination of his sleep to drop an anvil on Dante, he halted when he gazed upon the man sitting on the steps, a crazed smile stretching his profile. It brought back the memory of their issues together in that police bathroom and the crazy personality the elder displayed. The same persona crossed over into his dreams apparently, repeating the scenario at the end of his last dream.

“I got you.”

A red and black forearm held a bloody heart, blue and purple veins gushing the lifeblood out in force. Nero didn't have time to look down and react, face set in abject horror as the half-devil crushed the muscle into pulpous chunks.

“Dammit!” Dante growled, bending over a chair cradling his forehead with his left hand. His feet tapped on the floor, willing the sudden throbbing to cease. Nero found it a grand time to ricochet out of his sleep while the chief administered medicine to his once-torn chest, making them collide heads.

Nero lied awake in bed, both hands nuzzling his pulsing skull, toned legs lightly kicked the mattress. He had a mind to pounce on the elder and punch him blind, but something hard bobbed between his thighs. A warmth spread through his cheeks over his embarrassment threatening to kill him. Instead he opted to lie still, keeping his knees propped so his stiffened dick wouldn’t be so obvious.

“I hate you, Dante.”

“Yeah, well you're no ray of sunshine either.”

“... How'd I get here?”

“The ATV.” Dante replied, rubbing his eyes in a tired motion. “Getting you here was not fun.”

Slowly the images from the previous night poured into the youth's mind. The last thing he remembered were the over-eager puppies making him their chew toy. And that blame fell on Dante in part to his lack of communication and disengaged attitude.

After that nightmare-like shit, perhaps he needed to leave out of his company. It seemed plausible since Dante didn't express concern towards his safety, excluding now, especially following this mission. Withal, wasn’t Nero the one who said his partnership with the red slayer wouldn't commence on the job anymore? Besides, he didn't think he could stand to face the man after what took place in his dreams.

Dante had changed into a semi-tight gray shirt and faded blue jeans, cleaned up and fresh-looking from his gruff appearance. In his hands he smashed together something green and gold above the teen's chest, the liquid dripping onto his almost-closed injury. It spread heat over the opening, tingling prickles rising before the sensation dissolved. Maybe the bastard assumed responsibility, using this method as a cheap apology?

“Why didn't you leave me at the station? It's better than dragging me here, don't you think?” Anger simmered at his core, irritated at Dante's unnecessarily rude behavior. He knew he would be
leaving today.

Dante remained silent, lips pressing into a thin line.

“Am I going to get an answer this time, or should I shut up?”

“I... wasn't feeling too great yetser-”

“Understatement of the fucking year.”

“It's difficult fighting those things, right?”

“Avoiding the question, are you?”

“No, but you need to understand how fucked up this situation got-”

“So that explains away your shitty mood?”

“It does actually, yeah. You know that raging devil within me you always want to spar with? I let him out...”

Dante's teeth bit the inside of his cheek prior to his mouth tightening, jaw muscles flexing upon explaining his actions. “Those converts were hiding in the police force. Your friend, who gave you a nose job, was one of the six assholes running the place. I... had to put an end to them by using something more... reckless. After I called you, more of those Enkindles and whatnot wanted to party. So I gave him a dance card.”

Dante watched the teenager's skin heal on his chest, the thin, pink scar diminishing to only a small line. His smooth, alabaster flesh held no signs of teeth marks from those Spiritual Guardians, tight muscles appearing strong and healthy to his sight.

“When I tried to lock him back up, he didn't want to listen, wanting to tear and rip and shred some more. I literally fought that idiot to submit and send him to his prison. But he left a surprise you had to deal with.”

Nero guessed the 'surprise' was the half-demon's cold hospitality towards him.

“If you arrived five minutes earlier, you would have been seen as the enemy. I'm not sure if I could've stopped myself.”

The teen studied the veteran's face, noticing a dark expression creeping over his countenance. Nero supposed he didn't understand the full extent of Dante's devil trigger.

When the youth used his, it was to overcome a powerful foe that pestered him to no end. Dante, based upon his explanation, repressed his inner devil and the rage he harbored and when he let it out, he had a hard time containing it again. He briefly wondered whose released demonic state had the more blood-thirsty tendencies. The insight was nice to know, but he believed he should go home and check on things; it might be better anyhow.

“So that's your excuse.”

“No, I just need you to realize where I'm coming from.”

The youngster's eyes roamed around his room, noticing a first-aid kit sitting on the dresser. Cotton balls blotted with red and brown streaks along with various medical ointments rested on the side of his bed. He remembered the wolves and their ferocity, wondering why they nearly ate him.
“Why did those dogs do this?”

“You told me nothing went into your arm, at least on your part. But it did. See that jar on the stand?”

Nero didn't bother to look, lying motionless under the cover. He wondered why his erection didn't subside yet.

“Well, I placed the heart on your devil bringer and the gem started glowing. Soon after, the heart shriveled up.” Dante reached for a tiny green gemstone on the dresser, holding it up to the youth's sight. It was square-shaped and smooth on all sides, glimmering in the blue-gray rays of the early morning sun. “Something probably seeped or dissolved into your right hand from the jewel under the desk, and the Guardians felt as if you shouldn't have it.”

“Oh yeah? Hmph, tell those rabid mutts to get neutered.”

The elder snorted a chuckle, thinking now was the time to reveal the culprits responsible for this charade. After he towed an unconscious Nero through the door Trish gave him disapproving looks, Dante telling her to scold him later and bring him a vital gem and a golden orb. Magical beings of an elemental nature were a bitch to heal from. They were on par with blessed items and required more than a lone healing stone to restore him.

After heavy scolding from the blond they exchanged information, Dante reporting from the mission start to its ending, excluding the kissing and name calling. He didn't hold back on explaining the events preceding Lady’s theft and the office's destruction however.

In a mixture of mocking and sympathizing with him, she abruptly told him of a small detour she planned on taking, ordering him to tell Nero about Fortuna and to keep him put here. Dante didn't know how he would do that, but he made no promises.

He braced himself in expectance of the thrashing hormones to come his way.

“If they'd been out sooner, they probably would've bitten the balls off the scientist that started this bullshit.”

“Scientist?”

“From Fortuna.”

Yup, he's catching the first ferry back home.

“Don't do anything irrational yet kid, chances are the followers of that old fart are dead or they fled the island.”

“How long did you know about this?” Nero yelled in light anger, balling his fists into the sheets.

“I saw something on my second trip to Whetstone, but Trish confirmed it.”

“And when did she know about it?!”

“Uh... a little before she got here?” he shrugged, knowing the blond kept secrets.

“And she mentioned nothing!” he strained himself to speak through his thick throat.

“She wanted to round us up and share what we gathered. But since you were hurt and who gives a fuck about Lady, she left me to tell you.”
Is Kyrie in danger? Why didn't Trish tell him? No one navigated the island better than him. How long did this scientist develop the nature of these hearts and where was he? Was there anything else left behind as far as paperwork and books on how to make this stuff?

Months after the fall of the Savior, Nero traveled the castles and lairs of the small town, collecting objects he assumed were fundamental and storing them in a safe location. Did his stash undergo discovery? Did he miss another hidden place where more valuables hid? A hundred thoughts raced through his psyche, thinking the worst could and would happen to Kyrie if he didn't leave soon.

“Where's the scientist?” Nero asked, trying to keep the panic from rising too much in his voice.

“Dead. He wanted to be like the Titty Queen, so she changed him into a monster. Quite fitting, wouldn’t you think?”

“Did he meet her out there or out here?” He sat up out the bed, keeping the cover over his stiffener, but it lessened some.

“Out here,” Dante collected the medical supplies, readying to start his morning as he planned yesterday. Nero's becoming concern about Kaitlin was admirable, but if he assumed where Trish took her 'detour', he had little to woe about. “Kid don't worry, she's in no danger-”

“You don't know that!” he shouted, forehead crinkling because he hadn't a clue of any wrongdoing still going on in the town.

“Well, if you feel you need to go, then do it. Just let no one suspect anything to draw the spies out, if there are any.”

“Fine,” the teen muttered, his throat loosening from its constricted hold.

Dante wiped his hands with a spare towel, grabbing the objects and heading out. He withheld this strange notion that the kid wouldn't leave yet.

Any rational person would have enough sense to call first to gauge the importance of coming to a loved one's aid. And if he crossed any more of those infected hearts, Nero had the stopping power in his devil bringer to destroy the tainted essence within the gem.

He wasn't leaving.

Upon reaching the doorway the hybrid turned sideways, intent to put the brat's head back into focus before giving a wry smile, recalling the reason Nero didn't move around too much. “Before you walk out that door though, you should rid of your morning wood before doing anything. I don't think you should go scaring anybody outside with it.”

“Nero, how are you?” A soft, feminine voice beamed through the phone, lifting half of the stress settling on his shoulders just to hear her speak.

“I'm fine, Kyrie. How have you been?” He bothered the hem of his gray tank top sitting on Dante's table, tapping his foot in black sweatpants and matching socks.

“A little tired, but okay. We've really rebuilt the main plaza. Everyone's been so helpful.”

“I bet. And the church? Any repairs to that done?”

“Mm, no. People don't hang around there much.”
Why would they? After Dante's infamous entrance, the citizens avoided that place like the plague.

Calling her felt bittersweet. He was happy to know she was fine, but he was still a little sore about his departure thanks to those chickenshit dumbfuck citizens who pushed their fears onto him. Whatever, he can reminisce on that later. Right now he needed to see if any strange shit went on in the town.

“Oh okay. Hey, have you noticed anything weird going on? Like, any weird people or events taking place?”

She giggled. “Um, well... there is this one woman who came here. She said she knows you.”

He stopped the tapping. “Who? Has she tried talking to you? Where is she?”

“She's right here.”

What the hell.

“Why, hello Nero.”

“Trish?”

What the hell is going on? She's in Fortuna right now? In her disguise or as herself?

“I apologize for keeping this from you, but this little assignment required a woman's touch. Couldn't have you coming here and the town wasn't ready to praise your presence just yet.”

“But... why? Why didn't you mention something? I'm not Dante.”

“I know, but if I did you would have insisted to come out here anyway. You probably wouldn't listen to us. See, we were supposed to gather for a group conference and plan what to do next. Since nobody was available and Dante busied himself playing nurse, I took it upon myself to pay a visit out here. The town's busy and no one seems interested in anything other than rebuilding, or what I picked up from it.”

“How'd you meet up with Kyrie?”

“Oh, I saw her carrying vegetables to the kitchen and I snatched her away for a little 'girl talk.'”

Ain’t that a bitch? What gave these morons the audacity to tell him where and when he could leave? He knew Kyrie longer than all of them combined. And what made her think he was going to stay here? What if he was homesick? What if he wanted to catch up on old times with his friend?

“No one's holding you against your will or playing your part. If you want to come out here, that's your choice. All I'm asking is that you trust in me to handle my business.”
The phone went silent as Nero mulled over her words. A hesitant voice breathed through the receiver. “N-Nero? Are you still there?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Are you all right? What's going on?”

Her timid yet heightened tone told of her worry. The last thing he wanted to do was stress her out.

He admitted that Trish was a strong fighter, and she knew how important Kyrie is to him. Unlike another certain breed of a demon, she cared less to play games or fool around. Trish wouldn't put the songstress in harm's way and if trouble stirred, the blond would protect her, or at least he held a belief she would do so. He wished they'd tell him stuff, he hated being out of the loop.

“Oh nothing. This old geezer had his dentures stolen.”

“Nero!” she giggled, reeling in her humored tiffs.

“What?”

“That's so mean! No seriously, what's wrong?”

“Nothing much. You remember Dante, right?”

“Yes.”

“He... dropped something of his out there and someone's going around flashing it. That's all. He's acting like a baby because he misses it.” A lie, but he needed to calm her doubt. If he didn't give her an excuse, she'd speculate and assume until she became upset. “That's why Dante's friend is visiting because she knows where to look. She'll cause no trouble.”

“Oh, I see.” She sounded satisfied enough with his answer. “Will she need help in her search?”

“Nah, she's good. And don't you go offering your help either.”

“Are you sure?”

“As sure as Dante is a living fossil.”

“Nero! Be nice!” He could tell there was a smile in her voice. “Okay then, are you coming out here?”

“I... plan to, sometime soon,” he sensed a weight lift off of him now that he called her, leaving him to combat other issues. “Well, I won't hold you. It's almost time to prep for lunch, right?”

“Yes. The harvest is doing great this year, thanks to you helping to rebuild the farmhouse a while back, and the fish are swimming in plentiful.”

“Yeah that's... that's good. I hope the fisherman are catching something other than trout and bass.”

She must have picked up on his subtle mood change. “Nero, if at any time you feel like coming home, don't wait, just come all right?” She paused, as if waiting to hear his answer. “Now you're sure you're fine?”

“Yup. I'm just glad to hear your voice and that you're doing okay.”
“Well, I am. If you want to call me, don't hesitate. I'm here for you.”

“Yeah, thanks Kyrie. I'll see you soon.”

“Okay, bye.”

He hung up the phone, rubbing his head over the mixed emotions coming into play. He told himself that going home would cheer him up, but after he talked to the songstress and she seemed fine... he wasn't ready yet, supposedly.

The memories of his self-induced exile roved fresh in his mind every week when he phoned her, torn between showing up on their doorsteps with a big 'fuck you' smile and forgetting about it all. On the other hand, Dante's place provided an eccentric comfort he wasn't privy to in Fortuna, and maybe he didn't want to leave the kooky atmosphere just right now.

But he wouldn't admit that out loud you know, pride and whatnot.

“I hate... cookie squids!”

Dante didn't think his plan would turn out this bad.

With heavy teasing to the sulking punk after the phone call Dante, in his own manner of professionalism, challenged the teen to a drinking game after he ordered and ate pizza. In the effort to distract the youth from his brooding, he remembered the youngster wasn't over the legal drinking age. It didn't really matter because his blood prevented the rapid onset of inebriation, but he had to be the half-responsible adult in this.

Nero responded with “Bring it on you colossal relic,” and Dante said “Careful what you wish for pre-pubes,” which started this diversion of debauchery. He assumed the kid rode slim on his patience from the demonic commotion and wanted to relax his mind temporarily; the reason he agreed to it without hesitation. He wondered if Nero should get a massage or something afterwards, because he was a bit high-strung.

But by the looks of things, it seemed as though Nero wanted Dante to do the massaging.

The hybrid downed a bottle of Jack Daniels and felt... serene. Granted, he could chug a lot more but this lone bottle drove him towards a carefree afternoon. Or it would've been if Nero didn't embody the word's meaning.

The drinking game started off with light activities, such as taking a swig of they ever experienced a bed wetting and if they killed a demon with a single blow, to suffering a case of the worst blue balls. The distraction meant to be taken lightly as a way to relax and settle down before Ramona's antics brewed into another giant shit storm. But Nero took it as a challenge.

At the teen's first try at swallowing whiskey he couldn't stomach the strong taste, spilling the drink down his gray tank top and sweatpants. However, as with any habit in its beginning stages the seeds of addiction had been planted, urging him to nourish his palette with another sip. Swallow after swallow lulled his uptight demeanor, perhaps a little too good.

Naturally, Dante backed off to let the youngster sober up, but the kid protested. The elder even attempted to snatch his glass away, but his fingers almost ended up bitten off to his knuckles. To make the brat stop Dante asked personal questions: if he thought about fucking; how many times has he jacked off; did he ever have a dream about a guy fucking him. The invasive inquiries should've flustered the brat so he'd quit, but the fledgling chugged on.
The half-demon got a little carried away with the sensitive material and allowed the semi-interrogation to continue, but after Nero's third bottle of Jack, he stashed the rest of his alcohol to let the punk clear his mind.

They sat on the couch to watch TV, Dante waiting on the news to see if his antics caught the world's attention. A commercial came on about chocolate cookies and a cartoon squid trying to steal them from a whale... thus the saying of Nero's nonsensical sentence. Things took a strange turn afterwards.

Another advertisement announced a romantic comedy, each of the characters falling into slip-ups while kisses were thrown in the middle; with Nero scooting towards Dante to air out his complaints. Via resting his head in his lap.

Oh boy.

“I that yov kiss peoples yous love?” Nero looked up at him, speech slurred with glazed over orbs staring at him. The brat wasn't drunk, but he definitely reclined some.

The hybrid crossed his arms with widened eyes, Nero using him as a headrest and getting bolder with his touches.

“I suppose so.”

“Then you why kiss mes, no?”

How friggin' adorable.

“Because you're an annoying little shit, and you get on my nerves.”

The youth... didn't like that answer, presumably, after taking time to process his words, face contorting into one of confusion.

“Liar. Chu' only kiss some booty you likes.” He paused, gathering his scrambled thoughts. “Heey... yous do loves mes.”

“Hmph, don't flatter yourself punk, you're drunk.”

“I'm serrious, you do lilac me.” Nero felt the need to start touching Dante anywhere in his face, nearly poking his eye out by mistake.

The red hunter grabbed his devil bringer. “Don't force me to pour water on you to make you act right. Come on now, settle down.”

Cerulean irises fixated on him, unblinking with a heavy leer pointing at him. He couldn't read the expression in them, thinking Nero got the message to cool it, only it had the opposite effect.

The news came on, the reporter telling the events of a high speed chase that ended when the driver crashed into a sewer channel... or Dante presumed they said it while Nero found it necessary to straddle him, taking his focus off the TV.

This didn't look good.

“What are you doing?”

“Liar.”
Nero bent forward, grabbing the cradle of Dante's jawbones pressing harder to kiss him. The smell of pizza and whiskey permeated through the elder's nostrils, keeping still because Nero didn't realize what he was doing. The liquor drove him to act with free reign, guiding his nerves to something he might regret when he sobered. If he hadn't had so much to drink and he mounted him... well he guessed he'll never know now.

Ah, what the hell brought his on?

Doing relationships wasn't his style. The risks made it impossible to have one. Hell had a deep-rooted grudge against his bloodline, and he gained notoriety in response to his demon-slaying antics too. As soon as anyone heard anything remotely close to him having a physical relationship with someone, there remained the gamble of Dante losing them. If Nero wanted a quick fix then hey, it stood the chance to relieve their stresses quickly. Not to mention the complicated emotions bound to erupt. Anything else... shit he should have stopped him at a swig.

Or maybe give him half of a beer.

He didn't budge, keeping his folded arms in place, thinking of what to do next. If he reciprocated the kiss, then he'd be just as guilty, encouraging something he wasn't so sure he wanted to happen. If he turned him down, he didn't want the punk to hate him and leave, never to see him again. There wasn't time to entertain this heavy of a distraction and no matter if they used alcohol or not, Dante didn't take advantage of his partners. He assumed Nero's filtering system wasn't as strong as his, making the kid a bit of a lightweight.

Fumbling hands pushed his head back with Nero pressing to kiss deeper, but Dante refused to return the advances. The younger hunter planted caressing little nips on his upper lip, not in a seductive way but to sloppily experiment with his ministrations. A wet tongue licked him from his chin to the bridge of his nose, the elder thinking on an intervention... if his hands could gather strength in them to move.

“Kid, what are you doing?”

“I... don't know.”

An anxious male pulled back a little, wondering why the other participant stayed motionless. His mind roved in a mild daze, acting on his lax impulses. He didn't fully grasp the reasoning behind his actions, but there wasn't any inner voices telling him to stop his advances. Alarm bells remained silent in his head. It was as if common sense retired for the rest of the day. He didn't feel guilty about anything at the moment, just needed to get his brain away from this madhouse and the crazy patients living in it.

While sitting in the lap of the lead psychiatrist.

As if his common sense returned from its vacation it crashed home, filling his psyche with a million thoughts about how stupid he looked. Slowly he let his hands drop from the veterans face, fingers balling into fists to keep them from shaking in morbid embarrassment. His throat constricted with the weight of his touches replaying in his mind, eyes staring down at Dante's gray shirt to avoid eye contact.

“Nero.”

Baby blue irises touched pale icebergs momentarily, but their curious light seemed to penetrate him and see deep inside. But there was something else—a flash of danger and a heady, muddled awareness he had never had before. Startled at the way Dante's glance sent his pulse racing he
turned away, wondering how he would act after he removed himself off of the hybrid.

With his head swimming in confusion he intended on the movement but strong hands grabbed his wrists, preventing him from leaving and forcing him to be still.

“Let me go.”

“You've been acting very strange lately.”

“I said let go,” he muttered, speech remaining slurred, squirming under the elder's scrutiny.

“One thing I've learned about people buzzed on liquor is that what they say is true. Whatever bullshit they're harboring comes out, revealing all their dirty secrets on how they truly feel. So tell me, why do I like you?”

Nero tried wrenching himself free, pulling away with as much strength he could muster but Dante held fast onto him. His devil bringer flashed a bright blue, cheeks flushed pink upon realizing the brunt of his awkward actions. Even worse, Dante seemed intent on holding him until he spilled his heart out.

It's official, he's never touching alcohol again.

“Let me go,” he tried to snarl, but somehow he humored the half-demon, with what the smirk plastered on his face gave any leeway.

“Avoiding my question, punk?”

“Fuck you, like you care!”

Dante sensed aggression stemming from the youth, directed towards the anger at himself rather than the response to his question. He observed the kid wavering from his usual personality on some days, but he counted it as hormonal mood changes. Obviously this roved a bit deeper.

“Keeping secrets from me won't help your situation.”

Nero's protest grew in strength, using his legs to push off the hybrid's lap but Dante refused to heed his demand. The chieftain didn't dodge his head fast enough when the punk lurched forward to use his teeth, drawing blood on his cheek from the harsh bite he delivered.

Irritated with his secretive and childish ways his forehead connected to Nero's, the teen recoiling from the impact before settling down in the crook of his neck in defeat.

The strife left him, Dante releasing his hold after the teen slumped against him. One human and scaly hand covered a pained expression after recuperating from the exertion to escape from the elder and his throbbing head. He expected to be pushed to the floor or for Dante to get up but he did neither, letting him nurse his tiredness... and slightly wounded pride. Geez, he could be a physical son of a bitch.

“I don't like being cornered...” Nero mumbled into his shoulder.

“And...” the hybrid coaxled with gentle persuasion.

“In my dreams, I can't fight back—against you... or your demon. You... corner me and I have no way of escaping. It doesn’t matter if I swing at you, you always gain the victory.”

Dante knew how Nero wanted their spars to push each other to the max, yet the teen swallowed his
disappointment preceding every clash. Time after time the youngster goaded the hybrid to unleash his devil trigger, but he avoided the request. Sure the brat irked the shit out of him in battle, but it was nowhere near enough to release his demonic side. The youth tried carving him into pieces with Yamato, but Dante wouldn't cut him up with his claws.

"Is that what all this is about? Since you can't fight me how you want right now you do so in your sleep?"

"No... you show up and turn it into a nightmare," more mumbling poured out, lightly rubbing his head to soothe the ache.

"And why does it change into a nightmare? Do I try to kill you or does something else happen?"

Without another word Nero slid off of him, balance unsteady as his bangs drew over his eyes. He avoided eye contact moving towards his room, intent on getting away from Dante before he told him what really went on in his dreams.

"You're hiding something..."

Nero jumped, his back slamming into the wall beside the stairs. Dante's scented breath blew into his face, holding both of Nero's wrists in each of his hands. Anger swelled within him, pushing against the restraints with force but the alcohol in his system wobbled his focus. He had a mind to knee the elder's groin, except the warm body almost flushed against his halted his movements.

Didn't he tell that red ass he doesn't like to be cornered?

"Why do I get the sense that that's not the only thing I try to do?"

Nero quieted, forcing his mind to tune into the present and not the sudden flow of blood due south in his pants. If he wasn't so sluggish, he'd be able to fend off his interrogator and fight through his abashed sentiments. Instead, his views waged war with each other, refraining from spilling everything hampering his thoughts to openly expressing what he felt.

He made the mistake of looking into iceberg hues, igniting this foreign sensation settling in his toes, rising through his legs to spread to his crotch. Dante's expression remained impassive, burning into him with unrelenting ferocity. Cerulean eyes wavered down to his lips, breath becoming heavy as hazy images of those same labiums roamed over his body... much akin to his first wet dream living under this roof.

"What aren't you telling me, because it's starting to make you act a little crazy. Should I squeeze it out of you..."

Dante sniffed twice, stopping mid-sentence to inhale the hypnotic pheromones coiling around his nose. A while ago he held his suspicions close to him about Nero's odd behavior. Now that the physical evidence presented itself through his nostrils, he had a better understanding of how to treat this situation.

"You're helpless in your dreams because I dominate you, don't I?" Dante stared at pale eyelids covering eyes saturated in shame. It wasn't the first time someone told him they dreamt about him, however why does it turn into a nightmare?

Did he try to eat him in the cannibalistic sense? Does he... rip off the devil bringer while he's balls deep inside him? Ha, that would be a sight to see. Still, if Nero was feeling a little anxious, then Dante can get rid of that for him. Going after a guy wasn't his standard cup of tea, but what the hell. He'll make an exception for the punk.
“Now my dear Nero, tell me what I do to you.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dante, why do have to be so rough? Leave the rough-housing for a later time, lol.

Remember how I said I would do a Dark Dante story, I posted it. So far people like my interpretation of the character, so if you want to have a look at it, feel free. :
“No.” Nero's face morphed into an angry pout. “You'll think I'm stupid.” The effects of the alcohol simmered away, bringing back the firecracker and his raging hormones.

“No you're not. Young and naïve probably, but not stupid.” Dante hung onto his wrists, stopping him from moving around too much. The brat's pheromones projected a hefty musk, too strong for Dante to ignore. There was a reason he didn't deal with relationships, the other party had a habit to broadcast mixed messages until he coaxed their feelings out of them. “I mean it. I'm not letting you go until you tell me what happens in that noggin of yours.”

Nero's wrists started to ache, the tight grip keeping him imprisoned left him with few options to escape. Kneeing him in his crotch flitted across his thoughts again, however his stance wasn't sturdy in case he retaliated.

“We fuck, don't we?”

Ceruleans lit up at the blunt question then returned to Dante's shirt, nodding in curt annoyance. He might as well get it over with.

“Hm, I see.” He let go of Nero with delicacy, watching the teen slowly ball his fists at his sides, chewing on his bottom lip to avoid eye contact, his mouth frowning. “So, why is it a nightmare if I'm giving you the goods? Is there blood or mutilation involved?”

Another nod bobbed from his head, remaining still with specks of red tinting his cheeks. Talking, or rather agreeing, to his interrogation worked the elder's nerves to the edge. Perhaps if he moved away to let the kid gain breathing room it'll make him feel better.

“Is that it? Why you're so... weird-acting all of a sudden? If you're that horny, why don't you call up-”

Bristled with surprising anger Nero pushed Dante away, balling up his devil bringer, intending to deliver a solid right hook to his sturdy jaw. With practiced ease the veteran side-stepped the oncoming attack, letting Nero stumble out of his charge.

Did he say something wrong?

He just suggested he call up Kristy and see about going on a date and possibly getting laid. Did this pertain to his dreams? Is he taking his anger out on him because he and the girl grew distant or had problems? Did the brat think he was responsible for the awkwardness he felt in his slumber? Was mentioning anything about her a touchy matter? It goes without saying that Dante had a few naughty visions about the twerp as well, but he wasn't as invested in its significance as the punk. What was he doing to him in his sleep?

A roundhouse kick swung at his head, ducking under the limb as Nero's balance wavered. “Let me guess, I do something to her before I pounce on you?” Another fist flew in his direction, catching it without strain.

The devil bringer came into view with Dante acting on instinct. He wrapped his biceps underneath
Nero's arms, clasping his hands together at the base of Nero's skull. He shook the youth from side to side, applying pressure the longer the teen thrashed around. It seemed to work, the short burst of energy left him tired. Perhaps now he could get to the root of the problem devoid of any more outbursts.

“I wouldn't try that in the future, might end up hurting yourself more than you can bear.”

“It's all your fault,” Nero whispered in defeat, body slumped forward, letting his mouth move on its own, breath coming in short spurts. “I'm not supposed to be in my dreams fighting you off. I'm not supposed to think of you in that light. It isn't right and I am and I can't stop it.”

Ah, now we're getting somewhere.

“I can't... I just... don't know what to think or say to you about this.” Angered words filled the living room, accompanied by shallow breaths.

Legs seemed too weak to stand on their own so they buckled, Dante releasing his submission maneuver to cradle the teen's waist. He pulled them to where they sat on the couch with the teen leaning against him in the crook of his arm.

In truth, Dante himself didn't know how to respond to the youth's declaration. As much as he gathered from the drunken mess, he assumed Nero felt like he betrayed the songstress because he lusted after him. He wasn't familiar with how deep their relationship went, but it must be serious if he was this bothered by the attraction.

“I don't know what's wrong with me.”

“Well, I guess I have this magnet attached to me. No one's blaming you for how you feel. Don't worry kid, it'll-”

“Asshole...” Nero broke through the elder's sentence once he realized what he said. This wasn't a joking time, and he shouldn't treat this delicate situation with jesting attributes. He still had his mind set on telling the elder to fuck off, but he needed to rid his conscious of the bullshit plaguing it.

“Seriously, I'm flattered. I'm not sure what your dreams are edging you to do, but it's nothing you should fret over.”

“I get enough of you during the day, I don't need to see you in my sleep.”

“You shouldn't be seeing me in your sleep or fucking you in it?” He felt the youngster wince, obviously uncomfortable with the subject but this was no time to hide behind a shy curtain. The longer he neglected Nero's issues, the more repressed he would act. “Don't chicken out Nero. Man up and let me know what's happening with you.”

The teen inhaled a heavy breath, rubbing his eyes first to attempt to have a clean conscious.

Should he rely on him? Can he tell him what's been plaguing his psyche these past months? Would he confide in him to keep it between them? He wasn't one who had a great sense of courage when it involved expressing his personal feelings.

If a problem arose he handled it with reckless haste, words becoming emotional daggers to shoot down any conflict. It was only when Kyrie came into his life did he try to curb his hot-headed temper, more so for her though. Dante was asking him to open his heart to him and... he didn't know how. Sure he can blabber away and all, but gauging the elder’s reaction made him hesitate. A
He wasn't comfortable telling another guy his dreams—sex dreams about him. Men aren't supposed to be so... suggestive towards each other. That's what people said. That's what society believed. It wasn't natural to do so.

Then again, him and Dante gave two fucks about conforming to someone else's standards.

“I... It can't... I...” Nero opened and closed his mouth stuttering through his words, battling his urge to blurt out everything troubling his head and stifling his vocal cords. And the hybrid didn't grant him easier access by being so close upon him, making his mind a hazy fog trying to maintain his sensibilities. He probably focused on him with his intense gaze on purpose to heighten his discomfort level.

Dante immediately sensed his reluctance, shifting through his mortifying guilt, fighting through his conflicting emotions to reveal his troubles. In certain times, the elder was an impatient man. He didn't have time to second guess another's actions and wait until they conceded. Nero half-confessed to his dilemmas, and Dante decided he should help Nero along with the confession... in his own manner.

“Hang on... hey what are y-”

The partial-demon sucked in air, body going rigid as his toes splayed out in his socks. His heartbeat thudded against his rib cage, keeping his frame motionless as Dante gently grabbed his face and kissed his trembling lips. His devil bringer clenched and unclenched in surprise, making an effort to still his quakes with the halfling roaming his spicy peckers over his quivering mouth.

This wasn't like anything he experienced before. Dante bestowed this forceful gentleness upon him, flavored lips caressing his mouth with dominant ease, jittery nerves lessening their antics. Somewhere in the corner of his mind his conscious told him how wrong this felt, how dishonest this was to the brunette but for some elusive reason, he couldn't explain why.

They were intimate with small pecks of appreciation after the 'Savior incident', and then they went back to rebuilding the city. Nothing of a deep, flirty or sensual display took place long after, and neither of them questioned the status of their relationship. He came under the presumption, without discussing their footing with each other, that they are just friends but he hadn't the chance to talk to her about it. It gave the impression of a silent agreement never proposed verbally.

In retrospect, did it still count as a betrayal?

All logic dissolved when sharp teeth gently nibbled his upper lip, breath hitching when the sensation carried tingles to his groin. Moans disguised as soft exhales escaped through his nose, relaxing his frame the more ensnared he became in his grasp.

Baby blues couldn't peek from under shut eyelids, too doubtful of what he might see if he did. Would the veteran be looking down on him? Are his lids closed too? And therein lied the factor his brain strived to compute.

The half-demon kissed him first. For the longest, he told himself having an attraction to another man wouldn't be possible yet here he was. Well, he wouldn't say he had a crush on Dante, but there was a certain fondness he developed towards him.

Spending as much time in the elder's presence created these weird feelings rising within him. He meant to ask Trish about it, but Dante appeared to know more on his 'problems' than she did.
Perhaps shoving the dead weight of what went on in his dreams would free him of its burden, and
he blindly let the red hunter guide him through this.

Their lips pulled apart, Dante breathing out with caressing wisps of air while Nero panted in his
face. His fists remained by his sides, roaming under his surprise of how the kiss sent strong vibes
through his form. The buzz in his system faded his worries and cares to drift in the vacant spaces
of his mind, occasionally surging forward to make sense of his life.

Dante captured an unexpected moan from Nero's throat, swiping his tongue over the moist
labiums, managing not to smile at the display; the kid was putty in his hands. It seemed like he
would temporarily relieve all of their stresses in the coming moments.

The veteran wasn't sure where this would lead them down the road, but he was sticking to his
ideals. His agenda didn't include being the doting lover; demons gave no caution about his
attachments to anything he held dear, and he didn't have the energy to grieve again. The halfling
stayed confident he'd give him a good romping or two and that's it.

Then again, he was no fortune teller.

With slow, teasing effort Dante slipped his long and agile tongue in his moist tunnel, pulling his
face closer as the kid's stiffened body mellowed. He never believed he'd be smooching a guy but in
a weird sense, he can't help it. If it was anyone else, he wouldn't be as invested in finding out their
problems. The punk lived to be this magnetic enigma and he couldn't shake off the ensnaring vibes
he put off.

And by the way things were going, he may end up busting both their nuts.

Nero didn't know what to do with his wet muscle, venturing out to connect with the coiling snake
exploring his mouth in earnest. Dante applied just enough pressure to keep him breathless,
supplying light nips and gentle gnawing to lull his insecurities to bed.

More hushed groans of satisfaction escaped in blissful ignorance, procuring bravery to mimic the
movements the hybrid's tongue created. It became a game then, Nero attempting to push that same
energy back onto Dante but the experience the elder donned toppled any efforts on his part.

Heat pitted deep in his belly, making his prick ache to have a touch fondle the engorged length.
Humility flew out the window of sanity and he craved nothing but pure release. If he wasn't so
doped up on desire, he would connect the comparisons to his dreams.

Will his dreams be made of these scenes akin to what happened right now or in the future? Was
this a one-time deal? He didn't know the answer, nor what would come of their relationship once
this stopped; he'd just have to face the aftermath when the time came. But not after this maddening
errection went away.

Nero's fingers trailed towards the imprint in his pants, readying to free himself from the suddenly
tight confines when a threatening growl erupted from Dante's chest, rumbling through the youth to
halt his apparent goal.

Somewhere in the throes of becoming lust, he imagined Dante to say something like “I dare you”,
to which a delicious tremor snaked through his body, almost in a fit to challenge those words to
become true.

With ease, Dante leaned to hover over Nero, lips pressed and massaging with vigor against his
own. One human and demonic hand fought to keep still, itching to wrap around the hybrid's broad
back or to clutch his lily-white locks. Or to rub his own aching dick.

The red one immersed himself with the way the brat's excited frame shook with small twitches, emitting this seducing yet devilish scent of black ash and green mint. His arousal spiked to where the kid needed to free himself, but the elder stopped it. Sure, he left it up to the punk to express his anxiousness, but he wanted in on the fun too.

Until the sound of a rumbling engine pierced his ears.

Leaving gentle strokes on Nero's plumped labiums Dante sent a glare over the ledge of the couch, seeing a feminine physique riding a red and silver motorcycle en route to the shop. Without looking down at the panting youth he recalled the reason he was angry earlier, dissipating the rising desire burning in his groin.

“Is that what goes on in your dreams?”

Burning desire flowing through his veins had iced over, sobering from his blurred lust as Dante's hard voice broke through the cloudy fog. As eyelids opened he glanced upwards to see iceberg blues piercing out the window; Nero giving a slight nod in confirmation.

“Good,” Dante slowly slid off the youth, rubbing a hand on the back of his neck, walking towards his desk-less area with stiff movements. Nero sensed a frigid aura surrounding the elder, akin to a switch he turned off and on depending on his mood.

Did it have something to do with the kissing? Was he feeling regretful or worse, disgusted? Is he the cause to blame? The abrupt change was startling, leaving Nero with a deflated hard-on.

The youngster immediately sat up when he heard heels clack up the steps, trying to smooth over his crazy appearance. He could tell his face was flushed, splotches of red littering the upper half of his torso; he didn't need to look in the mirror. Nero hoped whoever walked in didn't notice... too much. That was too close a call not to sense someone's arrival.

“Well, if it isn't the hoochie-pants gold-digger.” Dante remarked in a snide tone, making his way towards the kitchen.

The female huntress stood in the doorway and glanced over at Nero, seeing his fidgety form sitting in the couch’s corner. There was a nervous twitch on his face, like he did something wrong and tried to cover it up. What was with his surprised look? Did it have to do with her sudden presence? Did he know something she didn't? But first she had to set this money-hoarding asshole straight on what she was not.

“Well, I can see someone got up on the right side of the bed this morning.”

“I guess you would know something about getting up early.” He came back out with a frosted beer, plopping down on the opposite end of the couch, noting Nero's hard stare through his peripheral vision.

“Ugh, do you see how pathetic you are eating pizza every day!” She looked at the empty boxes on the table. Then added later. “And what reason do you have to be cranky?”

“If only you knew, Lady.” He snorted with the barest hint of an insinuating undertone, popping the cap off to take a healthy swig.

“Well, I only came over here with a job-”
“Don't want it.”

“I'm not asking.”

“Don't care.”

“Too bad.”

“Take it yourself. I'm sure with all that money you stole from me, you can buy enough ammo to kill anything to a bloody pulp. Or nag it to death. Whichever way is quicker for you.”

“Are you done nagging? You're acting like a spoiled brat.”

Nero paid attention to their bantering nature, trying not to laugh at their comical dispute. Watching them took his thoughts away from almost being caught, and not a moment too soon.

Compared to the docile women in Fortuna, Lady would give the most head-strong man a run for his goods... and win by a landslide. She possessed this no-bullshit attitude coupled with distant trust he had no choice but to admire. On par with Dante she could match him in any verbal war, using witty comebacks to crush his words or to threaten him with a bullet to his extremities. And on the battlefield, from the small bits he's seen of her, she had a style and skill all her own for a human.

However, the teen thought it harsh how she used and manipulated the chieftain. For the small jobs she didn't care about, she passed them on to him without a second look then demanded the payment. Nero didn't know the particulars of their financial “agreement”, but the hybrid was a punk to bow under her demands.

He'll be damned if he stood in Dante's spot. The youth wouldn't allow her to take the last of his money just because she felt she could.

Wait... why was Dante mad at her this time, besides the obvious?

Dante glanced at Nero, reading the confusion on his face.

“Remember when you complained about the messy front office?”

“Y-yeah,” Nero cleared his throat after how soft it sounded. “Uh yeah, after your tantrum.”

“See, I'm not the only sane one-”

“You hush,” Dante waved her off. “My share of money was on the desk when I went back to Whetstone and-”

“You left it out?”

“Shh! I'm talking.” Dante grabbed a used napkin, hurling the greasy cloth in the teen's direction. “She must have came over here at the ass-crack of dawn, saw it there, and took something that wasn't hers to take.”

“... Yeah but, why would you leave it out in plain view?” Nero shot a look in the elder's direction, Dante returning the same gaze with a shadow of something mysteriously lurking within. Nero felt slow tingles shooting down his spine, recalling how that slinky appendix rolled and slid along his own, shortening his breath and leaving him hungry for more.

“Thank you again, Nero.” The brunette didn't neglect to notice the odd exchange shared between
the two. Since he came to stay here, Dante seemed calmer and not as... biting towards the femme fatales. She willed to bet money that Nero's presence had quelled his quick dismissal of a job, mostly. Lady guessed that was a good thing because it kept the red hunter bantering with the newcomer, and he focused on her and Trish less often.

“It doesn't matter where I leave my money in my house, if ya see it laying somewhere, don't touch it.” Dante threw his hands up flustered, managing not to spill any of his drink, taking a swig afterwards.

“You know, that's where I usually pick up the money on payday, so again, you're to blame. I thought it was mine.”

“So now that you've admitted it's not yours, give it back.”

“Give what back?”

Dante gave up, rubbing his hand over his face in a tired motion. Why does she keep snatching his earnings? It wasn't like he borrowed anything after the Fortuna scandal (after he did the majority of the work and she took his share), so what was her problem? He could be down to his last and she wouldn't blink an eye in care, despite her proclamations that she wouldn't let him starve. He was more than thankful for Nero's help here.

“Now that the pleasantries are out of the way, are you ready to listen?” Lady looked over her pinstriped, one-buttoned blazer and matching shorts. She was happy she took them to the cleaners in preparation for the incoming jobs ripe with heavier challenges. And what gave him the right to call her a 'hoochie'?

“If it doesn't equal the $2400 you took or greater, then shove off Lady.”

Wait, she took the amount from the six grand from that job? Oh, no wonder he was so angry at her... despite him wanting to laugh in Dante's face. Withal, the teen believed her to be in the wrong with her greedy and selfish ways. Nevertheless, his words rang true. If Dante wanted none of his stuff stolen, he shouldn't leave it out on display. Especially since he knew how financially hungry Lady could be.

“Aw, well it could be up your alley if you pretend it's that much,” she smiled in merriment, readjusting the strap holding Kalina Ann before she got down to business. “Look, this assignment requires you to transport this box of jewels for Ramona Barnes, does that name ring a bell?” Lady waited on the response she was seeking from the hunters.

After Trish met up and informed her of the duo's adventures, she checked with her sources on any additional references. One of her informants intercepted a note from Ramona's group and he gave it to her. Since Dante already had issues with this chick, she presumed the job would be more his speed to pass it along to him.

“A box of jewels you say,” he scratched his chin, recalling the stones he collected, most being in those coffin-cases he didn't sort through yet. “You like jewelry and flashy shit. Why don't you-”

“I'll take it.” Nero cut in, rolling his eyes over how these two went back and forth like children. He already knew that Dante would investigate the cargo, he was just being difficult since Lady controlled his finances. Honestly, when they bantered it felt as if he was the mature adult.

The brunette arched a shapely eyebrow in surprise, looking at his outstretched human hand while his demonic one tried to hide by his side. He stayed out of the way on most occasions, coming to
Dante's rescue when he snubbed a mission.

From what she gathered, he proved a handy and sufficient fighter, taking on the local jobs with ease. But around town lingered nothing but lesser demons, the occasional smart devil, and the upsurging of converted humans. Those were small chumps and a few bullets put them down. She wasn't ready to give something this big to a kid, regardless if he knew of Ramona or not.

“What makes you so sure you can handle it?”

The teen inhaled deeply, trying not to bristle at her dismissal of his capabilities. “You're not blind. You can see how he's moping.”

She wouldn't be able to experience half the shit he endured so that haughty attitude of hers better curb itself. Nero wanted to tell her off, but some unknown force trapped his defensive retort in his throat; namely Dante giving him a pensive stare to quit before it went any further.

“I know about that pouty moron. but what about you?”

“What about me?” he challenged. “If I can handle mangy mutts using me as a chew toy, then some bitter tramp poses no threat.”

“Oh? Those are big words you're claiming. You're not letting Dante's ego rub off on you and cloud your judgment on how scorned she could be, are you?”

“So you know all about being scorned then, right?”

Okay children, that's enough.” Dante intervened, seeing dark eyebrows narrow in contempt. Lady was known to push buttons. Whereas Dante was familiar with her distrustful ways, the youth would defend himself against her words until they blew up into a wrathful confrontation. “I don't want blood on my floors, it's a bitch to clean up.” He reached up and grabbed the note from her, never getting the chance to read it since the punk seized it.

“Well then, I guess that settles it.” She adjusted her rose-tinted glasses, giving Nero a pointed leer before she spun on her booted heel. “Work hard and pay me later.”

“Pay you for what?!” Dante said in disbelief, setting his drink down, expecting an answer.

She vacated the premises without another word or acknowledgment.

“Is she always like that?” Nero huffed, wondering if she was the one who woke up on the wrong side of the bed instead.

“Yup. Except after she's had her hair and nails did.” He watched her hop on her bike and sped off.

“And you just let her walk all over you?”

“No, I don't-”

“Yes you do.” The youth glanced up at the veteran with a purposeful focus, eyes falling a bit in contest as white-blue irises gazed at him with becoming hunger. In an instant his body temperature rose, tongue sticking hard into his cheek, his mind drifting to their kisses and heated exchanges.

Oh shit.

“I uh... I'll go get ready then,” Nero spoke, darting his vision over the room, refraining from swiping the side of his nose, standing to leave. He couldn't let that happen again, being too
enraptured in passion to think things through.

It is commonly said that submitting to your primal urges spiraled into catastrophic decisions, and he was happy the heavy touches stopped before it led to a physical connection... or he assumed to be glad it did. Unknown or not if they would discuss their actions, but maybe not talking might be better.

Too bad Dante couldn't read minds.

A harsh pop to his posterior made Nero jump, cradling the stinging muscle in alarm, whipping around geared to fight. Instead, he walked backwards as Dante advanced upon him with intense eyes. It wasn't until he hit the front door that he took an exhale.

“I'm not done with you.” His voice poured out like deep honey, adding a delicious swirl of dark chocolate coating its heavy meaning.

Nero's brain fought to contain rationality, telling him to fight, scratch, kick, pull, stab, and punch him away, but those words silenced when another voice echoed in his mind, quieting his needy doubts.

*Feed me.*

“I have t-to... ” Hands fisted into Dante's shirt when his thighs were lifted and wrapped around a thick, strong waist, trembling when that devious tongue pried open his mouth and dove inside.

Sultry movements with their slick muscles filled Nero's head with nothingness, focusing on the sensations and touches wracking his form. The new taste of beer glazing his labiums provided an intoxicating rush mingling with his own scent.

Dante bit and sucked on his quivering bottom lip, drawing out longer pleasured whispers from Nero. As much as he wanted to make those groans louder, he needed to get this Ramona thing out of the way. When she was over with, he could have a better glimpse into those dreams.

“What do I do to you?”

Faintly, the youngster registered the voice calling out to him, never releasing his clenched fist with the note inside. His devil bringer grew hot with sporadic pulses, flashing a brighter blue with each kiss planted. Strong palms pressed and kneaded his ass, making his eyes flutter while his body appeared to turn into jello. Teeth appeared, nipping him almost hard enough to draw blood.

“What do I do to you?” Dante traveled to the side of Nero's neck, gnawing and suckling with intent, reveling in the way the punk shuddered and twitched. Black ash and mint crept through his nostrils again, delighting in the heady aroma before dipping further into it. He pressed him harder into the door, making out his clothed erection rubbing against his stomach. His own length hardened, growing in need as Nero inadvertently moved his hips in a swaying motion.

“*Answer me.*” Dante gathered the energy to inhumanly growl into the crook of his snow-white throat, the punk sighing out a startled cry. Nero's excited body curled into him in shock, throwing his arms around his shoulders as his cock twitched in earnest. He heard toes popping as heat pooled into his cheeks. “Do I bite you like this?”

“Yes...” His automatic reply dripped from his lips, digging his fingernails into broad shoulders, sudden spikes of pleasure driving through him. Nero attempted to understand his thoughts, but they muddled into putty.
His feet touched the ground, using the wooden frame to support his faltering weight. Dante pulled away but not before sucking on Nero's pink tongue, rotating his head to sample all of him, trailing himself lower on his form.

“What happens to your collarbone?” A sensitive nose ghosted over the bone separating his neck from his torso, fingertips traveling under his tank top to lightly scratch his abs.

“You... you don't... jerk-”

Next he dropped to one knee, savoring the access to a lean, chiseled stomach, hearing the soft note once held in Nero's hand fall to the floor.

“Do these get licked?”

“Y... yeah.” Nero shook when the wet trail left by Dante had cooled, breezy air prickling the light hairs under his navel. He couldn't function, mind delving deep in the throes of sensual delight to do anything useful with his hands. There was an urge to run his fingers through Dante's hard head, to claw his back, to bite him deep enough to draw blood but his limbs remained lifeless.

The hybrid basked in the well-defined planes of Nero's abs, listening to the way his breath hitched when he nibbled below his belly button; hissed when he bit his sides; groaned when he left suckling nips over the expanse of his torso. Not even close to the good stuff yet and the kid was already a trembling mess, muttering incoherently whenever he moved to a sensitive spot.

“What about this thing hitting my throat? How does that scene play out?”

Nero stilled, opening his eyelids to peer into Dante's eyes, never flinching from his direct stare, despite his shivers. Iceberg blues were ablaze with a lustful fire, moments away from burning him with his unleashed desire. And to think that that look was solely for him sent his body on haywire. He felt naked. Though he ogled nowhere else on him, he possessed the uncanny ability to strip you of flesh and see into your soul, just with one simple glimpse.

The veteran's coming action didn't leave Nero with a warning except a smug smirk. Right as Nero glowered at it he screamed... internally, nails pressing into the door, knees wanting to graze the floor, mouth opened to deliver a wail set on mute.

“Speak before I bite your tongue again.”

Dante pressed his closed lips to Nero's clothed crotch, lightly teasing the firm length, following the bulge from the base to the tip. His hands held the punk's quivering thighs, gripping them tighter each time he bucked. That small touch made Nero squeal in silence, foot stomping the ground as his pelvis jerked in tiny thrusts with the pressure he applied.

Ah, the kid was too easy. If he had known he had this affect on the brat, he would have done this sooner, holding his laughter in through a wide smile.

The young man clinging to dear life to the door grew brazen with the bastard's know-it-all look. Just because he wasn't so well-versed in the language of sex didn't give Dante the go-ahead to silently taunt him. In the same breath, did he read too much into his expression, thinking him to tease when his countenance conveyed a hidden, desirable message?

Damn, cocky bastard.

Tossing self-caution to the wind he responded, voice dipping lower and husky to match with the elder's. “Use your imagination.”
Dante blinked, a bit surprised by his answer. With that he laughed, entertained and heavily aroused that his firecracker persona shone through. The more he contemplated about their situation the more... giddy he became, picturing him exploring and investigating every crevice and lump that maintained his muscularly, svelte form.

But he couldn't. At least, not yet. What would happen if he was balls deep inside his velvety tunnel and he received a call about Ramona—shit he didn't know... performing a circus act and having her converts go pick an audience member to stand by a group of Enkindles? If he planned on having fun with the twerp, he wanted all the time to frick and frolic around sans disruptions.

Smirking lips parted, moist air breathing on his engorged imprint.

Oh no, Nero thought. Dante was going to swallow him. Right now. While he leaned on the door since his legs gave out.

*Oh yes. Feed us. Satiate our hunger.* For once, Nero didn't argue.

His fingernails scratched the wooden entrance waiting in anticipation, a dark part of him rose to the surface to feel that coiling snake wrap around his prick with those same moves he demonstrated inside his mouth.

Maybe he wanted to touch his cock... or he imagined to. He wondered what the Legendary Devil Hunter was packing in his pants. Was it close to his size or larger? Was it short and fat or long and skinny? Veiny? Small and mushroom-shaped? Molded like Italian sausage? Purple at the tip or red? Straight or curved?

He closed his eyes and tilted his head back, trying to gain a grip on his shaking body and wayward thoughts. A fleshy-like graze on his groin made a lust-filled gasp leave his throat, ready to kick Dante away and relieve himself with all his teasing.

The teen felt Dante shift, moving to stand to his full height and lean in close to his face. Moments passed and the youth remained touch-less. His own puffs of oxygen grew more desperate and anxious, refraining from pouting and groaning in frustration. He didn't have it in his mind to beg, but his pent-up hormones needed exhaustion and immediate results. What's with all this waiting?

“I could just eat-you-up,” Dante lingered an inch from his lips, pulling back whenever Nero moved to connect to his. Nero frowned when his peckers touched something crinkly and soft... and smelling like ink from a pen.

Nero opened his drowsy eyes.

“But this would be in our way.” Dante held the crushed note in his hand.

Did he tell him...? At this moment...? The job...? Right before he...? He needed....? Horny...? Asshole!

Dante's lip curled at the corner prior to biting it, giving an appreciative glance at the teen's open and willing form before he turned around, heading towards his room to get ready.

Confused, and attempting to suppress his becoming disappointment, Nero sunk to the floor in a daze, still hard and in need of a release. His body was in an odd state of limbo. Part of him was ecstatic he received some notion of thriving attention to his nagging urges, able to feel this warming sensation pump through his veins while his nerves singed on fire.

The other part boiled in rage at his denial of blowing a load.
Palms shook with nervous energy, breath decreasing from its frantic pace while his stomach seemed to have dropped to his groin. It pulsed and throbbed with jolting spikes, sending delicious coils, making him rub his aching need.

He should just please himself and be done with it. No more second-guessing or wondering about the end result of all this. But by the way Dante devoured him with his stare told him of promises he would enact on him with sensuous gratification.

Besides, the elder's mouth felt ten times better than what his hands could do.

But one thing was for certain. Since he couldn't do anything because of this Ramona cat, he would make sure she paid for her incessant distractions... after he killed Dante for stopping.
Nero, for the life of him, couldn't figure out how he got into the truck. After trudging up the stairs with heavy feet, everything in his mind blanked out. The lingering touches and the fervent kisses plagued his thoughts, body shaking at the heated memories wrapping around his head like a blanket.

He guessed his brain switched to 'auto pilot' because his cognitive functions failed to recall how he planted himself in the passenger seat. Got dressed and ready in his entirety, but floundered in recalling his actions.

Ceruleans glued themselves to looking outside the window driving downtown. Dante had turned on the radio, alleviating some of the tension in the ride.

On the note, Ramona wanted an “outsider” to transport boxes of jewels to an abandoned warehouse. Embezzlement from a partnering company threatened to destroy them, financially, and she needed a maverick to make the delivery to a distant, unspecified location.

What a crock of shit.

Anyone with a brain knows this sting had the word 'setup' written all over it. If the worst she kept in her arsenal were those humanoid monsters to spring a trap on them upon their arrival then fine; they weren't so tough since he gained an extra asset in his right arm to kill them.

Speaking of tough, why couldn't he find the voice to say what stole his thoughts?

It would be foolish to deny that Dante had stirred something within him. A silent, unknown hunger awakened with each caressing kiss, each gentle nibble, each breath-taking bite. He found it difficult to describe the sensation because of its unfamiliarity, but it felt akin to a fire ignited in his soul... and in his groin.

His human conscious drove him to think about the ending result. Let's say he indulged in his wanting lust and rocked the boat with Dante. After his horny nature dissipated, will the weight of his choices leave him with regret, wishing he'd follow his instincts and go back to Fortuna? Should he... leave the situation be and treat it like a one-time event? What about Kyrie still? How can he even look at her again knowing what he did? Plus, with Dante being the self-proclaimed 'Big Daddy', would he view Nero as a conquest?

Feeling less confident about the possible outcomes he straightened in his seat, inhaling the truck's new-leather smell, absently focused on the heavy rock music streaming through the speakers.

Against his will, his mind flitted back to the day he witnessed Dante and his Casanova role at play, blinking several times to understand what he saw.

When first introduced to the concept, by gawking at Dante leading a busty brunette to his room, he withheld his surprise. The elder didn't mention he had a girlfriend visiting, however since it wasn't Nero's house he didn't bother to ask. Four hours later after sharp grunts and drawn-out yelps, the same woman trotted downstairs, looking like she fought a bear... and lost.

Lush auburn tresses fashioned in careful curls had morphed into poofy and thick tendrils. A red
tube skirt shone inside out, the white tag revealed for all to see. Her gray bralette bandeau hung by a lone strap on her shoulder. Medium-olive legs kissed by the sun couldn't grasp the balance of walking, wobbling without grace every few steps.

Nero internally patted himself on the back from scrunching his features when her fern-green eyes connected with his; black smudges of raccoon eyeliner and smeared, coral-hued lipstick shot him a coy look. In his mind, her man satisfied her and she moved to convey her happiness. Good for her, but he didn't care to know the details; it sounded synonymous to a war being fought behind Dante's door. What stupefied the youngster gave way to her beat-up appearance. Why didn't she fix herself up first?

A creaky door opened and out came a sweaty, shirtless hybrid, coral lip prints blotted his neck and chest, rubbing the offending color off of him. Long black sweatpants hung low on his hips, showing off the strong, pronounced 'V' shape. Trimmed, toned abs shamelessly showed on display while Nero kept his eyes on Dante's features. He didn't want to be caught staring at anything special on his body, so focusing on his face proved best.

"Why is your girl looking like she got in a fight with a bear?"

"That's because this bear gave her one she'll never forget." Dante ran a glove-less hand through his damp hair, trying to finger his locks back to its usual style after the sex kitten nearly yanked his roots out. After he rocked her senseless, a much-needed nap might restore him to serenity. He neared becoming complete with his bed when Nero's question played through his mind. "Hey kid, what do you mean by my girl?"

"… Isn't she your girlfriend?"

"Uh... no?"

"Then who is she?"

"Ah, just a horny little dame."

From that day forward, Nero bared witness to the various women strolling in and stumbling back out of the office. Each one more different from the other, yet they came out the same way every time; make-up smeared over, clothes half-off, legs all wobbly and slinked out into the world alone. Dante escorted a few girls to the exit; a rarity in itself to see.

Moreover, these "horny little dames" turned out to be nothing more than sexy distractions to keep the idiot from going haywire after a lackluster job. How many of these females let themselves be handled like that escaped his knowledge, but they all seemed to work at that stripper joint he loved to frequent. If so, it explained a lot about Dante's view on relationships.

The elder could have anyone he wants whenever he wants to. Nero assumed it made no difference to the man if he opened his legs to him or not. He wasn't the type to wrap himself into emotional attachments, judging by the different one-night stands that visited him.

The question remained of what he wanted to do with the hybrid. Dante had already shown heavy interest in the idea, and if Nero's memory served him correctly, the hybrid came back for seconds. Should he go on through with his raging hormones and see what happens or should he stop it here? How would this affect their relationship if the outcome proved detrimental to their friendship? The veteran could, at any time, resume his trysts with the supple curves of the female flesh.

All though it begged the question of why Dante stopped bringing them over. They hadn't talked to
each other about anything significant concerning who could do what in the house, and Nero reserved no qualms about Dante's sexcapades because it didn't concern him.

Now... he didn't know what to do or think. He craved for an explosive release that's been pushing to unleash itself by letting go; of his anxiousness, of his worries, of this fucking hampering stress sitting on him because of that nagging demonic voice in his head.

The chieftain possessed the skills to challenge him in ways he had no choice but adapt to; to learn and grow in strength to push himself to exceed his limits. The choices left to him called to see which route he would take: through fists or fucking.

A slow and quiet exhale escaped his lips, seeing the vast array of colorful, expensive-styled buildings and different people going about their day. He wondered how many of them had a dilemma like his, weighing the trivialities of their decisions in discovering what they needed—or was it wanted—in their lives. If they needed to betray their sentiments or another person to see what brought the most out of them in life.

Perhaps it was nothing more than his hexed side itching for a good fight, he thought with a heavy sigh. That's how this whole angsty thing began anyway. More often than not he suppressed his damned side from lashing out without control. The lower-ranking demonic fodder left him starved when Yamato cleaved them into pieces, pushing him for a stronger opponent to expel this pent-up energy.

Dante repeatedly refused to unleash his devil trigger in battle, leaving Nero to crave the hidden power the elder possessed; to imagine the force and strength behind his punches and kicks. He'd much rather find out the potency of the veteran's skills through their spars than through sex.

“You're distracted.”

The teen's body lightly started at Dante's voice, keeping his eyes out the window, maintaining his leveled thought of focus.

“What makes you say that?”

“The only time you're quiet is when you're alone or eating. Neither case applies to you right now so... a penny for your thoughts?”

“That'd be a lot of pennies then,” he mumbled into his hand holding his face up, propped by an elbow on the window's ledge. A slew of questions sat on his tongue, ready to tumble out of his mouth on their own accord. He figured starting off easy proved best before slithering into loaded territory. “Why don't you ever fight me with your devil trigger?”

“Cause I don't need to.”

“Is that your final answer?” Nero muttered, hand still pressed against his lips.

“Pretty much.”

Here we go.

Nero closed his eyes with a slow blink, seeking a leveled mood to keep Dante from getting under his skin with his vague answers. “Why though?”

“There is no why, Nero. I just don't need to.”
Dante only called him by his name when showing lax concern toward his well-being or if his annoyance spiked with Nero's actions.

How interesting. He didn't think a discussion on the elder's demon form would make him evasive of his responses. Did he unknowingly dig up a dark moment Dante remembered of his devilish model? He recalled the chieftain saying his infernal heritage had a troublesome time returning to its cage, wanting to rip and shred without jurisdiction. Which garnered disbelief because Dante is the experienced intellect involving damned issues. Why is it difficult for the veteran to control his hellish nature, and the seen sent his away with a wordless command?

“You used it on your scorpion-girlfriend though.” Nero drawled, focusing on a father giving his daughter a ride on his shoulder after they stopped at a red light. “Did you need to use it then?”

“Well if someone wasn't about to get their neck severed-”

The teen's eyes blinked rapidly. “Because someone wanted to flirt with some crazy broad-”

“Because someone felt the need to rush into battle-”

“Because someone thinks they know everything-”

“Because someone has a hard head and doesn't listen to anything you tell him-”

“Because someone is always playing games so they don't bother listening.”

His voice tightened with every word spoken, keeping the exasperated huff threatening to spill from his chest inside his mouth.

“And we've reached the foundation of your troubles,” Dante said, a ghost of a smile quirked his lips.

The light turned green. Dante eased forward to merge with the rush of traffic, humming to the tune of 'Cochise' oozing through the speakers. He kept his sights on the road, continually checking the side mirrors for a flashy sports car trailing a few cars behind them. It followed them after they left his immediate neighborhood, following his every movement with the truck. So, he guessed he could humor the punk before initiating evasive maneuvers.

“And what troubles do you think I have?” Nero's heart thudded a little faster, his left leg tapping the floor, anticipation gaining in strength.

“If I were to take a guess, you've spent the last fifteen minutes stewing in your feelings on that kiss and whether you wanna fuck me.”

It made sense. Embracing what the teen said about his dreams, coupled with Nero's demonic voice pining for release and his potent pheromones told him of his ordeal. Hell, almost everything he's done has slowly built up to the way he's feeling now. The hybrid knew the punk wanted to ask him about his relationship views, had seen it on his face whenever the brat glimpsed him with someone yet he kept to himself.

“And then thinking I'm gonna treat you like a trophy and go back to what I've been doing.” He assumed the youth would adopt his 'gigolo' persona and use it as a precursor towards his decision.

“Is that it? You think that's the gist of your troubles?” Dante guessed he voiced aloud Nero's thoughts, hearing the brat's heart rate increase under his seemingly calm exterior, nerves riling on edge further by his thumping foot. In his peripheral vision he saw Nero's jaw twitch, trying in vain
“Wrong,” Nero started, taking a moment to breathe to steady himself. “Like I told you already, I can't beat you to a bloody pulp the way I want, so all this energy is sitting inside me with no real release. So whatever bullshit this voice inside my head is screaming, it’s tired of me holding all this shit in. I guess it found a way for me to let go and it keeps telling me to take its advice.”

Shitty little liar. “Ah,” Dante said, unable to hide his upward-stretching lips.

“Ah what?” Nero questioned.

“Ah.”

“Ah what, Dante?”

“So that's all that's bothering you? A hard fight is all it takes to stop you from going stir-crazy then, huh?”

“That's it,” Nero gestured with his hand, soon letting it drop on his thigh with a loud smack.

“As much as you want to deny it, that's not what your dick said earlier.”

Nero's tongue floated in mid-air, unable to speak.

“Your pheromones are a dead giveaway; you don't have to tell me shit.”

Nero couldn't move, every muscle locked into place after the red one's blunt statement bombarded his mind with their hot and heavy touches. His groin tingled, jean-clad legs threatening to close to ward off the sensation but he remained still, eyes focusing harder out the window.

“Ah, there it is.” Dante crooned, voice soft and smooth, tilting his nose in the air. His chest expanded to its full capacity, inhaling the light, hypnotic scent Nero unknowingly emitted. He didn't know if the brat smelled his own arousal, but if a lascivious word got his pheromones jumping, then he hoped Nero didn't mind his cock getting hard often.

“Tongue-tied?” Narrowed periwinkles glanced over to the youth, making out the barest trace of a soft rose caressing his cheeks, knowing he put a dent in whatever argument he thought to speak aloud.

In his central mirror he saw the flashy black car behind a beat-up truck, thinking it time to lose him. “Well, we can have a little chat later about you wanting me to jump your bones-”

“No, I d-”

“-but first we gotta get rid of this tailgater.”

Dante pressed hard on the gas, the unexpected acceleration pushing Nero back into the seat. He narrowly avoided t-boning a sedan, eyes focused on the rear-view mirror, waiting on that sleek sports car to follow him.

“One of your crazy flings?” Nero said, squinting into the passenger mirror after his shock waned to watch an expensive-looking black car swerve around others to pursue them.

Dante looked over at him, surprised. “Oh, so you weren't over there just moping away. You actually paid attention, for once.”
“You’re the one that acts as if everything is peachy all the time.” Nero held the handle when Dante made a sharp right turn, horns honking because he barely escaped a collision.

“Everything isn't peachy, but it's much easier to deal with when you don't bullshit around. You let shit eat you from the inside out and you act weird. Case in point...”

“Don't you even come my way with that! You're the one always holding shit inside and never saying what's on your mind.”

“If I need to say something, then I'll say it.” Dante scanned ahead, squinting his eyes to see past normal human range. About 1000 feet in front of him the cars piled up to a halt, the train lights flashing red to signal everyone to stop.

With the black 2012 Pagani Huayra hot on his trail he could take this thing for a true test drive, seeing what power this beastly truck held now that he didn't have to transport weighty objects. Besides Nero that is, what with his heavy ruminations weighing him down.

“Don't fly out the window!”

Nero's head almost collided with the windshield, pressing himself against the seat as the hybrid swerved into the oncoming lane, cars veering to the side and blaring on their horns. The sports car copied Dante's action, rolling down their window with a machine gun in tow.

Strong fingers touched the base of his skull before it jerked downwards, bullets shattering the back window after the idiot behind them opened fire, shooting his headrest.

For the moment, their discussion of 'who's the bigger liar' went on a break, focusing on the assailants who disregarded the innocent humans around them.

All though he would have tilted his head to avoid the bullets on his own, he urged himself to issue his gratitude.

“Thanks for the heads up.”

Dante swerved into the correct lane again, eyes rapidly switching back and forth, searching for a route with the least volume of people. “No problem. Can't let you take any more hits to the head, not if I can help it.”

Here we go again.

“Last time I checked, my brain worked just fine,” Nero gritted out, obvious to dislike the veteran bringing up his small mishaps. More gunfire pierced the vehicle, citizens crying out in fear as the bullets startled them from their peaceful day.

“Yeah, but you can't think right for a while, it messes—dammit!”

Hard hands steadied the steering wheel, gripping it tight from colliding into other cars. The two back tires had ceased their function, the rubber flapping loose and wild, shaking the truck with violent tremors.

A sharp turn later and they sped down a backstreet, Dante pressing hard on the gas, refusing to let up to give the assailants an opening to strike. Dante blared on the horn, humans in soiled and tattered clothing scrambling out of the way as their frail livelihoods stood the chance to meet certain death.
“You were saying?” Nero jibed, ducking down in his seat after more gunfire pelted the headrest. The truck, rendered half-useless because of the tires, pushed its momentum to the front wheels, losing its traction to veer towards the right into a brick wall. High-pitched scraping pierced his ears, seeing the side mirror break off with the damage.

The rubber from the rear tires finally gave way, jerking the truck's bed downwards to drag and scrape the asphalt, sparks flying onto the trailing car, doing little to stop their pursuit.

The wheels' alignment gave way, forcing the vehicle to smash into the side wall again, Nero sinking down and towards his left to avoid the wall and the passing bullets... closer to Dante's right thigh.

Realizing his error, ceruleans looked up to see iceberg blues staring at him; eyes leaving the road to focus on what he did.

“Need to have your head in my lap again?”

“Would you focus in the road!” Heat crawled to his cheeks, mind driving back to the chieftain forcing his head in place in that mansion. “I don't want to be sardined in here!”

“Well, that might be a challenge if you keep scooting over here like you are. You sure-”

“If you don't get us out of here Dante, I swear I'll rip that steering wheel off and beat you with it!”

Dante pulled the vehicle to the right with a hard skid, blocking the alley so no other cars can pass. Faster than he could react to the sudden stoppage, Nero lost a sense of self after a firm hand grabbed his shirt and tugged, landing on his knees outside the truck on Dante's side; car oil and the stench of wet garbage assaulting his nostrils. Dante moved in a blur pulling both their swords from the pickup's bed, then yanking him from the ground.

“What are you-HEY!”

The red hunter hoisted Nero onto his shoulder, giving no time to adjust his posture before he sprinted in a swift speed, Nero unable to distinguish what object was what with his inhumanly fast motion. The enemies fired at them again, the veteran moving left or right to avoid taking a hit. He watched Dante pump his legs from his upside-down position, wanting to knee the bastard in his chest but thought against it, unfamiliar where he intended on going; the elder knowing the area better than he did.

“Agh-oh!”

Nero's insides threatened to bunch up inside his throat, his stomach seeming to float around without restriction. Dante jumped onto a nearby fire escape, then another... and another still until they landed on top of an apartment building.

Angered voices shouted below them, shuffling feet moving in frantic steps to follow where they had escaped to. The elder cared less to stay and see why they fired at them, believing their ringleader can explain her actions better than they could.

Dante double-backed to where the fiends stopped their car, standing over the ridge glancing down at the sleek beauty. Without warning the teen he jumped off the ledge from its fourth story, feeling Nero's tense body curl into him after gravity did its magic, hands wrapping around his waist to lessen the free-fall impression.

A short but powerful spike in energy jolted through Nero, sensing a harder-than-rock shoulder
supporting his pelvis. His blurred vision picked up a giant, scaly red wing flapping hard before Dante swiftly touched solid ground, Nero noticing the brief crackle of internal power dissolve along with the wing. Equilibrium hadn't caught up to his potato-sack position, pale lids staying closed to steady the dizzying motions beginning to swirl in his head.

Until Dante landed a heavy slap to his behind, jolting him to delirious consciousness.

Brown boots touched the gravelly cement, legs unable to stand firm after the adrenaline swimming in his stomach and the surprise smack on his ass. His organs gave the feeling to return to its original location when the veteran stood him upright. The concept of moving had left him, the chieftain having to push him into the passenger seat of the exotic black car, then closing the door that opened like butterfly wings because his hands refused to work. Sliding over the hood Dante eased into the driving seat, placing their weapons horizontally across each other's lap because the damn thing had no back seat.

Thick fingers used the handles to adjust the seat to his tall frame, glimpsing over the futuristic-looking controls. He saw no section for the key, assuming the crooks took it with them and they'll have to run on foot. A small, car-shaped crest rested a little underneath the radio, seeming out of place and fitting all the same. Giving in to his curiosity he messed with the weird contraption, hands turning it to the right to jump at the sound of a gracious roar.

Adrenaline rushed all the way to his bones, a wicked grin caressing his cheeks, happier than a dog with his favorite chew toy. Dante revved up the engine once then threw the gears into reverse. Swift fingers reached over to push Nero back into his seat, his head almost colliding with the dashboard.

“You say your brain works just fine, but can you think quick on your feet like that?” Dante said, a dangerous gleam sparkling in his eyes over the new toy he acquired.

The two men returned to watch their car speeding out of the alley in reverse, unable to move around the totaled pickup in time to fire at them; Dante sticking a middle finger high out the window. The duo reached the mouth of the backstreet, Dante beau-guarding the lanes until he faced in the right direction, ignoring all the blaring horns and angered curses hurled his way.

Periwinkles scanned the main street, seeing no cars piled on top of each other or no dead humans on the ground. The smart tactic paid off to keep the fiends' target sight on him, leading them into a narrow vicinity where he had the highest chance to escape... using the enemy's own transportation.

Letting the allure of the luxury car take the reins of his judgment, he maneuvered with speed around the slow-moving automobiles with ease, allowing the motor to purr in a gentle roar over its easy handling. At times, he imagined to have ridden on air, whooping and shouting in glee because he experienced how amazing it is to (temporarily) own an exotic vehicle.

Driving well above the speed limit while disregarding the majority of traffic laws, white-blue eyes slid over to his oddly silent counterpart, seeing a tense and obviously-stressed Nero appearing stricken.

“You still with me over there?”

The youth had a hunch to forgo future visits to amusement parks if they could leave him like this. Sure he didn't mind heights and tall places, but not when his limbs are restricted, unable to move as he pleased. His internal organs seemed detached, moving at a slow pace to recollect themselves; his intestines giving the sensation to cling to the inside of his throat and one of his lungs resting in his groin. Crossed ankles tried to calm the adrenaline rushing through his legs, but the action did
little to help.

Add that on top of Dante “borrowing” this car with the recent shenanigans coupled with the vigilant cameras; he should read his body language and develop the answer then.

So no. No, he wasn't feeling like himself right now.

A gloved hand picked up fingers bedecked with a few rings to show comfort but it slid out of his grasp, moving to tuck itself behind a folded arm instead.

Dante peeked at the sullen-looking youth, bearing no offense towards the gesture, thinking the punk needed a minute to calm down from all the action. If he wanted to stay out here, then the kid better get used to dealing with diabolical incidents of this caliber. More often than not he noticed the increase in hellish affairs involving humans, intentional or not, and he had to weed through the troublemakers to ensure he stopped their intentions.

And if that dweeb still lurked on them rubbing on each other...

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Aw Nero, you gotta realize that Dante is a good-natured guy once you peel back all those layers to his aloof personality, and that he won't hesitate to turn the tables on you if need be. XD!

I wanted to give Dante a Koenigsegg Agera R to drive but I don't think that car has the option to drive in reverse so...he got another equally stylish car. And I warned you guys that some of the goodies he got would meet destruction!

P.S. Since Capcom's doing all these damn remakes, can we get a remake for DMC2? I really miss Lucia.
Invited Interruption

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In due time they reached their destination, Dante parking the Pugani at a distance from the building, taking out the funky-looking key. The duo hopped out of the car, placing and checking their respective weapons. Auto repair shops, second-hand paralegal offices, and construction businesses populated a cul-de-sac, the breeze thick with burning fumes and stale, chemical odors.

Dante scanned everything with vigilant eyes, wondering why no one labored away, judging by the missing cars and the ‘Closed’ signs plastered in the windows. Did he come on a day when nobody worked? Lunch had been over for three hours, so that wasn't the case. Surely someone should have been out there.

Is this place another of Ramona's ghost towns? Where she had demonic officers disguised as humans infiltrate and then kill off the workers? Or did she come up with something slick, ready to send all her minions to pounce on them when they were close enough? Lifting his nose, he smelled nothing of a strong sulfuric taint in the air, but faint traces hovered around his vicinity.

Nero remained under the effects of a weakened balance, his form tense and unsteady standing a few feet away from the Pugani.

Dante himself had tingles coursing through his body from her sleek handling. Perhaps the kid needed a minute to calm down. “Maybe you should keep the car running while I-”

“Let's go,” Nero mumbled, shaking out his hands twice, walking ahead with slow and measured steps. It felt as if he bounced up and down a speeding elevator striding forward, unable to stabilize his gait thanks in no part to his role as a sack of potatoes and Dante's erratic driving. A small side of him admitted to sensing a warming glow from the fast ride, but his jostled nerves prevented his elated acknowledgment.

“So, do you prefer my quick thinking or me planning?” Dante walked by his side, noticing the punk shift away from him.

“Neither. Whenever I'm around, I end up taking the result of your bullshit.”

“My supposed 'bullshitting' got us out alive without taking bullets though, and the civilians too.”

Well... okay, he could agree with that. In all, true to his outlandish style, Dante had to go about his way of getting out of a troublesome situation, resorting to ridiculous tactics if he needed to. Which brought forth another memory wasting no time in taunting him.

Didn't he say he wasn't going to partner up with the dope again?

Crossing his arms Nero slowed his unsure pace, heeding to the consumer-less surroundings. The eerie quietness unnerved him, not even the birds squawked about. The usual rumbling of heavy machinery remained absent. No trucks or freight cars operated on cranes commandeered by sweaty men, along with missing vehicles to signify any employees. What in the world is going on?

The red one had mentioned something about the ghost town back in Whetstone. Is that the case here as well? “You left to that abandoned town didn't you? After you dropped off all that stuff from the truck?” Nero asked, eyebrows furrowed to make a sense of what's happening.
If you had went with him, he would be yours now.

He shook his head to silence his inner demonic voice. “What exactly did you find out there about these people, er... Ramona and stuff?”

“Well, when you have a lot of money, you get to bribe people to do stupid shit. So a member of... Angus, Magnus... that scientist's flunkies escaped Fortuna shortly after it collapsed, got with the in crowd and weaseled his way to be buddies with the titty queen.”

“He died, right?”

“Yup. Or she turned him into a monster. Which ever you prefer. I guess they traded demonic secrets and as soon as she got what she wanted out of him, she gave him the axe.”

“And... she's the one who created these monsters?”

“Yeah. He gave her the spells to make the hearts, then she did the rest.”

Nero bristled, recalling their time in the abandoned police station. “In which you chose to bite me after one of those freaks took a chomp out of you.”

“You kept pushing my buttons. I had to shut you up for a minute.”

“That's not what you told me!”

“I know, but you irritated the hell outta me with all those questions and I needed to clear my head. Nothing happened to you though, right? You gotta learn to let shit go, kid.”

Jerk. He hated when Dante treated everything with an aloof mindset, not caring about the principle of a situation, only if it meant something to him or not. By default, the teen thought along a similar path, yet whenever Dante acted on impulse, he had to put his guard up and walk around on eggshells.

Attentive iceberg blues saw the kid steady his saunter, but he wasn't up to par yet. “You okay enough to work today?”

A deep inhale expanded Nero's lungs, deciding to let his troubles and worries collect into this big ball of air, releasing all the drama weighing on his mind through a loud exhale. “Whatever man, let's go.”

Heavy, sliding feet trudged up to the entrance of a burgundy and gray-brick warehouse, opening the door as a bell chimed above. It possessed an old newspaper smell along with a humid-must scent. No one sat at the front desk, the metal table littered with papers strewn about and a blue coffee mug.

His left hand hovered over the cup, sensing no warmth from the espresso-hued liquid. Dipping two fingers inside he felt its frigid temperature, wiping the dark stain on his jeans.

“Nobody can really stand cold coffee, you don't suppose he went out to get more?” Dante said, browsing through the papers on the desk.

“The coffee is more important than locking up the shop?” Nero scoffed, preparing to vocally announce their arrival when a gloved palm covered his mouth. Having it in his mind to bite his fingers, ceruleans sent a glare towards the elder when his gaze softened, seeing a thick finger pressed to his lips.
Without another word Dante moved to the left, going through an entry that led upstairs, leaving Nero to investigate the tiny office. Sitting in the corner right behind the door a weeping fig drooped its leaves, signaling no one watered the thirsty plant in at least a few days. So that cup of coffee... sat there untouched all this time? What made the person drop everything and leave, or worse?

“Get up here,” Dante's voice called out to him, Nero then going up the stairs with a ball of doubt forming in his gut. Did he want to show him a dead body? No, that couldn't be it because he detected no sickly, decaying scent. Perhaps information remained pertaining to this Ramona chick or about the employees who worked here? Are there monsters hiding in there or more of those hearts?

At the top of the stairs a salty, musty smell met with his nose, snorting out the briny odor before stepping into a dirty room. Various clothing articles rested atop a full-sized, green and white-comforter bed, an oak-chipped dresser, and on dingy gray carpet, holding responsibility for the funk. A cramped bathroom sat near the bed, running water spouting a full stream in the sink.

“Is someone in there?” Nero mouthed the words with the elder shaking his head back and forth.

Dante stood in front of a small television sitting on a stand, a remote in his hand after he curled his pointer finger, beckoning the teen to come closer. The teen's hands involuntarily twitched, stepping forward to see what needed to be seen.

He pressed play on the remote, filling the room's silence with heavy breaths.

A man donning smooth, muscular umber skin struggled to breathe lying naked on a bed, thighs clenched tightly with his head thrown back. Tiny, sweat-laced droplets spread a thin layer over his form, veins popping out of his neck like corded string.

Another male with rich, butterscotch skin lay nude too, nestled between the other man's thighs, suckling on his member at a rapid pace, hands winding up and down his cock with swift tugs. Unable to hold on any longer the prostrate man succumbed to pleasure, opening his mouth to let a hoarse roar exit through his lips. Thick, white tendrils coated plump lips and palms refusing to lessen their pleasuring gifts, sending the guy on a writhing, euphoric trip.

And letting Dante take control of Nero's stolen focus.

Strong hands wrapped around a slim, toned waist, smelling the black ash and mint fragrance he couldn't get enough of, guiding his nose along the curve of his throat.

“They got the right idea. You wanna make our own little flick?” A long and thick tongue licked the edge of his neck in obvious glee, savoring the tiny shivers wracking through his form.

Two hands grabbed Dante's wrists, either in fashion to stop him or to secure an anchor for his wobbling legs, and squeezed, breath coming in shallow spurts after the flirtatious advances crumbled his common sense. A raspy gasp flew from his labiums when a firm mouth latched onto the side of his column, one hand trailing to his jawline as the other snaked to his crotch.

Anything pertaining to logic left his mind; rushing excitement pooling into his core, leaving his intuition to float adrift his jumbling thoughts. The guy on the television hadn't silenced his mewls, doing nothing to help Nero gain a hold of his bearings. Dante wasted no time palming his groin, sensing his cock stiffen when this clearly wasn't the time for a distraction.

Damn cocky, horny devil.

“Not again, you idiot,” he moaned on a weak breath, loosening his stiff muscles from their shaky
and strained feeling, leaning his head back to sink into the pleasuring ministrations.

This led him back to his previous thoughts, wondering of the outcomes if he submitted to his indulges. However, he picked up on Dante's earlier words echoing in his mind, the elder voicing aloud Nero's complaints about their plausible hook-up. While Nero busied himself with denying what Dante said about his brooding, he knew the hybrid talked sense.

The teen himself had no intentions of going into a committed relationship with the hybrid, but he didn't want to be viewed as a cheap fling either. Venturing into new territory drew natural bouts of hesitation within him, titillation wrapping a stronger hold on him, pulling him to let go of his securities and enjoy himself.

Strong hands moved to his slim hips, the chieftain detaching his lips and teeth from his pallid neck to turn him around, Nero unknowingly inclining his full front into the veteran's broad chest. Pale blues stared in a focused gaze into his own, soft wisps of breath escaped his throat, feeling light-headed from the intense look.

The youth tried his hardest not to step away from those glittering eyes, heat traveling through his feet to trail upwards, settling in his belly. He played a dangerous game, knowing he should halt this before it led to an awkward ending but the wheels had already sped in motion; Nero unable to find the gears to stop and shift the control into his hands.

“What's wrong with a little detour, huh?” Dante dragged his lips across the youth's own, Nero pushing his labiums out to gain friction but he pulled back, a gloved hand rising to cradle the base of his skull.

That funny-belly sensation pitted in his stomach, a cavern of emptiness swelling his insides before a tingle wracked through him... along with his feet growing hotter.

Thin toes curled inward when the caressing morphed into a slow kiss, Dante holding his neck in place, awakening his senses to tune in to every gesture placed upon him. Wet smacking sounds continued from the TV, adding to the blissful setting surrounding them.

An unexpected groan tore from his mouth when Dante clamped his teeth on his bottom lip, his strong palms sliding under his jacket to knead his ass. Ceruleans rolled lazily, not focusing on anything in particular, hands coming around broad shoulders to steady his balance.

Twitchy feet splayed out their nervous jitters, giddy over the attention he welcomed with eased desire. His inhales couldn't keep up with the hungry mouth suckling and gnawing on him with fervent hunger, sinking him further into a lust-filled haze, needing to take his shoes off before he caught on fire.

Wait, what?

Eyelids opened, not even realizing when he closed them, staring into half-lidded, smoldering periwinkles. His lips connected with the barest touch, a guiding warmth springing from his chest, overcome with a prickling serenity coursing in his limbs.

Whatever this sensation called itself he wanted to sample more of it, to see how it would make him feel—fuck this burning floor!

He peeled his eyes away, needing a moment to figure out why his feet wouldn't allow him a minute to relax, and to calm himself from the air-headed motion gripping him.

Except his soles had every reason to warn him; the floor became a cesspool of heated energy,
smoky tendrils rising from the gray carpet like it had spontaneously caught on fire from this very room.

Alarmed, Nero forced himself to step back, the misty aura clearing thanks to the situation developing. Brown boots couldn't take the heat simmering underneath them, bouncing on the bed to cool off his feet.

Seeking sanctuary on the bedding proved no better. The end of the bed rose into the air, its cheap, wooden headboard sinking into the floor followed by the start of the mattress. Every muscle in his body tightened, enlarged eyes looking to Dante to see if he stood shocked too. Instead, he stood by the small window, focusing on what occurred outside the building, face pulling inwards upon viewing his own confusing scene.

“What's going on here?” Nero growled flailing his limbs, scrambling to get off the rapidly dipping mattress. His balance left him after his stilts disappeared into the floor, fusing into the faltering structure, sensing his legs burn in heightened discomfort. The clothes once populating the carpet vanished, leaving nothing but charred remains descending into the torrid, quicksand-like mass.

Strong hands yanked him out of the sinkhole, pushing him out the door, Nero needing no further hint to scram. A potent fume of a thousand lit matches hit his nostrils, almost taken aback by the vigorous scent yet he pushed forward.

“Melting walls, that's a new trick,” Dante said after they reached the first floor, eyes seeing the agency corroding; the front half sunk into itself, creating a chasm rendering leaving out that way pointless. The air, made harder to breathe with its thickened aroma, tickled his nose without mercy.

A small opening led to a back office, the chieftain shoving Nero in that direction before he couldn't take another step; his nose scrunching up to deliver a sonic blast of a sneeze. Nero ran ahead to an additional door, stopping just in time to whirl around, watching the building's structure collapse, Dante sure to sink into the deteriorating floor and fall under the toppling ceiling.

On instinct, his right arm sprang towards the elder, grabbing a hold of his form, and snatching him from the rubble clawing to take anything with it. Nero burst through the door, letting go of the red one too soon; the elder's mass colliding into him. His feet sought to touch solid flooring but the collision disrupted his balance. He braced for a hard impact, instead feeling weightless before carried off in Dante's arms. When they moved far enough from the agency they stopped, Dante setting him down on his soles.

Nero opted to sit on the cold, metal ground in the vast warehouse, one knee propped to rest his left arm. A giant crater rested where the small office once belonged, heated tendrils still going strong. Breathless and shaken he looked to his right, Dante rotating his head to see their new surroundings, a light scowl marring his features. Spare car parts filled the shelves, rows upon rows taking up the capacity.

“What the hell was that?” Nero shouted, unable to tear his eyes away from the gaping hole.

“A trap,” the veteran muttered, withdrawing his prized pistols.

“I know that, but what was that? Can sulfur just... melt shit like that?”

“No. Someone used their bag of magic tricks to make that happen.”

“Ramona, you think?”

“Mm.... no. Something of that magnitude required a demon's know-how. I'm not counting her off,
but she couldn't have done it alone."

How could the building dissolve if nobody is here, unless hidden cameras tracked their movements. Wait, if they had cameras plugged in somewhere, is it possible they concealed one in the room? Did Ramona's goons witness them making out?

Chattering teeth gritted, lips pressed tight to keep his panicky thoughts from tumbling out. A warming heat (that was normal) originated from the back of his neck, gaining in intensity the further it crawled up his face, settling in his cheeks.

If the urge to flee grew any stronger, he knew he wouldn't stop himself from jumping into that burning chasm.

Nero couldn't stop his limbs from shaking, placing both hands on the ground to steady himself but it worsened. Cracked lines in the asphalt ran through the warehouse, a few shelves falling over to the side.

“What were you looking at out the window?” Nero shouted, standing up to stabilize his balance.

“A white van drove up and pushed eight guys out while they morphed into their better halves, then it sped off.”

“Morphed?”

Tremors and guttural growls of an unnatural biology vibrated through the complex, Nero having to cover his ears with the howling screams clamoring to a screeching pitch. Squelching sounds originated from the gaping chasm, rising steadily with surprising speed. Movement right outside the warehouse's structure drew Nero's eyes to its location, widening to see what Dante meant by 'morphing.'

“There's more of those gangly, shit-smelling demons! So those converts expected us all—”

Several shelves near the warehouse's rear collapsed, the hunters whipping their heads to the location, hearing irregular growls singing in a damned harmony, drifting in the air towards them.

Fumes from a thousand lit matches rose out of the abyss much stronger now, along with the creature responsible. Hot, blue-black slime burst from its giant jaws, the duo stepping away to create enough space around them. Nero shifted to stand to Dante's back, trying in vain to distinguish how many creatures corned them from the lot's end. Countless, muddled wheezes snarled together, believing to make out at least nine of them.

Hasty movements brought forth concentration, forgetting about their frisky rubbing and their argument. Intuition told him to dodge, rolling out of the way towards a set of stairs, Dante leaping by the second row of car parts. Nero witnessed a gray-skinned hand bigger than his whole body slam into the ground, leading to extra long arms attached to an even longer torso.

“I didn't know these things had an older sibling. You think it interrupted us to give a spanking for hurting their siblings?”

Wait a minute—did he just imply...

Dante tittered with amusement. “More like interrupting me from acquainting my hand with your ass.”

Yes. Yes he did.
Unable to decipher his words a thirty-five foot humanoid jumped at him, Nero having to leap up the stairs to escape its gaping maws. By opening its mouth alone he sensed the concentrated, match-fume smell, already feeling hot liquid build up around his temple from being in the creature's vicinity. Whatever they fed this thing, all the while stashing it underneath the warehouse, had tripled in size, along with the vicious, lethal attitude to boot.

Briefly, Nero wondered if the freak “sensed” their presence, activating its attack by melting the building, a frightening idea and an offensive tactic to watch out for. It also made him wonder if they had an underground facility, networking in secrecy away from lawful eyes, using demonic magic to create what they will.

“Hey uh, you should start getting rid of the Enkindles—”

“Forget their stupid names!” Nero yelled, side-stepping in haste after the colossal freak brought its massive hand in a downward arc, taking out a section of the stairs' walkway with a quick swipe. An unexpected shout spewed from his mouth after the thing followed up its attack with a lunge, gearing to bite him whole.

“You're the one with that wolf-power thing in your right arm.” Dante yelled back, seeing the Enkindles on the other side of the gaping hole squat, leaping to get to where he stood. Luckily, they couldn't successfully cross the wide gap, but the thought alone unnerved him.

“Wouldn't it be easier if we switched? I'm not in the mood to fight these things, and you don't want me to go into that mindset again, right? Fire killed them quick and you got that nifty little sword—”

“Shut up!” Nero screamed, a prickly, bubbling aura surging in his chest over Dante's incessant chatter. If the veteran focused hard enough, he could fight the smaller-yet-still-big monsters. He handled them fine at the police station, so if he kept his sights on them, he'll be all right.

Bullets from Dante's twin guns rained down onto something in the large gap, drawing the monstrosity's attention, it lunging at Dante with surprising speed.

A deep breath filled his lungs then exited as quick, noticing his inability to draw his weapons, too focused on surviving to do anything else, roughly shaking out his limbs to calm himself. At once he hopped over the stair railing, landing in the middle-back section of the warehouse, where front hoods to compact sedans lined the shelves.

Hiding behind a shelf, ceruleans looked through the car parts to see two Enkindles walking forward in their twitchy, unnatural gait, Dante's voice echoing his gleeful taunts to the world in the background. They stopped, raising their head into the air, lacking eyes and a nose to sense him correctly, using some hidden sensory nerves to detect his presence. Nero tip-toed in soundless steps to sneak behind them, intending to ignite them on fire in a single strike.

It's too bad he didn't recognize when something purposely obscuring his vision came into his immediate vicinity, unable to dodge a sneaky bastard that grabbed him with its hook-like limb, jaws stretched open to swallow his head whole.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Ramona's tired of your shit, you guys. I believe she really wants you dead.
I'm sure all that adrenaline from the fast car made Dante want to release some “happy
energy” onto (or is it into?) Nero and yet the distractions keeps coming.

Maybe I'll lock them in a basement...or a KFC (like hardly anyone buys anything from the KFC where I live because it's just lazy service and everyone is going to Popeye's) so they won't be interrupted when Dante's feeling a little...”playful”.

Can Capcom borrow elements from Bloodborne and put that into a Sparda game?

Ta-ta for now dearies!

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