



Devil May Cry 5
-Before The Nightmare-

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THE ORIGINAL
DEVIL MAY CRY

PROOFREADING:

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DIVINITY STATUE



THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY

VERGIL

WOMEN OF DEVIL MAY CRY

THE REAL DEVIL MAY CRY UNITY

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DANTE



The legendary devil hunter Dante who is the owner of the Devil May Cry shop and boasts unbelievable strength. He is born to the legendary dark knight Sparda who saved the world from the demon king Mundus despite being a demon himself, and a human called Eva.



NERO

A young man who lives in the city of Fortuna, who has his own branch of Devil May Cry which he manages through an auto-mobile, alongside the help of Nico. A bit before the Red Grave incident, he lost his right arm.

LADY



Lady is an expert devil Hunter who got to know Dante through very aggressive Circumstances, but with time Both of them helped each other Grow as a person and hunt Demons for very similar reasons.

A woman who lives as a Guardian on the island of Dumary and has an old History with Dante. She was originally created by an evil businessman but Rejected, later rescued by an old women called Matier and raised to be on human side.

TRISH



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A beautiful women who looks very similar to Dante's Mother, Eva. Created by the Demon king Mundus to kill Dante, she was saved by him And later began a work Partner-like relation with Dante.

LUCIA



MORRISON

An informant that Arranges Work and meetings between Clients And devil Hunters in the Matters Related To Demons. He has been Working with Dante for A long time, Bringing him jobs every once in a while.



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NICO

The self-proclaimed "weapon artist" who allies herself with Nero. A first-class weapon craftsmen who is the granddaughter to Nell Goldstein.

A Thin man with a cane, tattoos and a mouth full of poetry. Before the turmoil in the city of Red Grave, he visited Dante's shop through Morrison and brought in a request for the slaying of a powerful demon.



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PROLOGUE

IN THE DEPTHS OF THE BARELY LIT BAR, A CERTAIN WOMAN SAT FACE TO FACE WITH A MAN AT A TABLE.

HE DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HER, EXCEPT, PERHAPS THE NAME, AND THEY MET ABOUT AN HOUR AGO, WHEN THE WOMAN CALLED THE EDITORIAL OFFICE AND ASKED FOR A MEETING, BECAUSE SHE WANTED TO FIND SOMETHING OUT.

A DECENT PERSON WILL NEVER COME - THEY DO NOT RUN TO STRANGERS AT THE FIRST CALL.

BUT JEFFREY IS A JOURNALIST. AND HE WORKS IN THE 'OCCULT 'TIMES - A MAGAZINE WITH THIRTY YEARS OF HISTORY, WHERE THEY WRITE EXCLUSIVELY ABOUT ALL KINDS OF DEMONS AND URBAN LEGENDS, SO JEFFREY IS NOT USED TO STRANGE CALLS AND LETTERS. IN ADDITION, HE UNDERSTOOD VERY WELL: AT TIMES, GREAT NEWS COMES FROM WHERE EXPECTED LEAST. SO

JEFFREY IMMEDIATELY AGREED, AND HERE THEY ARE, SITTING HERE.

“I’LL HAVE A GIN AND TONIC,” JEFFREY ORDERED FROM A WAITER WHO CAME UP TO THEM AND LOOKED AT THE WOMAN. - WHAT WILL YOU HAVE?

“BOILERMAKER,” SHE THREW.

THE “BOILER MAKER” IS EASY TO MIX: A BEER IS TAKEN, A PILE OF BOURBON IS TIPPED OVER, AND THEN GRAB AND DRINK IN ONE GULP. IN SHORT, A TOUGH THING.

“HEY, BUT CAN YOU HANDLE THAT DRINK? WE HAVEN’T TALKED YET,” JEFFREY ASKED IN BEWILDERMENT, BUT THE WOMAN, AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED, STUCK A CIGARETTE IN HER MOUTH. – “OKAY, I GET IT. DRINK WHAT YOU WANT, WE’RE AT THE BAR” HE ADDED, LOOKING AT THE WOMAN.

NICOLETTA GOLDSTEIN IS A WOMAN WITH DARK SKIN AND BLACK WAVY HAIR. IT’S NOT THAT FRANK, BUT VERY

PROVOCATIVE. THE FACE ... NOT MUCH TO SAY AT ALL: NOT THE HEIGHT OF BEAUTY, BUT THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT HER. THE ONLY PITY IS THAT THERE ARE GLASSES ON THE NOSE.

“So, Nico, what did you want to find out?” - He addressed to Nicoletta. Usually they say that when they (reporters) want to get into confidence and understand what kind of person they are, only Jeffrey constantly used this technique.

“Goldstein,” she growled, lighting a cigarette. Jeffrey smiled blankly. Nico meanwhile dragged on and only then continued:

- Call me Miss Goldstein.

- Before the Nightmare -

Jeffrey involuntarily frowned. Actually, they pulled him out for a conversation in this god-forgotten tavern, forced to pay for a drink, and then they throw him such words. However, he did not begin to show dissatisfaction - the thing

IS COMMON. AFTER ALL, HE OFTEN ENCOUNTERS ALL SORTS OF ECCENTRICS AT WORK: THE SELF-PROCLAIMED MESSENGERS OF GOD, THE GOOD-DOERS WHO LOOK AFTER THE EARTH, THE REINCARNATIONS OF NAPOLEON...

SO NICO WAS STILL A RELATIVELY PLEASANT CONVERSATIONALIST - SHE DID NOT MUMBLE ANY HERESY AND DID NOT THROW SALT AROUND. IT WAS JUST ... RUDE.

COUGHING, JEFFREY SPOKE AGAIN:

“I’M SORRY, MISS GOLDSTEIN.” I’LL ASK AGAIN: WHAT DID YOU WANT TO FIND OUT FROM ME?

NICO, WITHOUT RELEASING CIGARETTES FROM HER MOUTH, PULLED OUT A MAGAZINE FROM HER PURSE NEXT TO HER.

NOTICING WHICH PARTICULAR MAGAZINE, JEFFREY COULD NOT RESTRAIN HIS ENTHUSIASM:

- OHHH, I STILL REMEMBER THIS ISSUE! - IN THE HANDS OF NICO WAS THE OCCULT TIMES, RELEASED ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO. - THEN MY ARTICLE FIRST HIT THE FRONT PAGE.

“I DON’T CARE,” NICO SNAPPED, EXHALING SMOKE, AND POINTED TO THE COVER. “I WANTED TO ASK ABOUT THIS.”

THERE FLAUNTED THE TITLE OF AN ARTICLE BY JEFFREY: “A MYSTERIOUS WHITE GIANT ATTACKED THE FORTRESS TOWN OF FORTUNE!”

“I REMEMBER IT WELL, I EVEN WENT TO THE PLACE,” SAID JEFFREY, PICKED UP A MAGAZINE AND TURNED OVER THE PAGE. *Before the Nightmare*

THE CITY OF FORTUNA IS A TOWN ON THE OUTSKIRTS THAT FEW PEOPLE HAVE HEARD OF. A STRANGE RELIGION WAS BORN THERE: SOME LEGENDARY DEMON SPARDA WAS

WORSHIPED LIKE A GOD, AND THE LOCALS THEMSELVES LED A MODEST, FAR FROM CIVILIZATION LIFESTYLE, EXACTLY THE SAME AMISH.

IT WAS IN THAT LITTLE TOWN FIVE YEARS AGO THAT SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENED.

NO, JEFFREY DID NOT SEE THIS “STRANGE” WITH HIS OWN EYES. AT FIRST, ONLY RUMORS REACHED HIM, THEY SAY, IN FORTUNE A WHITE GIANT APPEARED AND DESTROYED THE CITY.

- THE ARTICLE SAYS THAT THE FORTUNA ORDER OF THE SWORD IS GONE. AND HERE IS WHAT I WANT TO ASK: IS THIS TRUE? OR NOT?

MEANWHILE, THE WAITER PUT IN FRONT OF NICO A BEER AND A GLASS OF BOURBON, AND IN FRONT OF JEFFREY A GLASS OF GIN AND TONIC. NOTING THAT NICO DID NOT TOUCH THE DRINK, JEFFREY FOLLOWED HER EXAMPLE AND DID NOT EITHER, BUT INSTEAD BEGAN TO ANSWER THE QUESTION:

- I UNDERSTOOD YOU. THE OCCULT TIMES AT TIMES TRULY EMBELLISHES THE FACTS, AND AT TIMES IT ADDS ON ITS OWN. BUT SPECIFICALLY, IN THIS CASE, EVERYTHING IS PURE TRUTH. THE ORDER IS GONE. THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

ONLY IN FORTUNE DID THE VERY STRANGE RELIGION EXIST - THE ORDER OF THE SWORD.

ONCE IN THIS SMALL TOWN WHERE, ACCORDING TO RUMORS, A WHITE GIANT APPEARED, JEFFREY WENT TO SNIFF OUT ABOUT EVERYTHING ABOUT WHICH IT IS POSSIBLE. BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, THE RESIDENTS DID NOT REALLY WELCOME THE STRANGERS, AND JEFFREY HAD TO BE PATIENT ENOUGH TO FINALLY FIND OUT: THE ORDER OF THE SWORD IS GONE.

- Before the Nightmare -

- I DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THERE. THE KNIGHTS, MANAGERS, EVEN SIMPLE MINISTERS SIMPLY DISAPPEARED. IT WAS RUMORED THAT THEY ALL DIED.

THE CIVILIANS, OF COURSE, REMAINED, BUT DOUBTED THE TEACHINGS OF THE ORDER.

THAT'S BASICALLY ALL THAT JEFFREY MANAGED TO FIND OUT.

EVEN NOW, FIVE YEARS LATER, JEFFREY BELIEVED THAT HIS HUNCH WAS CLOSE TO THE TRUTH. AND ALTHOUGH HIS ARTICLE DID NOT BECOME POPULAR, IT LEFT A SERIOUS MARK IN HIS JOURNALISTIC LIFE.

- WHAT ABOUT THEIR INSTITUTIONS? WIPED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH?

QUESTION NICO BROUGHT BACK JEFFREY FROM THE DISTANT PAST.

- Before the Nightmare -

“INSTITUTES? GOD KNOWS ... THERE WAS A RESTRICTED AREA. I WANTED TO PEEK, BUT NOTHING WORKED OUT FOR ME. WELL, WHAT ELSE WAS THERE TO DO? I WANTED TO GET BACK ALIVE FROM THERE” JEFFREY REPLIED,

PUTTING DOWN THE MAGAZINE AND TAKING UP THE GIN AND TONIC.

MOST LIKELY, JEFFREY WAS WAITING FOR NICO TO REACH FOR HER DRINK AND IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE A TOAST, BUT SHE, NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO HIM, LOOKED AT THE MAGAZINE AND SMOKED. TIRED OF WAITING, THE MAN TOOK A SIP OF GIN AND TONIC.

- I HAVE ONE QUESTION LEFT. THE ARTICLE SAYS THAT THE INHABITANTS OF FORTUNE FLATLINE REFUSED TO COMMENT ON THOSE EVENTS, BUT ... - NICO SPOKE UP AND TURNED OVER THE PAGE OF THE MAGAZINE. THERE WAS A PHOTO OF THE RUINED CITY, AND IN THE BACKGROUND, THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN LOOKING SOMEWHERE TO THE SIDE. POINTING TO HIM, NICO CONTINUED: - ONLY THIS GUY AGREED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS.

JEFFREY, DRINKING FROM A GLASS, NODDED.

- YEAH, HE WAS LIKE A REPRESENTATIVE THERE. BUT HE DID NOT GIVE ANY INTERESTING INFORMATION, ALTHOUGH HE WAS THE ONLY ONE TO TALK. HE SAID THERE IS NOTHING INTERESTING HERE AND LEFT. AND HE WAS VERY SERIOUS. I'D CALL HIM N.

“IS HE SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH THE CHURCH?”

- PROBABLY. AS IT WAS ... AH, FOR SURE! HE SAID HE WAS A KNIGHT.

AT THE WORD "KNIGHT," JEFFREY SMILED SOURLY, AS IF TRYING TO SAY: "WELL, WHAT THE HELL ARE THE KNIGHTS THESE DAYS?"

HOWEVER, THERE WERE KNIGHTS IN FORTUNA. AN INDISPUTABLE FACT. WHILE THE ORDER OF THE SWORD WAS ENGAGED IN POLITICS, THE KNIGHTS KEPT ORDER. THEY WERE ARMED, AS BEFITS THE CHAMPIONS OF THE ORDER OF THE SWORD, HEFTY SWORDS.

JEFFREY DID NOT SEE THESE FELLOWS LIVE, BUT ON THE PAGES OF HIS MAGAZINE SEVERAL PHOTOS WERE PUBLISHED: THEY, ACCORDING TO RUMORS, DEPICTED A COLLECTION OF KNIGHTS DRESSED IN SOME VERY OLD-FASHIONED ROBES.

- WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT N? - SUDDENLY ASKED NICO.

JEFFREY STARED AT HER COMPANION WITH A SQUINT.

“AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?”

“I’LL TRY TO FIND HIM,” NICO ANSWERED RIGHT AWAY, WHICH MADE JEFFREY FALL SILENT.

- Before the Nightmare -

IF THE CONVERSATION WAS ABOUT ANY OTHER ARTICLE, JEFFREY WOULD IMMEDIATELY SAY THAT HE DOES NOT REMEMBER THE NAME. BUT HE REMEMBERED HIM WELL EVEN NOW - THAT INCIDENT IN FORTUNA MEANT SO MUCH TO HIM. THE FIRST TRIP ABROAD, PUBLICATION

ON THE FRONT PAGE, AND HE HIMSELF WAS BURNING WITH THE IDEA OF JOURNALISM - TO SURPRISE THE WORLD! - IT'S ONLY A PITY THAT NOW NOTHING IS LEFT OF THIS IDEA.

“NERO,” THE MAN SAID AFTER A PAUSE, AND THEREBY VIOLATED ONE OF THE JOURNALIST’S BASIC RULES - NEVER REVEAL YOUR SOURCES OF INFORMATION. BUT JEFFREY THUS WANTED TO THANK THE READER, WHO EVEN FIVE YEARS AFTER PUBLICATION CALLED THE EDITORIAL OFFICE AND ASKED THE AUTHOR FOR A MEETING. IN ADDITION, IF THE CURRENT CONVERSATION HAD HAPPENED FIVE YEARS AGO, JEFFREY WOULD NOT HAVE SPOKEN A WORD.

- AND THE LAST NAME? NICO ASKED AGAIN. JEFFREY SHOOK HIS HEAD.

-Before the Nightmare-

- I DON’T KNOW. BUT NERO IN THE WHOLE CITY IS ONLY ONE, AS I RECALL.

NICO NODDED SILENTLY.

“DO YOU REALLY WANT TO GO TO FORTUNA?” WHY DO YOU NEED IT? - IT WAS JEFFREY’S TURN TO ASK.

- MY GOAL IS TO AIM AT THE TOP.

THE MAN DID NOT UNDERSTAND ANYTHING FROM HER ANSWER.

- THANKS. IT WAS SOMEHOW UNCOMFORTABLE FOR ME TO GO WITHOUT ANY LEADS, NICO ADDED, AND SUDDENLY HELD HER GLASS OF BOILERMAKER, DRANK IT IN ONE GULP AND SMILED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE EVENING.

“I HOPE WE MEET AGAIN, JEFF.” NICO SAID GOODBYE, TOOK HER BAG AND HEADED FOR THE EXIT.

- Before the Nightmare -

AND ONLY THEN DID JEFFREY COME TO HIS SENSES:

- HEY, WAIT! HE SHOUTED, CLENCHING A FORGOTTEN MAGAZINE IN HIS FIST.

NICO STOPPED, TURNED AROUND, WITH A SMILE THREW: “TAKE IT. ISN’T THIS A MEMORABLE NUMBER FOR YOU?” - AND LEFT THE BAR.

NOT FULLY UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAD JUST HAPPENED, JEFFREY SAT BACK AND LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR.

“WHAT WAS THAT ...” FINALLY ESCAPED FROM HIM.

JEFFREY DRANK A GIN AND TONIC AND ORDERED ANOTHER ONE. AND WHILE THEY MIXED HIM, HE SUDDENLY WONDERED:

“BY THE WAY, I KINDA HEARD THE NAME GOLDSTEIN, BUT WHERE?”

BUT THE GIN AND TONIC ALREADY HIT JEFFREY IN THE HEAD, SO HE COULD NOT FIND AN ANSWER.

FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS NERO WORKED WITHOUT REST IN THE GARAGE.

NERO'S HANDS ARE GOLDEN, AND TO REMAKE THE SWORD THERE, TO RENEW THE THREAD ON THE HANDLE - HE IS NOT AT ALL AN AMATEUR.

"IT SHOULD WORK!" HE GRUMBLED, TURNING THE HILT OF HIS SWORD.

THE RED QUEEN - ONE OF THE MOTOR-SWORDS MADE BY THE ORDER OF THE SWORD. A SPECIAL MECHANISM IS BUILT INTO THE BLADE, WHICH IS ACTIVATED WHEN THE HANDLE IS ROTATED: FUEL IS INJECTED AND DRIVEN THROUGH THE ENTIRE BLADE, WHICH GIVES A MONSTROUS FORCE TO THE IMPULSE. BY THE WAY, THE SWORD GOT ITS NAME BECAUSE THE FUEL, PASSING THROUGH THE BLADE, IS RED-HOT AND BURSTS OUT WITH A BRIGHT FLAME.

- COME ON! - NO MATTER HOW MUCH NERO TWISTS THE HANDLE, NEITHER FLAME NOR GAS COME OUT. "WHAT, TAKEN BACK, SINCE YOU HAVE NOT BEEN WAVED FOR A LONG TIME?" HE ASKED ALMOST JOKINGLY, BUT, OF COURSE, HE DID NOT WAIT FOR AN ANSWER. AND WHAT TO EXPECT? THE RED QUEEN IS JUST A SWORD. NERO, NOT LETTING GO OF HIS HANDS, SAT DOWN WITH A SIGH AND LOOKED AROUND.

IN THE GARAGE, OF COURSE, THERE WAS COMPLETE CHAOS: THE KEYS, SCREWDRIVERS, BOLTS LAY WHEREVER NECESSARY, AND THEIR BOXES WERE PILED UP IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION; ENGINE OIL WAS GATHERING DUST IN OPEN CANS, AND YOU COULD NOT SEE LIDS FROM CANS. LIKE IT OR NOT, CLEANLINESS IS DEFINITELY NOT ABOUT NERO, BUT TO BRING THE GARAGE TO SUCH A STATE, YOU NEED A SPECIAL TALENT. HOWEVER, THE VERY THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO TIDY UP DROVE NERO INTO LONGING.

HE, PUTTING HIS SWORD ASIDE, HAD ALREADY RISEN, WHEN HE SUDDENLY HEARD SOMEONE'S FOOTSTEPS AND TURNED HIS HEAD TO THE DOOR. LITERALLY

IMMEDIATELY, JULIO, AN ORPHAN, RUSHED INTO THE GARAGE AND WAS WATCHED BY NERO AND KYRIE.

- NERO! TROUBLE! SOME STRANGE AUNT HAS COME! HE SHOUTED.

NERO JUST SHRUGGED.

- STRANGE? IN WHAT? DOES SHE HAVE AN EYE ON HER FOREHEAD? OR ARE THE EARS SHARP?

HE DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO BELIEVE IN THE TALES OF THE BOY, WHO WAS CONSIDERED THE FIRST MISCHIEF CHILD IN THE WHOLE DISTRICT: HE WOULD GIVE SOMETHING LIKE THAT, AND THEN RUN DOWN THE CEILING FOR ADULTS, AND HE WOULD LAUGH!

- Before the Nightmare -

- YES, I'M NOT LYING! - WITH A GRIMACE OF DESPAIR, JULIO WAS INDIGNANT.

“SO WHY IS SHE WEIRD?” - ASKED NERO, COLLECTING THE SCATTERED TOOLS AND THROWING THEM ON THE BOXES.

“SHE LOOKS LIKE ... WELL, ORDINARY.” BUT LOOKING FOR YOU ... - EXPLAINED JULIO.

NERO, REACHING FOR A WRENCH, FROZE AND TURNED HIS HEAD TO THE BOY:

- ME?

HE NODDED.

- SHE CAME UP TO ME AND SUDDENLY ASKED ... AND YOU KNOW NERO? WELL, I SAID I DON'T KNOW. I REMEMBER, AFTER YOU INSIST THAT WE DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS...

FORTUNA HAS NOT FAVORED NEWCOMERS FOR A LONG TIME. IN ADDITION, THE DEVIL KNOWS HOW LONG IT

TAKES TO GO TO THE NEAREST CITY OR VILLAGE - IN GENERAL, THIS IS A REAL ISOLATED TOWN. BUT FIVE YEARS AGO THERE WAS A MAJOR INCIDENT, AND ALL SORTS OF MAGAZINES, TELEVISION PEOPLE AND HACKS OF ALL KINDS BEGAN TO VISIT THE CITY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

AND THEY WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW THE TRUTH.

AND WHAT'S THE POINT OF TELLING? WOULD PEOPLE REALLY BELIEVE THAT A HORDE OF DEMONS GOUGED THE CITY IN A MATTER OF HOURS? BUT EVEN IF THEY BELIEVED, IT WOULD ONLY GET WORSE.

THAT IS WHY NERO STRICTLY ORDERED ALL RESIDENTS OF THE CITY (AND EVEN YOUNG CHILDREN) TO REMAIN SILENT.

Before the Nightmare-

- WHAT IS SHE LIKE? NERO ASKED, DECIDING THAT THE BOY WAS STILL LYING.

- WELL ... SUCH A DARK ONE AND WITH GLASSES...

NERO TWITCHED AN EYEBROW: I REMEMBER THERE WAS SUCH A PERSON. DARK-SKINNED. JUST DIDN'T WEAR GLASSES.

- IS IT A BLONDE? - CONTINUED THE INTERROGATION OF NERO.

JULIO SHOOK HIS HEAD.

- NOPE. BLACK HAIR, CURLY.

- WHO HAS CURLY HAIR, JERK? - SUDDENLY SOMEONE SOUNDED A VOICE.

-Before the Nightmare-

NERO LOOKED UP AND SAW AT THE ENTRANCE A DARK-HAIRED STRANGER WITH GLASSES - JUST LIKE JULIO DESCRIBED.

- UH, THAT'S HER! HE CRIED, POINTING A FINGER AT THE WOMAN WITH A CIGARETTE IN HER MOUTH.

- DO NOT POKE A FINGER AT PEOPLE! WHO TAUGHT YOU MANNERS? - THE STRANGER THREW.

“JULIO, GO TO KYRIE,” NERO IMMEDIATELY SENT THE BOY HOME.

IN ANY OTHER SITUATION, JULIO WOULD HAVE REACHED INTO HIS POCKET FOR A WORD, BUT HERE HE BECAME QUIET AND OBEDIENTLY HEADED FOR THE DOOR LEADING TO THE CORRIDOR. HE SEEMED TO SENSE THAT THIS WAS A SERIOUS MATTER.

WATCHING HIM, NERO TURNED TO THE WOMAN - SHE WAS STILL STAMPING AT THE ENTRANCE, SMOKING A CIGARETTE.

“SO WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?” NERO ASKED, CASTING A GLANCE AT HIS RIGHT HAND, WHICH HE MOVED TO HIDE FROM THE GUEST.

AFTER ALL, HIS RIGHT HAND IS INHUMAN. A FEW YEARS AGO, IT ACQUIRED A TERRIBLE, OR RATHER, DEVILISH FORM.

BUT IT'S NOT ONLY THAT.

THE DEVILISH FORM ENDOWED INCREDIBLE POWER: THE SHARPEST SWORDS DID NOT LEAVE EVEN SCRATCHES ON THE SKIN, AND THE PARANORMAL POWER HIDDEN IN THE HAND ALLOWED THROWING HEFTY DEMONS, LIKE PLUSH TOYS.

BY A FUNNY COINCIDENCE, THAT HAND SUDDENLY BECAME A GOOD THING FOR NERO, AS HE WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR STRENGTH, AND EVEN THOUGH HE SHIELDED AWAY FROM ITS UGLINESS AT FIRST, BUT HE GOT USED TO IT AND SOMETIMES EVEN REJOICED: IT IS

NOT DIFFICULT TO PROTECT THE CLOSEST ONES WITH SUCH A HAND.

AND THE DEVIL'S HAND (DEVIL BRINGER IN THE GAME) HAD ONE FEATURE: IT PULSED IN RESPONSE TO MANIFESTATIONS OF DEMONIC POWER.

NERO LOOKED AT HIS HAND TO MAKE SURE THAT IT WAS NOT A (HIS ARM LIGHTS UP IF IT'S A DEMON CLOSE TO HIM) DEMON WHO HAD COME TO HIM. AND IF HE REALLY WERE, THE HAND WOULD HAVE DEFINITELY REACTED.

THE WOMAN STOOD AND SILENTLY SMOKED A CIGARETTE.

THE HAND WAS ALSO SILENT, WHICH MEANT THAT THE GUEST WAS NOT A DEMON. WELL, OR A DEMON, BUT WITHOUT A DROP OF POWER.

- ARE YOU NERO? THE WOMAN FINALLY SPOKE, EXHALING A WISP OF SMOKE.

NERO FROWNED A LITTLE.

- YOU NEED TO PUT THE SMOKE OUT, NOT ALLOWED HERE! - AND POINTED A FINGER AT HER.

NERO COULD NOT STAND THE TOBACCO SMOKE. AND THIS IS NOT COUNTING HOW MUCH FUEL AND OIL IS STORED IN HIS GARAGE. SO THE REQUEST IS QUITE ADEQUATE.

- SO YOU TAUGHT THE JERK TO POINT AT PEOPLE? - THE WOMAN WAS SURPRISED, HAVING PASSED THE REQUEST OF NERO BY EARS.

AND HE DID NOT LIKE THIS ANSWER.

-Before the Nightmare-
“THROW THE DAMN CIGARETTE OR GET OUT!” HE REPEATED IN RAISED TONES, POINTING AT THE WOMAN’S FINGER.

SHE CASUALLY PULLED A CIGARETTE FROM HER MOUTH, THREW IT UNDER HER FEET AND PUT IT OUT WITH HER BOOT.

- WELL, SATISFIED NO SMOKING BOY?

NERO COULD NOT HIDE HIS IRRITATION AND VICIOUSLY CLICKED HIS TONGUE, BUT HE THOUGHT:

“SHE APPEARS THE SAME AGE AS ME BUT ACTS AS IF SHE’S 10 YEARS OLDER” – THOUGHT NERO.

“I WON’T SMOKE HERE, OKAY? I’LL INVITE MYSELF IN.” THE WOMAN ANNOUNCED, AND WITHOUT WAITING FOR THE GO-AHEAD, SHE CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF THE GARAGE.

- Before the Nightmare -

NERO INTERCEPTED HER ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, BUT SHE SUDDENLY RAISED BOTH HANDS:

- HEY HEY! WILL YOU BEAT A WEAK WOMAN? SHE JOKINGLY EXCLAIMED.

NERO MADE A SOUR FACE: A COUPLE OF MINUTES DID NOT PASS, AND HE ALREADY SHOWED HIS RIGHT HAND, AND HE HID IT AS BEST HE COULD.

THE WOMAN DID NOT NOTICE HIS ANXIETY AND SIMPLY BRAZENLY WALKED AROUND THE GARAGE. SHE REACHED THE WOODEN BOX IN THE CORNER AND SAT THERE.

- ANNOYED? DO NOT MIND IT. EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN TROUBLES TROUBLES, - SHE CROSSED HER LEGS. - BUT! I DIDN'T INTRODUCE MYSELF. NICOLETTA GOLDSTEIN. AND I HAVE A SMALL REQUEST.

- WHAT? *Before the Nightmare*

NERO INVOLUNTARILY BECAME INTERESTED, BECAUSE THE REQUEST WAS MADE EXACTLY AFTER THE STRANGER SAW HIS HAND.

“WE NEED TO FIND SOMETHING. I’M INTERESTED IN THE DEMON RECORDS KEPT IN THE ORDER OF THE SWORD. BUT I HEARD THAT THE ORGANIZATION HAS SUNK INTO OBLIVION, SO HAS ALL HOPE FOR THE SURVIVING FOLLOWERS” SHE EXPLAINED THE ESSENCE OF THE REQUEST AND LOOKED INQUIRINGLY AT NERO. THERE WAS NOT A TRACE OF MALICE IN HER EYES. THE CLEAN LOOK OF THE CHILD WHO WAS SHOWN HIS FAVORITE TOY.

“AND WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT THE ORDER STUDIED DEMONS?” NERO ASKED IMMEDIATELY.

OF COURSE, THE ORDER STUDIED DEMONS, BUT IN SECRET FROM THE WHOLE WORLD. AND IF ANYONE HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS, THE HYPE WOULD HAVE COME OUT GLOBAL. CROWDS OF DEMON HUNTERS WOULD SURELY HAVE DESCENDED INTO THE CITY.

NICOLETTA SHOOK HER HEAD IN RESPONSE.

“THERE ARE ENOUGH INFORMANTS ... WHO TOLD ME THAT? .. OCCULT JOURNALIST? TOBACCO HAG? STUBBORN DEMON HUNTER GIRL? OR MAYBE A DRINK FROM THE TAVERN? I HEARD A LOT FROM ANYONE, I DON'T REMEMBER EXACTLY” NICOLETTA ANSWERED, EITHER EVASIVELY OR TRUTHFULLY. BUT ONE THING WAS CERTAIN FOR SURE: THE GUEST IS NOT ORDINARY, IF SHE KNOWS ABOUT THE DEMON HUNTERS – THOUGHT NERO.

“YOU'RE MY FIRST GUEST,” NERO ADMITTED, STEPPED AWAY FROM THE WOMAN AND LEANED HIS BACK AGAINST THE WALL. “I WILL NOT STRETCH THE SPEECH. MY ANSWER IS NO. RECORDS OF THE ORDER WILL NOT GO TO ANYONE. YOU CAN LEAVE.”

AND HERE NERO FELT A PRICK OF DISAPPOINTMENT: NOT EVERY DAY SOMEONE TURNS TO HIM IN SUCH A WILDERNESS. MAYBE IT WOULD BE WORTH CONSIDERING EVERYTHING, AND THEN REFUSE?

DESPITE THE PROBLEMS IN THE CITY, THE SECRET LABORATORIES OF THE ORDER REMAINED INTACT. OF

COURSE, THE MOST DANGEROUS THINGS WERE TAKEN OUT LONG AGO, BUT SOME MATERIALS REMAINED IN THEIR PLACES. NERO WAS THINKING OF SOMEHOW BLOWING THEM TO PIECES — JUST IN CASE SO THE TRAGEDY WOULD NOT HAPPEN AGAIN — BUT HE SIMPLY DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH TIME: FIRST OF ALL, IT WAS NECESSARY TO RESTORE THE CITY SO THAT PEOPLE COULD LIVE SOMEWHERE. THAT'S WHY THE HANDS DID NOT REACH THE OMINOUS CELLARS.

HOWEVER, IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT, HAVING BEEN REFUSED, NICOLETTA WOULD LEAVE WITH HER TAIL TUCKED AWAY. IN THE WORST CASE, SHE COULD HAVE MADE HER WAY INTO THE LABORATORY UNTIL NERO SAW. ONCE, A JOURNALIST CAME TO TOWN, SNIFFED OUT EVERYTHING, BUT SIMPLE THREATS WERE ENOUGH TO SEND HIM HOME, BUT WHETHER THE SAME THREATS WOULD AFFECT THIS PERSON WAS A BIG QUESTION. IF NOT, THEN YOU HAVE TO DRIVE OUT BY FORCE.

AND THEN NICOLETTA THREW SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. NERO CERTAINLY DID NOT EXPECT THIS.

“WHAT HAPPENED TO AGNUS?”

HE HAD NOT HEARD THIS NAME FOR A HUNDRED YEARS, BUT SHE UTTERED IT, AND NERO IMMEDIATELY REMEMBERED HIS FACE. HE WOULD NOT LIKE TO REMEMBER, HE'D LIKE TO FORGET COMPLETELY, BUT HE COULD NOT.

AGNUS WAS ONE OF THE CHIEFS IN THE ORDER AND STUDIED DEMONS ALONE. IN A SENSE, IT WAS HE WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FACT THAT THE CHURCH WENT ALL OUT. IT WAS HE WHO TURNED PEOPLE INTO DEMONS, SUMMONED POWERFUL MONSTERS STRAIGHT FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL, AND THEREBY DOOMED THE CITY TO DESTRUCTION. NATURALLY, ONE CAN ALWAYS SAY THAT HE ACTED ON THE ORDERS OF THE LEADER, BUT NO ONE PULLED HIS HAND - THIS IS HIS AND ONLY HIS SIN.

“DIED,” NERO ANSWERED.

AGNUS IS DEAD. HE WAS KILLED DURING THAT MESS IN FORTUNA. NERO COULD NOT EVEN LIFT A FINGER AND DID NOT SEE WHO KILLED HIM AND HOW.

“EH ...” THE GUEST BREATHED REGRETFULLY, BUT THEN SHE CONTINUED CHEERFULLY: “I THOUGHT SO”.

“ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THAT SON OF A BITCH?” - SURPRISED NERO.

“I KNOW HIM. HE IS MY FATHER.”

NERO COULD NOT BELIEVE HIS EARS:

- WHAT? - STEPPING FORWARD, HE ASKED. I DIDN'T CATCH YOU?

- Before the Nightmare -

NICOLETTA SHRUGGED SADLY.

- FATHER. AND I AM THE DAUGHTER OF THIS SON OF A BITCH. FATHER. DAUGHTER, SHE RUMBLED, BUT NERO NEVER FINISHED.

WHO? SAID NERO, WORRYINGLY.

“AGNUS! THE MAN WHO DESTROYED THE CITY! HE IS MY FATHER” NICOLETTA SAID, AND ADDED “UNFORTUNATELY”, QUIETLY.

NERO AUTOMATICALLY POINTED A FINGER AT HER SIDE:

- DAUGHTER OF AGNUS? YOU?

- DON'T YOU POINT AT PEOPLE! WHERE ARE YOUR MANNERS? OR WHAT, DO YOU POINT HERE (IN FORTUNA) – AS A SIGN OF RESPECT? - SAID NICOLETTA, BUT SUDDENLY HER EYES LIT UP: SHE JUMPED FROM THE BOX AND WITH A FIRM STEP WENT SOMEWHERE.

- HEY! - NERO SCOLDED, - BUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!

NICOLETTA LET HIS COMPLAINTS PASS BY, PICKED UP THE RED QUEEN - SHE CALMLY SAT ON HER FLOOR - AND BEGAN TO STUDY.

- HEY! DO NOT TOUCH THAT WITHOUT ASKING! NERO SHOUTED AND REACHED FOR HIS SWORD, BUT NICOLETTA DEFTLY DODGED.

- HMM ... JUDGING BY THE SHAPE, THE MECHANISM INJECTS FUEL? INTERESTING IDEA. A SIMPLE ONE, BUT ... OH, WOW! WELL, THAT'S NOT BAD! SHE CHATTERED AND TURNED THE HILT OF HER SWORD. BUT THE RED QUEEN MADE NO SOUND. EVERYTHING IS THE SAME AS LAST TIME. - MM? HAS BROKEN? DID THE IGNITION FALL? OR WAS THE PHONE CLOGGED? - NERO AGAIN REACHED FOR HIS SWORD IN AN ATTEMPT TO TAKE IT AWAY, BUT NICO AGAIN DODGED AND SUDDENLY ASKED: - WHERE ARE THE TOOLS?!

NERO'S JAW NEARLY FELL OFF:

- HA?

- I'LL FIX IT. NOT A SINGLE SANE MASTER WILL LEAVE THE MECHANISM BROKEN - WITHOUT GIVING NERO A WORD TO INSERT, NICOLETTA GLANCED AROUND THE GARAGE AND RUSHED TO THE TOOL BOX THAT THE NERO HAD LEFT THERE. - IT SEEMS THAT HE HAD A GOOD TIME WITH IT, BUT THE WORK IS CLUMSY! YOU'LL DISASSEMBLE IT INCORRECTLY!

NERO'S JAW ALMOST REACHED THE FLOOR WHILE HE WATCHED THE WOMAN: SHE SAT DOWN AND BEGAN TO DISASSEMBLE THE RED QUEEN WITH SUCH DEXTERITY AND SPEED, AS IF SHE HAD TOUCHED A LOT OF SUCH THINGS IN HER LIFE.

- SO-SO ... FAMILIAR FILLING. NO DAMAGE. HERE, SOME MORON CROOKEDLY CLIMBED INTO IT ... YEAH, SO NORMAL, - IN A MATTER OF SECONDS THE MECHANISM OF THE SWORD WAS DISASSEMBLED INTO PARTS, AND NIKO

HERSELF PEERED INTO THE NOZZLE WITH INTEREST, MUTTERING: - THEY DIDN'T CARRY OUT THE DAILY MAINTENANCE, AND HERE IS THE RESULT. DO YOU KNOW HOW THE MANUFACTURER'S WARRANTY WORKS? DO NOT CARRY OUT MINIMAL MAINTENANCE - THE WARRANTY HAS FALLEN.

CAUGHT IN A HAIL OF RIDICULE, NERO FIRST THOUGHT THAT THE GIRL COULD INDEED BE THE DAUGHTER OF AGNUS - THEY WERE VERY SIMILAR.

THE HEAD OF AGNUS WAS FILLED WITH ALL SORTS OF STUDIES, AND IF HE CAME ACROSS SOMETHING ENTERTAINING, THEN HE IMMEDIATELY CARRIED ON A NONSENSE. AND THE SKIN OF THE SON OF A BITCH IS DARK.

-Before the Nightmare-
“COME ON!” MUTTERED NERO AND PRESSED HIS HAND TO HIS CHEST. TO THE VERY PLACE WHERE AGNUS FELL, TRYING TO PIERCE HIM THROUGH. IF NERO WAS AN ORDINARY PERSON, HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY GO TO THE

NEXT WORLD. BUT, FORTUNATELY OR NOT, YOU CAN'T NAME ORDINARY NERO, THAT'S WHY HE'S STILL ALIVE.

“WELL, THAT'S ALL,” NERO WOKE UP JUST WHEN NICOLETTA PUT THE RED QUEEN'S GEAR BACK. - WELL, BABY, HOW ARE YOU? THE GUEST COOED, LOWERED HER SWORD AND TURNED THE HILT. THE NEXT INSTANT, A HOT FLAME ERUPTED FROM THE NOZZLE.

THE SWORD RECEIVED SUCH A STRONG IMPULSE THAT NICOLETTA INSTANTLY DROPPED ON THE FLOOR. BUT SHE DIDN'T GET ANGRY, SHE WAS AMUSED. SHE GOT UP, SHOOK OFF HER SHORTS AND SAID:

- HERE IS A BULLY! BUT TERRIBLY CUTE!

NERO SIGHED. NOW HE OWED HER MONEY, WHICH MEANS HE COULDN'T JUST KICK HER OUT.

“OKAY ... I'LL SHOW YOU WHERE THE MATERIALS OF THE ORDER ARE,” HE SURRENDERED, AND NICOLETTA SMILED.

- THANKS, NERO. YOU CAN CALL ME NICO.

PEERING INTO NICO'S SMILE - AND THAT ONE HAD A TOOTH PEEKING OUT FROM UNDER HER LIPS - NERO INVOLUNTARILY REMEMBERED THE KILLER OF AGNUS - DANTE.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-

CHAPTER 2 : DANTE

THE LAST TIME DANTE WAS ON THE ISLAND OF DUMARY, GOD KNOWS HOW MANY YEARS AGO IT WAS, EVEN HE FORGOT.

“IT’S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I SAW YOU, BOY,” WHEN DANTE GOT OFF THE SHIP, HE MET AN OLD WOMAN. “HOW IS IT GOING?” SHE ASKED.

- OF COURSE! AND YOU ARE IN GOOD HEALTH, GRANNY, DANTE ANSWERED.

THE OLD WOMAN, DIFFICULTY BREATHING, SMILED:

- SO, YOU DON’T REMEMBER MY NAME”

- Before the Nightmare -

DANTE PUT HIS FINGERS ON HIS FOREHEAD, THINKING.

- I REMEMBER. IT SEEMS TO BE ... MATIA? - HE ANSWERED, LITERALLY HAVING FISHED OUT A NAME FROM A HEAD.

- MATIER, BOY. I KNEW IT WOULD BE THIS WAY” THE OLD WOMAN GRIMACED, AND THEN TURNED AND WALKED AWAY. DANTE FOLLOWED HER.

- SO ALMOST THE SAME! WELL, DON'T BE ANGRY, GRANNY.

- I'M NOT ANGRY. SPARDA ALSO OFTEN CONFUSED MY NAME. WITH THE NAME OF ANOTHER WOMAN.

DANTE SHYLY TOUCHED HIS HEAD. AFTER ALL, DANTE IS THE SON OF THAT VERY LEGENDARY KNIGHT SPARDA.

AND THAT WAR BETWEEN PEOPLE AND DEMONS, TALES OF WHICH ARE STILL POISONED, REALLY WAS TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO. IN THE MIDST OF THE CONFRONTATION, THE KNIGHT OF SPARDA, THE RIGHT HAND OF THE RULER OF THE WORLD OF DEMONS, CROSSED OVER TO THE ENEMY SIDE. AND OUT OF PITY FOR THE PEOPLE, HE SEALED THE GATES BETWEEN THE

TWO WORLDS, AND THEN REMAINED IN OURS IN HIS LAST DAYS.

AND MATIER WAS PERSONALLY ACQUAINTED WITH THE LEGENDARY KNIGHT.

- GRANNY, HOW MANY YEARS, HOW MANY WINTERS HAVE PASSED? - ASKED DANTE THE SILENT MATIER AS SHE WALKED AHEAD.

EVEN BEFORE SPARDA MET EVA, HE TRAVELED THE WORLD FOR A LONG TIME. SURELY DURING HIS WANDERINGS, HE CAME ACROSS MATIER. BUT WHEN EXACTLY THIS HAPPENED - DANTE DID NOT KNOW.

“WHO KNOWS ... A COUPLE OF HUNDRED YEARS AGO, MAYBE EVEN MORE,” THE OLD WOMAN ANSWERED, NOT TURNING HER HEAD TO DANTE, AND HE ONLY SHRUGGED A LITTLE.

IN GENERAL, DANTE KNEW LITTLE ABOUT HIS FATHER. AND HE REMEMBERED LITTLE. IN CHILDHOOD HE LEARNED TO WIELD A SWORD FROM HIM. HE PRACTICED LESSONS WITH HIS TWIN BROTHER. AND HE COULD NOT EVEN IMAGINE THAT HIS FATHER WAS A DEMON. AND HE DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE LEGENDS THAT WENT ABOUT SPARDA.

“... YOU HAVE NO HEART. THERE WAS AN AGREEMENT THAT I WOULD TELL THE STORY OF SPARDA IF YOU SHOWED UP, BUT YOU HAVEN’T SHOWN YOUR NOSE SINCE YOU FINISHED UP THE WORK” MEANWHILE GRUMBLED MATIER.

I REMEMBERED THE EVENTS OF A DECADE AGO: DANTE SAILED TO THE DUMARY FOR THE SAKE OF THE TASK - TO STOP A DARK BUSINESSMAN WHO WAS PLANNING TO RESURRECT A POWERFUL DEMON.

“WHAT WAS I TO DO?” “THEY THREW ME INTO SOME GARBAGE DUMP WITHOUT AN ENTRANCE AND EXIT,” DANTE OBJECTED.

AND INDEED THE TRUTH WAS THAT DANTE WAS LOCKED IN THE WORLD OF DEMONS (HELL).

-I HEARD ABOUT IT. BUT I DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU MANAGED TO GET OUT.

“I WAS LUCKY: A HOLE OPENED AND I GOT OUT,” DANTE THREW.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE WORLDS HAS LONG BEEN BROKEN, BUT SOMETIMES DEMONS STILL MANAGE TO SEEP INTO THE PEOPLE. THROUGH RANDOM “GAPS”.

AND IN THE WORLD OF PEOPLE THERE ARE SPECIAL PLACES WHERE “TEARS” HAPPEN MORE OFTEN THAN USUAL.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE ISLAND OF DUMARY.

DEMONS HAVE BEEN APPEARING HERE SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, AND IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT A GUARDIAN HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO THE ISLAND, WHICH PROTECTS THE INHABITANTS FROM ALL EVIL SPIRITS.

“I THOUGHT YOU WERE COMING BACK TO THE ISLAND ... BUT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN THAT WAY, RIGHT?” THE OLD WOMAN IS A DESCENDANT OF THE ISLAND'S GUARDIANS CLAN.

“YEAH, WELL, Y'KNOW, BUSY” DANTE NODDED.

WHEN HE MANAGED TO ESCAPE FROM HELL, HE FOUND HIMSELF IN SOME SMALL PORT TOWN, FAR, FAR FROM DUMARY.

“A STRANGE THING,” THE OLD WOMAN CONTINUED TO GRUMBLE. “RANDOM HOLES ARE TOO UNSTABLE, DEMONS DON'T HAVE THAT ROAD. THEY CAN'T COME HERE WITHOUT A MEDIUM SIZED GAP AT LEAST.

THERE ARE ENOUGH PLACES WHERE THERE ARE GAPS. DUMARY ISLAND AND FORTUNA ARE EXAMPLES. BUT THE DEMONS, SEEPING THROUGH THE HOLES THERE, WERE NOT CONSIDERED DEMONS IN THE FULL SENSE OF THE WORD: ONLY THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS MOVED, WHICH COULD ONLY CONTROL THINGS. AND SO THAT THE DEMON - IF IT IS, OF COURSE, NOT A BUG OR AN INSECT - COULD STEP OVER THE BORDER IN ITS TRUE FORM, THE HOLE MUST BE HUGE AND, MOST IMPORTANT, STABLE. SUCH GAPS DON'T RANDOMLY APPEAR.

“THERE IS SOME THOUGHT ON THIS SUBJECT, SO DON'T WORRY,” SHE TRIED TO ALLAY THE FEARS OF OLD DANTE.

HE HIMSELF ASKED EXACTLY THE SAME QUESTIONS AS MATIER. HAVING VISITED FORTUNA, DANTE UNDERSTOOD WHY GAPS WERE FORMED BETWEEN THE WORLDS.

MOST LIKELY, THE FIENDISH INSTRUMENT YAMATO IS USED AS A KEY.

THE DEVILISH SWORD YAMATO IS THE FAVORITE WEAPON OF VERGIL, DANTE'S BROTHER, AND A GIFT LEFT BY HIS FATHER. THE SWORD IS ENDOWED WITH SPECIAL POWER: IT CUTS THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE WORLDS OF PEOPLE AND DEMONS.

AND EVEN A SPLINTER OF THE SWORD IS CAPABLE OF THIS.

"I'LL TELL YOU THIS WITHOUT HIDING ..." THE OLD WOMAN INTERRUPTED DANTE'S THOUGHTS. SHE DIDN'T WANT TO SEE YOU ON THE ISLAND.

HEARING ABOUT LUCIA, DANTE SQUINTED. LAST TIME, IT WAS SHE WHO CALLED DANTE TO THE DUMARY AND, TOGETHER WITH HIM, FOUGHT AGAINST THE DEMONS. ®

-Before the Nightmare-

"HOW MUCH TIME HAS PASSED..." HE THOUGHT.

MATIER SIGHED AND CONTINUED:

“BUT ISN’T LIVING LIKE THAT SADNESS? IN MY FOOTSTEPS, SHE’S NOT LEAVING THE ISLAND IN ANY WAY. AND THERE ARE ALMOST NO YOUNG MEN LEFT.”

“YES, AND I’M NOT YOUNG,” DANTE INTERPOSED AND RAN A HAND OVER HIS BRISTLES.

DEMONS LIVE LONG. DANTE’S FATHER, SPARDA, STRETCHED A LITTLE OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS. BUT HOW MUCH IS ALLOCATED TO HALF-BREED PEOPLE? DANTE DID NOT EVEN KNOW. BUT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, HE WAS AGING A LITTLE, IN WHICH HE HIMSELF HAD JUST ADMITTED. AND THE HOUR IS NOT FAR OFF WHEN HE BECOMES A DECREPIT OLD MAN.

MATIER SMILED VEXINGLY.

-Before the Nightmare-

- RIGHT. HOWEVER - SHE BEGAN TO SPEAK, NOT TAKING HER EYES OFF DANTE, "... THIS IS NOT ABOUT THAT, BOY. ALL THIS TIME, LUCIA WAS WAITING. WAITED AND WAITED SINCE YOU DISAPPEARED INTO HELL. DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS? DID YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES

SHE DRAGGED INTO YOUR AGENCY? THERE AND BACK ... BUT SHE WON'T GET ANY NEWS FROM YOU! HAS HE RETURNED? IS HE GONE?"

DANTE RAN HIS HAND THROUGH HIS HEAD, AWKWARDLY.

AS SOON AS HE GOT OUT OF HELL AND RETURNED TO THE OFFICE OF THE DEVIL MAY CRY AGENCY, HE CAME ACROSS LUCIA: SHE THREW HERSELF ON HIS NECK (A HUG) AND CRIED. BUT THEN THE PHONE RANG AND CUT THEIR REUNION SHORT.

AT THE OTHER END OF THE PIPE THEY SAID THE "PASSWORD."

IN APPEARANCE, THE DANTE AGENCY IS THE MOST COMMON, THEY STILL TAKE ON ANY KIND OF WORK THAT THEY OFFER, BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN SOMEONE CALLED AND GAVE THE PASSWORD, WHICH MEANT THAT THE JOB WOULD BE SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH THE DEMONS.

AND THAT TIME THE CALL TOOK DANTE BY SURPRISE, BUT HE COULD NOT REFUSE. AFTER ALL, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE, WHOM AND FOR WHAT. IF THE DEMONS WERE INVOLVED, DANTE WOULD GO.

SINCE THE DEMONS HAVE LAID EYES ON PEOPLE, HELP IS NEEDED - THIS IS AN IMMUTABLE RULE FOR DANTE.

“AND WHAT ABOUT YOU GIVE LUCIA A HAPPY MEMORY? I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO MARRY HER ... IT ISN'T GOOD FOR A MAN TO JUST FORGET ABOUT WOMEN, DON'T YOU THINK?” THREATENED MATIER, POKING DANTE WITH A CANE. “SAY SOMETHING ALREADY, BOY!”

REALIZING THAT HE COULD NOT GET ALONG WITH A CANE, DANTE SIGHED AND SPOKE:

- SORRY. I HAVE MY REASONS. *Before the Nightmare* -

- CHEAP TRICK! SPARDA WOULD HAVE COME UP WITH SOMETHING MORE ELEGANT.

- COME ON! I'M BETTER THAN FATHER.

MATIER THOUGHTFULLY CHEWED HER LIPS. FROM HER WRINKLED FACE, OF COURSE, IT'S HARD TO UNDERSTAND WHAT KIND OF EMOTIONS SHE HAS THERE - IS SHE ANGRY?

“WELL, IF I'VE ARRIVED ... LUCIA, GO AND BE DELIGHTED,” MATIER MUTTERED, LOWERING HER CANE.

DANTE EXHALED: IT ALREADY SEEMED TO HIM THAT HE HAD MET ONE OF THE GROUCHY RELATIVES PEOPLE HAVE.

“SO WHO AM I TO KILL?” DANTE TRIED TO CHANGE THE TOPIC, AND WALKED FORWARD.

- Before the Nightmare -

HE AGAIN SHOWED UP AT THE DUMARY FOR ONE SINGLE REASON - MATIER SAID THE “PASSWORD” WHEN SHE CALLED HIM.

“REMEMBER THE DEMON THAT YOU DEFEATED HERE?” - THE OLD WOMAN ASKED, CATCHING UP WITH DANTE, BUT HE SHOOK HIS HEAD.

- WHICH ONE? THE ORANGGUERRA? OR THE ONE THAT WAS BULL-LIKE? - DANTE SPECIFIED AND LOOKED AT HIS COMPANION - SHE SLOWLY SHOOK HER HEAD.

- ARGOSAX! YOU WERE DRAWN INTO HELL BECAUSE YOU TRIED TO DEFEAT HIM, RIGHT?

“WAS THAT HIS NAME?” I DON’T REMEMBER WHO’S CALLED, ANYWAY THIS IS NO USE. A WASTE OF MEMORY. I SAW - KILLED, AND THE MATTER IS OVER.

IN FACT, DANTE REMEMBERED THE NAME OF ONLY ONE DEMON - THE EMPEROR MUNDUS, THE SWORN ENEMY OF HIS FAMILY.

- AS YOU WISH. THIS TIME A DEMON DESCENDED ON THE ISLAND, WHO IS CONSIDERED THE RIGHT HAND OF ARGOSAX,” EXPLAINED MATIER, AND DANTE GRINNED.

- IT TURNS OUT, THEN THERE WAS NUMBER ONE, AND NOW WHAT, THE SECOND?

SLOWLY, DANTE BEGAN TO REMEMBER WHO ARGOSAX WAS. IT SEEMS THAT HE WAS THE SOVEREIGN OF HELL AND OPPOSED THE RULER OF MUNDUS BACK IN THAT GREAT WAR THAT DIVIDED HELL INTO TWO CAMPS. IN GENERAL, THE BUMP IS BIG BY LOCAL STANDARDS.

BUT AGAINST THE POWER OF DANTE, WHO FORCED BACK MUNDUS HIMSELF, ARGOSAX HAS NOTHING SPECIAL.

“REMEMBER HOW LONG AGO IT WAS, BOY,” MATIER INTERRUPTED DANTE’S SWEET THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EASY JOB. - NOW, A GOOD HALF OF THE DEMONS, WITHOUT THE RULER OF THEIR ARGOSAX, HAVE COME UNDER THE BANNER OF HIS RIGHT HAND, WHICH, MOREOVER, HAS BEEN DOING EVERYTHING IN RECENT

YEARS TO SAVE STRENGTH. AND NOW THEY GOT INTO OUR WORLD” MATIER EXPLAINED, CLOSED HER EYES AND ADDED: “THIS IS SUCH A STORY.”

DUMARIY MAY BE A SPECIAL PLACE, BUT EVEN HERE A HUGE GAP COULDN'T JUST ARISE THAT COULD BRING IN SUCH A POWERFUL DEMON. MOST LIKELY, SOME OF THE LOCALS TRIED AND PERFORMED A RITUAL, BUT ONLY MATIER AND LUCIA ARE WATCHING THE ISLAND - YOU JUST CAN'T TURN IT ON.

“ANY CLUE?” - ASKED DANTE. MATIER SHOOK HER HEAD.

- LUCIA WOULD NOT CALL. AT FIRST, SHE HERSELF THOUGHT THAT SOMEONE AGAIN PLANNED EVIL, BUT DID NOT FIND ANY TRACES. AND ARIUS WITH HIS OUROBOROS IS ALSO GONE.

DANTE STILL REMEMBERED SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

OUROBOROS IS A COMPANY THAT ONCE DEVELOPED THE DUMARY ISLAND, ONLY ON PAPER. THEIR TRUE PURPOSE

WAS TO OPEN THE PASSAGE BETWEEN THE WORLDS. YES, IT LOOKS LIKE A DECENT CONGLOMERATE, BUT ITS HEAD, ARIUS, WITH HIS HEAD WENT INTO OCCULTISM AND IMAGINED THAT HE WOULD SUBORDINATE THE POWER OF THE POWERFUL DEMON ARGOSAX.

BUT DANTE AND LUCIA KILLED ARIUS, HE IS NO LONGER IN THIS WORLD. SO WHERE DOES A STRONG DEMON GET ON THE ISLAND?

“OKAY, FORGET ABOUT IT,” DANTE MUTTERED AND LOOKED AT MATIER. “SO WHAT KIND OF DEMON GOT OUT OF THE HELLISH GARBAGE, GRANNY?”

MATIER GIGGLED.

“TOMORROW YOU WILL FORGET, BUT I’LL SAY IT ANYWAY.” HIS NAME IS BALROG. ACCORDING TO LEGEND, HE’S CRUEL AND COMMANDS FIRE, SO BE CAREFUL, HE SHARED HER ADVICE, AND DANTE SMIRKED SLIGHTLY.

CHAPTER 3: NERO

FORTUNA CASTLE HAS BEEN EMPTY FOR MANY YEARS, AND ITS CELLARS REMAINED IN EXTREMELY POOR CONDITION.

ON A DIFFERENT TIME, THE CASTLE GATES WERE OPEN TO EVERYONE, INCLUDING FOR RARE VISITORS TO THE CITY, BUT NOW EVEN THE LOCALS HAVE NO WAY THERE.

THE REASON FOR THIS IS EXTREMELY SIMPLE: THE LABORATORY OF AGNUS.

ENTERING THE LABORATORY (EQUIPPED WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARRANGED IT IN AN ANCIENT BASEMENT), NICO IMMEDIATELY SPUN ENTHUSIASTICALLY.

- Before the Nightmare -

- WHAT, ARE YOU INTERESTED? NERO ASKED.

ONCE AT THE CYLINDRICAL FLASK FOR BREEDING DEMONS, NICO RAN A HAND OVER THE GLASS AND RUSHED:

- YES! THERE IS SO MUCH COOL STUFF HERE!

AND WHILE SHE WAS ENTHUSIASTIC, NERO, LEANING HIS BACK AGAINST THE WALL, STEALTHILY PUT HIS HAND UNDER THE CLOAK, WHERE THE BELOVED BLUE ROSE REVOLVER WAS WARMING.

“I NEVER ASKED ... WHY DO YOU NEED ALL THIS RESEARCH?”

IF NICO REALLY IS THE DAUGHTER OF AGNUS (AND THIS IS PROBABLY TRUE), THEN SHE IS QUITE CAPABLE OF CONTINUING THE WORK OF HER FATHER AND LETTING HORDES OF DEMONS INTO THE HUMAN WORLD. AND IF SHE REALLY WANTS TO, NERO WILL HAVE TO SHOOT HER ON THE SPOT, AND IT DOESN'T MATTER THAT NICO REPAIRED THE RED QUEEN. EVEN ON THE WAY TO THE

CASTLE, NERO WAS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT READY FOR SUCH A TURN OF EVENTS.

PATting THE GLASS OF THE FLASK, NICO TURNED TO NERO.

“I WANT TO BECOME A MASTER,” SHE ADMITTED.

FROM SUCH A STATEMENT, NERO NEARLY PULLED THE REVOLVER OUT. BUT STILL HE RESTRAINED HIMSELF AND CLARIFIED:

- THE MASTER? SCULPT THE FIGURES OF DEMONS, EH?

GRINNING, NICO CLUCKED HER TONGUE:

- Before the Nightmare -

- WEAPONS. I WANT TO BE A FIRST-CLASS GUNSMITH.

- WEAPONS? - ASKED NERO, RECALLING HOW DEFTLY NICO DISMANTLED THE RED QUEEN.

- LIKE MY GRANNY. HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THE "MASTER OF THE FORTY-FIFTH CALIBER"? NICO ASKED, BUT, NOTICING HOW HER GUIDE SHOOK HIS HEAD, SHE SPAT AND TURNED AWAY:

“WHAT DO YOU EVEN KNOW, MAN?!”

USUALLY, HAVING HEARD THIS, NERO WOULD HAVE FLUSHED UP, BUT HE LET HER WORDS SLIP BY HIS EARS. MAYBE BECAUSE NICO WAS YOUNGER THAN HIM, OR MAYBE BECAUSE HE USED TO LOOKING AFTER THE ORPHANS, PUTTING UP WITH THEIR ANTICS AND ANSWERING THEIR DIRECT (EVEN ARROGANT!) QUESTIONS.

“FORTY-FIFTH CALIBER, YOU SAY? SO, IT'S ABOUT GUNS? EXCUSE ME, GUNS ARE NOT PARTICULARLY FAVORED HERE. THEY ALTOGETHER MOCKED ME BECAUSE OF A REVOLVER” NERO EXPLAINED.

NICO FROZE FOR A MOMENT.

- REVOLVER? DO YOU HAVE A REVOLVER? - EXCITEMENT CAUGHT FIRE IN HER EYES.

NERO DID NOT FIND WHAT TO DO WITH HER ENTHUSIASM, SO HE SIMPLY GRABBED THE BLUE ROSE - ALL THIS TIME HE HELD THE REVOLVER, RUNNING HIS HAND UNDER THE LAPEL OF THE CLOAK - AND THEN NICO RUSHED RIGHT UNDER THE BARREL.

“HEY HEY ... YOU DIDN'T GO CUCKOO THERE?!”

NICO LOOKED WITH SUCH EAGERNESS AT THE REVOLVER THAT NERO ALREADY THOUGHT THAT AT HIS FEET A DOG CURLS, ASKING FOR A TREAT. AND NERO REMEMBERED SUCH A GREEDY LOOK IN THE EYES OF AGNUS.

- D-LET ME SEE, HUH?! WILL YOU?

NO ONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD HAND OVER A REVOLVER TO A MAN WHO, WITH THE HELP OF THIS VERY REVOLVER, MIGHT HAVE TO SHOOT HIM. BUT NERO GAVE HIS TOY, NOT REALLY UNDERSTANDING HOW IT HAPPENED.

- HA HA! TWO BARRELS?! REALLY TWO ROUNDS AT A TIME ?! - MEANWHILE, NICO ADMIRERD, TWIRLING THE BLUE ROSE IN HER HANDS.

THE BLUE ROSE IS A SIX-SHOT REVOLVER CONVERTED FROM STOCK. DURING THE FLIGHT OF ENGINEERING THOUGHT, THERE WAS NO TRACE OF THE ORIGINAL FORM: NERO REPLACED THE USUAL BARREL WITH A NEW ONE, WITH TWO MUZZLSE, AND NOW IT WAS POSSIBLE TO SEND TWO BULLETS AT A TIME. WELL, ALMOST.

-Before the Nightmare-
ALMOST - BECAUSE THE STRIKER HIT THE CARTRIDGES WITH A SMALL LAG - THE TRUNKS WERE LOCATED ONE ABOVE THE OTHER. BUT THIS SMALL LAG OF A FEW MILLISECONDS WAS THE MAIN FEATURE OF THE BLUE ROSE.

“I SEE ... TWO DIFFERENT BULLETS,” NICO REALIZED. SHE HAD ALREADY PULLED OUT THE DRUM AND EXAMINED ITS FILLING.

“YOU SOMEHOW UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING TOO QUICKLY,” NERO REMARKED, BUT DIDN'T GET ANGRY.

THE BLUE ROSE WAS REALLY STUFFED WITH TWO TYPES OF BULLETS - ALL AS NICO SAID. THE FIRST IS AN EXPLOSIVE CARTRIDGE THAT BREAKS THE DEMONS' HARD ARMOR, AND AN INSTANT LATER A PIERCING BULLET FLIES INTO THE SAME PLACE, WHICH FLASHES THE DAMAGED SKIN OF THE ENEMY WITHOUT ANY PROBLEMS AND CAUSES REAL DAMAGE.

AND NERO HAD NOT YET MET A MAN WHO WAS READY TO POINT OUT A CHIP WITH CARTRIDGES, YOU JUST HAVE TO LOOK AT THE BARREL. AND BULLETS ARE ALIKE.

“WELL WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?!” – NICO WAS INDIGNANT, PUT THE DRUM INTO PLACE, TURNED IT AROUND, PUT IT ON AND GAVE IT TO THE OWNER, HOLDING IT BY THE BARREL. NERO TOOK HIS GUN, WHILE SHRUGGING HIS SHOULDERS.

NERO HAD ENCOUNTERED STRANGE TYPES BEFORE, LIKE AGNUS, AND NERO WAS ALWAYS LOST, NOT KNOWING HOW TO BEHAVE WITH THEM. OF COURSE, HE WAS NOT ONE OF THE NICEST BOYS, BUT THOSE WHO LOOKED AFTER HIM THROUGH LIFE WERE DECENT AND HONEST PEOPLE, AND THEY BROUGHT HIM UP IN THE SAME SPIRIT. THIS ALSO APPLIES TO FOSTER PARENTS, WHO SAW HIM AS HIS OWN SON, AND CREDO, WHO CONSIDERED HIM ALMOST A BROTHER, AND KYRIE - LOVED NERO.

- MY GRANDMOTHER MADE SIMPLE GUNS, BUT THEY HAD A SPECIAL GRACE. I ESPECIALLY REMEMBER HER LAST PAIR OF PISTOLS. BUT IN GENERAL, I SAW THEM ONLY IN THE PICTURES” NIKO CHATTERED INCONSISTENTLY, NOT REALLY NOTICING WHETHER NERO WAS LISTENING TO HER OR NOT.

“WOW ...” NERO MUTTERED WITHOUT INTEREST, BUT THIS DID NOT BOTHER THE GIRL:

- THEIR NAME IS JUST A CLASS! EBONY AND IVORY – CLASSIC PISTOLS. NAMED AFTER THE FLOWERS: EBONY - BLACK, IVORY - IVORY. - ONE BLACK, THE SECOND WHITE. A REAL WORK OF ART!

NERO FROWNED, AND NICO AGAIN DID NOT NOTICE THIS.

- THE IDEA IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE YOURS. ONE BULLET FLEW QUICKLY, WHILE THE SECOND WAS HIT POWERFULLY. IF SUCH A TRICK WAS LAID IN THE GUNS, THEY WERE PROBABLY MADE TO SHOOT DEMONS. ABOUT WHO ORDERED THIS COUPLE, I LEARNED MUCH LATER. HE SEEMS TO STILL BE HUNTING DEMONS. AND HIS NAME WAS ... - NIKO CHATTED ALL OVER UNTIL NERO INTERRUPTED HER:

- DANTE.

- YES! SO! - NICO JOYFULLY POINTED TO NERO. “DO YOU KNOW HIM TOO?” WELL-KNOWN TYPE, I GUESS. I JUST RECENTLY LEARNED ABOUT ALL EVIL SPIRITS AND ALMOST NEVER MET LOCAL CELEBRITIES ...” SHE ADDED, LOOKING AT NERO’S FACE.

AND HE DIDN’T EVEN KNOW HOW TO ANSWER BETTER. THE SITUATION ITSELF SIMPLY DID NOT FIT IN HIS HEAD.

NICO IS THE DAUGHTER OF AGNUS. GRANDMA NICO IS THE MASTER OF FIREARMS, WHO CREATED THE GUNS OF DANTE. AND NOW NERO IS TIED UP WITH NICO. WHAT NONSENSE?

- COME ON?! - NERO SAID, TRYING TO REDIRECT HER FROM THE QUESTION.

- DO YOU WANT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION? I’M TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT KIND OF DUDE WEARS MY

GRANDMOTHER'S MASTERPIECE. HE IS NOT A MORON RIGHT?

TRYING TO GATHER HIS THOUGHTS, NERO RAN A HAND THROUGH HIS HAIR.

- YES, YOU WAIT ... MY HEAD WILL EXPLODE NOW.

FOR NERO, DANTE IS SOME KIND OF PATRON. AND SO IT IS: HE FOUND OUT ABOUT THE INTENTIONS OF THE ORDER, RUSHED TO FORTUNA, SAVED NERO FROM TROUBLE ... WELL, HE ALSO KILLED AGNUS ALONG THE WAY, YES.

AND NOW THE DAUGHTER OF THAT SAME AGNUS IS STANDING IN FRONT OF NERO. SHE ALSO ASKS ABOUT HER DADDY'S KILLER.

- AND HOW CAN I EXPLAIN EVERYTHING, EH? WELL, WHAT A SETUP! - COMPLAINED NERO.

LOOKING AT HIM, NICO RAISED HER EYEBROWS IN SURPRISE.

CHAPTER 4 : DANTE

THE PATH TO THE PLACE WHERE THE INFERNAL GUEST NAMED BALROG SETTLED DOWN HAS ALREADY BEEN BLOCKED BY DEMONS. OBVIOUSLY, EVERY LITTLE THING THAT CRAWLED OUT OF THE GAP WITH IT.

- BAH, THE FAMILIAR MONKEY FACES! MUTTERED DANTE, TAKING OUT HIS FAVORITE GUNS - EBONY AND IVORY. THEY KNEW HOW TO PERFECTLY SHOOT THE ENEMIES WITH HOT LEAD AND FOR HELL KNOWS HOW MANY YEARS HAVE BECOME INDISPENSABLE FOR DANTE'S PARTNERS, WHOM HE TRUSTED MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE. - GO BACK TO THE HELL! NOTHING TO DO HERE! HE SAID, AND PULLED DOWN TWO TRIGGERS AT ONCE.

EBONY AND IVORY - NELL GOLDSTEIN'S LATEST MASTERPIECE. EVEN IF YOU GO AROUND THE WHOLE WORLD, YOU WON'T FIND ANOTHER SUCH PAIR OF GUNS. FOR SPEED - FOR SURE. AND THE MINIGUN WILL RIDE AROUND.

UNDER A HAIL OF BULLETS, THE DEMONS FLEW TO PIECES AND TURNED TO DUST. OF COURSE, THE REBEL WAS STILL PROTECTING DANTE'S BACK, BUT FOR THE SAKE OF SUCH A RIFFRAFF, YOU SHOULD NOT TOUCH HIM.

"INCREDIBLE, AS ALWAYS," SOMEONE PRAISED THE PISTOLS. DANTE HEARD A VOICE JUST WHEN HE MOWED DOWN A HORDE OF DEMONS AND NEARLY RETURNED HIS PISTOLS TO THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE. THE VOICE WAS FEMININE, AND THEY SPOKE WITH A STRONG FRENCH ACCENT, FANCIFULLY COMPOSING THE WORDS. YOU RECOGNIZE THIS MANNER IMMEDIATELY.

"HOW MANY YEARS, HOW MANY WINTERS, LUCIA," HE TURNED, GREETING THE OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF DANTE.

AND HE WAS NOT MISTAKEN. IT WAS INDEED SHE: RED-HAIRED, DARK-SKINNED LUCIA.

"AND THAT'S RIGHT, WE HAVE NOT SEEN EACH OTHER FOR A LONG TIME."

DANTE SQUINTED AND RAN HIS FINGERS ALONG HIS CHIN.

LUCIA LOOKED AWAY FROM DANTE'S FACE AND LOOKED UP AT THE SKY.

“ONLY I HAVE NOT CHANGED ... I HAVE SUCH AN ETERNITY,” SHE REMARKED WITH EXTRAORDINARY SERIOUSNESS.

DANTE STOPPED GRINNING AND SHRUGGED.

- SO THIS IS AWESOME! ANY WOMAN WANTS TO BE FOREVER YOUNG – SAID DANTE.

FROM THEIR FIRST MEETING, LUCIA HAS NOT CHANGED A BIT. AND DANTE KNEW WHY: LUCIA IS NOT A HUMAN.

-Before the Nightmare-

SHE IS A HOMUNCULUS - A MAN-MADE DEMON CREATED BY THE OUROBOROS COMPANY, WHICH TRIED TO CALL A STRONG DEMON ON THE ISLAND OF DUMARY. BUT THE HOMUNCULUS DID NOT LIVE UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE OWNERS, AND THEN THEY GOT RID OF HER. IN

THE END, THE GIRL WAS PICKED UP BY MATIER, WHO LIVED HERE, WHO RAISED LUCIA AS HER OWN DAUGHTER. DANTE HEARD THIS STORY FROM THE GIRL HERSELF.

LUCIA LOOKED AT DANTE AGAIN, THIS TIME WITH A DISTANT LOOK. AND DANTE TURNED TO HER AND, GRINNING, SAID:

- BY THE WAY, I NOTICED THAT THE GRANDMOTHER ALSO HAS NOT CHANGED. IT WAS THEN THAT I WAS REALLY SCARED. IT EVEN SEEMED FOR A MOMENT THAT I WAS MISTAKEN BY THE SHIP AND WENT TO HEAVEN.

LUCIA FINALLY SMILED, ALBEIT VERY RESTRAINED.

“SHE'S TOO OLD. SHE BARELY EVEN EATS ANYMORE” SHE OBJECTED, AND, STEPPING FORWARD, SHE EXTENDED HER RIGHT HAND. “THANKS FOR COMING, DANTE.” re-

GRASPING HER FINGERS, DANTE BOWED HIS HEAD SLIGHTLY.

“I HEARD YOU WERE AGAINST MY ARRIVAL.”

“TRUE, I AM THE KEEPER OF THE ISLAND. WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS HERE, DEALING WITH THIS IS MY DUTY” LUCIA REPLIED. – BUT THE BALROG IS STRONG ... IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR ME ALONE. AND WE’LL DEAL QUICKLY WITH YOU AROUND.

HAVING CAUGHT THE HINT THAT THEY COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT HIM, DANTE GRINNED: IT SEEMS THAT LUCIA BECAME A LITTLE MORE CONFIDENT IN HERSELF.

- I WILL HELP WITH ALL I CAN, OKAY? LET’S GO - HE SUGGESTED, AND MOVED FORWARD.

LUCIA QUICKLY CAUGHT WITH HIM. HOW MUCH TIME HAS PASSED SINCE THEY WALKED LIKE THIS, SHOULDER TO SHOULDER? JUST LOOK AT THEM NOW - LIKE LONG-TIME PARTNERS, READY TO COVER EACH OTHER’S BACK. AND NO DEMONS ARE AN OBSTACLE TO THEM.

A SHOWER OF BULLETS - AND ALL OF DANTE'S PISTOLS - INSTANTLY CLEARED THEIR WAY, AND THOSE UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE WHO MANAGED TO SURVIVE WERE OVERTAKEN BY LUCIA'S DAGGERS.

IT GOT TO THE POINT THAT AT THE SIGHT OF THIS COUPLE THE DEMONS SCATTERED WHERE AND WHERE. MORE PRECISELY, THEY FLED UNDER THE WING TO THE BALROG.

- HERE HE IS! LUCIA NODDED, POINTING FORWARD.

THERE, SHROUDED IN BRIGHT FLAME, BALROG ROSE.

SENSING THAT THEY HAD COME FOR HIM, HE TURNED TO DANTE AND LUCIA, BUT WAS NOT IN A HURRY TO ATTACK.

- BUT I WAS HOPING FOR A CHALLENGE ... DID WE GET A SHY THING HERE? - SNAPPED DANTE, STEPPING FORWARD.

THE BALROG IMMEDIATELY RESPONDED TO THIS CAUSTICITY. HIS VOICE WAS STIFLED, LIKE ALL DEMONS.

- HAVE YOU FINALLY ARRIVED?

LUCIA FROWNED.

“HAVE YOU BEEN WAITING FOR US?”

- WAITED. SOONER OR LATER, SOMEONE WOULD COME. TO END ME” BALROG EXPLAINED, AND MOVED ON TOWARDS DANTE. THE EARTH SHOOK.

LUCIA BENT HER KNEES A BIT, GETTING READY FOR AN ATTACK, BUT DANTE DIDN'T EVEN MOVE - HE STOOD, STRAIGHTENING UP TO HIS FULL HEIGHT, AND LOOKED AT BALROG.

AND HE FELT: SOMETHING FAMILIAR, EVEN VERY DEAR, WAS NEARBY.

THE BALROG SLOWLY APPROACHED THEM. STEP BY STEP.

“I HAVE BEEN ACCUMULATING STRENGTH FOR SO MUCH TIME, GAINING STRENGTH IN ORDER TO ONE DAY DEFEAT ARGOSAX, BUT HE DISAPPEARED AND THERE IS NO ONE TO BRUSH OFF WITH,” THE DEMON GROWLED AND RAISED A HUGE PAW. - THAT’S JUST ME, MIRED IN BOREDOM, COMING ACROSS ONE POWERFUL LITTLE THING.

DANTE SQUINTED, TRYING TO MAKE OUT WHAT THIS SHINING “THING” WAS IN THE DEMON’S PAW; BUT HE HAD SENSED IT BEFORE. AND I REALIZED WHAT EXACTLY HELPED BALROG TO GET INTO THE WORLD OF PEOPLE.

“YAMATO?” MUTTERED DANTE.

LUCIA GAVE HIM A BLANK LOOK.

YAMATO - THE SWORD OF VERGIL, INHERITED FROM SPARDA. EVEN A FRAGMENT, WHICH THERE ARE PLENTY

OF IN THE DEMONS WORLD, IS ENOUGH TO MAKE A GAP IN THE WORLD OF PEOPLE. SO BALROG CAME TO BE HERE.

DANTE KNEW FIRSTHAND HOW THIS HAPPENS, BECAUSE HE HIMSELF FOUND THE SAME FRAGMENT AND FLED FROM HELL.

IF YOU THINK SO, EVERYTHING SUDDENLY MAKES SENSE: A YAMATO FRAGMENT ACCIDENTALLY MADE A GAP, DANTE USED IT AND GOT OUT OF HELL, AND WITH IT THE ILL-FATED FRAGMENT FELL INTO THE WORLD OF PEOPLE.

LIKE THIS, SOME ORGANIZATION WAS ENGAGED IN COLLECTING FRAGMENTS OF YAMATO FRAGMENTS - THE ORDER OF THE SWORD. THE VERY IDEA OF THE EXISTENCE OF A DEVILISH SWORD INFLAMED THE MINDS OF THE ENTIRE TOP OF THE ORDER, AND THEY, IN TURN, MADE A MESS IN FORTUNA.

- HERE'S AN AMBUSH. BUT HOW MANY OF YOU TO STOP IT? – BALROG SPOKE TO DANTE AND PREPARED FOR

BATTLE. "HAVE TO NAIL HIM. HERE IS A DANGEROUS BASTARD!" SAYS DANTE.

WITHOUT TAKING HIS FLAMING EYES FROM DANTE, BALROG ARCHED AND ROARED - A WHIRLWIND RAISED THE FLOORS OF DANTE'S CLOAK, BUT HE DIDN'T RAISE AN EYEBROW, ALTHOUGH THE AIR SHOOK FROM THE HEARTBREAKING HOWL. DANTE ONLY GLANCED AT THE ENEMY, STILL HOLDING HIS SWORD TIGHTLY IN HIS HAND.

- LUCIA ... WAIT ON THE SIDELINES. IT SEEMS THAT THIS IS A WORK FOR ME" DANTE ASKED HIS COMPANION, AND BEFORE SHE ANSWERED, RUSHED TO BALROG WITH HIS SWORD.

THE FLAMES THAT COVERED THE DEMON SOARED TO THE SKY.

DANTE'S REBELLION SWORD AND BALROG'S FIST CLASHED, AND A POWERFUL SHOCK WAVE SHOOK THE HOT AIR.

CHAPTER 5 : NICO

NICO NEVER CONSIDERED PEOPLE BEAUTIFUL. SHE FINDS GUNS, SWORDS AND OTHER WEAPONRY BEAUTIFUL, BUT NEVER PEOPLE. YET WHEN SHE SAW KYRIE IN FRONT OF HER, SHE FOUND HER BEAUTIFUL – SOMETHING THAT IS RARE FOR HER.

“DO WE HAVE A FREE ROOM? WELL, I THOUGHT, MAYBE SHE COULD STAY WITH US FOR A BIT?” – NERO SUGGESTED TO KYRIE, WITH A GUILTY LOOK. “NOT IF YOU ARE AGAINST IT THOUGH, THEN THERE ARE NO QUESTIONS. I DO NOT OWE HER ANYTHING” HE ADDED.

KYRIE SLOWLY TURNED HER GAZE TO NICO, AND NICO SUDDENLY THOUGHT THAT KYRIE WAS A BIT LIKE ALYSSA, THE LONG-DEAD MOTHER OF NICO.

-Before the Nightmare-

“MAY I CALL YOU NICO?” - KYRIE ASKED THE GUEST.
NICO NODDED.

“YEAH, WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL: NICO, NICOLETTA, A BITCH” NICO ANSWERED AND WINCED PAINFULLY. LOOKING DOWN, SHE SAW WHO EXACTLY PRESSED THE BOOT INTO HER FOOT: NERO! “HEY YOU! ..” SHE CRIED OUT AND JUMPED OUT OF THE CHAIR. NERO IMMEDIATELY GAVE HER A POKE IN THE NOSE AND LOOKED AT HER ANGRILY.

“DO NOT SWEAR IN FRONT OF KYRIE.”

NICO FROWNEED. IF SOMEONE ELSE HAD TOLD HER THAT, SHE WOULD NOT HAVE RAISED AN EYEBROW, BUT AT LEAST IT WAS STRANGE TO HEAR SUCH A THING FROM NERO. DURING THEIR BRIEF ACQUAINTANCE, SHE HAD ALREADY LEARNED: NERO IS FAR FROM A NICE-BOY.

- BUT YOU SWEAR YOURSELF? *Before the Nightmare* -

NERO QUIETLY CLICKED HIS TONGUE - SO KYRIE WOULD NOT HEAR.

- BUT

NICO LOOKED AT NERO, THEN AT KYRIE, THEN AGAIN AT NERO, AND THEN AT KYRIE ... AND THEN IT DAWNED ON HER: KYRIE FOR NERO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE WORLD. WITHOUT ANY DOUBT.

- OH, FOR SURE! SORRY! THIS IS FROM MY FATHER” NICO BLURTED OUT, LAUGHING OUT OF BREATH, TO WHICH NERO SIGHED WEARILY.

KYRIE LOOKED AT THEM WITH CARE, AS IF WATCHING SOME CHILDREN.

IT TURNED OUT THAT HER FATHER, AGNUS, LEFT A BUNCH OF USEFUL THINGS, SO NICO DECIDED TO TEMPORARILY TURN OVER IN FORTUNA BECAUSE OF NERO. OF COURSE, IT WOULD BE GREAT TO TAKE PILES OF DOCUMENTS WITH HER, BUT NERO WILL NOT ALLOW IT, TO BE SURE OF DANGER.

NICO WAS EVEN READY TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE POURING RAIN, BUT NERO FELT THAT HER IMPUDENCE WOULD HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE INHABITANTS OF THE CITY, IN HONOR OF WHICH HE DECIDED THAT HE AND HIS BELOVED KYRIE SHOULD LET HER LIVE WITH THEM FOR A WHILE. AND HERE THEY ARE AND SEEKING KYRIE'S CONSENT.

- I'M NOT AGAINST IT. LET'S HAVE DINNER TOGETHER? I ALWAYS COOK EXTRA" SAID KYRIE, AND NICO'S CHEEKS WENT LIMP FROM HER WORDS.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN HAS A BEAUTIFUL VOICE. FOR NICO THIS ONLY APPLIES TO GUNS, SWORDS, AND NOW, THIS WOMAN.

"THANK YOU, KYRIE, YOU SAVED ME! IF SOMETHING BREAKS IN YOU, JUST SAY - I'LL FIX IT IN FIVE MINUTES" NICO SUGGESTED AS POLITELY AS POSSIBLE, TRYING NOT TO HIT HER FACE IN THE DIRT.

KYRIE SMILED AND LOOKED AT THE WALL CLOCK.

“IT'S TIME TO MAKE DINNER.” WHAT DO YOU PREFER, NICO? SHE ASKED.

NICO SHOOK HER HEAD.

- I'LL EVEN EAT THE TIRE FROM YOU.

KYRIE GIGGLED, GOT UP AND LEFT THE ROOM.

- WELL ...

NERO HUNG WEARILY OVER HIS HEAD.

- SO BEAUTIFUL. AND YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF HER! - SAID NICO, BUT DID NOT MEET OBJECTIONS.

“I AGREE ...” NERO ANSWERED, RAISED HIS HEAD AND POINTED A FINGER AT NICO “AND DO NOT SAY THAT YOU

ARE THE DAUGHTER OF AGNUS. KYRIE SUFFERED BECAUSE OF HIM IN DUE TIME.”

- I REALIZED, STOP POINTING A FINGER AT ME! - SHE HIT NERO ON THE ARM, PULLED OUT A PACK OF CIGARETTES, AND THEN THE PACK WAS TAKEN FROM HER.

- WE DON'T SMOKE. SMOKE ON THE STREET!

- HEY, GIVE ME A SMOKE IN THE GARAGE! I CAN'T WORK WITHOUT A SMOKE! YOU'LL THANK YOURSELF LATER!

NERO SHRUGGED, AS IF AGREEING.

- DON'T WORRY, I WON'T SMOKE IN FRONT OF THE LITTLE ONES. I STILL NEED A ROOF OVER MY HEAD” NICO[®] REASSURED HIM.

MOREOVER, SHE COULD NO LONGER TAKE AND REFUSE THE RECORDS OF AGNUS.

IN THE MORNING, NERO SENSED THAT IF SHE WANTED TO SURPASS HER GRANDMOTHER-GUNSMITH NELL GOLDSTEIN, WHOM SHE RESPECTED IMMENSELY, THEN SHE, NICO, WOULD COME IN HANDY.

NICO ONCE DREAMED OF MAKING GUNS, AS HER GRANDMOTHER DID. WHILE NICO WAS BUILDING UP HER EXPERIENCE AND SKILL, THE IDEA CAME TO HER MORE AND MORE OFTEN THAT, BEING ENGAGED IN GUNS ALONE, YOU COULD NOT SURPASS THE EMINENT RELATIVE.

BUT WHAT WAS LEFT TO DO?

FIND ANOTHER WAY.

AND THEN NICO REMEMBERED A TICKLISH LITTLE BUSINESS MAN IN FORTUNA.

HER MOTHER, ONCE IN HER CHILDHOOD TOLD NICO ABOUT THE HOMELAND OF AGNUS - THE CITY OF FORTUNE. AND THEN THE MENTION OF THIS LITTLE

TOWN APPEARED ON THE PAGES OF THE OCCULT TIMES - NICO'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE.

"MAYBE THERE IS SOMETHING IN THIS ... IF YOU TAKE THE POWER OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL BEINGS AND USE IT TO CREATE WEAPONS ... MAYBE I'LL SURPASS GRANNY ..." SHE THOUGHT THEN AND BEGAN TO EAGERLY COLLECT ALL GRAINS OF INFORMATION ABOUT FORTUNA, DEMONS AND ABOUT HOW SHE WOULD APPLY THIS KNOWLEDGE. NICO'S OBSESSION HAS BORNE FRUIT, BECAUSE NOW SHE IS HERE.

"IT WAS NOT NECESSARY TO LET YOU OUT OF THE DOORWAY," NERO MUTTERED, LOOKING AT THE CEILING, TURNING TO NICO, BUT THAT ONE HAD ALREADY CAUGHT A TRACE - MOVED TO THE DOOR TO SMOKE.

-Before the Nightmare-
"BUT YOU STILL NEED MY LITTLE THINGS ... RIGHT?" SHE RECALLED, STOPPING HALFWAY, AND NERO NEITHER AGREED NOR DENIED. AND NICO TOOK HIS SILENCE FOR CONSENT. - SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? YOU TO ME, I TO YOU - THIS IS HOW BUSINESS WORKS. I WANT TO BECOME

A REAL MASTER, YOU ARE TO GET WEAPONS FOR DEMON SMASHING.

“THAT’S RIGHT,” NERO NODDED THIS TIME. “BUT YOU DO KNOW I ALMOST KILLED YOUR FATHER?”

THEN NICO REMEMBERED THE CONVERSATION THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THEM IN THE CASTLE. IT TURNED OUT THAT HER FATHER, AGNUS, WAS KILLED BY A MAN NAMED DANTE.

THE SAME DANTE, FOR THE SAKE OF WHICH GRANNY NELL GOLDSTEIN MADE THE LAST MASTERPIECE. THE DREAMER NICO COULD NOT EVEN THINK OF SUCH A THING!

IN GENERAL, NICO DID NOT HAVE ANY WARM FEELINGS FOR AGNUS.

SHE WAS TWO OR THREE YEARS OLD WHEN HE ABANDONED HIS MOTHER, SO NICO HAD NO MEMORIES

OF HIM AT ALL. AND SHE TOLD ABOUT DAD ONLY TO PROVE TO NERO: HEY, MAN, AND I'M NOT SUCH A STRANGER TO FORTUNA.

- DO YOU HAVE A HOBBY - TO WAVE YOUR FISTS AFTER A FIGHT? - SQUEEZING THROUGH THE TEETH WITH WHICH SHE SQUEEZED AN UNLIT CIGARETTE, ASKED NIKO WITH A SMILE. "BY THE WAY, DO YOU HAVE A CELL HERE?" I NEED TO WARN SOMEONE," SHE ASKED NEXT.

NERO LOOKED AT HER IN SURPRISE.

- CALL? TO WHOM?

- TO THE FATHER. TO SEND THE SUITCASE" NICO SAID, BUT IMMEDIATELY ADDED: "AH, DON'T BE AFRAID, THIS IS NOT AGNUS." I WILL CALL MY CURRENT FATHER. WE ARE NOT BLOOD RELATIVES.

NERO LISTENED TO HER EXPLANATION WITH HIS MOUTH OPEN, UNABLE TO ANSWER ANYTHING.

WHEN THEY SAY "DEMONS", THEY MEAN MANY KINDS OF ALL EVIL SPIRITS.

THERE ARE SKILLFUL SORCERERS, MASTERS OF DISGUISE, AND ALMOST IMMORTAL REPTILES, AND A POISONOUS SPECIMEN CAN ALSO BE FOUND - IN SHORT, THE VARIETY IS AMAZING. DEMONS ALSO DIFFER IN CHARACTER. JUST LIKE PEOPLE.

BUT IF YOU DESCRIBE ALL AT ONCE, THEN THE DEMONS ARE UNUSUALLY INGENUOUS. THEY CONSIDER PEOPLE EITHER FOOD OR GARBAGE ON THE ROAD.

THAT'S WHAT LUCIA KNEW ABOUT THE DEMONS.

-Before the Nightmare-
HOWEVER, WHILE SHE WATCHED THE BATTLE BETWEEN DANTE AND BALROG, THE IDEA CAME TO HER THAT THE ENORMOUS DEMON UNEXPECTEDLY LACKED MILITARY DIGNITY: HE DID NOT EXCHANGE FOR TRICKS AND JUMPS,

BUT HE PENNED THE ENEMY IN THE FOREHEAD, TRYING TO CRUSH HIS PAW OR BURN WITH A FIERY FLASH.

- GREAT, JUST GREAT! I NEVER DREAMED OF MEETING SOMEONE LIKE YOU, AND EVEN AS SOON AS I ARRIVED! -
BALROG GROWLED RATHER, AND WITHOUT A DROP OF DOUBT OR ANGER HE STEPPED ON DANTE, WHILE HE DODGED, JUMPING FROM SIDE TO SIDE.

- YES, GO TO HELL WITH YOUR COMPLIMENTS!
MUTTERED DANTE, GRINNING, AND RAISED THE REBELLION. SO FAR, DANTE, EXPERIENCING ONE AFTER ANOTHER WAVES OF ATTACKS, BREATHED MEASUREDLY, BUT MOVED EASILY.

“I REALLY DON’T HAVE TO INTERFERE,” LUCIA REALIZED, AND CLENCHED HER FIST TIGHTLY.

SINCE LUCIA MET DANTE, SHE ONLY DID WHAT SHE IMPROVED HER SKILLS. TO NEVER AGAIN DEPEND ON THIS PERSON. IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE ISLAND OF DUMARY ON HER OWN, SHE WAS APPOINTED KEEPER. LUCIA

BELIEVED THAT SHE WOULD ACHIEVE HER AND SO REPAY GOOD MATIER, WHO DID NOT SPARE THE STRENGTH TO GROW HER.

BUT ONCE LUCIA SAW HOW BALROG AND DANTE FIGHT, AND SHE FELT TERRIBLE POWERLESSNESS, BECAUSE SHE UNDERSTOOD: DANTE IS SEVERAL TIMES STRONGER THAN HER.

“WHAT DID HE HAVE TO GO THROUGH TO GET SUCH POWER? OR IS IT THE LEGACY OF SPARDA’S BLOOD?”

“WELL THEN, HOLD ON!..” ROARED THE BALROG, SCANNING THE FIERY FIGURE OF DANTE WITH A FIERY LOOK, AND LEANED FORWARD SHARPLY.

-Before the Nightmare-
LUCIA HEARD A STRANGE CRACK IN THE AIR.

“WHAT WAS HE UP TO?..” SHE MUTTERED, READY FOR ANY TRICK.

SHE LOOKED AT DANTE, TRYING TO MENTALLY WARN HIM, BUT HE JUST WATCHED THE ENEMY AND SEEMED NOT TO NOTICE HIS WORDS.

- MAN, I ALMOST THOUGHT THIS'D BE A CHALLENGE!

- I'LL RIP YOUR TONGUE OUT! BEHOLD!

WITH THESE WORDS, THE BALROG ARCHED BACK, AND THE FLAME THAT COVERED HIS BODY FLARED UP EVEN BRIGHTER AND STRONGER. RANDOM SPARKS AND CLOTS FROM HIM DEVoured TREES, DILAPIDATED HOUSES IN THE VICINITY - AND IN AN INSTANT EVERYTHING TURNED INTO A SEA OF FIRE.

BUT DANTE DID NOT EVEN RAISE AN EYEBROW.

- Before the Nightmare -

“DO YOU HAVE MASS PYROMANIA THERE?” EVERYWHERE I TRAMPLE, I'LL MEET SOME CREATURE, READY TO THROW FIRE! - WAVING OFF THE SPARKS, HE SNAPPED.

- WE HAVE MANY WHO CONTROL THE FIRE. BUT DO NOT EVEN DARE TO PUT ME ON A PAR WITH THESE WEAKLINGS! - ANSWERED THE BALROG AND THREW UP A GIANT FIST. "YOU THINK YOU CAN WARD OFF MY HOT FIST?!"



AS SOON AS BALROG STOMPED ON THE GROUND, HE IMMEDIATELY AGAIN THREW HIS CLAW OVER HIS HEAD - WHAT A MONSTROUS SPEED!

- DIE! GROWLED THE DEMON AND BROUGHT DOWN ALL POWER RIGHT ON DANTE.

THE DUST ROSE FROM THE BLOW AND COVERED THE ENEMY'S FIGURES IN A CLOUD - LUCIA COULD NOT SEE ANYTHING.

- DANTE?! - ESCAPED FROM HER

WHEN THE DUST CALMED DOWN A LITTLE, A STRANGE PICTURE APPEARED IN FRONT OF LUCIA: THE DEMONIC FIST, WHICH WAS TO SMEAR DANTE, FROZE A FEW CENTIMETERS FROM HIM. AND THEN, LOOKING CLOSELY, LUCIA NOTICED: DANTE AND BALROG SEEMED TO BE SEPARATED BY AN INVISIBLE WALL.

- OH YOU!..

THE BALROG BURNED DANTE'S GAZE, AND HE HIMSELF PRESSED A GIANT FIST AGAINST AN INVISIBLE WALL. THE MAN IN FRONT OF HIM WAS HOLDING ARMS FROM WHEREVER HE CAME FROM - THREE METAL CLAWS ON CHAINS ATTACHED TO THE RING.

- ALREADY ITCHED FOR A LONG TIME TO USE IT. I CAN'T STAND THE STEAM ROOM" SAID DANTE, AND THE WALL IN FRONT OF HIM FELL APART WITH A RINGING — SOME FRAGMENTS REACHED AS FAR AS LUCIA. SHE MECHANICALLY LEANED OVER AND PICKED UP ONE: ICE GLITTERED IN HER HAND.

- HMM ...ICE WEAPON?! HOW BIZARRE!

THE WALL CRUMBLED INTO FRAGMENTS, AND BALROG STAGGERED BACK, BUT THEN STRAIGHTENED UP AND CLENCHED HIS FIST AGAIN. IN RESPONSE, DANTE SKILLFULLY TWISTED THE CHAINS, SPENT A COUPLE OF TIMES FROM SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AND STOOD IN SOME KIND OF UNPRECEDENTED STANCE, JUST LIKE THE

HERO OF A MOVIE ABOUT MARTIAL ARTS. THAT'S JUST THE CHAINS ON THE RING BLEW FROST.

MATIER ONCE TOLD LUCIA THAT A SPECIAL WEAPON IS ENCOUNTERED IN THE WORLD - THE PURE EMBODIMENT OF DEVILISH FORCES. AND THE GIRL IMMEDIATELY REALIZED: IN FRONT OF HER IS JUST ONE OF THESE.

- THIS FORM AND THIS POWER ... DID YOU SUBJUGATE ONE OF THE CERBERUS? - ASKED THE BALROG, TRYING TO GET AROUND DANTE AND GO FROM THE REAR. "DO YOU THINK THE STRENGTH OF THOSE MONGRELS IS ENOUGH TO DEFEAT MY FLAME ?!"

THEN LUCIA RECALLED HER GRANDMOTHER'S INSTRUCTIONS: "AMONG THE DEVILISH WEAPONS (DEVIL® ARMS) THERE ARE SPECIAL ONES - THEY REPRESENT THE DEMONS THEMSELVES, WHO TOOK THE FORM OF SWORDS, AXES AND EVERYTHING ELSE. IF YOU WANT TO GET THIS, YOU HAVE TO CRUSH THE DEMON AND GAIN POWER OVER HIM. OR BECOME A FRIEND TO HIM. "

DANTE SMILED AND JUMPED TO THE BALROG. HAVING FINISHED SOMERSAULT IN THE AIR, HE WHIPPED THE DEMON WITH CHAINS.

- Mm!

HAVING TAKEN THE BLOW, BALROG THREW HIS FIST FORWARD, BUT MISSED - DANTE CONFIDENTLY FLEW THROUGH THE SKY, AS IF HE HAD SUDDENLY GROWN WINGS. THE CHAINS IN HIS HAND BENT, MOVED, AS IF PREPARING TO BITE SOMEONE.

AND LUCIA WAS INSEPARABLY WATCHING EITHER BALROG OR DANTE.

AND SHE REMEMBERED THAT SHE REPLIED TO HER GRANDMOTHER WHEN SHE FINISHED TALKING ABOUT THE BRUTAL POWER OF THE DEVILISH WEAPON:

“DEVILISH WEAPONS? .. NO, I DON’T NEED ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I DON’T WANT TO MESS WITH THE DEVILISH POWER.”

AND THE REASON SEEMED TO BE SIMPLE: LUCIA’S INEXHAUSTIBLE HATRED OF DEMONS. AND SHE COULD NOT PART WITH HER, BECAUSE LUCIA HERSELF WAS A MAN-MADE DEMON.

TO THIS OBJECTION, MATIER TOLD HER:

“LISTEN CAREFULLY, LUCIA. IN THE FUTURE, A DEMON MAY APPEAR IN OUR WORLD THAT CANNOT BE DEFEATED BY YOUR POWER ALONE. WHAT WILL YOU DO THEN? ANY BODY HAS ITS LIMITS, YOU CAN’T EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES WITH TRAINING. BUT IF YOU TAKE THE DEVIL’S WEAPON (DEVIL ARM), THEN YOU WILL FIGHT ON EQUAL TERMS EVEN WITH THE MOST POWERFUL DEMONS.”

LUCIA DID NOT TAKE HER WORDS SERIOUSLY, BECAUSE SHE HAD NEVER SEEN THESE MYSTERIOUS WEAPONS LIVE AND NEVER HOPED TO EVER SEE.

AND NOW, RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER EYES, DANTE SMASHED BALROG WITH ICY, EVIL CHAINS.

“YOU ... DON'T DIE!” ROARED THE BALROG, BUT ONLY HIS FLAME WAS ALREADY EXTINGUISHED.

“EH ...” DANTE SIGHED IN DISAPPOINTMENT AND CHARGED THE DEMON WITH ALL STRENGTH, AND THE RECOIL FROM THE BLOW CAME OUT STRONG, SO DANTE HAD TO LAND. - SHIT!

THE BALROG STAGGERED, BARELY RECOVERED FROM THE BLOW, AND SENT A FLAMING FIST AFTER DANTE.

“TOOK YOU A LONG TIME,” DANTE SAID, TWISTING THE DIABOLICAL CHAINS OF CERBERUS, RUSHED FORWARD

AND, WITHOUT HESITATION, HE QUILTED THE DEMON'S FIST.

THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION. THE BALROG'S FIST HAD BEEN CRUSHED, BUT SO HAD CERBERUS: LITTLE PIECES OF BOTH. BUT DANTE WAS NOT TAKEN ABACK, BUT SMILED CONFIDENTLY, AS IF HE KNEW AHEAD OF TIME THAT IT WOULD BE SO.

"IT'S EVEN HARD FOR ME TO SMASH THIS THING. I HAD TO GO FOR A DRAW."

LUCIA DID NOT IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND WHAT DANTE'S WORDS MEANT, BUT SHE TOOK A CLOSER LOOK AND SAW THAT SOMETHING SHONE IN BALROG'S FIST.

- WHAT IS IT? SHE ASKED SOFTLY.

AND THE NEXT MOMENT THE LITTLE THING, SQUEEZED IN BALROG'S FIST, SCATTERED TOO. THE FRAGMENTS OF THE LITTLE THING AND THE DEFEATED CERBERUS SHONE

IN UNISON, TURNED DUST AND MELTED, AS IF TO SAY: WE HAVE FULFILLED OUR MISSION.

- BUT HOW SO?

WHILE THE BALROG PEERED INCREDULOUSLY INTO THE EMPTY PAW, DANTE GRABBED THE SWORD THAT HUNG ON HIS BACK.

- WELL ... WANNA CONTINUE? HE ASKED AND BENT HIS KNEES A LITTLE.

BUT THE ENEMY WAS NOT READY TO CONTINUE.

“SO YOU ... ARE YOU THE SON OF SPARDA?” – BALROG ASKED THE QUESTION.

“AND WHAT IF YES?”

- I HEARD RUMORS ... ABOUT HOW YOU DEFEATED THE EMPEROR MUNDUS AND TOOK THE RULER OF ARGOSAX ... I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU WERE SO STRONG...

THE FLAME OF BALROG, WHICH WAS BURNING BRIGHTLY UNTIL RECENTLY, WAS RAPIDLY DYING AWAY: EITHER THE DEMON GOT TOO SICK TO FIGHT, OR THE FORCES HAD ALREADY RUN OUT. BUT LUCIA DECIDED THAT THE ENEMY SIMPLY DID NOT WANT TO FIGHT.

- COME ON, ARE YOU GIVING UP?

- YES

DANTE LOOKED AT THE DEMON IN SURPRISE. LUCIA FROWNEED - SHE OBVIOUSLY DID NOT EXPECT SUCH AN ANSWER. I DID NOT KNOW THAT DEMONS WERE GENERALLY ABLE TO ADMIT DEFEAT.

- I CAN'T WIN - THE DIFFERENCE IN STRENGTH IS TOO GREAT. BUT NEVERTHELESS! .. - THE EXTINGUISHED FLAME FLASHED WITH RENEWED VIGOR.

- DANTE! - SHOUTED LUCIA, GUESSING THAT HE WOULD NOW BE OVERTAKEN BY A DYING, BUT THEREFORE NO LESS POWERFUL ENEMY ATTACK, ONLY DANTE DID NOT MOVE HIS MUSCLE.

THE FLAME ENVELOPED BALROG, SWIRLING WITH UNPRECEDENTED POWER ... BUT THE BODY ... THE BODY OF THE BALROG FELL TO THE GROUND.

- I WANT TO CONTINUE TO FIGHT! FIGHT WITH THE STRONG! THE STRONGEST! I WILL NOT DIE AT YOUR HAND! - ROARED BALROG THE FLAME, WHILE HIS BODY TURNED INTO ASH. PICKING UP THE ASHES, THE FLAME RUSHED TO DANTE AND ENVELOPED HIM. "I WILL BECOME YOUR INSTRUMENT, SON OF SPARDA!" USE ME! SO I CAN CONTINUE TO FIGHT! I CAN SAVE STRENGTH IN ENDLESS BATTLES! AND WHEN I GAIN ENOUGH POWER TO CRUSH YOU, WE WILL FIGHT AGAIN!

AND WITH THESE WORDS, THE FLAME THAT COVERED DANTE FROM HEAD TO TOE DIED OUT. IN A PANIC, LUCIA

RUSHED TO HER PARTNER, BUT STOPPED HALFWAY: SHE SAW THAT THE DEMONIC FIRE DID NO HARM TO DANTE, BUT ON HIS ARMS AND LEGS ... SOME NEW ... FLAUNTING ... WEAPONS?

- WELL THEN!

LOOKING AT THE DEMONIC WEAPON, DANTE SIGHED.

“DANTE, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?” - ASKED LUCIA, QUIETLY APPROACHING A PARTNER - HE ONLY SHRUGGED.

- AS YOU SEE... - DANTE SAID.

- NO PROBLEM. NOT A SINGLE ONE” BALROG SAID SUDDENLY.

DANTE GLANCED AT THE WEAPON ON HIS RIGHT AND WARNED:

- IF YOU WANT ME TO CARRY YOU WITH ME, SIT ON YOUR HAND STRAIGHT AND KEEP QUIET. YOUR CHATTER INFURIATES ME, - HE TAMED THE DEMON, AS IF HE WAS GOING TO TRAIN A PET.

LUCIA COULD NOT RESIST AND SMILED, ALTHOUGH HER SMILE TURNED OUT TO BE RESTRAINED. BUT DANTE STILL DID NOT SEE HER - HE LOOKED EXPECTANTLY AT HIS HAND, TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHETHER BALROG WOULD FULFILL THE ORDER OR NOT. AND BALROG WAS SILENT.

“THAT’S FINE,” DANTE TOLD HIS WEAPON, TURNED AROUND AND HEADED BACK. HOME.

LOOKING AT HIS RECEDING BACK, LUCIA FELT SUCH A LONGING ...

Before the Nightmare-

“THAT’S WHY I DIDN’T WANT YOU TO COME ...”

WHEN MATIER ANNOUNCED THAT SHE WOULD CALL DANTE, LUCIA PROTESTED. AFTER ALL, A NEW MEETING PROMISED A NEW PARTING, BUT THIS IS SOMEHOW TOO MUCH.

BUT LUCIA UNDERSTOOD THAT HER FEELINGS WERE ANOTHER REASON MATIER WOULD CALL DANTE. THE OLD WOMAN SEES THROUGH HER AND KNOWS HOW DESPERATE LUCIA HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR THIS MAN FOR MANY YEARS.

“FOREVER MATIER BREAKS IN ...” LUCIA MUTTERED AFTER DANTE.

- HOW ELSE? – DANTE SAID CARELESSLY OVER HIS SHOULDER. “YES, YOU ARE NOT BLOOD RELATED, BUT YOU HAVE A GOOD MOTHER.”

“I WONDER HOW MUCH DANTE KNOWS? DID HE UNDERSTAND MY FEELINGS, THE PLAN OF MATIER, WHEN HE WAS GOING TO COME? OR SIMPLY SHOWED UP ON THE

ISLAND TO DO HIS JOB? ..” LUCIA WENT DEEP INTO HER THOUGHTS UNTIL DANTE BROUGHT HER TO HER SENSES:

- LUCIA! ..

- WHAT? SHE ANSWERED AND SEEMED TO FREEZE.

“NOTICED WHAT BALROG HAD?” - DANTE SPOKE ABOUT WORK IN SPITE OF THE GIRL’S EXPECTATIONS.

LUCIA SMILED.

- I NOTICED. WHAT WAS IT?

- A FRAGMENT OF A DEMONIC WEAPON (YAMATO) THAT CAN CUT THE BORDER BETWEEN THE WORLDS OF DEMONS AND PEOPLE. FROM SUCH A HOLE, THE DEMONS TUMBLED DOWN. BUT I BROKE THIS FRAGMENT, EVEN IF I HAD TO SACRIFICE MY WEAPONS. WELL, THEN EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE. IT’S JUST THAT A CHANCE

CAN HAPPEN AGAIN,” DANTE STOPPED AND TURNED HIS HEAD TO LUCIA, “AND IF ANYTHING, THEN CALL ME.”

LUCIA DID NOT BEGIN TO ASK HIM WHAT HE HAD IN MIND, BUT ONLY NODDED, FOR SHE MANAGED TO UNDERSTAND: THE FRAGMENT OF THAT DEVILISH WEAPON HAS SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR DANTE. BUT YOU WON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS NEW KNOWLEDGE - DANTE CLEARLY TOLD LUCIA TO JUST CALL HIM.

“LISTEN, DANTE, I HAVE LONG BEEN TORMENTED BY ONE THOUGHT ...” LUCIA TRIED TO SAY AT LEAST SOMETHING OF WHAT SHE WAS THINKING. AND AGAIN THE WORDS HIT DANTE'S BACK. “YOU ARE ... A CRUEL MAN.”

DANTE OPENED HIS EYES WITH UNDISGUISED SURPRISE. ®

-Before the Nightmare-

NO, CASES SUCH AS THE APPEARANCE OF THE BALROG SHOULD NOT BE REPEATED. BUT LUCIA THOUGHT IT WAS A SINFUL AFFAIR: LET THEM REPEAT, IF SO, YOU CAN LURE DANTE TO THE ISLAND.

“IT WOULD BE TIME TO IMPROVE BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE,” LUCIA SAID OUT, BYPASSING DANTE, WHO WAS STILL MAKING A FOOL OF HIMSELF. – “LET’S SAY GOODBYE”

- YEAH. LOOK, DON’T CATCH A COLD, LUCIA.

AND LUCIA, WITHOUT TURNING AROUND, WITH A QUICK STEP LEFT, BECAUSE SHE KNEW: JUST TURN AROUND, LOOK AT DANTE, AND IT WILL BECOME VERY HARD ON THE HEART. AND SHE CANNOT TURN AROUND - AFTER ALL, THE KEEPER OF THE ISLAND, WHO ONCE AND FOR ALL DECIDED TO DEVOTE HER LIFE TO THIS CAUSE.

“GOODBYE, DANTE,” LUCIA SAID MENTALLY, AND ONLY THE WIND ANSWERED HER, TEARING HER SCARLET HAIR.

IT WAS A DEEP NIGHT. ALREADY EVERYWHERE THE LIGHT WENT OUT IN THE WINDOWS, AND ONLY IN A SECLUDED CORNER ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY THE SIGN OF A GUN SHOP - ROCK'S GUNS & AMMO, BURNED BRIGHTLY.

NO, THE STORE WAS CLOSED FOR A LONG TIME AT NIGHT, BUT THE SIGN GLOWED WITH NEON FOR A COMPLETELY STUPID REASON - THEY FORGOT TO TURN IT OFF. AND ALL BECAUSE THE OWNER CALLED THE BELOVED DAUGHTER. RIGHT AT THE END OF THE DAY.

“... SO WHAT'S NEXT? SPREAD IT OUT ALREADY, THE CALL IS INTERNATIONAL! .. - ROCK GOLDSTEIN, THE OWNER OF THE SHOP, THUNDERED IN THE WORKSHOP.

-Before the Nightmare-
ROCK WAS NO LONGER YOUNG: A PALE PUFFY FACE, MOTTLED WITH WRINKLES; GRAY HAIR ... HE HIMSELF SMILED FAINTLY, THEN FROWNEED AND RUFFLED HIS ALREADY DISHEVELED HAIR: HE WAS GLAD THAT HIS

DAUGHTER HAD CALLED, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NOT STINTED AT A STRONG WORD.

- MM? THAT THING WITH THE OCCULT TIMES? IN THIS LOUSY ... - ROCK ALMOST FINISHED SAYING, BUT HE WAS SHUT UP BY THE INDIGNANT SHOUT OF A LITTLE DAUGHTER. - OKAY ... I UNDERSTAND ... I WILL SEND, I WILL SEND, DO NOT SCREAM... CALL YOU LATER

AFTER HANGING UP, ROCK SMOOTHED HIS HAIR WITH HIS FINGERS AND EXPOSED THE RIGHT CHEEKBONE, AND WITH IT THE BLACK BANDAGE. HE HID A PRACTICALLY BLIND EYE - THIS HAPPENED TO ROCK WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE KID.

- WELL, WHAT CAN I DO” HE MUTTERED AND WENT TO THE SECOND FLOOR, WHERE NICOLETTA’S ROOM WAS.

FROM EACH STEP THE STEPS CREAKED HEARTBREAKINGLY, AND THIS SOUND EVOKED MEMORIES OF ROCK GOLDSTEIN. HE PAINTED PICTURES OF HIS PAST LIFE.

THAT DAY HE CLIMBED THE STAIRS IN THE SAME WAY.

ROCK GOLDSTEIN SAW HIS MOTHER, NELL GOLDSTEIN, FOR THE LAST TIME THAT DAY. (FLASHBACK)

ROCK WAS BORN INTO THE FAMILY OF RICH ROY MARTIN AND GUNSMITH NELL GOLDSTEIN. ROCK DID NOT KNOW HOW HIS PARENTS MET, BUT HE GUESSED: HIS FATHER ALWAYS LOVED HUNTING, AND IT SEEMS THAT IT WAS THIS LOVE THAT BROUGHT HIM TO NELL - THERE IS NOTHING TO BE SURPRISED AT.

AND IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT ROCK ADORED GUNS FROM A SNOTTY CHILDHOOD. LIKE HIS MOTHER, SHE STUCK WITH HER SOUL, BECAUSE SHE WAS ALWAYS AT HOME, WHICH CANNOT BE SAID ABOUT HER FATHER.

ROCK LEARNED TO SHOOT AS EARLY AS FIVE YEARS OLD. OF COURSE, UNDER THE STRICT GUIDANCE OF THE MOTHER. NELL DID NOT ALLOW HER SON TO TOUCH HER

GOODS UNATTENDED AND DIDN'T LET HER INTO THE WORKSHOP JUST LIKE THAT.

BUT ONCE THE ROCK VIOLATED THIS BAN, FOR WHICH HE PAID CRUELLY: HE FOREVER LOST HIS MOTHER.

WHEN ROCK WAS SEVEN, HE MADE HIS WAY TO THE WORKSHOP WHILE HIS MOTHER WAS NOT AT HOME. SO WHAT? WHO DIDN'T HAPPEN TO! BOYS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE.

AND SINCE HE CLIMBED UP WITHOUT DEMAND, THE WORKSHOP SEEMED TO ROCK NOT LIKE IT WAS BEFORE, MYSTERIOUS, UNKNOWN, SO HE BEGAN TO STUDY WHAT WAS HERE AND AS IF FOR THE FIRST TIME HAD COME. AND SO HE STAGGERED ABOUT WITHOUT PURPOSE UNTIL[®] HE CAME ACROSS A GUN THAT HIS MOTHER HAD COLLECTED RECENTLY.

AND THEN TWO MISFORTUNES AWAITED ROCK: FIRSTLY, HE KNEW WHERE HIS MOTHER HAD A SAFE WITH CARTRIDGES (AND AT THE SAME TIME THE KEY TO IT),

AND SECONDLY, HE DID NOT KNOW THAT THE FIREARM REQUIRED SERIOUS SUPERVISION.

EVEN AT A SHORT AGE, ROCK BEGAN TO ADMIRE THE BEAUTY THAT HER MOTHER COULD GIVE WEAPONS, SO HE SIMPLY COULD NOT RESIST. "I'LL TRY TO SHOOT!" ROCK DECIDED THEN, WITHOUT EVEN THINKING ABOUT WHETHER HIS MOTHER HAD FINISHED WORKING ON THIS GUN OR NOT.

FIRING BULLETS WITH A FIVE-SHOT REVOLVER, THE BOY, GRINNING ALL OVER HIS FACE, MOVED TO THE SHOOTING GALLERY, ARRANGED IN THE CORNER OF THE WORKSHOP.

IT WAS THEN THAT THE FATEFUL HOUR STRUCK.

ONCE AT THE STAND, ROCK ALREADY TOOK UP THE EARPLUGS AND FOR THIS PUT THE REVOLVER ON THE TABLE, WHEN SUDDENLY - BAM!

THE BULLET RUSHED PAST, BUT WHEN THE FLAME ESCAPED FROM THE MUZZLE, IT STILL TOUCHED ROCK'S RIGHT EYE.

NELL RETURNED HOME ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AND FOUND HER SON.

AFTER THIS INCIDENT, ROCK ALMOST WENT BLIND IN HIS RIGHT EYE.

TO TELL THE TRUTH, THE BOY STILL GOT OFF EASILY, BUT HIS FATHER, ROY, DID NOT THINK SO. INSTEAD, HE DECIDED THAT IT WAS HIS WIFE WHO OVERLOOKED AND IS AT FAULT.

FROM THAT DAY ON, ROCK'S PARENTS ONLY QUARRELED. IT GOT TO THE POINT THAT ROY DEMANDED THAT NELL STOP WORKING WITH WEAPONS.

HOWEVER, EVEN ROCK, WHO ALMOST HAD HIS EYES KICKED, UNDERSTOOD: FORCING A BRILLIANT

GUNSMITH, KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AS A “MASTER OF FORTY-FIFTH CALIBER,” TO ABANDON HER PISTOLS WAS LIKE HANGING HERSELF.

AND ONE NIGHT THE BOY NEVERTHELESS CAME TO HIS MOTHER IN THE STUDIO, ALTHOUGH HIS FATHER STRICTLY FORBADE HIM NOT TO. BUT LITTLE ROCK DECIDED FIRMLY THAT HE WOULD SPEAK WITH HIS MOTHER.

- ROCK ... DON'T. DO NOT COME HERE, - NOTICING THAT THE SON DID COME, NELL TRIED TO SEND HIM HOME.

- SORRY, MOM. THIS IS ALL BECAUSE OF ME...

HEARING THIS FROM HER OWN CHILD, NELL COULD NOT STAND IT AND, HUGGING ROCK, BURST INTO TEARS.

- YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME. I OVERLOOKED THIS” NELL COMFORTED THE BOY WHEN SHE RELEASED FROM HER EMBRACE AND STROKED HER HEAD. AND THEN SHE

ADDED: - WELL, IT'S TIME TO GO TO BED, OTHERWISE DAD WILL SEE.

ROCK NODDED, BUT INSTEAD OF LEAVING, HE PUT WHAT HE BROUGHT WITH HIM INTO HIS MOTHER'S HAND.

“AND WHAT IS IT?”

NELL WAS VERY SURPRISED: ROCK MADE A SMALL PAPER MEDAL FOR HER. POOR, BUT TAKE A LOOK - AND IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH EFFORT HAS BEEN INVESTED.

“.45ART WARKS” WAS ON THERE.

ROCK WAS STILL SMALL, SO IT WAS A MISTAKE IN THE WORD “WORKS”.

“YOU GOT IT WRONG HERE,” NELL POINTED OUT AND HUGGED HER SON VERY TIGHTLY AGAIN, WHISPERING TO HIM EITHER “SORRY” OR “THANK YOU”.

- MOM ... DON'T DROP THE GUNS!- ROCK ASKED IN A TREMBLING VOICE. HE UNDERSTOOD BETTER THAN ANYONE IN THE WORLD HOW IMPORTANT HER CRAFT WAS TO HER MOTHER.

PERHAPS IT WAS ROCK'S WORDS (AND MAYBE THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON) THAT PROMPTED NELL TO REFUSE HER HUSBAND - SHE DID NOT CEASE TO BE A GUNSMITH. EVEN IF SHE HAD TO GET A DIVORCE.

ROCK WANTED TO STAY WITH HIS MOTHER, BUT SHE DIDN'T HAVE RELATIVES TO HAVE SOMEONE TO LOOK AFTER THE BOY, AND THE RICH FATHER RESTED HIS HORN ON THE GROUND: YOU WILL LIVE WITH ME.

IN THE END, NELL HAD TO LEAVE.

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED, AND ROCK STILL REMEMBERED THAT DAY TO THE LAST DETAIL.

THEN THE FATHER FORBADE EVEN TO SAY GOODBYE TO HIS MOTHER. MAYBE HE DIDN'T WANT HIS SON TO BE EVEN WORSE OFF LETTING HIS MOTHER GO (AND HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THAT, PROBABLY), BUT FOR ROCK THE BAN BECAME WORSE THAN TORTURE.

AND THAT DAY HE ASKED AND ASKED, ASKED AND ASKED HIS FATHER, BUT ROY WAS ADAMANT. EVERYTHING WAS IN VAIN, AND ROCK HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO WANDER WILDERLY TO THE SECOND FLOOR, TO THE NURSERY. WANDER, HARDLY CLIMBING THE CREAKY STEPS.

FROM THE WINDOW IN THE NURSERY, THE BOY COULD WATCH HIS MOTHER LEAVE: HER SILHOUETTE BECAME SMALLER AND SMALLER.

-Before the Nightmare-

SHE NEVER TURNED AROUND. AND NO, NOT BECAUSE SHE WAS HEARTLESS - ROCK KNEW THAT NOBODY WAS MORE CORDIAL AND THEREFORE DID NOT FEEL BITTERNESS. IN ADDITION, MOM WAVED A HAND AT HIM.

AND HER FINGERS GRIPPED THAT VERY MEDAL ...

(FLASHBACK END)

“I BECAME QUITE OLD ...” ROCK MUTTERED UNDER HIS BREATH AND GRINNED. AND THERE IS REASON TO LAUGH: CLIMBED THE STAIRS - ALREADY OUT OF BREATH.

HE'D BE OLDER IN AGE BY NOW, IN COMPARISON TO HOW LONG IT HAD BEEN SINCE HE LAST SAW MOTHER, SOMETHING THAT FELT BIZARRE TO HIM.

ROCK FINALLY REACHED NICOLETTA'S ROOM AND, GRABBING THE DOORKNOB, TURNED ... BUT NO, NOTHING, DIDN'T EVEN JERK - SHE LOCKED IT.

“SOMEWHERE I HUNG A KEY”

HIS DAUGHTER IS STILL SPECIAL: SHE'S BOTH RUDE AND SHAMELESS, SHE CAN GET OUT OF THE BATHROOM IN SOME SHORTS, BUT IF SHE GETS SOAPY, SHE'LL LEAVE THE KEY SOMEWHERE AND NOT FORGET IT. SO BE IT, BUT

WHERE THIS CRAPPY KEY IS - WHICH REALLY, REALLY ENRAGED ROCK.

- IN THE WORKSHOP, HUH? SURELY DRAGGED THERE, - ROCK MUTTERED, TURNED AROUND AND MOVED BACK TO THE CREAKY STAIRS.

AND THEN AGAIN MEMORIES FLASHED OVER HIM ...
(FLASHBACK)

... AS SOON AS ROY HAD TIME AFTER DIVORCING NELL, HE MARRIED AGAIN. MAYBE THE DAD GOT ACQUAINTED WITH HIS NEW WIFE EVEN BEFORE THE DIVORCE - HE DEFINITELY DIDN'T KNOW AND DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW: HE HAD ONE MOTHER, AND A NEW ONE ..., A HOUSEWIFE, NO MORE.

ROCK NEVER PARTICULARLY FAVORED HIS FATHER'S NEW WIFE, BUT AS SOON AS A DAUGHTER WAS BORN IN THE FAMILY, WHO WAS NAMED ALYSSA, THE BOY BECAME A STRANGER TO HIS FATHER. ALL THE LOVE OF ROY WENT TO HIS DAUGHTER, AND NOT TO THE SON, AND SOON

ROCK COMPLETELY STOPPED COMMUNICATING WITH HIS FAMILY.

IN THOSE DAYS, HE WAS LOOKING WITH SPECIAL ZEAL FOR HIS MOTHER, ONLY THE BOY DID NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO FIND OUT WHERE SHE WAS, SO BASICALLY ROCK EVERY DAY WAS WORN OUT FROM ANGUISH, BUT IN FACT HE DID NOT ADVANCE AT ALL.

HE MANAGED TO FIND NELL ABOUT TWENTY YEARS AFTER HIS PARENTS DIVORCED.

THEN ROCK HAD LONG SINCE LEFT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE AND WORKED FOR THE OUROBOROS CORPORATION.

IT WAS A HUGE CONGLOMERATE, WHICH WAS ENGAGED IN ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS, AND WEAPONS, AND REAL ESTATE, AND AGRICULTURE - IN GENERAL. ROCK WORKED THERE AS A RESEARCH ENGINEER AT ONE OF THE WEAPONS ENTERPRISES. THE ORDERS WERE STRICT, IT WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO REST, THEREFORE, EVEN AFTER FINDING OUT WHERE HIS MOTHER WAS, ROCK FOR

A WHOLE YEAR COULD NOT GET TOGETHER AND GO TO HER.

AND WHEN HE NEVERTHELESS ESCAPED FROM HELL OF WORK AND VISITED NELL, HE LEARNED THAT SHE HAD BEEN DEAD FOR HALF A YEAR.

LOCALS TOLD ROCK THAT A FIRE HAD OCCURRED IN HER SHOP AND NELL BURNED DOWN ALONG WITH ALL HER PROPERTY ... ROCK THEN ROARED FOR A LONG TIME IN THE ASHES. AFTER THAT, ROCK REFUSED THE SURNAME MARTIN, WHICH HE WORE ALL HIS LIFE, AND TOOK THE SURNAME GOLDSTEIN, BECOMING ROCK GOLDSTEIN.

AROUND THE SAME TIME, HE QUIT UROBOROS, MOVED TO THE HINTERLAND, AND OPENED HIS OWN WEAPONS ROOM, ROCK'S GUNS & AMMO, WHICH HE HAS RUN UNTIL NOW.

-Before the Nightmare-

HE OPENED A BENCH IN MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER.

ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, ROCK DID NOT BECOME A GUNSMITH IN MORE THAN ONE HOUR - HE WAS

PREPARING FOR THIS CRAFT FOR A LONG TIME, EVEN IF THE STRICT DAD FORBADE HIM TO MESS WITH GUNS. WHILE ROCK WAS SMALL, HE, OF COURSE, OBEYED - BUT WHERE TO GO? - BUT THAT WAS UNTIL HIS COMING OF AGE. THAT'S ONLY IN THE "OUROBOROS" ROCK SETTLED ON A DOOM - HIS FATHER HAD FRIENDS THERE.

AND WHEN ROCK LEFT THE CORPORATION, THE FATHER SCREAMED MOST OF ALL - HE MADE A REAL SCANDAL AND, IN THE END, LET GO OF THE IMPOLITE SON. NOT THAT IT REALLY BOTHERED ROCK ...

"THINK WHAT YOU WANT, BUT I'M THE SON OF NELL GOLDSTEIN. WHAT I'M PROUD OF"

(FLASHBACK END)

RETURNING TO THE WORKSHOP, ROCK BEGAN TO SCOOP[®] UP ALL THE BOXES AND RUMMAGE THROUGH HIS POCKETS, TRYING TO SHAKE THE KEYS TO NICOLETTA'S ROOM FROM SOMEWHERE.

BUT SHAKE OR NOT SHAKE - NOTHING. NICOLETTA'S HANDICRAFTS, SCHEMES, SOME SPARE PARTS ABANDONED

BY ROCK HIMSELF, BUT THE KEYS, DIDN'T COME TO HAND.

“WELL, WHAT NONSENSE!..” MUTTERED ROCK, WHEN IN HIS HANDS WAS NOT A VERY SUCCESSFUL CRAFT. HIS OWN, BY THE WAY.

AND LET ROCK DECIDE AT ALL COSTS TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS MOTHER, BUT DID NOT INHERIT HER TALENT.

NO, HE WAS A SKILLED GUNSMITH ... COMPARATIVELY. ON THE GENERAL BACKGROUND. BUT THE TROUBLE IS THAT BETWEEN HIM AND HIS MOTHER THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MONSTROUS DIFFERENCE - IN EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, TALENT, IN THE END. AND ROCK, OF COURSE, UNDERSTOOD THIS BETTER THAN OTHERS. AND ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND, THIS BECOMES FOR YOU THE GREATEST MISFORTUNE.

ON THE DESKTOP IN THE WORKSHOP THERE WAS A FRAME WITH A PHOTO - ROCK LOOKED AT HER. USUALLY

SHE LAY FLAT, AND THEN SHE STOOD AS EXPECTED, AND YOU COULD SEE IN THE PHOTO ROCK AS A BOY AND YOUNG NELL.

“MOM ...” WHISPERED FROM ROCK WHEN HE INVOLUNTARILY REMEMBERED HIS MOTHER. BUT QUITE OFTEN HE WAS TORN OUT - EVEN HIS WOMEN MADE FUN OF HIM BECAUSE WHEN HE DREAMS, HE OFTEN SPEAKS “MOM “... BUT THIS HABIT DID NOT LEAVE ROCK EVEN AFTER MANY, MANY YEARS.

HE, OF COURSE, DENIED EVERYTHING IN WORDS, BUT DEEP DOWN HE KNEW THE TRUTH.

“I REALLY HAVE A MATERNAL COMPLEX ...”

A LOT OF TIME PASSED, BUT ROCK NEVER MET HIS MOTHER, AND STILL HE FELT SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR HER. AS A SON AND AS A GUNSMITH.

“IF I HAD BORROWED SOMETHING FROM MY MOTHER, I WOULD SURELY HAVE CLIMBED HIGHER ...” - WITH A SIGH, ROCK PUT THE PHOTO FRAME DOWN AND BEGAN TO LOOK FOR THE KEYS.

(FLASHBACK)

SHORTLY AFTER ROCK OPENED HIS SHOP, HIS FATHER AND STEPMOTHER DIED.

THERE WAS TALK: THE ACCIDENT WAS TO BLAME, BUT ROCK THOUGHT THAT THEY COULD HAVE COMMITTED SUICIDE. RUMOR HAD IT THAT JUST ON THE EVE OF HIS DEATH, ROY HAD FAILED A MAJOR PROJECT AND WAS MIRED IN DEBT.

HOWEVER, THE DEATH OF RELATIVES DID NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERN ROCK, BECAUSE HE HAD LONG SINCE BROKEN UP WITH THE SAME FATHER. BUT ALYSSA WAS LEFT COMPLETELY WITHOUT EVERYTHING: NEITHER A HOME (TAKEN BY BANKS DUE TO DEBT) NOR FUNDS - IN GENERAL, NO INHERITANCE, AND EVEN NO ROOF OVER HER HEAD.

AND EVEN THOUGH THE BROTHER AND STEPSISTER DID NOT COMMUNICATE FOR MANY, MANY YEARS, ROCK SIMPLY COULD NOT LEAVE ALYSSA ON THE STREET, SO HE INVITED HER TO LIVE AT HIS WORKSHOP.

TIMES WERE HARD. THE STORE ALREADY DID NOT BRING GREAT PROFITS, THERE WAS BARELY ENOUGH MONEY TO FEED HIMSELF, AND THEN THERE WAS AN EXTRA MOUTH

...

AND ONE DAY, ALYSSA ANNOUNCED THAT SHE WOULD ALSO GO TO WORK:

- I DO NOT WANT TO SIT ON YOUR NECK ...

- Before the Nightmare -
MAYBE SHE WENT TO WORK AND FROM ANXIETY:
BROTHER AND SISTER DID NOT GET ALONG VERY WELL,
ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT QUARREL.

AND MY SISTER QUICKLY FOUND A JOB. TO ROCK'S GREAT SURPRISE, SHE WAS INVITED TO AN OFFICE IN THE OUROBOROS, FROM WHERE ROCK HIMSELF QUIT NOT SO LONG AGO. APPARENTLY, ALYSSA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HER FATHER'S OLD TIES AND WALKED IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY AS HER BROTHER.

LIFE WENT ON. ALYSSA'S EARNINGS BECAME A GREAT HELP FOR A SMALL FAMILY, AND ROCK'S BUSINESS WENT UPHILL: THE SKILL OF THE GUNSMITH IS GROWING - AND THE MONEY IS PAID MORE.

AND THEN ALYSSA ONCE ASKED:

“LISTEN, ROCK, DO YOU MIND IF I BRING SOMEONE?”

- SOMEONE? WHO IS THIS? - ASKED ROCK, BEFORE SCOOPING THE MINISTRONE, WHICH HIS SISTER HAD PREPARED. TO THE QUESTION, ALYSSA WAS CONFUSED AND BLUSHED, AND ROCK IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING. - HAHA, BOY? WHERE DID YOU MEET?

ALREADY A YEAR HAD PASSED, WHEN ALYSSA SETTLED IN ROCK'S SHOP, AND HE WAS SLIGHTLY WORRIED THAT HIS SISTER WAS ALL ALONE AND ALONE. SO HE WAS GLAD TO HEAR ABOUT THE GUY.

- A COLLEAGUE...

ROCK NODDED AND PUT A SPOON IN HIS MOUTH.

- WELL, IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE, WHERE ELSE TO MEET YOU? SO WHO IS HE? NOT A TECHIE? THEY ARE ALL RECKLESS THERE, AS IF FOR SELECTION!

ROCK KNEW PERFECTLY WELL WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WERE HUNCHING OVER THAT PLACE, SO HE DECIDED TO LET GO OF THE JOKE, TO WHICH ALYSSA EMBARRASSEDLY COUGHED AND STRAIGHTENED UP:

“ONE OF THOSE CRAZY SCIENTISTS,” SHE ANSWERED AND SMILED.

(FLASHBACK END)

ROCK WAS STILL LOOKING FOR KEYS WHEN HE STUMBLED UPON SOME PROJECT THROWN BY NICOLETTA. WHILE HE WORKED FOR OUROBOROS, HE, OF COURSE, HAD TO DEAL WITH ALL SORTS OF THINGS, SO ROCK WAS A SAVVY LIKE NO ONE IN THIS BUSINESS, BUT EVEN HE DID NOT REALIZE WHAT THE PROJECT INVENTED BY HIS DAUGHTER WAS FOR.

NICOLETTA ALWAYS THOUGHT UP SOMETHING LIKE THAT. AND THEN SHE EMBODIED. WHAT DOES ROCK DO? JUST WONDER.

“WHAT EVEN WAS IN THAT MAN?” HE MUTTERED AND RECALLED THE REAL FATHER OF HIS NIECE. (FLASHBACK) ®

-Before the Nightmare-

ROCK REPEATEDLY ASKED ALYSSA WHAT SHE FOUND IN HER HUSBAND, BUT EACH TIME HE RECEIVED ONE ANSWER: “HE IS CUTE. ESPECIALLY WHEN HE WORKS ...” - AND THEN HIS SISTER STARTED ENDLESS TALES OF CRAZY EXPERIMENTS THAT EVEN ROCK BARELY UNDERSTOOD.

- WELL THEN! SO HE'S FROM FORTUNA ... - MUTTERED
ROCK, AS SOON AS HE REMEMBERED.

AND HE RECALLED THAT THE NIECE, AS SHE CALLED,
FIRST BLURTED OUT: "ROCK? I'M GOING TO LIVE IN
FORTUNA FOR A BIT... SO SEND MY CLOTHES AND STUFF
HERE OKAY?"

ROCK HAD NOT HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THIS TOWN
FOR A LONG TIME, SO HE DID NOT IMMEDIATELY REALIZE
WHAT AND HOW. BUT HE KNOWS THIS PLACE WELL.

FORTUNA IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF AGNUS, THE HUSBAND
OF ALYSSA.

-Before the Nightmare-
PLAYING WITH HIS HAIR, ROCK MUTTERED:

- WELL, WELL ... YEARS GO BY, AND THE CHILD IS STILL IN
THE FOOTSTEPS OF PARENTS...

USUALLY, WHEN YOU HEAR A “SCIENTIST,” YOU IMMEDIATELY IMAGINE A SKINNY MAN IN YEARS. AND WHEN ROCK SAW NOT A SKINNY ROACH AT ALL, BUT A REAL HEALTHY MAN, HE WAS VERY SURPRISED.

“HELLO ...” THE GUEST BLURTED OUT AND DID NOT INTRODUCE HIMSELF AT ALL.

“THIS IS AGNUS,” ALYSSA SAID INSTEAD, AND ADDED: “AGNUS, THIS IS MY BROTHER, ROCK.”

AND ONLY THEN DID A DARK-SKINNED BIG MAN NAMED AGNUS SILENTLY OFFER HIS HAND FOR A HANDSHAKE.

“HELLO, AGNUS.” YOU MUST BE HELPING ALYSSA A LOT” ROCK SAID, AND GRABBED AGNUS’S PALM; HE ONLY LOOKED AT HIM, BUT DIDN’T ANSWER.

“HMMM ... REALLY, A WEIRD KID!” THOUGHT ROCK, BUT HE DIDN’T WORRY MUCH. ALYSSA HAD ALREADY TOLD

EVERYONE, AND HE HIMSELF WAS AWARE OF WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE IN THIS ORGANIZATION: SOMETIMES THEY CAN'T EVEN SAY SOMETHING - EITHER HELLO TO YOU OR GOODBYE.

“AWESOME MONOCLE ... OLD-FASHIONED ONLY,” ROCK OBSERVED, AS HE EXAMINED AGNUS.

HE SMILED AND STRAIGHTENED IT WITH HIS FINGER.

- O-ORDERED.

IN FACT, ROCK WAS THINKING OF TRICKING HIS SISTER'S CHOICE, BUT HE TOOK “PRAISE” AT FACE VALUE. WELL, WHY NOT SMILE?

-Before the Nightmare-
THAT'S HOW ROCK AND AGNUS MET.

OVER TIME, AGNUS WARMED UP TO ROCK, ALYSSA BECAME PREGNANT, QUIT HER JOB...

BY THAT TIME, ROCK'S GUNS & AMMO WAS ALREADY EARNING A DECENT INCOME, AGNUS WAS ALSO HELPING OUT WITH MONEY, SO IT WAS POSSIBLE TO LIVE.

AND THEN NICOLETTA WAS BORN.

AND THE NEXT TWO YEARS BECAME FOR ROCK ALMOST A PARADISE: NICOLETTA GREW BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS, ALYSSA COOKED EVERYTHING JUST AS TASTY, AND AGNUS WOULD ALWAYS BE INVENTING NEW THINGS HERE AND THERE AND HELPING ALYSSA OUT.

BUT HAPPINESS DID NOT LAST LONG.

ONE DAY, AGNUS SIMPLY TOOK AND DISAPPEARED.

-Before the Nightmare-
ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT THAT HE DISAPPEARED, BECAUSE ROCK AND ALYSSA KNEW WHERE HE HAD GONE.

SHORTLY BEFORE THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AGNUS, ALYSSA HAD A GREAT FIGHT WITH HER HUSBAND. AND ROCK WITNESSED THAT.

“WHY DID YOU DECIDE FOR NO REASON THAT YOU SHOULD RETURN TO FORTUNA?” SHE TORTURED AGNUS THEN.

AND THAT ONE IS SILENT. HE ONLY INSISTED THAT HE HAD BEEN CALLED HOME. THEY CALLED IN FORTUNA. CALL - AND THAT'S IT! AND HE WILL GO ALONE, LEAVING HIS FAMILY BEHIND.

- J-J-JUST DO NOT SCREAM! I HAVE NO CHOICE! IT IS AN ORDER OF HIS HOLINESS! - STUTTERING, REPEATED AGNUS. HE ALWAYS SPOKE SOMEHOW, IF HE WAS WORRIED.

ALYSSA AND ROCK KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THAT AGNUS WAS STICKING OUT IN SOME SECT CALLED THE “ORDER OF THE SWORD”, BUT THEY WERE NOT PARTICULARLY WORRIED: AGNUS HIMSELF DID NOT DRAG ANYONE

ANYWHERE, HE DID NOT HOLD RITUALS; HE DIDN'T DRINK THE BLOOD OF PIGS, HE DIDN'T HANG THE HEADS OF HENS IN THE ROOM - AND ALL RIGHT.

“THEN WHY NOT TAKE ME WITH YOU ?!” - ALISSA HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO START, BUT AGNUS STOOD FIRMLY ON HIS OWN:

- N-NOTHING! N-NO! F-FORTUNA IS FOR BELIEVERS ONLY!

- THEN I WILL BECOME A BELIEVER!

AGNUS FELL SILENT, BUT IMMEDIATELY SHOOK HIS HEAD.

- W-W-WILL NOT WORK ... Y-YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE D-DOCTRINE ... the Nightmare-

THE QUARREL ENDED IN NOTHING, AND AFTER A FEW DAYS AGNUS DISAPPEARED SOMEWHERE. AS THROUGH THE EARTH FELL.

NATURALLY, ALYSSA WANTED TO RUSH AFTER HIM, BUT, GETTING READY, SHE SUDDENLY COLLAPSED TO THE FLOOR AND WOKE UP ALREADY IN THE HOSPITAL.

LATER IT TURNED OUT THAT SHE WAS ILL. INCURABLE.

AND THE DOCTOR SAID THAT WITH SUCH A DIAGNOSIS, SHE DOES NOT HAVE MUCH TIME. BUT ALYSSA WAS STILL EAGER FOR HER HUSBAND, EAGER FOR FORTUNA, AND ROCK HAD TO HOLD HER BACK AND FORTH:

- HEAL A LITTLE, NOWHERE TO HURRY. LET NICO GROW UP TOGETHER.

EVEN NOW, AFTER SO MANY YEARS, ROCK DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT KIND OF MANIA IT WAS: DID AGNUS EVER LOVE ALYSSA? DID ALYSSA LOVE AGNUS THAT MUCH OR WAS SHE JUST STUBBORN?

A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER THE DISEASE WAS REVEALED, ALYSSA DIED. DIED, NEVER REACHING FORTUNA.

(FLASHBACK END)

AND ROCK WAS LOOKING FOR NICOLETTA'S KEYS, BUT NO, HE HADN'T FOUND ANYTHING.

- EH ... - ROCK SIGHED, GRABBED A BOX OF TOOLS AND CARRIED UPSTAIRS - TO REMOVE THE DOOR LOCK IN THE LITTLE GIRL'S ROOM. HE DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO POKE HIS NOSE WHEREVER HE SHOULDN'T, ALL THE MORE SO IF AT ANY OTHER TIME THE BUSINESS WOULD HAVE SMELLED LIKE KEROSENE - THAT WOULD BE AN ISSUE - BUT THEN ROCK THOUGHT THAT NICOLETTA, SINCE SHE WAS GOING TO LIVE SEPARATELY, MIGHT BE ASKING HIM FOR THE LAST TIME. AND SINCE IT'S THE LAST, THEN ROCK SOMEHOW CROSSED OVER HIMSELF.

- Before the Nightmare -

“HERE IS A NIECE, HUH!” THOUGHT ROCK, UNSCREWING THE HINGES.

OF COURSE, AS SOON AS ALYSSA PASSED AWAY, ROCK ADOPTED NICOLETTA. AND THERE WERE REASONS FOR THAT.

AND THE FIRST OF THEM - HE WAS TERRIBLY PROUD OF NICOLETTA AND THE FACT THAT HE WAS ABLE TO RAISE HER. NATURALLY, HE HAD TO TAKE CARE OF THE HOUSEWORK AND SIP BUSINESS WITH GRIEF...

AND ROCK WAS PROUD THAT NICOLETTA HERSELF, WITHOUT A POKE, WITHOUT A HINT, BECAME A GUNSMITH. JUST LIKE HIMSELF WHEN HE GRABBED ANYTHING FROM NELL.

AND AFTER ALL, "DAUGHTER" DIDN'T KNOW A DAMN THING ABOUT GRANDMA!

-Before the Nightmare-

ROCK WAS NOT GOING TO TALK TO NICOLETTA ABOUT NELL. AND HE WAS NOT GOING TO TEACH WEAPONS BUSINESS. MAYBE THE GIRL NEVER THOUGHT IN HER LIFE WHO SHE SHOULD BE? ..

BUT THEN ROCK REMEMBERED THE DAY WHEN NICOLETTA SHOWED SUCH INTEREST. (FLASHBACK)

NICOLETTA, WHO WAS MAKING SOMETHING IN HER CORNER, SQUEALED JOYFULLY, HOLDING A PICTURE OF A RECENT ORDER OF A CUSTOMER:

- OOOH! AAH, WHAT IS THIS ?! B-BEAUTIFUL SO-CUTE! - STAMMERED, SOMEHOW CHATTERING NICOLETTA LIKE AGNUS HIMSELF! IN HER HANDS THE GIRL HELD A PHOTO WITH TWO PISTOLS – THAT A CLIENT BROUGHT OVER A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO.

- AH, IT'S MA ... AHM. - ROCK WANTED TO SAY "MOTHER'S", BUT STOPPED SHORT. ONCE WITH THIS "MOTHER" HE WAS ALREADY IN A MESS. RECENTLY, THE OWNER OF THESE GUNS RAN IN, SO ROCK TOOK A PHOTO AS A KEEPSAKE.

- Y-Y-YOUR MOM? THIS IS MY G-GRANDMOTHER ?! WOW! - NICOLETTA SCREAMED AND LAY DOWN ON THE FLOOR,

BUT FORGOT ABOUT HER CRAFT AND THOUGHT, SO SHE ADMIRING THE PHOTOGRAPH.

- OF COURSE, I'VE SEEN ENOUGH OF MY MOTHER'S GUNS, BUT THIS COUPLE IS A REAL WORK OF ART. THEIR NAMES ARE EBONY AND IVORY.

THE SAME CLIENT SPOKE ABOUT THE NAMES OF THE GUNS, ADDING THAT THEY SYMBOLIZE THE OPPOSITE COLORS.

AND HE INTRODUCED HIMSELF AS DANTE.

WHEN ROCK ACCEPTED THE ORDER, HE REMEMBERED THE ENGRAVING AND ASKED: "DANTE? NOT TONY REDGRAVE?"

- Before the Nightmare -

AND INDEED, THE PISTOL READ: "FOR TONY REDGRAVE."

TO WHICH THE CLIENT REPLIED, IT WAS THEIR NAME WHEN THEY MET NELL.

USUALLY SUCH AN EXCUSE IS A GOOD REASON TO BE WARY: YOU CAN'T SIMPLY BUY A PERSONALIZED WEAPON. IT OFTEN HAPPENED THAT THE OWNER WAS ROBBED, KILLED, OR IN SOME OTHER WAY FORCED TO TRANSFER THEM, BUT ROCK DID NOT SUSPECT ANYTHING AND JUST THREW IT:

- CLEAR.

BUT THE REASON IS SIMPLE: LOOK AT HOW THIS DANTE HANDLES CANNONS, AND EVERYTHING IMMEDIATELY FALLS INTO PLACE. PLUS, ROCK NOTED THAT THE PISTOLS WERE UNUSUAL: NOT EVERY PERSON, NOT EVERY MONSTER WOULD GIVE SUCH A WEAPON - ONLY TO SOMEONE WHO WAS MUCH WORSE, MORE SEVERE AND MERCILESS.

ROCK, OF COURSE, DID NOT BELIEVE IN ALL THE DEMON STUFF, AS WELL AS IN THE FACT THAT THE MOTHER

COULD JUST PICK UP AND CONCEIVE SUCH PISTOLS. IN ADDITION, A CLIENT NAMED DANTE SEEMED AN OUTSTANDING PERSON.

“SHE REALLY COULD FIT THE GUNS...” - REALIZED ROCK, EXAMINING THE BARREL. YES, ONLY ONE THOUGHT DID NOT GIVE HIM REST ...

- THE QUESTION IS MAINTENANCE, BUT NOTHING SEEMS TO BE BROKEN. OF COURSE, I WON'T REFUSE, IT'S MY BREAD.

ROCK ALREADY REALIZED THAT THE GUNS HAD SEEN MANY BATTLES AND STILL WORKED PROPERLY. AND IF THE OWNER DID NOT TAKE CARE OF HIS TOYS, EBONY AND IVORY WOULD NOT HAVE LASTED SO LONG.

- Before the Nightmare -

DANTE SUDDENLY POINTED TO AN ENGRAVING:

- CORRECT THIS.

UNDER HIS FINGER, JUST BELOW THE INSCRIPTION "FOR TONY REDGRAVE", ONE MORE FLAUNTED:

"BY .45ART WARKS."

ROCK, OVERLOOKING HER, WAS AMAZED:

- MOTHER...

THE SAME INSCRIPTION, WHICH HE SO DILIGENTLY HEATED UP ON THAT MEDAL! THE ONE WHERE HE MADE SUCH A STUPID CHILDHOOD MISTAKE! AND MOTHER, EVEN THOUGH SHE LEFT ROCK SO LONG AGO, STILL REMEMBERED.

"FIX WARK... THAT'S ALL," DANTE ADDED, WATCHING THE MAN TREMBLE BEFORE HIM. "AND SO I THOUGHT, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO FIX THIS MATTER. TO EXPLAIN TO EVERYONE IS STILL A HASSLE. BUT IN THE DISTRICT, ALL THE GUNSMITHS ARE TALKING ABOUT NOTHING. RELUCTANCE TO TOUCH MY BEAUTIES," LOOKING AT

ROCK IN THE FACE, DANTE SMILED. “AND IF ANYONE CAN DO THE JOB, THEN ONLY YOU. WHAT DO YOU THINK, ROCK GOLDSTEIN?”

RUBBING HIS EYELID, ROCK SOBBED AND, TREMBLING HIS LIPS, SQUEEZED HIMSELF OUT IN A THIN VOICE:

- I’LL DO IT

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT WAS DIFFERENT: DANTE IS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. IF ANYONE NEEDED TO CORRECT A STUPID MISTAKE, IT WAS ROCK, THE SON OF NELL GOLDSTEIN AND THE CULPRIT OF THE TYPO.

AT THAT TIME, ROCK BELIEVED THAT IF HE CORRECTED THE ENGRAVING, THEN HE WOULD FINALLY GET RID OF HIS CURSE, BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN HIM AND HIS MOTHER AND BECOME A FULL-FLEDGED MASTER.

“HERE! TELL ME, HE KNOWS WHAT AND HOW, THEREFORE, HE ASKED ME FOR IT!” HE THOUGHT,

REALIZING: THIS DANTE IS HARDLY KIND ENOUGH TO TELL SUCH THINGS TO EVERYONE WHO CROSSES.

AND SOMETHING TOLD ROCK: HE WOULD NEVER SEE A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER BY THE NAME OF DANTE AGAIN.

(FLASHBACK END)

HAVING REMOVED THE DOOR, ROCK FINALLY WENT INTO HIS NIECE'S ROOM AND BEGAN COLLECTING THINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND ALL KINDS OF MAGAZINES IN A BOX.

HE PEERED AT THE WORD "FORTUNA" ON ONE OF THE MAGAZINES AND WONDERED WHY NICOLETTA HAD GONE TO THAT LITTLE TOWN.

ROCK HAD NO IDEA WHAT AGNUS WAS DOING THERE, BUT REALIZED THAT THE DAUGHTER WAS EAGER FOR FORTUNA DUE TO HIM.

AFTER ALL, SHORTLY BEFORE DEPARTURE, NICOLETTA ISSUED:

- ROCK, I GIVE UP MAKING HANDGUNS. I CAN'T BEAT MY GRANDMOTHER.

IT SEEMS NOTHING LIKE THAT, WORDS LIKE WORDS SPOKEN, IT SEEMED, FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON, BUT ROCK UNDERSTOOD BEST OF ALL WHAT THEY MEAN: HE HIMSELF HAS BEEN TORMENTED FOR SEVERAL YEARS WITH THE THOUGHT THAT HIS MOTHER CANNOT BE SURPASSED.

- AND THEN WHAT? WILL YOU DO WITH THOSE STRANGE THINGS? HE ASKED, AND NICO SHOOK HER HEAD.

- DO NOT KNOW YET. I'LL TRY... ANYTHING = AND UNTIL I GET TO A LEVEL THAT IS ALREADY A WORK OF ART!

-Before the Nightmare-

- AS YOU SAY...

IN FACT, ROCK WAS VERY HAPPY.

HE HIMSELF WAS AGING AND HIS MOTHER, OF COURSE, COULD NOT BE SURPASSED, BUT HERE THE NIECE, ONCE ADOPTED THIS PASSION FOR ARMS, COULD WELL CATCH UP WITH NELL GOLDSTEIN.

AND HERE YOU GO! - NICOLETTA ALWAYS CALLED NELL “GRANDMOTHER”, ALTHOUGH SHE WAS NOT CONNECTED WITH BLOOD TO HER. BUT ROCK WAS NEVER CALLED “DAD” OR “UNCLE”.

“GOOD LUCK, NICO.” SOMETHING TELLS ROCK THAT SHE WILL SURPASS HIS MOTHER.

THERE WAS NOTHING MORE ROCK COULD TEACH NICO, SO HE LET HER GO TO FORTUNA TO STUDY THE CRAFT OF AGNUS. HER FATHER, OF COURSE, IS NOT SO HOT, BUT AS AN ENGINEER HE IS QUITE GOOD.

“AND WHEN NICOLETTA BECOMES A TRUE MASTER GUNSMITH, LEARNS NOT ONLY HOW TO CRAFT GUNS BUT

EVEN MORE, I WILL DEFINITELY STAND IN A VICTORY POSE AND SHOUT: MY NIECE IS THE BEST!”

IMAGINING HOW HE WOULD SURVIVE UNTIL THAT DAY, ROCK GRINNED AND, PICKING UP A BOX STUFFED TO THE EYEBALLS, AND DRAGGED IT OUT TO SEND TO NICOLETTA.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-

“BUT WHAT THE HELL ... WHAT KIND OF NAME IS THAT?” NICO MUTTERED, LOOKING AT THE NEON DEVIL MAY CRY PLATE AFFIXED TO THE VAN'S SIDE.

“THE DEVIL KNOWS HIM.”

“I HEARD THAT. AND WHAT'S THE POINT OF REPEATING? JUST WONDERING WHY THE HELL DANTE CALLED IT THAT.”

THIS SIGN NERO RECEIVED SHORTLY AFTER THE TROUBLE IN FORTUNA AND THE FALL OF THE ORDER OF THE SWORD. BY THAT TIME, THE GUY ALREADY KNEW THAT DANTE WAS IN CHARGE OF THE DEVIL MAY CRY AGENCY, SO HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISED AT THE GIFT - HE WAS ENTRUSTED WITH THE BRANCH!

- AND WHAT IS WRONG? THE DEVIL CAN ALSO CRY -
NERO ANSWERED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.

“AREN’T YOU WORKING WITH HIM NOW IN A WAY? SO WHY NOT WRITE DEVILS MAY CRY INSTEAD? – NICO JOKINGLY POINTED OUT, WHILE NERO GRINNED.

- I ALSO THOUGHT ABOUT IT, BUT IT SOUNDS LOUSY. DEVILS MAY CRY? HEH! LET IT BE AS IT IS.

- I DID NOT SIGN UP FOR THIS! SHE COMPLAINED, STUCK A FRESHLY LIT CIGARETTE IN HER TEETH AND ROLLED UNDER THE VAN WHILE NERO WAS BUSY WITH THE ENGINE UNDER THE HOOD.

“LET’S FIND A CAR.”

NERO RAN THE “AGENCY” UNDER THE GUISE OF “DEVIL MAY CRY”, BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS A SHORTAGE OF JOBS IN FORTUNA, AND HIS ACQUAINTANCES WERE IN OTHER CITIES, NAMELY ONE OR TWO. BUT KYRIE ALWAYS PERSUADED NERO TO DO ANY WORK, EVEN FOR FREE, AS SOON AS SOMEONE CAME WITH AN ORDER, AND THEN SHE HERSELF REFUSED MONEY. NO, THEY WANTED TO PAY, EVEN VERY MUCH, BUT KYRIE TOOK EARNINGS ONLY WITH VEGETABLES AND MEAT.

AND THEN ONE DAY NERO DAWNED:

“WE WILL MAKE AN OFFICE OUT OF THE CAR, AND THERE WILL BE A WANDERING AGENCY. SO WE CAN TAKE ORDERS FROM OTHER CITIES. ”

HEARING ABOUT THIS VENTURE, NICO IMMEDIATELY REALIZED THAT NERO HAD DECIDED BECAUSE OF HIS CONCERN FOR KYRIE, WHO WAS ALREADY LIVING UNSWEETENED. SHE WALKS AROUND HERE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN ONE AND THE SAME THING (CLOTHES), BUT FOR THE LOCAL CHILDREN SHE SEWED A BUNCH OF CLOTHES. SHE WILL BARELY NOTICE HOW NERO WILL SCRATCH AN OUTFIT, AND NOW SHE ALREADY MAKES HIM A NEW ONE TOO.

-Before the Nightmare-

“A RARE SIGHT THIS WOMAN IS. YOU’LL SEE DEMONS MORE OFTEN THAN PEOPLE LIKE HER” NICO SAID, AND NERO NODDED.

OF COURSE, THE GUY WANTED TO PLEASE KYRIE. AND IF IT HAD BEEN POSSIBLE TO ORGANIZE A MOBILE AGENCY,

NERO AND NICO WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE RAISED SOME MONEY, WHICH IS WHY NICO AGREED. FROM THESE CONSIDERATIONS. THERE WAS ONLY ONE PROBLEM: THE CAR WAS YET TO BE OBTAINED.

NATURALLY, NERO CANNOT BUY A NEW ONE – AS WIND WALKS IN HIS POCKETS MORE THAN MONEY.

SO NERO AND NICO CLIMBED ALL THE CORNERS, ALL THE DUMPS, UNTIL THEY CAME ACROSS A BROKEN-DOWN VAN, WHICH CHRONICALLY LED TO THE SIDE. AND AS THEY STUMBLED - THEY BEGAN TO FIGHT OVER REPAIR AND TUNING.

“LISTEN ...” NICO SAID, TAKING OFF HER SPARE PART. “ARE YOU AWARE THAT THIS IS A JOB FOR A MECHANIC? YOU DIDN’T CONFUSE ME WITH SOMEONE ELSE RIGHT?”

NICO, OF COURSE, OWED KYRIE AND NERO, BUT IT SEEMED TO HER THAT SHE WAS GIVING MORE THAN SHE WAS TAKING: SHE WAS OFTEN CALLED TO FIX THIS AND THAT, AND THEY DIDN’T GIVE A PENNY.

“I SHOWED YOU THE RECORDS OF THE ORDER, SO EVERYTHING IS PAID IN ADVANCE.”

FROM THESE WORDS, NICO ALMOST EXPLODED IN INDIGNATION. NO, THE RESEARCH OF THE ORDER OF THE SWORD WAS REALLY INTERESTING (AFTER WHICH SHE CAME TO FORTUNA), SHE WILL NOT SAY ANYTHING; AND BE GRATEFUL, SINCE THEY GAVE HER A LOOK DESPITE THE FACT THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN READ THEM, YOU CAN'T ARGUE. TRUE, NICO HAS ALREADY PAID OFF IN FULL: SHE REPAIRED THE RED QUEEN, AND MORE THAN ONCE AND NOT EVEN JUST TWICE IN JUST ONE YEAR.

AND NOW THEY ALSO FORCED THE CAR TO BE REPAIRED.

“ISN'T IT TIME TO SAY EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE?

SOMETHING COMPLETELY TO FINISH THIS DEAL UP” NICO THOUGHT, AND ALMOST GOT READY, BUT THEN HER DETERMINATION WAS BLOWN AWAY BY THE WIND - KYRIE CALLED:

- LET'S HAVE DINNER, THE TABLE IS ALREADY SET!

- WE'LL COME NOW! - CUTE, SOMEHOW EVEN GOOD-NATUREDLY (NICO NEVER HEARD SUCH A THING IN HIS ADDRESS) NERO ANSWERED, WHILE NICO ROLLED OUT FROM UNDER THE VAN. "GO AHEAD, I'LL FINISH SOMETHING HERE."

- DO WORRY, I'LL SAVE YOU SOME...NOT" NICO JOKED, AND LEFT TO THE SECOND FLOOR.

"JULIO, DO NOT TAKE FOOD WITH YOUR HANDS. KYLE, CARROTS MUST ALSO BE EATEN" SAID KYRIE AS NICO, KYRIE AND THREE ORPHANS ATE THE FOOD TOGETHER.

DURING THAT BIG MESS WITH DEMONS, THE CITY CHILDREN'S HOME WAS BADLY DAMAGED, AND KYRIE AND NERO HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE THE INHABITANTS TO THEMSELVES. IT WOULD SEEM THAT WOULD BE THE CASE FOR A MONTH OR TWO, BUT THE CITY AUTHORITIES DID NOT REBUILD OR REBUILD THE INSTITUTION, SO THE ORPHANS SETTLED WITH KYRIE AND NERO FOR GOOD. THE OLDEST, JULIO, WAS TWELVE,

THE YOUNGEST, CARLO, WAS ONLY TWO YEARS OLD. A LITTLE LATER, OTHER CHILDREN FREQUENTED TO NERO AND KYRIE - LOCAL, FROM THE SURROUNDING FARMS. PARENTS SENT THEM FOR FOOD.

SO EVERY DINNER IN THE HOUSE OF KYRIE AND NERO WAS LIKE A REAL WAR.

SOMEONE STUFFED THEIR MOUTHS WITH FOOD, NOT CARING ABOUT ANYTHING (AND NO ONE), SOMEONE ATE ONLY WHAT HE LIKED, AND SMEARED THE REST ON A PLATE; SOMEONE HAD TO BE FED FROM A SPOON, AND SOMEONE HAD ALREADY TORN UP AND WAS NOW RUSHING AROUND THE TABLE – AND KYRIE HAD TO WATCH EVERYONE.

- NICO, WOULD YOU LIKE A CASSEROLE? IT'S DELICIOUS” SHE SUGGESTED WHEN SHE NOTICED NICO.

“JUST WANTED TO. AND I DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE TASTE - YOU NEVER COOK ANYTHING NOT AMAZING” SAID NICO.

- THANKS FOR YOUR KIND WORDS.

PEERING INTO KYRIE'S SMILE, NICO ONCE AGAIN WONDERED: "WELL, HOW DID NERO WIN THE HEART OF THIS GODDESS?"

- AND WHERE IS NERO? ASKED KYRIE, SENDING A SPOON OF STEW INTO CARLO'S MOUTH, WHO WAS SITTING ON HER LAP, AND LOOKED AT THE DOOR LEADING TO THE GARAGE. "NICO, LOOK AFTER CARLO?"

NICO, STILL CHEWING ON THE CASSEROLE, NODDED, AND THEN KYRIE PLACED THE BABY ON HER LAP. HE IMMEDIATELY POUTED LIKE A HAMSTER, AND BEGAN TO ACCOMPANY EVERY SPOON THAT NICO SENT INTO HER MOUTH WITH A LOOK.

"WHERE ARE YOUR MANNERS? BUT I'M A BIT YOUNGER THAN KYRIE! OR DO YOU LIKE OLDER GIRLS?" - TEASED

NICO AND STROKED HIS HEAD, AND ONLY THEN HE STOPPED SULKING.

- NERO? DINNER IS GETTING COLD! - AS SOON AS KYRIE CALLED OUT, A WILD CRY WAS HEARD FROM THE GARAGE:

- KYRIE! STAY BACK!

NICO JUMPED UP FROM HER PLACE (AND NEARLY DROPPED THE BABY, BUT MANAGED TO CATCH IT), TURNED AROUND AND SAW THAT KYRIE HAD BECOME A FROZEN PILLAR AT THE DOOR, NOT DARING TO OPEN IT.

No, THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED BEFORE.

IF DEMONS APPEARED IN FORTUNA, THEN ALMOST ALWAYS IN THE FOREST OR ON THE MOUNTAIN, THEY NEVER WANDERED INTO THE CITY. FOR THE WHOLE YEAR, NICO COULD NOT RECALL A SINGLE INCIDENT.

AND SINCE NERO SHOUTED AT KYRIE, IT'S REALLY DANGEROUS IN THE GARAGE. AND IF IT'S DANGEROUS, IT'S ONLY BECAUSE THERE ARE ... DEMONS?

“JULIO, TAKE CARLO.”

“I SHOULD CHECK IT MYSELF, SINCE KYRIE STANDS ROOTED TO THE SPOT,” NICO DECIDED, HANDING THE BABY TO THE ELDEST OF THE GUYS, AND LITERALLY THE NEXT MOMENT SHE CAUGHT NERO'S CRIES, AND KYRIE RAN INTO THE GARAGE.

- NERO!

- KYRIE! DON'T COME! NERO SHOUTED AGAIN.

- Before the Nightmare -

NICO WAS NEARLY FLAT ON THE SPOT, BUT SOMEHOW SHE HELD HERSELF AND STOOD FIRMLY ON HER FEET.

- SO, CHILDREN, FROM HERE - NOT A FOOT! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME? SHE TOLD THE ORPHANS AND RUSHED TO THE GARAGE.

AND WHEN SHE ENTERED, SHE FROZE IN HORROR.

THE WHOLE FLOOR IS IN THE BLOOD.

NERO LIES ON THE FLOOR

AND KYRIE FRANTICALLY CALLS FOR HIM, RAISING HIS HEAD.

NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK, THE PICTURE IS CREEPY. ANYONE WOULD FALL INTO A STUPOR, BUT NICO WAS NOT UP TO IT.

SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT HAS DISAPPEARED.

THE RIGHT HAND OF NERO DISAPPEARED.

THAT SAME MYSTERIOUS HAND, WHICH CONTAINED THE DEVILISH POWER IN ITSELF, SIMPLY DISAPPEARED, AS IF IT HAD BEEN TORN OUT BY THE ROOT.

- HEY, WHAT THE HELL? I LEAVE YOU ALONE FOR TWO MINUTES! - SHOUTED NICO AND ALSO RUSHED TO NERO.

USUALLY THIS WOULD DEFINITELY CAUSE NERO TO SPEAK SOME NONSENSE, BUT NOW HE WAS SILENT - NERO'S EYES SEEMED TO BE GLAZED.

- NERO! NERO-OH-OH! .. - CONTINUED TO CALL HER LOVER KYRIE, BUT NERO DID NOT ANSWER HER.

“KYRIE, CALL THE HOSPITAL!”

KYRIE NODDED, LEFT NERO AND RUSHED TO THE SECOND FLOOR. OF COURSE, THE DOCTOR IS VERY USEFUL HERE, BUT IT WAS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT TO TAKE KYRIE AWAY FROM HERE.

NICO UNDERSTOOD THAT NERO CERTAINLY WOULDN'T JUST CUT OFF HIS HAND LIKE THAT, WHICH MEANS THAT SOMEONE "HELPED" HIM. AND THIS SOMEONE IS NOW EITHER OUTSIDE OR INSIDE THE GARAGE.

- HEY BASTARD! ARE YOU STILL HERE?! WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE?! NICO MUTTERED, RUNNING HER HAND INTO NERO'S CLOAK, AND PULLED OUT BLUE ROSE.

IN FACT, IT'S NOT MEANT FOR A GIRL LIKE HER TO SHOOT FROM THE BLUE ROSE - WITH LARGE-CALIBER REVOLVERS (AND THIS ONE ALSO FIRES TWO BULLETS AT A TIME, ALMOST AT THE SAME TIME!) THE RECOIL IS TOO POWERFUL, THE SHOULDER WILL BE KNOCKED OUT FOR AN HOUR, OR IT WILL SIMPLY BE THROWN BACK, BUT IT'S BETTER TO HAVE ROSE WITH YOU THAN NOT AT ALL.

- Before the Nightmare -

- HEY! COME OUT! I'LL SMASH YOUR HEAD OFF! - SHOUTED NIKO, THINKING SO TO PROVOKE THE ENEMY, AND MEANWHILE SHE GLANCED AT NERO'S RIGHT HAND.

HE WAS BLEEDING TERRIBLY.

WITHOUT THINKING TWICE, NICO PULLED OUT THE WIRE FROM HER POCKET ON HER BELT, LEANED TOWARDS NERO AND PULLED HIS SHOULDER - HE MOANED.

- COME ON, COME OUT ALREADY! - SHOUTED NICO

IF THE ENEMY WAS A DEMON, IT WOULD BE UNLIKELY THAT HE WOULD SIT FOR SUCH A LONG TIME AND FALL INTO NICO'S ANTICS, WHICH MEANS THAT THERE WERE TWO OPTIONS:

FIRST: IT WAS NOT THE DEMON WHO PULLED OFF NERO'S HAND, AND THIS "NON-DEMON" WAS HIDING SOMEWHERE IN THE GARAGE.

- Before the Nightmare -

SECOND: THE ENEMY IS UNCLEAR WHO AND HE IS NO LONGER IN THE GARAGE.

“IT CANNOT BE ...” NICO BURST OUT: NO MATTER HOW MUCH SHE WONDERED WHAT AND HOW, BUT SHE COULD NOT BELIEVE WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

IF THE ENEMY IS NOT A DEMON, THEN MAN. BUT IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE FOR A MAN TO TEAR OFF THE DEMONIC HAND OF NERO? NONSENSE. MOREOVER, EVERYTHING HAPPENED IN A MATTER OF MINUTES - NERO WOULD NEVER BE BLOWN AWAY SO QUICKLY.

“WHAT IS THE POINT OF TEARING OFF ONE’S HAND AND RUNNING AWAY? WELL, SOMEONE WOULD HAVE COME TO KILL NERO, BUT THIS ONE JUST TOOK HIS HAND AND DUMPED. IT DIDN’T EVEN BOTHER TO FINISH OFF! SOMETHING DOESN’T FIT HERE ...” NICO CAME TO THE CONCLUSION AND REMEMBERED SOMETHING.

-Before the Nightmare-
AGNUS’S NOTES INCLUDED NOTES ABOUT ONE INSTRUMENT, AND NICO EVEN ASKED NERO WHAT THE THING WAS.

(FLASHBACK)

- WHAT KIND OF A SWORD IS THIS?

IF YOU BELIEVE THE DIARIES OF AGNUS, THE OLD MAN FOUND A PIECE OF A CERTAIN "YAMATO" ON THE SHORE NEAR FORTUNA. IT SEEMED TO AGNUS THAT A POWERFUL FORCE LURKED IN THE FRAGMENT, IN HONOR OF WHICH HE LAUNCHED A WHOLE STUDY, UNTIL HE REALIZED THAT THIS WAS YAMATO.

NICO THEN DID NOT REALIZE WHY NERO WOULD SUDDENLY LOOK DOWN TOWARDS HIS HAND IF YAMATO WAS MENTIONED, AND WHEN ASKED HE CLAIMED IT BELONGS TO THE BROTHER OF DANTE.

- BROTHER? DOES DANTE HAVE A BROTHER? WELL, IN THAT SENSE? ALSO THE SON OF SPARDA?

THE FACT THAT DANTE IS THE SON OF SPARDA, NICO LEARNED FROM THE SAME RECORDS OF AGNUS. TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN OF THE ORDER OF THE SWORD,

THE BLOOD OF SPARDA WAS NEEDED, AND THIS IS WHY THE ORGANIZATION SAT ON THE TAIL OF THE DEMON HUNTER FOR A LONG TIME.

- WHO KNOWS? I DIDN'T ASK DANTE. BUT HOW CAN I ASK, I ALMOST DIED THERE. ALTHOUGH WHAT'S THE POINT? HIS BROTHER ... IS LONG DEAD.

“OKAY, WHERE IS YAMATO NOW? THE FRAGMENT WAS NEVER FOUND ... IS IT REALLY THROWN AWAY?”

EVEN A SPLINTER FROM SUCH A POWERFUL THING COULD HAVE UNIMAGINABLE POWER, AND NICO WAS TERRIBLY ANXIOUS TO LEARN WHAT WAS THERE AND HOW. IF THE SPLINTER IS REALLY FROM YAMATO.

-Before the Nightmare-
NERO SMILED AND SHOWED NICO HIS RIGHT HAND.

- LOOK, I'LL SHOW THE TRICK!

- BUT?

NICO WAS EMBARRASSED. AND THEN A BLADE APPEARED IN FRONT OF HER.

- AH ?! WHAT IS IT? H-HOW ?! E-THIS IS Y-Y-Y-YAMATO ?!
SHE STAMMERED.

“GOD KNOWS HOW IT HAPPENED, BUT IT SEEMS TO BE IN MY RIGHT HAND,” NERO EXPLAINED, TO WHICH NICO SIMPLY FELL INTO A STUPOR. NERO, CLEARLY ENJOYING HER SHOCK, SLAPPED A BLADE ON THE SHOULDER AND ADDED WITH A GRIN: “HEY, BUT AGNUS HAD THE SAME FACE WHEN I WOKE HIM UP.”

NICO COULDN'T STAND THE COMPARISON AND GAVE A SIZZLING LOOK.

- LOOK AT HIS FACE, HOW PROUD ... JUST LIKE A SNOT!

NERO RELEASED HIS SWORD, AND IT DISAPPEARED.

- I'LL SAY RIGHT AWAY: I WON'T LET YOU STUDY YAMATO. THIS THING IS DANGEROUS, I DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO HAPPEN.

NERO THOUGHT SHE WOULD START ARGUING WITH HIM, BUT IN RESPONSE RECEIVED ONLY SILENCE AND A NOD.

- WELL, OKAY. I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO!

NICO, IN GENERAL, DIDN'T LIE: HER INTEREST SOMEHOW QUICKLY FADED AWAY, AS SOON AS SHE FOUND OUT THAT THE BLADE HAD ALREADY AWAKENED. PERHAPS, DEEP DOWN, SHE HOPED TO FURNISH HER FATHER AND FINISH THE INVESTIGATION, WHICH AGNUS COULD NOT DO, AND THUS AVENGE HER MOTHER.

“SOMEHOW YOU AGREED TOO SIMPLY. ARE YOU OKAY? – NERO SAID WHILE BEING SURPRISED.

(FLASHBACK END)

NICO STILL DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THE SECRET OF NERO'S RIGHT HAND WAS, WHAT KIND OF "DEVILISH INSTRUMENTS" THERE COULD TURN INTO COMPLETELY UNTHINKABLE THINGS. AND INDEED, SHE DID NOT UNDERSTAND HOW NERO MOVES HUGE AND HEAVY THINGS WITH THIS HAND. BUT NICO KNEW SOMETHING FOR SURE: YAMATO WAS IN NERO'S RIGHT HAND.

IN THIS CASE, THE ENEMY, TEARING OFF THE HAND OF NERO, COULD WELL HAVE APPEARED JUST BEHIND THE SWORD. AND IF SO, IT'S QUITE LOGICAL TO JUST STEAL AND FLEE - TO KILL NERO FOR THIS IS NOT NECESSARY AT ALL.

-Before the Nightmare-
- LOUSY ... DAMN LOUSY...

NICO WAS MENTALLY INDIGNANT THAT SHE WAS AGAIN DRAGGED INTO ANOTHER DANGEROUS MESS, SIGHED ... AND THEN SHE HEARD A SHARP WHISTLE OF BRAKES -

SOMEONE STOOD RIGHT AT THE GARAGE DOOR. AN
AMBULANCE ARRIVED.

ONCE IN THE HOSPITAL, NERO DID NOT RECOVER FOR
SEVERAL DAYS.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-

MORRISON WALKED ALONG A STREET IN AN EMBRACE WITH A BOUQUET OF GERBERAS. THE OLD MAN HAD NOT BEEN IN THESE PLACES FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS, ALTHOUGH HE USED TO VISIT A BAR CALLED BOBBY'S CELLAR BACK THEN, WHERE ALL THE DRUNKARDS ARE, ALMOST EVERY DAY.

BUT HE DIDN'T GO THERE TO DRINK, EVEN IF IN THE CERTAIN PLACE ALCOHOL ALWAYS POURS LIKE A RIVER. AND MORRISON HAD A SPECIAL REASON TO DRAG HIMSELF HERE AT DISTANT LANDS - HERE ALL-ROUNDERS GATHERED. MORRISON HIRED THESE GUYS FOR SOME WORK AND ALSO TO GAIN INFORMATION.

HE LIVED WITH THIS: HE FOUND ORDERS, HANDED THEM OVER TO THE PERFORMERS, AND KEPT A PERCENTAGE FOR HIMSELF. MORRISON HIMSELF IS A TYPICAL INTERMEDIARY, BUT NO ONE REALLY COMPLAINED ABOUT IT.

RATHER, WHOEVER YOU TAKE, EVERYONE NEEDS SUCH A USEFUL PERSON. JACK OF ALL TRADES - PEOPLE ARE AMBIGUOUS, SOMETIMES THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO SPEAK AND EVEN SCARE THE CLIENTS OF THEIR SMALL AGENCIES. BUT MORRISON IS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MATTER: HE IS GALLANT, AND HIS TONGUE IS SUSPENDED AS IT SHOULD, AND THE SUIT IS SITTING ON IT ALL RIGHT. WELL, WHAT ABOUT A SUIT? NOT ONE PERFORMER HAS PUT ON GOOD CLOTHES.

IN THOSE DAYS, IN THE "BASEMENT" THE APPLE HAD NOWHERE TO FALL - THERE WERE ALWAYS ENOUGH MERCENARIES: THE BEGGAR SALLY, CONSTANTLY DEMANDING MONEY AHEAD, DIEGO WHO PREFERRED HARD WORK, THE HOUND VLAD AND HIS DOG COMPANION, AND ALSO GRU...

- WOW! - BURST OUT FROM MORRISON WHEN HE SAW A FAMILIAR BREWERY.

THE SAME "BOBBY CELLAR" STOOD BEFORE HIM, AS IF STRAIGHT FROM THE PAST, ALTHOUGH IN ONE DAY THERE WAS NOT A STONE LEFT FROM IT.

MORRISON, OF COURSE, HEARD, THEY SAY, REBUILT AGAIN, BUT COULD NOT EVEN THINK THAT THE BRAND NEW BAR WOULD BE THE SAME AS THE PREVIOUS ONE: THEY EVEN PRESERVED THE SHABBY APPEARANCE, BECAUSE THEY USED OLD WOOD.

AND THAT INSCRIPTION, WHICH WAS FAMOUS FOR "BOBBY CELLAR" - "GO HOME, WAKE UP AND SLEEP" - WAS CARVED ON THE DOOR.

BUT THE SIGN WAS DIFFERENT - "GRUE'S CELLAR".

SMILING, MORRISON PUSHED THE DOOR - THE BELL TINKLED, WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE.

- WELCOME! - A VOICE WAS HEARD FROM BEHIND THE COUNTER. THERE STOOD TWO LONG-TIME

ACQUAINTANCES WHOM THE OLD MAN HAD NOT SEEN SINCE THE DEVIL KNOWS HOW OLD HE WAS, THE SISTERS NESTY AND TIKI.

- MORRISON! AND I KNEW THAT YOU WOULD COME TO US!

NOTICING THE GUEST, TIKI JUMPED OUT FROM BEHIND THE COUNTER AND RUSHED TO HIM. HUGGING AND KISSING HER, MORRISON HANDED HER A BOUQUET OF GERBERAS.

- CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR DISCOVERY. SORRY THE BOUQUET IS SO SMALL.

- DO NOT WORRY. BETTER LET'S HAVE A DRINK" TIKI SMILED SLYLY AND SHOUTED TO HER SISTER, WHO REMAINED BEHIND THE COUNTER: "NES!" BRING A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE!

THEY GAVE HIM A WELCOME! THE SMILE NEVER LEFT MORRISON'S LIPS - HE WAS SO HAPPY FOR TIKI AND NESTY. AND THERE IS SOMETHING TO REJOICE: THE GIRLS MANAGED TO RESTORE THE BAR DEAR TO HIS HEART.

- HEY MORRISON, COME HERE! SALLY CALLED OUT TO THE INTERMEDIARY, WHO WAS SITTING AT THE CORNER TABLE. MORRISON SMILED WRYLY - HE NOTICED, AS SHE TURNED GRAY OVER THE YEARS THAT THEY HAD NOT SEEN EACH OTHER, ANOTHER OLD ACQUAINTANCE. THE OLD MAN CAME UP AND SAT OPPOSITE TO THE WOMAN.

“WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH YOU, SALLY? A LITTLE MORE, AND YOU WILL BECOME A BALD ROGUE.”

- DON'T TALK NONSENSE. I HAVE MONEY, SO MY HAIR FELL OUT.

AFTER THESE WORDS, BOTH GRINNED. AND THEN, BEHIND THE COUNTER, A CORK FLEW OUT OF A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE.

“HEY, ISN'T IT A BIT EARLY FOR A DRINK?” – MORRISON ASKED TIKI, WHILE SHE WAS CARRYING CHAMPAGNE. THE REASON FOR THIS WAS SIMPLE: THERE WAS NOBODY ELSE IN THE BAR BESIDES THEM WITH SALLY. SPREADING THE GLASSES, TIKI ANSWERED:

- MERCENARIES ARE NOT EXPECTED. THEY'RE ALWAYS LATE, RIGHT? - AND SMILED.

“I CAN'T DISAGREE,” MORRISON ANSWERED A LITTLE CAUSTICALLY AND SHRUGGED. TIKI Poured CHAMPAGNE INTO GLASSES AND LEFT TWO OF THEM TO MORRISON AND SALLY, AND CARRIED THE OTHER TWO TO THE COUNTER.

- FOR “GRUE'S CELLAR”! THE FIRST TOAST HAPPENED, AND MORRISON AND SALLY RAISED THEIR GLASSES, SMILING.

“AND THE LITTLE ONES HAVE GROWN A LOT.” GRUE MUST BE DANCING A TWIST IN HEAVEN” SALLY MUMBLED A SIP OF CHAMPAGNE AND TURNED TO THE SISTERS — THEY WERE BUSY AT THE COUNTER, PREPARING SNACKS.

- YEAH.

GRU, AFTER WHOM THE BAR WAS NAMED, WAS THE FATHER OF TIKI AND NESTI. AND ALSO A REGULAR CUSTOMER OF “BOBBY CELLAR”.

“AND BY THE WAY ... IT ALL HAPPENED AT THE SAME TIME, RIGHT?” WELL, GRUE’S DEATH ... THAT MESS IN BOBBY’S CELLAR” - SALLY SAID ALMOST IN A WHISPER, AS IF SHE DIDN’T WANT THE SISTERS TO HEAR. MORRISON NODDED SILENTLY. SALLY DID NOT LET UP, AND Poured AND Poured WORDS. EITHER THE DRINK WORKED, OR IT WAS JUST GLAD THAT THE BELOVED BEER OPENED: - THANK YOU, THANK YOU, MORRISON! IF YOU HADN’T THROWN THAT JOB WITH LUGGAGE CARRYING, I WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED.

“YOU ALSO SAVED ME WHEN YOU PERSUADED ME TO GO WITH YOU,” HE SAID.

YES, THEY WERE LUCKY IN EVERY SENSE. IF, FOR THE SAKE OF A TEDIOUS JOB, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO LEAVE THE CITY AND LEAVE THE BOBBY CELLAR FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS, THEY WOULD HAVE HARDLY SURVIVED.

IT ALL HAPPENED, RIGHT IN THE BAR.

ALONG WITH THE MERCENARIES, TEN MORE GUESTS DRANK, AND SUDDENLY - A MASSACRE! THE BODIES OF THE DEAD WERE SO DISFIGURED THAT YOU EVEN DOUBT WHETHER IT IS WHO YOU THINK IT IS.

OF COURSE, A LOT OF THINGS WERE GOING ON IN THE CITY, BANDITS AND HOOLIGANS SCURRIED ABOUT EVERYWHERE, BUT SUCH ATROCITIES HAD NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

- THE WHOLE CITY WAS OVERTURNED. IT'S EVEN SCARY TO REMEMBER.

- YEAH. THERE WERE A LOT OF THINGS. EVEN TOO MUCH.

SALLY DIDN'T LIE. THE BOBBY'S CELLAR MASSACRE DIDN'T END THERE. A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE MASSACRE, ALL THE PATIENTS AND DOCTORS SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED FROM THE LOCAL HOSPITAL AT ONCE. AND A LITTLE EARLIER AT AN UNDERGROUND GATHERING AN EXPLOSION OCCURRED - THEN GOD KNOWS HOW MUCH DIED. IT WAS RUMORED THAT THE MAFIA HAD TRIED THAT.

NELL GOLDSTEIN DIED AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME. A TALENTED GUNSMITH BURNED OUT IN HER OWN STORE. ®

-Before the Nightmare-

AND IN ADDITION, THE FATHER OF TIKI AND NESTY - GRUE DIED.

HE HIMSELF WAS A MERCENARY, WHO "PICKED UP" PENNILESS WORK, WHICH NO ONE USUALLY TOOK ON.

HOWEVER, GRUE WAS A PROFESSIONAL, ONE TO LOOK UP TO, NOT LIKE THE OTHERS WHO CAME TO THE BAR. AND GRUE HAD MORE STRENGTH THAN OTHERS. IN ADDITION, DESPITE AN INSULTING NICKNAME, HE WORKED HARD - HE TRIED TO FEED THREE DAUGHTERS AT ONCE.

AND THEN MORRISON REMEMBERED GRUE'S LAST WORDS: "I NEED MONEY." IT SEEMS THAT AT THAT TIME THE MEDIATOR TRIED TO DISSUADE HIM FROM TAKING CONTRACT KILLINGS.

CONTRACT KILLINGS - THE JOB IS NOWHERE MORE DIRTY. ®
USUALLY, THOSE MERCENARIES ARE TAKEN FOR IT, WHICH ALREADY DOESN'T MATTER WHAT KIND OF INSTRUCTIONS TO FULFILL. AND THE SAME "JACK OF ALL TRADES" ARE TALKING: HE TOOK IT ONCE, AND THERE WILL BE NO TURNING BACK.

MORRISON RESPECTED GRUE AND DID NOT WANT HIM TO GET HIS HANDS DIRTY, AND THE MERCENARY HIMSELF VOWED THAT HE WOULD NOT TAKE THE CONTRACT MURDER.

BUT ONE DAY GRUE'S ELDEST DAUGHTER, JESSICA, FELL ILL WITH A SERIOUS ILLNESS, AND GREW HAD TO GO ON A CONTRACT KILL. MORRISON FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS TOO LATE, BESIDES A TIDY SUM WAS REQUIRED FOR TREATMENT - JUST TAKE IT OUT AND PUT IT DOWN. YOU CAN'T JUST FIND A GOOD JOB FOR THE MONEY.

GRUE GOT TO WORK, BUT NEVER RETURNED. SOMEONE SAID THAT HE DIED AT THE UNDERGROUND GATHERING WHERE THE EXPLOSION OCCURRED, BUT THERE WERE NO WITNESSES TO THAT. UNDER THE RUBBLE THEY FOUND THE BODIES OF DRUG DEALERS, MANY DEAD CUSTOMERS, AND SO THE WAR FOR THE TERRITORY BETWEEN THE DRUG LORDS ENDED. AND THE INCIDENT IN BOBBY'S CELLAR HAPPENED ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATER.

AND A WEEK BEFORE THE MASSACRE FROM THE HOSPITAL WHERE JESSICA WAS, ALL THE PATIENTS AND DOCTORS SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED. IRONICALLY, JESSICA ALSO DISAPPEARED, AS IF FOLLOWING GRUE. WHERE SHE IS NOW - NO ONE KNOWS TO THIS DAY.

GREE DIED, JESSICA DISAPPEARED, AND LITTLE TIKI AND NESTY WERE LEFT ALONE.

THEY WERE WATCHED BY MORRISON AND SALLY - A MEDIATOR AND A MERCENARY, THOSE WHO WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO STAY ALIVE.

OF COURSE, THEY COULD TAKE GIRLS TO THE ORPHANAGE, BUT NO, THEY DECIDED TO CHIP IN AND PROVIDE THE LITTLE GIRLS WITH A DECENT FUTURE. MAYBE SOME ROLE IN THIS WAS PLAYED BY GRUE'S FAME, OR MAYBE HIS FATHER'S INSTINCT WOKE UP AMONG TWO AGING BACHELORS, WHEN BOTH SAW CHILDREN WHO HAD NOWHERE TO GO.

SAY WHAT YOU LIKE, BUT MORRISON AND SALLY WERE PLEASED WITH THEIR DECISION. ESPECIALLY NOW, WHEN THEY SAW HOW THEIR PUPILS GREW.

“HEY MORRISON” NESTY INTERRUPTED THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THEM, “HOW IS TONY?”

MORRISON SAW SALLY SQUINT UNKINDLY.

- TONY? WELL, TONY IS NOW ... BUSY WITH SOMETHING, - THE INTERMEDIARY ANSWERED EVASIVELY, TO WHICH HIS FRIEND MADE A SOUR FACE AND SAID:

- HOPEFULLY THE MORON IS DEAD... IF HE WAS ALIVE, I WOULD HAVE PLANTED A SHOTGUN IN HIS ASS.

-Before the Nightmare-
NESTY WAS NOT HAPPY WITH HER WORDS.

“BUT TONY HELPED US WITH MONEY! DO NOT SAY THAT!”

- WHAT, FOR FORGIVENESS? HA! AFTER ALL - THE PLAGUE IS NATURAL! A MORON WITH A HEFTY BUMP! - SALLY DID NOT RELENT, UNTIL SHE RAISED A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE AND KNOCKED IT DOWN HER THROAT.

TIKI LOOKED IN SURPRISE AT THE GUARDIAN AND WENT TO THE COUNTER FOR A BOTTLE.

“BUT HE DOES SOMETHING ... RIGHT?” PAPA'S PARTNER IS STILL ... - TIKI REMARKED TIMIDLY, ALREADY POURING CHAMPAGNE INTO SALLY'S GLASS.

HE GRINNED:

- YES, THAT WAS THE CASE. THESE TWO FOLKS - TONY AND GRUE - WERE THE COOLEST HERE. ETERNALLY CALM GRUE AND CRAZY TONY ... JUST LIKE IN A MOVIE OF SOME KIND. I EVEN THOUGHT OF WORKING SOMEHOW WITH SOMEONE IN A PAIR, SO AS THEY ARE. THAT'S JUST ... - SALLY AGAIN DRAINED HER GLASS AND HIT THEM ON THE

TABLE SO HARD THAT SHE NEARLY BROKE IT. - AND THEN NEXT TO TONY IT BECAME SOMEHOW DANGEROUS. EVEN SUPERSTITION HAD GONE UP, PEOPLE BELIEVING TONY IS THE CAUSE OF THESE THINGS, THEY SAID IT'S BETTER NOT TO WORK WITH THIS ASSHOLE. AND DID NOT APPROACH HIM AT ALL. BUT TONY, AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED, WENT TO THE BAR. AND THEN IT HAPPENED. ONLY SALLY AND I SURVIVED.

MORRISON GRIMACED, BUT SALLY'S FACE TURNED RED LIKE A TOMATO.

“HAVE YOU ALREADY DRINK BEFORE YOU COME HERE?”

MORRISON GUESSED, AND SALLY ONLY YAWNED LAZILY.

- A LITTLE BIT. FIVE GLASSES ... ALE AND RUM ... WELL, I WAS GLAD, YOU KNOW, MORRISON? I'M LOOKING AT THE LITTLE ONES AND EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE! .. I DIDN'T WANT TO REMEMBER ANYTHING AT ALL, BUT THEY TAKE THEIR YEARS ... AND I REMEMBER, IT WAS ALREADY DEAR TO MY HEART ... - SALLY EXPLAINED, AND THEN SHE SUDDENLY SWAYED AND FELL FLAT ON THE TABLE.

ALCOHOL HAD NOT BEEN HER FRIEND BEFORE, BUT NOW SALLY, IT'S TRUE, WAS CUT DOWN FROM THE HALF-GLASS. AND WHAT IS HER FAULT? IN THE BEST OF TIMES, "BOBBY CELLAR" WAS THERE FOR THIRTY MERCENARIES, AND NOW SOME OF THEM ARE DEAD, SOME OF THEM ARE OLD.

"FORGIVE ME, THE OLD WOMAN ALWAYS POISONS HERSELF AND FALLS ASLEEP," EXPLAINED TIKI, AND SHE JUST SHRUGGED.

- THE PARTY HAS NOT STARTED YET, BUT IT HAS ALREADY DISCONNECTED ... IT'S A PITY EVEN.

- COME ON, IN THIRTY MINUTES SHE'LL WILL WAKE UP. HAPPENED ALREADY, - OBJECTED MORRISON.

AND THEN THE BELL RANG - EVERYONE INVOLUNTARILY LOOKED AT THE DOOR.

AT FIRST THEY THOUGHT, MAYBE ONE OF THE MERCENARIES CAME, BUT NO ...

“AH ... UMM ...” TIKI WAS FADING, AND SHE COULD BE UNDERSTOOD.

AT THE THRESHOLD STOOD AN UNFAMILIAR GUY. EXTREMELY SKINNY, ALL IN TATTOOS, AND ONLY HIS FACE IS WHITE, PALE. IN THE HANDS OF A CANE. SUCH A GUEST CANNOT BE CALLED “NORMAL”.

- SORRY, WE HAVE A RESERVATION TODAY.

DECIDING THAT TIKI SHOULD NOT LEAVE THIS BUSINESS, MORRISON GOT UP AND WALKED OVER TO THE BOY, AND HE WAVED HIS HAND AT TIKI, SAYING, DON'T INTERFERE.

“I UNDERSTAND THAT THE PLACE IS BEAUTIFUL, BUT TODAY WE ARE CLOSED.” WE PLAN TO FEAST ALL NIGHT LONG,” HE TOLD THE GUEST, WAITING FOR HIM TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS GOING ON. BUT HE ONLY LOOKED CAREFULLY AT MORRISON.

WAITING FOR AN ANSWER, MORRISON DID NOT WASTE TIME IN VAIN - HE CAREFULLY EXAMINED THE GUEST. YOU NEVER KNOW WHO HE MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE.

THE BOY HAD A CANE IN ONE HAND, AND A BOOK IN THE OTHER. THE COVER HAS FADED SO MUCH THAT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHO THE AUTHOR IS, HOWEVER, THE CAPITAL LETTER "V" CLEARLY APPEARED ON IT. MAYBE SOME MONOGRAM? HOWEVER, FROM SUCH A DISTANCE MORRISON COULD NOT MAKE OUT AND SAY FOR SURE.

"ARE YOU MORRISON?" - AFTER A LONG PAUSE, THE GUY ASKED. MORRISON WAS SURPRISED BECAUSE HE HAD NOT YET GIVEN HIS NAME, BUT DECIDED TO NOD.

- RIGHT ... DO YOU HAVE BUSINESS FOR ME?

- Before the Nightmare -

"I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU ... I HAVE A REQUEST FOR YOU."

- WHICH ONE? – WARILY SAYS MORRISON.

AFTER A PAUSE, THE BOY SIGHED AND INDIFFERENTLY ASKED:

“COULD YOU INTRODUCE ME ... TO DANTE.”

MORRISON CAUGHT HIS BREATH, BUT EVERYTHING IN HIS HEAD IMMEDIATELY FELL INTO PLACE. A SUSPICIOUS GUEST IN FRONT OF HIM IS JUST ONE OF THOSE.

- DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL ORDER? - SPECIFIED MORRISON JUST IN CASE, AND THE BOY NODDED.

WHEN A CONFIDENT AND PROMPT ANSWER IS GIVEN TO SUCH A QUESTION ... YES, THE CLIENT'S REQUEST IS PRECISELY CONNECTED WITH DEMONS.

- Before the Nightmare -
- EXCUSE ME, GIRLS, I HAVE A CASE HERE.

PULLING OUT HIS WALLET, MORRISON WENT TO THE COUNTER AND PUT SOME BANKNOTES AT THE CASH DESK.

“WILL YOU COME BACK?” TIKI ASKED.

- I DO NOT KNOW. IF THE CONVERSATION IS SERIOUS, I MAY NOT COME TODAY. BUT THE NEXT DAY – I WILL. HONESTLY, I PROMISE” MORRISON REASSURED HER, AND TIKI POUTED LIKE A CHILD, AND THEN SHOOK HER HEAD CAPRICIOUSLY.

- I'M ALREADY AN ADULT!

- IT IS TRUTH TOO. - MORRISON SMILED AND TURNED BACK TO THE BOY. - WELL, LET'S GO? HE SUGGESTED, AND THEY LEFT THE BAR.

THEY WALKED ALONG THE STREETS FOR A LONG TIME: MORRISON IS IN FRONT, THE CLIENT IS BEHIND.

- TELL ME THE DETAILS ALONG THE WAY. AND BY THE WAY, DO YOU HAVE MONEY? - SUDDENLY REMEMBERED THE INTERMEDIARY.

IF THE JOB IS REALLY CONNECTED WITH DEMONS, THEN DANTE WILL DO EVERYTHING THAT IS REQUIRED. HE IS SUCH A HUNTER.

BUT THE MONEY IS STILL OUT OF PLACE. EVEN A THREE-YEAR-OLD CHILD KNOWS THAT YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR WORK. IN ADDITION, DANTE'S REPUTATION IS NOW TO HELL, AND EARNINGS WILL NOT HURT HIM.

THE CLIENT PUT HIS HAND IN HIS POCKET, TOOK OUT A WAD OF MONEY AND HANDED IT TO MORRISON.

- THIS IS HOW MUCH I MANAGED TO COLLECT.

MORRISON GLANCED AT THE BANKNOTES, AND HE THOUGHT HE WAS BLEEDING FROM NEW PIECES OF PAPER.

SUDDENLY, SOMEONE MOANED.

MORRISON TURNED AROUND AND SAW THAT A MAN WAS LYING NEARBY, RIGHT ON THE PAVEMENT. THERE ARE BLOODY MARKS NEXT TO HIM, AS IF A FIGHT HAD JUST ENDED. BUT MORE THAN THIS MORRISON WAS SURPRISED BY A STRANGE BIRD NEARBY - THERE ARE NO SUCH BIRDS IN THESE PARTS. IT LOOKS LIKE A HUGE VULTURE, BUT WHAT KIND OF BREED? AND NOT TO MENTION: MORRISON HAS NEVER BEEN FOND OF BIRDS.

THE CLIENT THREW UP HIS HAND, AND THE BIRD, AS IF ON COMMAND, FLEW UP TO HIM AND CLUTCHED ITS SKIN IN ITS CLAWS.

- YOUR BIRD?

BUT THE INTERMEDIARY WAS NOT ANSWERED BY THE CLIENT, BUT BY THAT SAME BIRD:

“OLD MAN, I’M ME.”

THE FOREGOING DID NOT RESEMBLE A MEMORIZED PHRASE. THEREFORE, THE BIRD SAID WHAT IT WANTED.

WITHOUT TAKING ITS EYES OFF MORRISON, THE BIRD MOVED ITS BEAK.

“MONEY IS MONEY, YOU AGREE OLD MAN? OR WHAT, ARE YOU SHOWING DISDAIN? WELL, IF YOU ARE A TENDER LITTLE SOUL, YOU CANNOT STAND THE SIGHT OF HUMAN BLOOD ... HA HA! WELL, WHAT CAN YOU DO! WE’LL TAKE IT TO THE BANK AND EXCHANGE IT FOR FRESH ONES!” - ANNOUNCED THE BIRD.

MORRISON GLANCED AT THE CLIENT AGAIN. THE CLIENT CALMLY ADDED:

- IF THIS SEEMS LITTLE ... WE WILL FIND MORE.

-Before the Nightmare-

YEAH, IN THE BEST TIMES OF BOBBY’S CELLAR, BLOODIED MEN DIDN’T WALLOW IN THE STREETS. IT TURNS OUT, AFTER MORRISON ENTERED THE BAR, SOMEONE

ATTACKED THE POOR FELLOW AND ROBBED HIM, WHICH APPEARED TO BE THIS CLIENT.

“NO, THAT’S ENOUGH,” MORRISON REASSURED THE CLIENT AND STUFFED THE BLOOD-STAINED NOTES INTO HIS JACKET POCKET.

THE INTERMEDIARY SHOULD NOT GO INTO THE AFFAIRS OF THE CLIENT. IN ADDITION, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE CUSTOMER IN FRONT OF HIM IS A ROBBER. SO MORRISON CAN ONLY DO THE WORK.

“BEFORE GOING TO DANTE’S OFFICE, I NEED TO DROP IN A COUPLE OF PLACES.” DO YOU MIND?

THE CLIENT AND THE BIRD WERE SILENT. ACCEPTING THIS AS CONSENT, MORRISON HEADED FOR THE MAIN STREET. Before the Nightmare-

CHAPTER 10: DANTE

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, DANTE DID NOT HAVE A SINGLE NORMAL ORDER, SO THEY CUT HIM OFF COMPLETELY AND THOROUGHLY: WATER, GAS, ELECTRICITY AND EVEN A PHONE, AND AFTER ALL, CUSTOMERS CONTACTED DANTE JUST BY PHONE.

THROWING HIS LEGS ON THE TABLE, DANTE SAT AND WONDERED HOW MANY NIGHTS HE HAD ALREADY SPENT IN THE PRISON CELL, WHEN MORRISON CAME INTO THE OFFICE. IN DIFFICULT TIMES, HE ALWAYS GOT A JOB FOR DANTE, AND HE BELIEVED HIM AS THE MOST RELIABLE INTERMEDIARY. THEREFORE, HE KEPT IN TOUCH FOR MANY, MANY YEARS.

- THERE IS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS. WHERE TO START? - IMMEDIATELY ASKED MORRISON.

- Before the Nightmare -

- NO DIFFERENCE. YOU'LL TELL THEM BOTH" DANTE ANSWERED.

MORRISON SAT DOWN ON THE GUEST SOFA AND ONLY THEN SPOKE:

“WELL THEN, LET'S START WITH THE BAD. MISS PATTY WAS VERY ANGRY.”

HEARING PATTY, DANTE FROWNEA A LITTLE. HE HAD KNOWN HER FOR TEN YEARS. HE MET WHEN THEY INSTRUCTED HIM TO WORK AS HER BODYGUARD, AND THEN THE GIRL OFTEN VISITED THE AGENCY. AND SHE, EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS THE MOST ORDINARY PERSON, CONSTANTLY POKED HER NOSE INTO DANTE'S AFFAIRS AND TRIED TO PULL HIM SOMEWHERE — TO LIVE AN UNUSUAL “ORDINARY LIFE”.

- SHE WANTED TO INVITE YOU TO HER BIRTHDAY, BUT THE PHONE IS OFF.

DANTE SHRUGGED.

“THEY CUT OFF MY PHONE WITH LIGHT AND WATER” HE ANSWERED IMMEDIATELY.

MORRISON DELIBERATELY SLOWLY LOOKED AROUND THE GLOOMY OFFICE.

- WELL YES...

“AND THE GOOD NEWS?”

NOT TO SAY THAT HE DID NOT LIKE PATTY VERY MUCH. IT'S JUST HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT HE WOULD DO AT A PARTY WHERE THE MOST ORDINARY PEOPLE WOULD GATHER.

MORRISON GRINNED. *Before the Nightmare-*

- A WORTHWHILE JOB. WITH ADVANCE PAYMENT.

INDEED, THE NEWS IS EXCELLENT. ALTHOUGH DANTE ALWAYS WALKED WITH EMPTY POCKETS AND DIDN'T HAVE ANY PARTICULARLY WARM FEELINGS FOR MONEY, BUT RECENTLY HE EVEN FELT: SOMETHING WAS MISSING. IN ADDITION, HE USUALLY ASKED WHAT KIND OF WORK THERE WAS, HOW MUCH THEY PAID, AND ONLY THEN HE AGREED, BUT NOW HE PRESSED SO THAT HE WOULD TAKE UP ANY BUSINESS.

- WELL. IT WAS ENOUGH TO LIVE WITHOUT A NORMAL PUSH, - BENDING OVER THE TABLE, DANTE ADMITTED.

MORRISON GOT UP FROM THE SOFA, WENT TO THE TABLE AND LAID OUT SEVERAL SHEETS ON IT.

“I WAS THINKING AND PAID FOR WATER, GAS, ELECTRICITY AND A TELEPHONE. OUT OF YOUR ADVANCE.”

LOOKING AT THE PAPERS, DANTE IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED THE ACCOUNTS IN THEM. MOREOVER, THE NUMBERS THERE WERE IMPRESSIVE. AFTER SCROLLING

THROUGH THE PAPERS, DANTE LOOKED AT MORRISON, BUT HE ONLY SHRUGGED AND SHOOK HIS HEAD. IT SEEMS THAT ALMOST THE ENTIRE ADVANCE WAS SPENT ON PAYING BILLS.

MORRISON IS KNOWN TO BE A MAN WITH BRAINS. INSTEAD OF A MESS, DANTE OFTEN TAKES ON ALL SORTS OF PETTY MATTERS AND SECRETLY SETTLES THEM. BUT THIS TIME, AS DANTE THOUGHT, THE MAN WITH THE BRAINS WENT TOO FAR. NO, OF COURSE, IT WAS WORTH PAYING THE BILLS, BUT FIRST OF ALL IT WAS WORTH POPPING INTO THE FREDDY'S SHOP AND ENJOYING A STRAWBERRY SANDAE. DANTE DID NOT EAT IT FOR A HUNDRED YEARS.

AND WHILE DANTE SIGHED DISAPPOINTEDLY, A LIGHT CAME ON IN THE OFFICE AND, AS IF ON SIGNAL, THE TELEPHONE RANG.

THE BELL DIDN'T PROMISE ANYTHING GOOD, BUT DANTE PICKED UP THE PHONE ANYWAY, INTRODUCING AS DEVIL

MAY CRY AND IMMEDIATELY GOT PATTY'S PIERCING SCREAM IN HIS EAR:

- DANTE? IS THAT YOU, DANTE? FINALLY I GOT THROUGH! WHY AREN'T YOU ANSWERING? YOU'RE GOING TO COME, GOT IT ?! TODAY IS MY BIRTHDAY! STARTS AT SIX IN THE EVENING! AND DON'T CALL ME A KID ANYMORE!

SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ENDLESS SCREAMS, DANTE COULD NOT STAND IT AND HUNG UP. HE HAD KNOWN PATTY FOR A LONG TIME, BUT STILL HE NEVER CEASED TO WONDER HOW SHE HAD THE COURAGE TO DRAG HIM TO ALL THESE PARTIES.

MORRISON WAITED FOR WHAT WOULD COME OF THIS, AND LOOKED AT DANTE WITH A WIDE SMILE. THE HUNTER HIMSELF WAS ABOUT TO CLARIFY SOMETHING, AS THE PHONE RANG AGAIN. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHY, BUT DANTE ALREADY KNEW THAT IT WAS PATTY AGAIN. IT'S STRANGE AFTER ALL: IT RINGS ALWAYS THE SAME, BUT NOW IT'S SOMEHOW UNPLEASANT ...

TIRED OF WATCHING HOW THE PHONE IS SHAKING FROM CALLS, DANTE COULD NOT STAND IT AND PULLED OUT THE CABLE.

“NOW ABOUT THE JOB, MORRISON. YOU HAVE TO HELP ME SKIP THE PARTY.”

THE BROKER SMILED AND PUT A CIGARETTE IN HIS MOUTH.

- OKAY. I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO INFORM MADAM THAT YOU WON'T COME” HE SAID, AND SUDDENLY POINTED TO THE DOOR. SOME GUY WAS ALREADY STANDING THERE. WHEN HE APPEARED, IT IS NOT CLEAR. - THIS IS THE CLIENT, HE WILL TELL YOU WHAT AND HOW. AND I NEED TO CALL TRISH AND THE LADY” MORRISON ADDED AND HEADED FOR THE EXIT. DANTE IMMEDIATELY JUMPED UP AND TRIED TO SLOW HIM DOWN:

“HEY! .. I CAN DO IT ALONE!”

WORKMATE TRISH AND COLLEAGUE LADY ARE RELIABLE PEOPLE, YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING BAD ABOUT THEM. IN ADDITION, AS SOON AS MORRISON DRAGGED THE ORDER, THE HUNTER PERKED UP, SO HE WAS OFFENDED THAT THE WORK HAD ALREADY BEEN DIVIDED.

- SO I SAID THAT THE WORK IS WORTHWHILE. YOU WILL NEED SOME HELP.

THERE IS NOTHING TO BE DONE - DANTE CAN ONLY WATCH AS MORRISON LEAVES THE AGENCY.

MEANWHILE, THE CLIENT SIMPLY STOOD, LEANING HIS BACK AGAINST THE WALL, AND SILENTLY READ THE BOOK. FINGERS CLUTCHED HIS CANE, BUT THE GUY DID NOT LEAN ON IT - THAT MEANS HE COULD WALK LIKE THAT.

“SOME KIND OF ECCENTRIC,” DANTE THOUGHT WHEN HE SAT BACK IN HIS CHAIR, AND ONLY THEN STARTED A CONVERSATION:

- WELL, INTRODUCE YOURSELF AT LEAST!

ONLY AFTER THESE WORDS THE CLIENT STUCK TO THE WALL AND MOVED TOWARDS IT. BUT STILL HE DID NOT TAKE HIS EYES OFF THE BOOK.

“I HAVE NO NAME, I AM BUT TWO DAYS OLD” HE CONTINUED, AND THEN HE SUDDENLY SLAMMED THE BOOK AND STOPPED. A LITTLE JERKING OF THE CORNER OF HIS MOUTH, THE CLIENT RAISED HIS EYES AND LOOKED DANTE IN THE FACE. – JUST KIDDING. CALL ME V.

-Before the Nightmare-

THE NAME WAS MORE LIKE A PSEUDONYM, BUT DANTE DIDN'T CARE MUCH. WHEN WORKING AS A MERCENARY, YOU ENCOUNTER PEOPLE FROM THE CRIMINAL WORLD, AND THEY DON'T GIVE REAL NAMES.

- V, YOU SAY? SO WHAT KIND OF WORK? DANTE ASKED CAREFULLY.

THE CLIENT CAME ACROSS AS STRANGE: BLACK HAIR, PALE SKIN, A SLEEVELESS CLOAK, HANDS COVERED IN SOME TATTOOS, AND HE DIDN'T NEED A CANE AT ALL. IF THERE WAS A PROBLEM WITH THE LEGS, THE GUY WOULD LEAN ON IT.

HOWEVER, AT FIRST GLANCE IT WAS CLEAR: V IS NOT HONEST. AND MORRISON, WITH ALL HIS APPEARANCE, MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE WORK WAS RELATED TO DEMONS.

AND V DID NOT DECEIVE DANTE'S EXPECTATIONS.

-Before the Nightmare-

“A STRONG DEMON WILL BE RESURRECTED SOON ... I NEED YOUR HELP, DANTE.”

HE GRINNED. WELL STILL - HIT THE BULL'S-EYE! BUT WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT A "STRONG" DEMON WOULD BE COMING AROUND.

- THEY SAY THIS TO ME EVERY DAY. STRONG DEMON, CRUEL DEMON ... THE KING OF DEMONS ... BUT, YOU KNOW, THEY WERE NOT SO STRONG, SHEER DISAPPOINTMENT.

NATURALLY, DANTE UNDERTOOK ANY WORK RELATED TO DEMONS. HIS CALLING IS THIS. BUT OFTEN THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO THERE BESIDES A SLASH OR TWO.

FROM TIME TO TIME, CHASING ANOTHER OTHERWORLDLY TRIFLE, DANTE WONDERED IF HE WOULD BECOME A TERMITE FIGHTER - ALL THE SAME, EVERY SINGLE DAY TRAMPLES ALL TRASH. NEITHER GOOD NOR PLEASURE. IT'S LIKE CHEWING GUM.

BUT DANTE COULD NOT ALLOW THIS OTHERWORLDLY TRIFLE TO DO IN THE WORLD OF PEOPLE EVERYTHING THAT SHE WANTED, WHICH IS WHY HE HUNTED THEM.

BUT STILL, WHEN HE HEARD SOMETHING ABOUT THE “STRONG” AND “CRUEL DEMON”, HE WANTED TO MEET SOMEONE WHO WOULD JUSTIFY SUCH BIG WORDS. BUT DANTE ALWAYS EASILY DEALT WITH THE DEMONS AND THEN WALKED AWAY DISAPPOINTED.

AND AFTER ALL, HE SAW MANY OF THESE, THAT’S WHY, RESPONDING TO THE CLIENT, HE COULD NOT RESTRAIN THE RIDICULE.

“THIS TIME, IT’S TRUE” V DECLARED WITH A SERIOUS LOOK.

- HM? IS THAT SO?

“THIS DEMON IS THE REASON ... THE REASON WHY YOU FIGHT.”

IT SEEMS AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE RUBBISH, BUT, LOOKING AT V, DANTE INSTANTLY REALIZED: HE KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT HIM.

“THE KID IS DEFINITELY NOT A DEMON,” DANTE SENSED INWARDLY. “BUT IF NOT A DEMON, THEN WHY DID HE SAY THAT?”

“AND WHAT IS THAT DEMON CALLED?” - ASKED DANTE WITH UNUSUAL INTEREST FOR HIM.

V DROPPED THAT THE ENEMY IS THE “REASON”. IF THE CUSTOMER DOES NOT LIE, THEN DANTE, PERHAPS, KNOWS WHAT KIND OF DEMON WILL BE RESURRECTED THERE. THERE ARE NO OPTIONS, EXCEPT...

V SMILED AND CALMLY CALLED HIS NAME.

-Before the Nightmare-

ON THE TV SCREEN, A HOST SPOKE IN A BLANK TONE.

- ... AS FOR THE HUGE TREE-LIKE OBJECT SEEN IN THE CITY, NO NEW INFORMATION HAS BEEN RECEIVED YET. ACCORDING TO THE POLICE, THE OFFICERS ARE IN PLACE AND ARE DEVELOPING A FURTHER PLAN OF ACTION...

BEHIND THE BACK OF THE SPEAKER, PICTURES FLICKERED - SHOTS FROM THE SCENE: A GIANT SOMETHING THAT LOOKED LIKE A TREE SPREAD OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CITY. SO HUGE! AND STILL IT SEEMED THAT THE TELEVISION PEOPLE WERE SHOWING ONLY PART OF SOMETHING INCREDIBLE.

- AND WHAT, DO YOU NEED TO CUT IT OUT? THE LADY ASKED MORRISON WHEN SHE MUFFLED THE VOLUME ON THE TELEVISION. THE MEDIATOR STOOD LEANING AGAINST THE WALL AND SMOKING A CIGARETTE.

“ESSENTIALLY, YES.” DEFEAT THE BIG SHOT INSIDE AND THE TERRIBLE TREE WILL DISAPPEAR” EXPLAINED MORRISON.

LADY WAS SLIGHTLY SURPRISED AND SENT ANOTHER QUESTION IN PURSUIT:

“WHY DO YOU NEED ME?”

ALTHOUGH MORRISON IS AN INTERMEDIARY, HE RARELY WORKED WITH LADY. NO, HE KNEW THAT THE LADY WAS COLLABORATING WITH OTHER INTERMEDIARIES, VARIOUS INFORMANTS, SO SHE ALWAYS HAD ENOUGH WORK, MOREOVER, MORRISON HAS SOME FIRST-CLASS OPTIONS, SUCH AS DANTE.

AND IF DANTE GETS TO WORK, THEN TO INVITE LADY - IT MAKES NO SENSE.

“I ALREADY TURNED TO DANTE,” MORRISON EXPLAINED, EXHALING A SMOKE. HE UNDERSTOOD THE LADY’S

QUESTION PERFECTLY. - BUT HE HIMSELF CAN'T DO IT. SO I'M CALLING YOU ... AND ALSO TRISH.

HEARING THAT TRISH ENTERS THE GAME, LADY COULD NOT HIDE HER SURPRISE. AFTER ALL, SHE, THE COMPANION OF DANTE AND THE CONSTANT COMPANION OF THE LADY, WAS INCREDIBLY STRONG, ALTHOUGH SHE DID NOT REACH THE LEVEL OF DANTE HIMSELF.

“MORRISON ... DO YOU WANT TO SMASH THE WHOLE CITY?” WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH SUCH A COMPOSITION?

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE THAT DANTE COULD NOT COPE WITH SOMETHING. AND IF YOU GIVE HIM TRISH AS A COMPANION, THEN EVEN THE HELL LORDS WONT FARE.

“I UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERN, AND DANTE SAID HE COULD HANDLE IT HIMSELF, BUT ...” MORRISON TOOK A DEEP BREATH. - THE PREMONITION IS VERY LOUSY. INTUITION TELLS US: SOMETHING WILL GO WRONG” HE FINISHED AND EXHALED SUCH A CLOUD OF SMOKE THAT

THE LADY COULD NOT SEE ANYTHING AT ALL FOR SOME TIME.

IT'S GENERALLY DIFFICULT TO MEET WITH HER: YOU NEED TO ASK IN ADVANCE AND COME AT EXACTLY THE APPOINTED TIME AND PLACE.

“BUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN?” HOW MANY SELF-PROCLAIMED DEMON LORDS WERE THERE! SHE HERSELF KILLED AN ENTIRE CROWD,” LADY REMINDED. SHE KNEW FROM THE VERY BEGINNING THAT THE MEDIATOR HAD COME TO HER TO ENTRUST THE MURDER OF THE NEXT RESURRECTED “LORD OF HELL”. “SUPPOSE THIS TIME SOMEONE IMPORTANT ... BUT DANTE HAS ALREADY DEALT WITH SUCH.”

ONCE TRISH TOLD LADY ABOUT DANTE'S PAST. ABOUT HOW THE DEMON KING MUNDUS, THE EMPEROR OF THE UNDERWORLD, KILLED DANTE'S MOTHER AND HE AND HIS TWIN BROTHER HAD TO FLEE. TWENTY YEARS LATER, THE DEMON HUNTER DEFEATED THE KING AND AVENGED HIS MOTHER.

MORRISON KNEW THAT STORY TOO, AND STILL SOMETHING TOLD HIM THAT THE UPCOMING EVENTS SMELL LIKE GASOLINE. HE WANTS TO PLAY IT SAFE.

“I HEARD THAT OLD AGE MAKES PEOPLE COWARDS. BUT YOU’RE NOT AN OLD MAN YET HUH? - LADY WAS SURPRISED, AND MORRISON CHUCKLED DRYLY AT HER REMARK:

- DO YOU WANT TO CHECK?

HAVING EXCHANGED PLEASANTRIES, LADY AND MORRISON SMILED AT EACH OTHER. AND AGAIN, THERE WAS PEACE BETWEEN THEM, BECAUSE MORRISON ONLY CARRIED PEACE. PEACE AND SERENITY.

- OKAY, LIKE I TOLD YOU EVERYTHING. I’LL COME TOMORROW, DON’T STAY UP LATE” MORRISON ORDERED, HEADING FOR THE DOOR.

“I WONDER WHAT BOTHERS YOU SO MUCH?” - ASKED THE LADY AFTER.

MORRISON STOPPED.

“THE CITY ITSELF,” HE ANSWERED AND LEFT.

- CITY? - ECHOED THE LADY AND LOOKED AT THE TV SCREEN, WHERE THERE WAS A NEWS RELEASE ALREADY WITHOUT SOUND. IN THE CORNER OF THE VIDEO FLAUNTED A PLATE WITH THE CAPTION: "A MYSTERIOUS PHENOMENON IN RED GRAVE."

WHEN THE LADY SAW WHAT KIND OF CITY IT WAS, SHE GASPED FOR BREATH.

- DANTE'S PISTOLS!

-

AND AFTER ALL, NOT SO LONG AGO SHE SPOKE WITH DANTE ABOUT NELL GOLDSTEIN.

“DID SHE MAKE YOUR PISTOLS? NELL GOLDSTEIN?”

THE LADY ASKED FOR A REASON: HER FAMILIAR GUNSMITH ALSO BORE THE NAME GOLDSTEIN.

- WHAT'S THE MATTER? - ASKED DANTE, TO WHICH THE LADY TOLD HIM ABOUT A FRIEND NAMED ROCK GOLDSTEIN.

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THEN DANTE'S FACIAL EXPRESSION SOMEHOW ... CHANGED. AND THEN HE SUDDENLY BEGAN TO QUESTION ABOUT A COMPLETE STRANGER TO HIM. HE WAS ESPECIALLY WORRIED WHETHER THIS ROCK GOLDSTEIN WAS A GOOD GUNSMITH.

“I THINK ... NOT BAD. BUT CERTAINLY NOT FIRST-CLASS. I ONLY ORDER SERVICE, IT SEEMS TO BE NOTHING MORE ...”

- LADY ANSWERED HONESTLY.

AND SUCH AN ASSESSMENT WAS QUITE FAIR. ROCK IS NOT BAD, BUT HIS DAUGHTER WILL BE BETTER. RECENTLY, LADY ENTRUSTED THE WORK TO HER.

“DO YOU THINK HE WILL FIX IT?” DANTE ASKED AND SHOWED THE LADY HIS PAIR OF PISTOLS.

- CORRECT IT? DID SOMETHING BREAK?

- WELL NO. BETTER TELL ME WHERE TO FIND THIS ROCK.

LADY DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT EXACTLY DANTE HAD SOUGHT FROM HER, BUT STILL GLANCED AT THE PISTOLS. AND SHE MANAGED TO NOTICE THAT THE NAME WAS CARVED ON THE CASE ... REDGRAVE?

-Before the Nightmare-

BUT ALL THIS IS... VAGUE MEMORIES.

BUT THEN WHAT DO THESE COINCIDENCES MEAN? LADY, NOT KNOWING ANYTHING ABOUT DANTE'S PAST, COULD ONLY GUESS...

SAY WHAT YOU LIKE, BUT MORRISON IS GREAT AT WHAT HE DOES.

HE DID NOT JUST IMMEDIATELY ACCEPT V'S ORDER, IN FACT, A MAN HE KNEW LITTLE, BUT INSTANTLY CONTACTED DANTE, LADY, AND TRISH. AND TO EVERYTHING ELSE, HE FOUND A HELICOPTER TO THROW THEM IN PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY, MORRISON ALWAYS HAS EVERYTHING.

FOR THIS REASON, V THOUGHT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO SORT THINGS OUT SOMEHOW.

- HOW IT STINKS ... - LOOKING AROUND THE DISTRICT, LADY COMPLAINED. SHE SPOKE OF A MYSTERIOUS TREE THAT SUDDENLY GREW IN THE CENTER OF RED GRAVE. OF COURSE, V AND HIS HIRED HUNTERS WITHOUT ANY PROBLEMS BROKE THROUGH TO THE GOAL, HAD DELAYED EVEN A LITTLE, THE PATH WOULD HAVE BECOME MANY TIMES MORE DIFFICULT, SO MORRISON STILL DESERVED

THANKS. AND HE WILL RECEIVE IT WHEN THE CASE ENDS SUCCESSFULLY.

“IT STINKS OF GARBAGE,” DANTE AGREED WITH A NOD.

BUT ONLY V RELIABLY KNEW THAT THE GIANT TREE HAD SPROUTED FROM HELL ITSELF AND INSIDE IT THERE WAS A PASSAGE LEADING TO THE UNDERWORLD, BUT HE DID NOT TELL ANYONE ABOUT IT. AND DANTE AND HIS COMPANIONS ONLY RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT ONE OF THE LORDS OF HELL WOULD RISE HERE.

THE COMPANY HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE TREE, WHEN SUDDENLY THE EARTH TREMBLED UNDERFOOT AND A FIERCE HOWL SOUNDED - AND THIS VERY DEMON WOKE UP FROM A DREAM.

-Before the Nightmare-

PERHAPS HE DID NOT RECOVER FULLY, AND IF DANTE, TRISH, LADY AND V ATTACK AT ONCE, THEY MAY BE ABLE TO KILL HIM. NEVERTHELESS, V KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THAT SUCH AN OUTCOME WAS TOO OPTIMISTIC.

“WHAT STRENGTH ...” V MUTTERED.

DANTE, GRINNING, TURNED TO HIM.

“YOU WOULD BLOW YOUR LEGS, V. YOU WANNA GO BACK?”

PERHAPS V WOULD HAVE USED THESE WORDS EARLIER, BUT NOW, DEEP DOWN, HE AGREED WITH THEM.

“WELL ... THEN SEE IT FOR YOURSELF,” HE SAID, TURNED AROUND AND HURRIED OUT OF THIS PLACE. SOON HE WAS CAUGHT UP BY A BIRD, AND WITH GREAT SURPRISE ASKED LADY:

-Before the Nightmare-
-HEY! ARE YOU JUST RUNNING AWAY LIKE THAT?

AND THE BIRD STREWED ALL THE WAY WITH TAUNTS AND REPROACHES. NEITHER HIS FORMER PRIDE, NOR HIS

FORMER ARROGANT SELF-CONFIDENCE, WAS LEFT WITH A DROP.

“APPARENTLY, WE NEED HELP. LETS BRING THAT MAN”

- THE MAN? ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT NERO, OR WHAT? YES, FORGET IT! HE IS WITHOUT A HAND! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN? WHAT GOOD IS IT?

THE BIRD DIDN'T LIE: NERO REALLY DIDN'T RECOVER AND WAS NOT READY TO FIGHT. BUT EVEN SO, THERE'S MORE HELP FROM HIM THAN FROM V HIMSELF.

“I CANNOT HELP DANTE - I WILL ONLY BE AN ANNOYING HINDRANCE. BUT THE BLOOD OF SPARDA FLOWS IN NERO'S VEINS, AND IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE TO INCREASE THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS, EVEN BY A FRACTION OF A PERCENT” V THOUGHT, WONDERING WHO HE WOULD HAVE TO DEAL WITH. HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO HOPE FOR THIS OPTION.

HAVING HARDLY LEFT THE OPENING LEADING TO HELL, V WANDERED TO MORRISON - HE WAS WAITING NEARBY AT THE HELICOPTER. IF YOU USE A TURNTABLE, YOU CAN QUICKLY FLY TO FORTUNA AND BACK.

- JUST DON'T SAY THAT EVERYTHING IS MUCH WORSE THAN YOU THOUGHT? - THE BIRD ASKED CAUTIOUSLY, TO WHICH V CONFIDENTLY NODDED.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-

TRISH IS NOT A HUMAN.

SHE IS A DEMON CREATED BY THE DEMON EMPEROR MUNDUS.

BETRAYED BY THE DARK KNIGHT SPARDA AND SEALED IN HELL, MUNDUS FOR MANY YEARS WAS WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO BE REBORN. IT DIDN'T LET HIM REGAIN ALL HIS STRENGTH, BUT HE MANAGED TO GATHER UNDER THE BANNER OF A HORDE OF DEMONS. AND THE FIRST THING HE DID AFTER THAT WAS REVENGE ON THE TRAITOR.

THE DARK KNIGHT, THE SWORN ENEMY OF MUNDUS, COULD NOT BE FOUND, BUT THE HENCHMEN OF THE LORD REPORTED THAT THEY HAD FOUND WHERE THE WIFE AND CHILDREN OF SPARDA LIVED. THE EMPEROR WAS NEVER FAMOUS FOR KINDNESS AND DID NOT SPARE THE FAMILY OF THE TRAITOR.

HAVING RECEIVED AN ORDER FROM THE LORD, THE HENCHMEN OF MUNDUS WENT TO THE WORLD OF PEOPLE, FOUND EVA, THE WIFE OF SPARDA, AND KILLED HER, BUT MISSED THE SONS. THIS ALARMED THE DEMON EMPEROR.

HE KNEW THAT DANTE AND VERGIL, THE SONS OF SPARDA, WOULD SURELY ONE DAY COME AND AVENGE THEIR FATHER.

THEREFORE, MUNDUS, DAY AFTER DAY, YEAR AFTER YEAR, LOOKED FOR THEM.

THE ELDER BROTHER WAS FOUND FIRST - VERGIL.

HE DID NOT HIDE WHERE HE CAME FROM AND WHO, BUT SIMPLY WANDERED AROUND THE WORLD. MUNDUS SENT COUNTLESS KILLERS TO VERGIL, BUT THEY ALL DIED FROM THE YAMATO, THE LEGACY OF SPARDA. VERGIL MASTERFULLY HANDLED THE KATANA AND DID NOT LEAVE ANY CHANCE TO THE ENEMIES. IN ADDITION, MUNDUS, LOCKED IN HELL, COULD NOT SEND ENOUGH

STRONG SERVANTS TO THE WORLD OF PEOPLE TO DEAL WITH THE SON OF SPARDA.

BUT THE YOUNGEST SON, NAMED DANTE, ACTED DIFFERENTLY: CHANGED HIS NAME AND BEGAN TO LIVE AN ORDINARY HUMAN LIFE.

MUNDUS DID NOT FIND HIM IMMEDIATELY – UNTIL TEN YEARS AFTER THE MURDER OF EVA - AND AT FIRST HE SIMPLY SUSPECTED DANTE OF A CERTAIN PERSON.

THAT MAN WAS CALLED TONY REDGRAVE.

MUNDUS SENT LOWER DEMONS TO HIM, AND TONY WIPED THEM INTO POWDER. THIS WAS THE PROOF: TONY IS DANTE. WELL, WHO ELSE CAN DEAL WITH EVEN LOWER, BUT DEMONS?

THEN THE EMPEROR DECIDED TO CREATE IN THE NAME OF REVENGE A DEMON THAT WOULD OVERSHADOW THE POWER OF ALL HIS MINIONS.

AND HE CREATED, BUT PREVIOUSLY CAREFULLY STUDIED HOW DANTE, VERGIL AND SPARDA FIGHT. AND THE ARMOR FOR THE NEW DEMON WAS FORGED BY THE INFERNAL SMITH MACHIAVELLI. THE CREATED DEMON, HARDENED IN HELLFIRE AND CLAD IN STRONG ARMOR, RECEIVED THE NAME "BLACK KNIGHTS". AND THEY WERE NOT AFRAID OF ANYONE.

THE BLACK KNIGHTS HUNTED TONY REDGRAVE FOR A LONG TIME AND ALREADY DROVE HIM INTO A CORNER, BUT NEVERTHELESS SUFFERED A DEFEAT.

MUNDUS CONTINUED HIS EXPERIMENTS AND CREATED TIME AFTER TIME NEW BLACK KNIGHTS, BUT THEY STILL COULD NOT KILL EITHER VERGIL OR DANTE, WHO WAS HIDING UNDER THE NAME TONY.

WHATEVER YOU SAY, ANY MATERIAL HAS ITS LIMIT. AND THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE CAPABILITIES OF THE SERVANTS OF THE DEMON LORD. TO DEFEAT DANTE, MUNDUS DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH.

IT SO HAPPENED THAT THE SONS OF SPARDA CROSSED AND TRIED TO KILL EACH OTHER, AND THEN IT DAWNED ON MUNDUS: HERE, HERE IS THE MATERIAL FOR THE NEW DEMON!

DURING HIS WANDERINGS, VERGIL SOMEHOW DISCOVERED THE SEAL OF SPARDA. WITH IT'S HELP, THE LEGENDARY KNIGHT CLOSED THE BORDER BETWEEN THE WORLDS, SEALED HIS STRENGTH AND STAYED WITH HUMANS. VERGIL WAS SEDUCED BY THIS POWER AND DECIDED TO GET IT, AND DANTE WENT AGAINST HIS BROTHER, BELIEVING THAT VERGIL WAS OVERLY OBSESSED WITH THE IDEA OF POWER.

TO REMOVE THE SEAL, IT WAS NECESSARY TO CONNECT THE AMULETS OF THE TWO BROTHERS, AND VERGIL NATURALLY TRIED TO TAKE THE AMULET OF DANTE, WHICH HE COULD NOT AGREE WITH.

AS SOON AS THE MINIONS REPORTED ON THE QUARREL BETWEEN THE SONS OF SPARDA, MUNDUS DECIDED TO

WATCH THEM. HE DID NOT INTERVENE, AND WHOEVER HE SENT TO THEM, THEY WILL SWEEP AWAY EVERYONE IN THEIR PATH.

THEN MUNDUS REALIZED THAT THE DISAGREEMENT OF THE BROTHERS WAS IN HIS HAND. AND HE DID NOT LOSE: VERGIL AND DANTE FOUGHT NOT FOR LIFE, BUT FOR DEATH, AND VERGIL LOST.

BUT A PLEASANT SURPRISE HAPPENED A LITTLE LATER: THE LAST BATTLE BETWEEN THE BROTHERS TOOK PLACE IN HELL. AND THE ELDER STAYED THERE WITH AN AMULET.

DANTE, ON THE OTHER HAND, RECEIVED A PIECE OF SPARDA'S POWER, HOWEVER, THE TRUE POWER OF THESE THINGS WAS REVEALED ONLY WITH AN AMULET.

MEANWHILE, VERGIL, WHO REMAINED IN HELL, FOUND OUT ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF MUNDUS AND CHALLENGED HIM, ALTHOUGH FATIGUE AND SEVERE

WOUNDS EXHAUSTED HIM. THIS WAS EXPLOITED BY THE LORD OF DEMONS.

VERGIL WAS STRONG, AND IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE WOUNDS, HE MAY HAVE SURELY DEFEATED MUNDUS, WHO DIDN'T RISE BECAUSE HE DIDN'T COMPLETELY REVIVE. AND SO MUNDUS WITHOUT MUCH DIFFICULTY TOOK THE EXHAUSTED VERGIL AS HIS PRISONER.

IT WAS SPARDA'S ELDEST SON WHO BECAME THE VERY MATERIAL FOR THE NEW BLACK KNIGHT. AND HE TURNED OUT TO BE THE BEST CREATED. HIS POWER WAS PHENOMENAL, AND THE OTHER KNIGHTS WERE NO MATCH FOR HIM.

MUNDUS CALLED HIS CREATION NELO ANGELO. AND ALTHOUGH THE NEW BLACK KNIGHT WAS INCREDIBLY STRONG, HE PRACTICALLY DID NOT GIVE IN TO CONTROL AND REPRESENTED A DANGER TO THE LORD.

HE FELT THAT VERGIL, WHO HAD BECOME THE NUCLEUS FOR THE BODY OF A KNIGHT, DID NOT OBEY HIM, AND

THEN MUNDUS GAVE THE AMULET THAT HE HAD PREVIOUSLY TAKEN AWAY TO THE NEW SERVANT. IT SEEMS THAT THE AMULET SYMBOLIZED THE POWER THAT VERGIL SO PASSIONATELY CRAVED, AND THEREFORE, HAVING RECEIVED THE GIFT, HE BOWED HIS HEAD BEFORE MUNDUS AND REALLY BECAME NELO ANGELO.

MUNDUS WAS NOW READY FOR REVENGE.

HOWEVER, THE EMPEROR DID NOT IMMEDIATELY SEND A NEW TOY INTO BATTLE, OH NO. AS YOU KNOW, DEMONS ARE NOT ABLE TO SHOW THEIR TRUE STRENGTH IN THE WORLD OF PEOPLE, SO DANTE STILL HAD TO BE LURED TO HELL.

AND FOR THIS, MUNDUS CREATED ANOTHER DEMON. ®

-Before the Nightmare-

TRISH BECAME THAT DEMON.

CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF DANTE'S MOTHER, EVA. IT WAS ASSUMED THAT IT WOULD BE

EASIER FOR MUNDUS TO CONVINCЕ DANTE IN THIS NEW CREATION, BECAUSE HE DESPERATELY MISSED HIS MOTHER. AND TRISH BRILLIANTLY FULFILLED THE MISSION ASSIGNED TO HER, BROUGHT DANTE TO THE ISLAND OF MALLEТ, AND THEN, TOGETHER WITH OTHER DEMONS, TRIED TO KILL HIM.

WHEN TRISH REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS, BEFORE HER EYES WERE STILL FLICKERING PICTURES OF HER FIRST MEETING WITH DANTE.

“AND HOW MUCH DID I SLEEP?”

RISING, SHE LOOKED AROUND AND SAW LADY: SHE FELL ON ONE KNEE AND WAS ALREADY PANTING.

- Woke up, finally? She asked in a low voice.

“A LITTLE MORE, AND ALMOST INTO THE COFFIN,” SHE THOUGHT, STRAINING HER LEG MUSCLES. “IS MY DREAM, COLLECTED FROM FRAGMENTS AND IMAGES, A SIGN OF

DEATH?" THESE ARE THE MEMORIES OF ALL THOSE FROM WHOM THEY CREATED ME ... SO BRIGHT ... SO FRESH ... PROBABLY, THEY THOUGHT THAT WAY, ALL THOSE DEMONS LIVED THAT BECAME A PART OF ME. "

- HOW ARE YOU? LADY ASKED AGAIN.

TRISH NODDED SILENTLY AND TURNED TO FACE THE ENEMY

- LOUSY.

BOTH AGAIN RUSHED INTO BATTLE, AND THEIR ENEMY SAT QUIETLY ON A WICKER THING THAT LOOKED LIKE A THRONE, AND WAS NOT GOING TO GET UP.

-Before the Nightmare-
THEIR ENEMY IS URIZEN.

IT WAS HIM WHO NEEDED TO BE KILLED, AND FOR THIS MORRISON HIRED TRISH, LADY AND DANTE.

BUT TRISH AND THE LADY DECIDED THAT THEY HAD BEEN GIVEN THE ORDER - JUST TO SPIT, AND GALLOPED FORWARD, LEAVING DANTE BEHIND, BUT FATE WAS NOT FAVORABLE TO THEM. URIZEN GAVE A FITTING REBUFF.

“THIS IS NO TIME TO BE GREEDY!” - THREW THE LADY AND FIRED A FULL CLIP OF ROCKETS - THEY ESCAPED FROM THE HEFTY ROCKET LAUNCHER KALINA ANN AND FLEW TO THE ENEMY. HOWEVER, TRISH RUSHED TO URIZEN.

BUT HE DID NOT EVEN JERK, ALTHOUGH THE ROCKETS EXPLODED ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

HE DID NOT TWITCH.

-Before the Nightmare-

SOME STRANGE THING FLEW IN FRONT OF HIM AND REFLECTED ALL THE ATTACKS OF LADY AND TRISH. AND THE SAME THING STOPPED ALL THE MISSILES TO ONE. NOTICING THIS, TRISH WAVED SPARDA'S SWORD - SHE

RECEIVED WEAPONS FROM DANTE HIMSELF. INITIALLY, THE PLAN WAS AS FOLLOWS: LADY FIRED ROCKETS IN URIZEN, AND TRISH ATTACKS WITH A SWORD.

BUT THE IDEA FAILED: HE BEAT OFF ALL THE SHELLS WITH A STRANGE THING AND LAUNCHED A SHOCK WAVE IN RESPONSE, WHICH SCATTERED THE GIRLS TO WHERE, HAVING PREVIOUSLY FIRMLY PRINTED ON THE ROCKY WALLS OF THE TREE.

“DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT,” URIZEN GROWLED OMINOUSLY, AND THE HUNTERS' HAIR STOOD ON END FROM HIS VOICE.

TRISH IMMEDIATELY GOT TO HER FEET AND GATHERED STRENGTH IN HER RIGHT HAND AND GRABBED SOMETHING.

IT WAS ARTEMIS - THE DIABOLICAL RIFLE GUN THAT DANTE GAVE HER. ANOTHER CREATION OF THE INFERNAL FORGE MACHIAVELLI, CAPABLE OF RELEASING COUNTLESS LIGHT ARROWS. AND THE “STONE” THAT

COVERED TRISH'S HAND IS THE SAME MATERIAL FROM WHICH ARMOR WAS PREPARED FOR THE BLACK KNIGHTS. WE CAN SAY THAT ARTEMIS AND THE BLACK KNIGHTS ARE THE CLOSEST RELATIVES.

“WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT ?!”

LIGHT ARROWS PARTED IN THE AIR WITH AN UMBRELLA, SURROUNDED URIZEN AND RUSHED TOWARDS HIM. TRISH SINCERELY BELIEVED THAT A STRANGE THING PROTECTING THE ENEMY COULD NOT COPE WITH A MASSIVE ATTACK...

BUT SHE WAS DISAPPOINTED - A NEW SHOCK WAVE KNOCKED DOWN ALL THE ARROWS TO ONE AND AGAIN THREW TRISH AWAY - SHE HIT THE WALL FROM ALL OVER.

Before the Nightmare-

- IT CANNOT BE ... SUCH POWER...

TRISH IS HARD TO SURPRISE: SHE WAS BORN IN THE WORLD OF DEMONS AND SAW MANY STRANGE CREATURES. TAKE THE SAME EMPEROR WHO FELL AT THE HANDS OF DANTE; TAKE THE SAME RULER OF THE ISLAND OF DUMARY AND HIS MINIONS ... WHATEVER YOU THINK OF, ALL ARE POWERFUL DEMONS. AT TIMES, ONLY RUMORS OF THEIR FAME REACHED TRISH, BUT EACH OF THEM WAS A UNIQUE AND POWERFUL INDIVIDUAL.

ONLY UNTIL THIS DAY, TRISH HAD NEVER HEARD OF URIZEN.

HOWEVER, SHE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN TOO SURPRISED IF SHE HAD FOUND OUT THAT A NEW DEMON HAS ENTERED INTO HELL. BUT SO POWERFUL, WITH SUCH POWER...

-Before the Nightmare-
- DANTE...

STILL THINKING WHO THIS URIZEN IS, TRISH FELL TO THE GROUND AND LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

WHEN NERO OPENED HIS EYES, THERE WAS ALREADY SOME STRANGE GUY NEXT TO HIM.

NOTICING HIM, NERO WAS WARY - WHAT IF THIS ONE GRABBED HIS RIGHT HAND? THE STRANGER SMILED AT NERO:

“APPARENTLY, YOU MANAGED TO RECOVER,” THE GUY SAID.

NERO LOOKED AT HIM AND NOTICED THAT HIS HANDS WERE ALL IN TATTOOS, BUT HIS FACE WAS PALE AND CLEAN; HOLDS A CANE IN ONE HAND AND AN OLD BOOK IN THE OTHER. AND BY THE WAY, THE WINDOW BEHIND THE GUY STOOD WIDE OPEN.

-Before the Nightmare-
“THEY LOCKED THE DOOR, I HAD TO USE THE WINDOW,” THE GUY EXPLAINED BEFORE NERO ASKED, AND, WITHOUT WAITING FOR INVITATIONS, SAT DOWN NEXT TO THE BED. - CALL ME V. THIS IS MY NAME” THE STRANGER INTRODUCED HIMSELF.

FOR SOME REASON, NERO TENSED AND SQUINTED AT HIS RIGHT HAND - IT ALWAYS LET HIM KNOW IF THERE WAS A DEMON NEARBY. A GOOD BONUS... ONLY THERE IS NO MORE HAND, AND IN ITS PLACE, STARTING FROM THE ELBOW, - THE STUMP IS BANDAGED.

FOR SEVERAL DAYS HE LAY IN A COMA, AND SO THE MEMORIES OF EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED WERE FRAGMENTARY. THAT IS, HE WOKE UP - BUT HIS HAND WERE GONE. AND AS HE WOKE UP WITHOUT A HAND, HE DID NOT PUT UP WITH IT, ALTHOUGH TWO DAYS HAD ALREADY PASSED. SO IT TURNED OUT THAT NERO WAS LOOKING AT V WITH AN ANNOYED LOOK, AND HE UNKINDLY ASKED:

“WHO ELSE ARE YOU?”

- Before the Nightmare -

“I KNOW THE ONE WHO STOLE YOUR HAND,” SAID V.

- WHAT?

“THAT DEMON ... CONSUMED YAMATO, HIDDEN IN YOUR HAND, AND GAINED INCREDIBLE POWER.” DANTE IS ALREADY HEADING TOWARDS HIM.

- HOW DO YOU KNOW? NERO ASKED.

VI SIGHED AND ANSWERED:

“I KNOW, AFTER ALL, THE SAME DEMON HUNTER DANTE. AND FOR A LONG TIME, I PURSUE THE ONE ... WHO TOOK YOUR HAND. THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU” V LOOKED AT NERO. “I ASKED DANTE FOR HELP, I WANTED TO BORROW HIS STRENGTH, BECAUSE I ALONE COULD NOT DO IT ALONE ... HOWEVER, THE DEMON WAS MORE POWERFUL THAN I EXPECTED,” HE ADDED AND NODDED TOWARDS THE STUMP OF NERO. - I ADVISE YOU TO COME. DANTE MAY NEED HELP.

NERO GRINNED:

- DANTE AND NEEDS HELP? IS THIS A JOKE?

ONCE DANTE SAVED NERO'S LIFE - NO MORE, NO LESS. IN ADDITION, NERO HAD TO FACE OFF WITH A FAMOUS DEMON HUNTER, AND HE KNEW: DANTE WOULDN'T BE SO OVERWHELMED. THERE IS NO ENEMY THAT DANTE WOULD NOT DEFEAT.

V SILENTLY PUT OUT HIS HAND. NERO WAS WARY, BUT THEN HE NOTICED THAT THE TATTOOS ON HIM SOMEHOW STRANGELY CHANGE. FINALLY, A SHADOW SEPARATED FROM THE HAND AND TURNED INTO A BIG BIRD. HE CALMLY GOT UP, AND THEN SANK INTO V'S HAND WITH THE APPEARANCE THAT HE WAS ALWAYS SITTING THERE, AND THEN, MEASURING NERO WITH A LOOK, HE SPOKE:

- Before the Nightmare -
- BOY, WHY DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND YET? GET READY, JERK! - IT CROAKED.

NERO SQUINTED AT V.

“WE DON’T HAVE TIME,” HE CALMLY REMARKED, AND SILENTLY, WITHOUT EXPLANATION, TURNED TO THE WINDOW. “DO WHAT I ASK, AND THAT’S ENOUGH. OR DO YOU THINK YOU CAN’T WIN WITHOUT YOUR HAND?”

NERO GRITTED HIS TEETH.

HE DID NOT WANT TO DANCE TO THE TUNE OF THIS STRANGE PERSON, WHICH IN FACT COULD TURN OUT TO BE A DEVIL, BUT NO MATTER WHAT, NERO OWED DANTE. AND IF THE MAN WITH THE BIRD DID NOT LIE, IT TURNS OUT THAT HE, NERO, WITH HIS HELP WILL BE ABLE TO GET TO THE SWORN ENEMY.

AND NOT TO SAY THAT WITHOUT A DEMONIC HAND, NERO IS COMPLETELY USELESS. EVEN DURING THE DAYS OF THE ORDER, NERO DID NOT USE THE RIGHT HAND AT ALL, HE HID IT IN BANDAGES, TELLING EVERYONE THAT HE WAS INJURED, AND IN THE MEANTIME HE HAD DONE SO WELL WITH DEMONS WITH ONE LEFT ARM.

- WE NEED TO GRAB A WEAPON – NERO SAID

NATURALLY, WITHOUT A WEAPON I CANNOT FIGHT. I NEED TO GET TO THE GARAGE AND NOT GET CAUGHT IN THE EYES OF KYRIE AND NICO. PICK UP THE BLUE ROSE, THE RED QUEEN, AND THEN...

“HURRY UP” V AND HIS BIRD URGED IN.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-

AND NOW, HAVING DEALT WITH THE DEMONS WHO DECIDED TO BLOCK HIS PATH, DANTE GOT TO THE GOAL.

“HEY, ARE YOU THE KING OF THIS GARBAGE DUMP?” HE ASKED, LOOKING AROUND.

LADY AND TRISH DECIDED TO GO AHEAD, AND NOW THEY’RE LYING UNCONSCIOUS BY THE WALL. AND THE DEMON DIDN’T EVEN MOVE HIS ASS OFF THE THRONE.

“NOT BAD. THESE ARE TWO OF THE STRONGEST WOMEN IN THE WORLD YOU JUST DEFEATED”

DANTE DID NOT JOKE: THERE ARE NO EQUALS IN DEMON HUNTING TO LADY AND TRISH. AND WE MUST REMEMBER THAT IT WAS THEY WHO ALWAYS TOOK THE PREY FROM UNDER DANTE’S NOSE.

“OKAY, WELL, LET’S FINISH HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE” - DANTE TOOK OUT TWO PISTOLS FROM THE HOLSTER AND AIMED AT THE DEMON. “SEEMS LIKE I HIT THE JACKPOT.”

WHEN V SPOKE THE NAME OF THE TARGET, DANTE ALREADY KNEW WHO HE WOULD HAVE TO DEAL WITH, ALTHOUGH AT HEART HE REFUSED TO PUT UP WITH IT.

HE SHOULD NOT HAVE RISEN. IT IS SIMPLY NOT POSSIBLE.

BUT IF THE LADY AND TRISH SO EASILY LOST TO HIM, IT TURNS OUT THAT DANTE CAN ONLY ADMIT: THE DEMON IN FRONT OF HIM IS THE SAME.

“DANTE ...” THE DEMON ON THE THRONE BROKE THE SILENCE.

- Before the Nightmare -

AND HE KNEW PERFECTLY WELL WHO DANTE WAS. OF COURSE! THE DEMON HIMSELF IS THE REASON DANTE IS STILL FIGHTING. THAT’S WHAT V SAID.

“YOU SHOULD’VE STAYED DEAD” DANTE REMARKED, BUT THE DEMON DID NOT ANSWER HIM. “OKAY, TIME TO SEND YOU BACK TO HELL!”

SCORCHING IMMEDIATELY FROM THE TWO PISTOLS, DANTE RUSHED TO THE ENEMY. AND ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO GUNS MORE RAPID IN THE WORLD THAN NELL GOLDSTEIN’S MASTERPIECES, NONE OF THE BULLETS PASSED THE BARRIER CREATED BY THE STRANGE THING HOVERING IN FRONT OF THE DEMON. IT SWIFTLY BLOCKED ALL ATTACKS, AS IF THE BARRIER HAD ITS OWN FREE WILL.

- HUH, WHAT’S UP WITH THIS GUY

DECIDING THAT THE DEMON COULD NOT BE REACHED WITH BULLETS, DANTE REMOVED PUT HIS PISTOLS AWAY AND GRABBED THE HANDLE OF THE REHELLION, WHICH WAS HANGING BEHIND HIM. WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE REBELLION IS DANTE’S FAVORITE SWORD AND THE FIRST-CLASS DEMONIC WEAPON WITH WHICH HE PASSED

THROUGH FIRE, ICE AND ALL KINDS OF DEMONIC GARBAGE.

DANTE, HOLDING HIS SWORD IN FRONT OF HIM, RUSHED FORWARD, BUT A STRANGE THING REPULSED THIS ATTACK.

AND NOW IT WAS ALREADY OUT OF THE ORDINARY. THERE IS NO WEAPON OR CREATURE IN THE WORLD THAT THE REBEL CANNOT EVEN SCRATCH.

“AND THAT’S ALL?” THE MYSTERIOUS DEMON EMPEROR ASKED.

YOU COULDN’T UNDERSTAND WHO HE WAS FROM THE STRANGLED VOICE, BUT IF YOU RECALL HOW EASILY HE REPELLED DANTE’S ATTACK, THERE’S ONLY ONE OPTION

...

“AND WHERE DID YOU GET SUCH STRENGTH?” HE ASKED, AND THE DEMON GRINNED. “LAUGH WHILE YOU CAN, IT

WONT LAST LONG!” DANTE SNAPPED AND AWAKENED THE POWER THAT WAS SLEEPING IN HIM. THE SAME FORCE HE COULDN’T CONTROL IN CHILDHOOD AND WHICH SHOWED ITSELF WHEN DANTE WAS ON THE BRINK OF DEATH. THE STRENGTH THAT WAS GIVEN TO HIM BY THE BLOOD OF A DEMON FLOWING IN THE VEINS OF THE HEIR TO SPARDA.

DANTE HAD TRANSFORMED FROM A MAN INTO A DEMON. AND THAT WAS HIS TRUE FORM.

HE REMEMBERED THIS POWER ONLY IN EXCEPTIONAL CASES, BECAUSE HE STUBBORNLY CONSIDERED HIMSELF A HUMAN, NOT A DEMON. HE WAS SICK OF TURNING INTO SOMETHING ELSE.

BUT WITHOUT THIS POWER, THE DEMON EMPEROR CANNOT BE DEFEATED.

“IT’S TIME TO WRAP THIS UP, I’M A BIT LATE BUT I HAVE A BIRTHDAY PARTY TO ATTEND!” DANTE SPOKE, TURNED INTO A DEMON AND AGAIN RUSHED TO THE ENEMY.

THE CENTRAL SQUARE OF RED GRAVE WAS FILLED WITH ONLOOKERS.

EVERYONE STARED AT THE STRANGE THING THAT LOOKED LIKE A TREE THAT HAD BEEN STANDING TALL IN JUST A COUPLE OF DAYS. SOME PHOTOGRAPHED IT, SOMEONE PRAYED TO IT, SOME ARGUED ABOUT IT, NOT BEING ABLE TO DECIDE WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT.

A LITTLE FURTHER FROM THEM STOOD MORRISON. HE, SMOKING A CIGARETTE, PUT HIS HAND IN HIS POCKET AND TOOK OUT A WATCH - A LITTLE THING DEAR TO HIS HEART. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN THREE HOURS SINCE THE COMPANY OF DANTE CLIMBED INTO THAT "TREE". AFTER ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES, ONLY V RETURNED AND ASKED TO FLY FOR NERO.

-Before the Nightmare-

RETURNING THE WATCH TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE, MORRISON STEPPED FORWARD AND LOOKED UP AT THE TREE. HE DID NOT KNOW IF IT WAS A TREE AT ALL, BUT HE FELT THAT THE THING WAS NOT FROM THIS WORLD -

THAT WAS HOW HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY EXPERIENCE WITH DANTE. HE ALWAYS TOOK ON SOME KIND OF DEMONIC THING.

“SOMEHOW I DON’T REMEMBER THAT WE CAME ACROSS SUCH THINGS,” MUTTERED MORRISON, EXHALING SMOKE.

WHEN V RELUCTANTLY DROPPED WHAT CITY THEY WERE GOING TO, HIS INSTINCT TOLD MORRISON THAT THE MATTER WAS BAD.

CITY OF RED GRAVE.

MORRISON DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE NAME OF THE TOWN AND THE PSEUDONYM TONY REDGRAVE, UNDER WHICH DANTE HAD WORKED IN THE PAST, COINCIDED BY A LUCKY COINCIDENCE. THE INTERMEDIARY, OF COURSE, DID NOT KNOW THE ENTIRE BIOGRAPHY OF THE DEMON HUNTER, BUT COULD EASILY GUESS WHY DANTE WOULD HIDE HIS REAL NAME.

AND SO, LOOKING AT THE GIANT TREE, MORRISON REMEMBERED SOMETHING ABOUT THE TIMES WHEN DANTE STILL WALKED UNDER THE NAME OF TONY REDGRAVE.

TONY HAD A BAD REPUTATION AND YOU'D WANT TO AVOID HIM, BUT YOU COULDN'T SHUT YOUR EYES WHEN YOU DID SEE HIM. EVERYONE WHO WENT ON A MISSION WITH HIM DIED VERY QUICKLY. IT ENDED UP THAT NO ONE WANTED TO GET DOWN TO BUSINESS IF TONY WAS INVOLVED IN IT. MORRISON DIDN'T REALLY BELIEVE BAD RUMORS, BUT THE ENTIRE BUSINESS WORKED ON TRUST, SO THE GENERAL INTERMEDIARY HAD TO REFUSE THE SERVICES OF THE FAMOUS MERCENARY.

MORRISON THEN, OF COURSE, DID NOT KNOW ABOUT ANY DEMONS. AND HE DID NOT KNOW THAT EVERY TASK OF TONY - OTHERWISE DANTE - TURNS INTO A SHOWDOWN BETWEEN HIM AND THE DEMONS.

AND ONLY THEN MORRISON FOUND OUT THAT DANTE IS THE SON OF THE LEGENDARY DARK KNIGHT SPARDA. THE

HERO WHO DEFEATED THE LORD OF HELL HIMSELF. THE INTERMEDIARY GUESSED THAT THE DEMONS HAD BEEN TRYING TO KILL DANTE SINCE CHILDHOOD, WANTING TO AVENGE THE BLOOD OF RELATIVES THAT SPARDA HAD ONCE SLAIN, AND THAT'S WHY THE HUNTER HAD TO CHANGE HIS NAME - ALL IN ORDER TO HIDE FROM THE LEGION OF ALL KINDS OF CREATURES. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE BAD RUMORS ABOUT TONY CAME IN THOSE YEARS WHEN THE DEMONS NEVERTHELESS FOUND HIM AND TRIED TO FINISH HIM OFF, AND DANTE'S COMPANIONS WERE SIMPLY UNLUCKY - THEY WERE NEARBY AND FELL INTO A MEAT GRINDER.

NATURALLY, MORRISON COULD ONLY GUESS HOW THE MATTER WAS, AND THE ANXIETY DID NOT LEAVE THE OLD MAN, PROMPTING HIM TO THINK THAT HE WAS RIGHT AGAIN AND THAT THE DEMON KING APPEARED IN REDGRAVE JUST BECAUSE OF DANTE.

JUST LIKE A DEMON FROM THE ISLAND OF MALLET.

AFTER THAT INCIDENT, DANTE DID NOT SHOW UP AT THE OFFICE FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

IF YOU COME ACROSS WORK RELATED TO THE KILLING OF A DEMON, A BETTER PERFORMER THAN DANTE CANNOT BE FOUND. BUT THERE ARE THE RARE CASES WHERE DANTE HIMSELF TOOK LONGER THAN A COUPLE OF HOURS – BUT THAT IS A SEPARATE DISCUSSION ABOUT MALLET ISLAND. YOU CAN LITERALLY COUNT WITH YOUR FINGER THE USUAL TIME OF DANTE’S JOBS, EVERYTHING ENDED IN A COUPLE OF MINUTES. WELL, AN HOUR, AT VERY MAXIMUM.

BUT THIS TIME, DANTE HAD BEEN GONE FOR 3 HOURS.

“WE’VE KNOWN EACH OTHER A LONG TIME. YOU’VE NEVER HAD THIS MUCH TROUBLE, YOU GONNA MAKE IT THROUGH THIS?” MUTTERED MORRISON TO HIMSELF.

- Before the Nightmare -

HAVING REACHED THE TOP OF THE TOWER, NERO STOPPED WALKING.

HE NOTICED HOW DANTE WAS FIGHTING THE DEMON ALREADY AND WAS ALIVE AND WELL.

- WELL, DANTE ALREADY HAS IT COVERED AND THE DEMON WILL BE DEAD SOONER OR LATER. WHAT AM I EVEN HERE FOR? - COMPLAINED NERO.

V WENT UP TO HIM AND STOOD BY A LITTLE DISTANCE.

“IT’S NOT THAT SIMPLE” - HE OBJECTED. “HE TOOK YOUR RIGHT HAND AND GAINED TREMENDOUS STRENGTH.”[®]

-Before the Nightmare-

NERO TURNED TO HIM AND ONCE AGAIN ASKED HIMSELF:
“WHO THE HELL IS V? A BONY, PALE MAN, ALL IN TATTOOS, WALKS WITH A CANE, BUT FORGETS TO LEAN

WITHOUT IT, AND HE HAS A DEMONIC BIRD - IN GENERAL, THE GUY A RIDDLE.

“WELL THEN, I'LL GO FIRST. I ADVISE YOU NOT TO FALL BEHIND”

“YEAH” NERO NODDED.

V DEFTLY JUMPED ON A “SHADOW” AND IT RUSHED FORWARD. IT SEEMS THAT THIS THING IS HIS COMPANION, LIKE THE BIRD.

- WHAT A STRANGE GUY, THIS V.

THE PSEUDONYM DOES NOT REALLY EXPLAIN ANYTHING, AND IN ADDITION TO THESE STRANGE FORCES - EVERYTHING LITERALLY SHOUTED THAT V SHOULD NOT BE TRUSTED. BUT FOR SOME REASON NERO BELIEVED HIM. THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT HIS VOICE YOU'D TRUST.

“EH ... I’LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO” MUTTERED NERO AND GRABBED HIS RIGHT ELBOW. THE ARM, OF COURSE, WAS GONE NOW, BUT THE HABIT REMAINED. “I OUGHT TO RETURN THE FAVOR TO THIS SON OF A BITCH.”

IN THE DISTANCE, THEY STILL FOUGHT. MORE PRECISELY, THE GIGANTIC ENEMY CALMLY SAT ON THE THRONE AND REPULSED ALL THE ATTACKS OF DANTE. A STRONG DEMON, V DID NOT LIE.

“AND HOW WILL I PUT IT WHEN I SEE DANTE?” - FLASHED THROUGH NERO’S HEAD, BUT HE SHOOK HIS HEAD AND MOVED ON. “IT’S NECESSARY FOR ME TO FIGHT THIS GUY, HE TOOK MY ARM”

“I NEED TO GET YAMATO BACK” NERO MUTTERED AND MOVED TOWARDS HIS GOAL. *Before the Nightmare-*

AS SOON AS THE TROUBLE IN FORTUNA SETTLED, DANTE ENTRUSTED NERO WITH THE ONLY MEMORABLE THING THAT REMAINED OF HIS BROTHER - YAMATO. JUST LIKE

THAT, HE GAVE THE BLADE AND SAID: "IT STAYS IN THE FAMILY"

DANTE NEVER TOLD WHY HE LEFT YAMATO, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS AFTER IT WHEN HE APPEARED IN FORTUNA. IT WAS A DANGEROUS SWORD THAT DANTE COULDN'T HAVE JUST LET FLOATING AROUND.

AS FOR THE REAL REASON ... MAYBE DANTE DECIDED TO BELIEVE IN NERO.

AND NERO KEPT AND NOW LOST YAMATO. TOGETHER WITH A DEMONIC HAND.

OF COURSE, NERO FELT WILD GUILT: HE FAILED DANTE, COULD NOT DEFEND THE SWORD ... AND NOW THIS BURNING FEELING PUSHED HIM FORWARD.

"SOMETHING I CHERISHED. A PEACEFUL LIFE IN FORTUNA WITH KYRIE AND THE KIDS. COMPLETELY RUINED. AND I FORGOT THAT THEY COULD COME TO MY HOME. AND

WHY DID I DECIDE THAT IT COULDN'T BE ANY WORSE THAN IN FORTUNA?" NERO THOUGHT WHILE HE WALKED, BUT A HORDE OF DEMONS BLOCKED THE WAY. JUDGING BY THE LOOK, SOME WASPS OR BUGS. NERO GRINNED.

- COME ON THEN! ONE BY ONE, ALL AT ONCE! - HE SHOUTED AND TOOK HOLD OF THE OF THE RED QUEEN, WHICH HUNG BEHIND HIM.

YES, HE IS NOW WITHOUT THE DEMONIC ARM (DEVIL BRINGER), BUT CAN STILL FIGHT. AND STOPPING HIM WILL NO WORK.

Devil May Cry

- Before the Nightmare -

V STEPPED FORWARD, HOPING TO AT LEAST CLEAR THE PATH A LITTLE FOR NERO. INSIDE THIS TREE WHICH IS NAMED QLIPHOTH, THERE IS A PORTAL TO THE WORLD OF DEMONS, SO HORDES OF ALL KINDS OF CREATURES SCURRY ABOUT THROUGH THE PLACE IN SEARCH OF HUMAN BLOOD. THE CONSTANT BATTLES WITH THEM ARE EXHAUSTING AND TAKING TIME, AND NERO WAS NOT IN GOOD SHAPE, SO THE MAIN TASK OF V WAS TO QUICKLY BRING HIM TO THE DEMON LORD.

BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH V DESTROYED THE GROUPS OF DEMONS, NERO NEVER SHOWED UP.

- HE'S LATE – SAID THE BIRD. ALMOST AT THE SAME MOMENT, THE SHADOW, WHICH BECAME A PANTHER, QUIETLY HOWLED.”

-Before the Nightmare-

“THE CAT THINKS SO TOO” – V TRANSLATES THE PANTHER (SHADOW) FOR THE BIRD (GRIFFON).

BEHIND V, DANTE AND THE DEMON LORD STILL FOUGHT.

V SIGHED. THERE WAS LITTLE OF HIMSELF, AND HE COULD NOT HELP, THUS WHY HE BROUGHT OVER NERO.

“COME BACK,” V ORDERED, AND THE SHADOW, TURNING INTO A BLACK MASS, WRAPPED AROUND HIS LEGS.

SO V MOVED MUCH, MUCH FASTER THAN HIS FRAIL BODY ALLOWED. THE CRUMBS OF POWER THAT V HAD REMAINED IN THIS, WITHOUT EXAGGERATION, WORLD OF DEATH, HELPED.

WHEN V GOT TO NERO, HE DISCOVERED THAT HE WAS BUSY WITH ANOTHER SKIRMISH OF DEMONS. NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO ANYTHING, NERO FAMOUSLY SHOT AND CHOPPED DOWN ENEMIES - HE WASN'T EVEN OUT OF BREATH! EXTRA EVIDENCE THAT HE HAS MORE THAN ENOUGH STRENGTH.

V STOPPED, HIS BIRD FLEW TO NERO, AND ONLY THEN DID HE NOTICE THAT THEY HAD COME FOR HIM, AND SMILED.

- WHAT? IS THAT ALL? HE ASKED NONCHALANTLY. V GRUNTED AND STEPPED CLOSER.

“I THINK I ALREADY SAID ... WE CANNOT DEFEAT THE ENEMY WITHOUT YOU.”

NERO WAS ABOUT TO ANSWER, BUT NEXT CAME ANOTHER CROWD OF DEMONS, WHICH THE BIRD IMMEDIATELY BURNED WITH LIGHTNING – AND IT SOARED ABOVE THEIR HEADS.

- GOT IT, HERO? GO AHEAD! WE’LL DEAL WITH IT OURSELVES!

NERO RELUCTANTLY AGREED AND MOVED ON.

FOLLOWING HIS GAZE, V GOT READY AND PREPARED TO FINISH OFF THE DEMONS WHILE THE CHATTY BIRD FRIED WITH LIGHTNING.

- HEY V! COME ON, HELP! WE CAN'T FINISH THEM! THE BIRD CRIED, LAUNCHING ANOTHER LIGHTNING INTO THE CROWD OF DEMONS. SHADOW ALSO CHOSE THE VICTIM AND RUSHED TO IT.

THE BIRD AND THE SHADOWY FIGURE BOTH HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH TO SMASH CROWDS OF DEMONS EVEN WITHOUT THE HELP OF A MASTER.

BUT THERE WAS ONE ISSUE: THEY COULD NOT "KILL" THE DEMONS.

V'S FAMILIARS (NAME GIVEN TO CREATURES HE CAN CONTROL) ARE LIKE DREAMS, AND A PERSON, SUFFERING IN A DREAM, CANNOT DIE IN REALITY. IT TURNED OUT THAT V'S SUBORDINATES WERE CAPABLE OF TORMENTING DEMONS, LIKE NIGHTMARES, BUT COULDN'T TAKE THEIR LIVES.

-HEY V! MOVE! - THE BIRD CALLED AGAIN, RAINING THE ENEMIES WITH LIGHTNING FROM ABOVE.

“TAKE YOUR TIME,” V MUTTERED, WENT TO THE DEMON AND THRUST A CANE INTO IT.

HE HAS VERY LITTLE STRENGTH, BUT EVEN HE HAD ENOUGH STRENGTH TO GRANT DEATH TO THE TORTURED DEMONS.

“TRASH” HE SAID TO THE PIERCED ONE, AND IT SHATTERED INTO PIECES.

SO ONE CREATURE DIED, AND THERE WERE MANY MORE TO GO.

-Before the Nightmare-

“KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK, PRINCESS!” JOKED GRIFFON.

“WELL THEN ...” V AGREED AND WANDERED OFF TO THE NEXT ENEMY.

CHAPTER 19: NICO

UPON LEARNING THAT NERO HAD ESCAPED FROM THE HOSPITAL, KYRIE FELT SICK WITH ANXIETY.

- NICO ... WHAT DO I DO? - SHE ASKED IN A TREMBLING VOICE.

NICO NEARLY HUGGED HER, BUT CHANGED HER MIND.

- WE CAN JUST WAIT, HE'LL COME ANYWAY” SHE TRIED TO COMFORT KYRIE, BUT SHE STILL RUSHED FROM SIDE TO SIDE, UNABLE TO CALM DOWN.

WHEN THEY ENTERED THE GARAGE, IT TURNED OUT THAT THERE WAS NEITHER A BLUE ROSE NOR A RED QUEEN.

- Before the Nightmare -

OBVIOUSLY, NERO TOOK THEM. WENT TO FIGHT SOMEWHERE.

NICO DID NOT KNOW WHAT KYRIE HAD DECIDED THERE, BUT SHE HERSELF GUESSED: NERO WENT TO GET HIS ARM BACK.

AND KYRIE JUST WALKED AND WALKED, REMEMBERING NERO. NICO COULD NOT STAND IT AND LOOKED AWAY.

USUALLY NERO TAKES CARE OF KYRIE AND WOULDN'T DO THAT, BUT HERE IT'S DIFFERENT AND IT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD WHY. TELLING KYRIE HOW HE'S ABOUT TO FACE SOMEONE SO POWERFUL, ESPECIALLY AFTER JUST ESCAPING FROM THE HOSPITAL WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE, THEREFORE IT WAS BETTER HE SNEAKED AWAY.

THERE WAS ONLY ONE QUESTION: WHERE DID NERO GO. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE DEMON HAS HIS ARM, BUT HOW CAN HE KNOW WHO THIS THIEF IS AND WHERE TO LOOK FOR HIM.

“LISTEN, NICO,” JULIO SUDDENLY CALLED TO HER.

NICO TURNED AND SAW HIS FACE PEERING OUT FROM BEHIND THE GARAGE DOOR. JULIO WAS CLEARLY WORRIED.

- WHAT? DINNER IS STILL A LONG WAY OFF.

JULIO SHOOK HIS HEAD AND RUSHED TOWARD HER.

“THERE IS SOMETHING ... I SAW A HELICOPTER LAST NIGHT,” HE SAID.

NICO FROWNED.

“WAIT A MINUTE ...” SHE CROUCHED AND LOOKED THE BOY IN THE FACE CAREFULLY. “THIS HELICOPTER, BY CHANCE, DIDN’T LAND FOR US?”

“YEAH, OUT OF TOWN, BUT VERY CLOSE BY,” JULIO ADMITTED, A LITTLE LOST. HE, TOO, SEEMS TO HAVE

REALIZED THAT SINCE NERO HAS DISAPPEARED, IT'S NOT WORTH JOKING.

- IT'S TRUE? ASKED KYRIE. SHE CAUGHT AT THE EDGE OF HER EAR, WHAT NICO AND JULIO WERE TALKING ABOUT.

- PURE TRUTH! I ONLY SAW THEM (HELICOPTERS) IN BOOKS, SO I WAS VERY SURPRISED ...

NICO AND KYRIE LOOKED AT EACH OTHER.

HELICOPTERS FLY INTO THIS OUTBACK ONLY ON HOLIDAYS, AND THEN NERO DISAPPEARED ... IT CAN'T BE JUST A COINCIDENCE.

- AND THEN WHAT? DID THE HELICOPTER FLY AWAY?
NICO SPECIFIED, AND JULIO NODDED.

“IT'S CLEAR,” SHE MUTTERED, STRAIGHTENING UP.

MOST LIKELY, THE HELICOPTER PICKED UP NERO AND TOOK HIM SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY. AND THE ONE WHO FLEW FOR NERO MUST HAVE KNOWN THE DEMON WHO TOOK THE ARM.

“WHERE IS HE ...” KYRIE WAS WORRIED AGAIN.

NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, EVERYTHING WAS DECIDED QUICKLY. MAYBE THE MATTER REQUIRED HASTE.

“I’M SAYING, KYRIE, LET’S WAIT. DON’T WORRY! HE’S A STRONG GUY, HE WON’T BE DEFEATED LIKE THAT” NICO TRIED TO REASSURE HER, HOWEVER, SHE HAD NOTHING ELSE TO SAY.

“YOU’RE RIGHT ...” KYRIE NODDED, AS IF STRUGGLING TO CONVINCHE HERSELF.

AND WHAT CHOICE WAS SHE LEFT WITH, REALLY?
THROW THE KIDS AND GO FOR NERO? SHE WOULDN’T BE

ABLE TO, AND SHE'S NEVER BEEN OUTSIDE THE CITY. THEN NICO COULD HAVE GONE, BUT WHERE? IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO SEARCH.

ONLY THING THAT REMAINED WAS TO WAIT. WAIT UNTIL NERO RETURNS OR UNTIL THEY ARE TOLD WHERE TO LOOK.

"KYRIE ..." NICO CALLED AND GRITTED HER CIGARETTE. - I'VE BEEN LOST IN THE GARAGE FOR A WHILE, CAN YOU KEEP THE SMALL ONES OUT?

KYRIE LOOKED AT HER BLANKLY.

- SOMETHING HAPPENED?

-Before the Nightmare-
SMOKE NICO EXHALED OUT THE DOOR, BECAUSE SHE HERSELF DECIDED NOT TO SMOKE NEXT TO KYRIE, AND REPLIED:

- I'LL WORK ALL NIGHT LONG. THE JOB IS COMPLICATED, I DO NOT WANT ANYONE TO GET IN THE WAY.

KYRIE DID NOT BEGIN TO PRY, AND ONLY ANSWERED:
"OKAY."

LEAVING THE GARAGE AND LIGHTING ANOTHER CIGARETTE, NICO BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT "WORK". SHE HAD BEEN PLANNING THIS PROJECT FOR A LONG TIME - SINCE NERO LOST HIS ARM - BUT SHE DIDN'T GET TO THE DETAILS.

NICO WANTED TO MAKE A PROSTHESIS.

IF NERO CANNOT LIVE AN ORDINARY LIFE, KYRIE WILL BE EXHAUSTED, WHICH MEANS THAT THE PROSTHESIS WILL COME IN HANDY SOONER OR LATER.

BUT IF NERO GETS INTO TROUBLE, THEN HE WILL NEED NOT A PROSTHESIS, BUT STRENGTH. THAT WHICH

REPLACES THE DEMONIC HAND. SO NICO DECIDED TO COMBINE TWO THINGS - A PROSTHESIS AND A WEAPON CREATED ON THE BASIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGNUS.

AND NO MATTER WHAT NERO SAYS THERE.

“WELL, LET’S HAVE SOME FUN! ..” NICO KNEW THAT SHE WOULD NOT BACK DOWN NOW. “AND LOOK, COME BACK IDIOT! YOU STILL HAVE TO TEST MY GENIUS!” SHE COMMANDED NERO, WHO HAD GONE TO WHO

Devil May Cry[®]
-Before the Nightmare-

WHEN NERO MADE IT TO THE DEMON EMPEROR, THE DEMON THREW DANTE AWAY ON THE GROUND WITH ONE LAST HIT.

FLAT ON THE GROUND, HE FELL UNCONSCIOUS, NOT EVEN HAVING TIME TO GREET NERO. DANTE WAS STILL BREATHING, BUT HE WAS IN NO HURRY TO RECOVER.

NERO LOOKED AROUND THE PLACE AND FOUND TRISH NEARBY, WHOM HE HAD ALREADY SEEN ONCE IN FORTUNA, AND SOME BLACK-HAIRED GIRL, WHO SEEMED TO BE DANTE'S FRIEND TOO.

"IT REALLY IS THAT WAY.." NERO ASKED HIMSELF.

-Before the Nightmare-

THE DEMON PUT OUT HIS HAND, AND SOME TERRIBLE TENTACLE REACHED FOR DANTE. SEEING THIS, NERO IMMEDIATELY PULLED HIS GUN AND PULLED THE TRIGGER - THE LEAD QUICKLY PUSHED THE TENTACLE AWAY.

“I ADVISE YOU TO COME. PERHAPS DANTE WILL NEED HELP” IT SEEMS, THE WORDS OF V TURNED OUT TO BE PROPHETIC.

NERO GRINNED.

LONG AGO, HE WANTED TO RETURN DANTE'S FAVOR.

AND THE HUNTER DID A LOT: SAVED THE LIFE OF NERO, SAVED THE INHABITANTS OF THE CITY ... EVEN HIS BELOVED KYRIE.

AT TIMES, NERO HOPED THAT DANTE WOULD SOMEHOW GET INTO TROUBLE, AND THEN AN EXTRAORDINARY CHANCE TO SAVE HIM WOULD TURN UP.

WELL, THIS IS IT.

“THIS TIME I WILL BE THE ONE TO SAVE YOU” NERO DECIDED AND GLANCED AT THE DEMON.

- “HEY ASSHOLE, DIDN’T YOUR MOTHER TELL YOU IT’S NOT NICE TO STEAL?” – SHOUTED NERO.

THE DEMON DID NOT DIGNIFY NERO WITH AN ANSWER, AND REMAINED SILENT.

ALTHOUGH WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE? HERE IS THE ENEMY, AND THE ENEMY MUST BE DEFEATED, AND IT DOESN’T MATTER IF HE DID TAKE NERO’S ARM OR NOT.

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-



PULLING THE RED QUEEN INTO THE GROUND, NERO GRINNED AGAIN.

“SORRY, DANTE,” HE SAID, AND TURNED THE HILT OF HIS SWORD. THE RED QUEEN ROARED, FLAMES ENVELOPED THE BLADE. – “I’M BAGGING THIS BITCH!”

NERO RUSHED AT THE SILENT DEMON. ONCE THE ENEMY DEFEATED DANTE, IT IS CLEAR THAT CHEAP TRICKS NOT WORK ON HIM, SO NERO, NOW WITHOUT ONE ARM, HAD ONLY ONE THING: TO MARCH ON AND FIGHT WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH.

- TAKE THIS!

SWINGING THE RED QUEEN, NERO TURNED HIS WHOLE BODY FORWARD AND STRUCK THE DEMON. BUT NERO DID NOT EXPECT IT TO BE EASY. IF EVERYTHING WAS SO SIMPLE, DANTE WOULDN’T BE LYING ON THE GROUND. ®

- Before the Nightmare -

GLANCING AT A STRANGE THING, NERO TURNED THE HILT OF THE QUEEN. GASOLINE AND FLAME HEATED THE SWORD, LED HIM FORWARD, BUT THAT THING BLOCKED TIGHTLY. IT GLOWED DIMLY AND SEEMED TO CREATE AN

INVISIBLE BARRIER WOVEN FROM DEMONIC POWER, CAUSING NERO TO BE PUSHED BACK.

“DO YOU WANT ME EXCEED THE GAUGE? ALRIGHT, I’LL EXCEED IT!”

NOT WORRYING ABOUT WHETHER THE SWORD WOULD SURVIVE AFTER THIS, NERO TURNED THE GEAR TWO MORE TIMES - THE QUEEN ROARED. USUALLY, AFTER THE EJECTION OF ALL THE POWER INTO ANY DEMON, IT WILL BE HALVED BY ONE OR TWO AND THAT STRANGE THING (URIZEN’S SHIELD THINGY) - NOT EVEN A MILLIMETER MOVED.

THEN THE DEMON LORD MOVED HIS HAND, AND FROM THE HEFTY THING THAT LOOKED LIKE A THRONE, TENTACLES FLEW OUT TO NERO. HE WANTED TO SHOOT THEM WITH BLUE ROSE, BUT HE COULDN’T: IN HIS ONLY HAND WAS THE RED QUEEN. USUALLY NERO WOULD STOP THE ATTACKS OF ENEMIES BY USING BOTH THE RED QUEEN AND THE BLUE ROSE, BUT EVEN HERE - HE DIDN’T HAVE ANOTHER HAND.

- SHIT!

IF HE STILL HAD A LITTLE TIME TO GET USED TO FIGHTING WITH ONE HAND, HE WOULD NOT HAVE FIGURED A BETTER WAY TO FIGHT.

ANGRY AT HIMSELF, NERO PREPARED TO TAKE THE TENTACLES' BLOW, BUT INSTEAD HE WAS HIT HARDER THAN HE EXPECTED - HE FLEW BACK. AWKWARDLY ROLLED BACK, BARELY STANDING UP. THE GROUND SHOOK UNDER HIS FOOT, WHICH IS ALWAYS A BAD SIGN.

- THIS IS NOT GOOD! THIS IS THE END! - THE CRY OF A BIRD WAS HEARD BEHIND HIM. IT SEEMS THAT V HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH NERO.

-Before the Nightmare-

BUT NERO COULD NOT TURN AROUND AND CHECK - IT WAS NECESSARY TO ATTACK, AND NOT LOOK AROUND.

“SOONER OR LATER, THE THING WILL GIVE IN!” NERO ESTIMATED. HIS BODY WAS NOT FEELING AS STRONG AS HE WISHED IT WOULD, YET HE KEPT PUSHING ON.

THE DEMON EMPEROR MOVED HIS HAND AGAIN. HE WAS ABOUT TO KILL NERO, BUT NERO COULD NOT EVEN BUDGE HIM ON THE OTHER HAND. GRINDING HIS TEETH, HE REACHED FOR THE BLUE ROSE ... AND THEN FAMILIAR SHOTS WERE HEARD. THE DEMON'S HAND FROZE.

TURNING TO THE SOUND, NERO SAW DANTE WITH GUNS IN HIS HANDS.

“ROUND 2” HE SAID, AND TURNED BACK INTO A DEMON.

EVEN BEFORE NERO MANAGED TO GET THE REVOLVER, DANTE RUSHED TO THE ENEMY, BUT HE EASILY STOPPED HIS ONSLAUGHT.

THE EARTH SHOOK AGAIN FROM THEIR COLLISION.

- RUN, V, AND TAKE NERO WITH YOU! - DANTE SHOUTED, TURNING HIS HEAD, AND HE HIMSELF WAS PRESSING HIS SWORD INTO THE SOARING THING WITH ALL HIS MIGHT.

- "YOU GOTTA BE SHITTING, ME! I CAN STILL FIGHT!" - SNAPPED NERO.

HE, OF COURSE, IS GOOD - HE MISSED THE ATTACK, BUT HE COULD STILL FIGHT! IF HE RUNS AWAY, THEN WHY DID HE COME? NERO STAGGERED, SOMEHOW STOOD UP STRAIGHT AND RUSHED TO DANTE, BUT HE SHOUTED:

- NERO, GO! YOU'RE JUST DEAD WEIGHT!

THE GUY FROZE. HE DID NOT EXPECT SUCH WORDS. OF COURSE, NERO KNEW THAT DANTE WAS STRONG. ALWAYS WAS AND WILL BE - NERO DOES NOT COMPETE WITH HIM. BUT TO BE CALLED A 'BURDEN'...

"BUT I CAME TO HELP. I HEARD THAT HE COULD NOT DO IT ALONE, AND CAME TO THE RESCUE. AND IN RESPONSE,

I HEAR THIS!” - NERO THOUGHT, WHILE THE GROUND TREMBLED UNDER HIS FEET. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS HEATED UP TO THE LIMIT, BUT NERO WAS NOT GOING TO LEAVE.

- NERO, LET'S GO! - PUTTING HIS HAND ON HIS SHOULDER, V CALLED TO HIM. NERO BURST OUT, RUSHED TO THE DEMON, WHEN HE SUDDENLY NOTICED THAT A STONE BLOCK WAS RUSHING TOWARDS THEM FROM THE CEILING, CAUSING THE DEBRIS TO SEPARATE HIM AND DANTE.

THEY HAD TO RETREAT. THE BLOCK COLLAPSED, AND THE EARTH FELL FROM UNDER NERO'S FEET. THERE, WHERE HE HAD JUST BEEN, ANOTHER BLOCK COLLAPSED. STONES FELL FROM THE CEILING ONE BY ONE, AND SOON THE PATH TO THE DEMON EMPEROR WAS BLOCKED, ENOUGH THAT YOU COULD NOT BREAK THROUGH. NERO STRUGGLED TO STAND STILL ON HIS FEET.

“I CAN STILL DO THIS!”

HE COULD SQUEEZE THROUGH THE BOULDERS AND RUN TOWARDS DANTE, BUT AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT, V DRAGGED HIM BACK.

- WE MUST ESCAPE! HE IS STRONGER THAN WE THOUGHT! - INSISTED V.

NERO TRIED TO BREAK FREE, BUT HE DIDN'T SUCCEED - V PULLED HIM BACK, LED HIM FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY. AND THE STONES ALL STREWED AND STREWED. SOON THE PASSAGE WAS SO DENSELY WALLED THAT THROUGH THE CRACKS BETWEEN THE STONES, ONE COULD HARDLY SEE THE BATTLE OF DANTE AND THE DEMON.

- "YOU THINK I'M DEAD WEIGHT!?! DON'T BULLSHIT ME!"[®]
- SHOUTED NERO TOWARDS DANTE.

NERO WAS UPSET: HE DRAGGED HIMSELF HERE, WANTING TO SAVE THE ONE HE RESPECTS, WANTING TO CORRECT THE MISTAKE HE MADE, AND HE WAS THROWN OUT LIKE GARBAGE.

- ANGRY? THEN FIND A WAY TO GAIN STRENGTH! -
SHOUTED V, TEARING AWAY NERO FROM THE STONES.
“IF DANTE LOSES, THEN ONLY YOU CAN DEFEAT URIZEN”

HEARING AN UNFAMILIAR NAME, NERO RAISED AN
EYEBROW.

- WHO IS IT? THAT BASTARD?

“THE DEMON LORD URIZEN - THAT’S THE NAME OF THE
DEMON THAT TOOK YOUR ARM”

NERO TURNED AROUND, BUT HE COULD NO LONGER SEE
WHAT WAS HAPPENING BEHIND THE STONES.

-Before the Nightmare-

“HURRY ... OTHERWISE, WE WON’T BE ABLE TO GET OUT.
IF DANTE LOSES, THEN YOU’RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN
DEFEAT URIZEN!” V URGED HIM, AND WAS THE FIRST TO
MOVE FORWARD. NERO HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW
HIM.

OUT OF THE CROWD OF ONLOOKERS, SOME OF THEM NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE.

- HEY ... WHAT IS IT? - A MAN POINTED UPSTAIRS, AND EVERYONE LIFTED THEIR HEADS TO THE SKY.

AND MORRISON, TOO, TOOK A CLOSER LOOK...

SUDDENLY, A BRANCH OF THE MYSTERIOUS TREE TURNED INTO A VINE, AND NERO AND V JUMPED FROM THERE.

SOMEONE SCREECHED IN FRIGHT, SOMEONE SHOUTED APPROVINGLY. THEY IMMEDIATELY MOVED TOWARDS MORRISON.

- Before the Nightmare -
- HEY, WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE IS DANTE?

“HE'S TRYING TO BUY US TIME, THE WHOLE QUESTION IS, HOW LONG ...” V ANSWERED, AND MORRISON TURNED TO THE TREE ON HIS OWN.

THROUGH THE ASPHALT, THE TENTACLE-LIKE SPROUTS SUDDENLY APPEARED - GIANT, MONSTROUS. THEY WRIGGLED LIKE THE TAILS OF SNAKES.

ONLOOKERS LOOKED AT THEM, AS IF BEWITCHED, UNTIL ONE OF THE TENTACLES SNATCHED SOMEONE AND RIPPED OPEN THE POOR MAN'S STOMACH. SCREAMS OF PANIC FILLED THE SQUARE AND PEOPLE RUSHED WHEREVER, AND PREDATORY TENTACLES GRABBED AND PIERCED THEM ONE BY ONE.

- DANTE...LOST? - MORRISON COULD NOT BELIEVE.

- Before the Nightmare -

NERO CLICKED HIS TONGUE AND WANTED TO GO SHRED THE TENTACLES, BUT V HELD HIM.

- NO POINT.

NERO GRINDED HIS TEETH, PUSHED MORRISON ASIDE AND WALKED AWAY. V MOVED AFTER HIM. NOT UNDERSTANDING WHAT WAS GOING ON HERE, THE OLD MAN MECHANICALLY FOLLOWED HIM. WHAT ELSE TO DO? HE IS JUST AN INTERMEDIARY; HE CAN'T HELP ANYONE.

- AND THEN WHAT? DO YOU HAVE A PLAN - ASKED MORRISON TO V WHEN HE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM AND NERO.

- I'M AFRAID NOT. HOWEVER, I KNOW WHAT WE NEED. STRENGTH. ONLY THAT CAN HELP IN DEFEATING THE ENEMY.

- STRENGTH? HOW CAN YOU JUST GET IT? - ASKED MORRISON STUBBORNLY.

V SIGHED.

- WE HAVE TO GET IT, SOMEHOW. I WILL SAY THAT WE HAVE A MONTH. IF NOTHING IS DONE ... THE WORLD WILL END.

TO THIS THE OLD MAN COULD NOT THINK OF WHAT TO ANSWER. OF COURSE, HE WAS CONFRONTED WITH ALL SORTS OF THINGS BEFORE, INCLUDING WORLD THREATS, BUT USUALLY DANTE TOOK THEM UPON HIMSELF. MORRISON ALSO RELIED ON HIM BECAUSE HE WAS USED TO THINKING THAT THE HUNTER WOULD COPE WITH ANY CRISIS.

SIMPLY PUT, DANTE IS MORRISON'S TRUMP CARD.

AND MORRISON IS NOT A THIRD-CLASS PLAYER TO KEEP HIS TRUMP CARDS TO THE VERY END. NO, HE COMES IN WITH A STRONG CARD AND INSTANTLY WINS.

“HEY ... IS THAT ... DANTE LOST, RIGHT?” MORRISON'S VOICE TREMBLED. HE HEARD HIMSELF TREMBLING.

THE INTERMEDIARY HAD A BAD FEELING ABOUT IT AHEAD OF TIME, AND SO THE OLD MAN TRIED TO PREPARE HIMSELF AND TAKE EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT SO THAT THINGS WOULD GO SMOOTHLY.

“IT’S POSSIBLE,” V ANSWERED.

“WHAT THE HELL!” – MORRISON SAID OUT LOUD.

“SO THAT’S IT, NOTHING HELPED?” - MORRISON ASKED HIMSELF. HE CALLED LADY AND TRISH, GRABBED NERO AT THE REQUEST OF V ... NO MATTER HOW YOU TWIST, MORRISON NOW HAS NOTHING TO DO, HE FEELS USELESS AS THERE’S NO ONE ELSE HE CAN CALL.

“DON’T GIVE UP. HUMANS DO NOT ACCEPT DEFEAT. THIS IS THEIR STRENGTH.”

-Before the Nightmare-

TO MORRISON, V’S CYNICAL TONE SEEMED OUT OF PLACE. HE WANTED TO SUPPORT OR TO CONVINCHE HIMSELF THAT THINGS AREN’T THIS BLEAK.

“YOU SAY WE HAVE A MONTH? .. A MONTH?” - SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED NERO.

- YES. WE MUST FIND A WAY TO GAIN STRENGTH, BY THE DEADLINE. NO MATTER WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO FOR THIS.

NERO STOPPED AND TURNED TO THE INTERMEDIARY.

- MORRISON ... TAKE ME TO FORTUNA. I NEED A MONTH, THEN I'LL COME BACK.

LOOKING INTO THE HONEST EYES OF NERO, MORRISON ONCE AGAIN ACUTELY FELT THAT THE YEARS WERE TAKING THEIR TOLL. HE LOST HIS TRUMP CARD AND SURRENDERED, YET NERO SIMPLY DID NOT KNOW HOW TO GIVE UP. BECAUSE HE IS STILL TOO YOUNG.

ONLY THE YOUNG DO NOT KNOW HOW TO GIVE UP. AND IT SOMETIMES BECOMES A SOURCE OF UNIMAGINABLE POWER.

ABOUT NERO, MORRISON DID NOT REALLY KNOW ANYTHING ... WELL, MAYBE A COUPLE OF WORDS FROM DANTE, A MAN LIVING IN FORTUNA WITH DEMONIC POWER ... BUT WHAT DID THIS NERO DO TO DANTE THAT HE ALREADY SHARED THE NEON DEVIL MAY CRY SIGN WITH HIM?

“OKAY ... LET'S GET READY TO THE MAXIMUM,” MORRISON NODDED, AND THEN V BEGAN TO SPEAK:

“I WILL STAY IN THE CITY.” - MORRISON AND NERO LOOKED AT HIM INCREDULOUSLY, AND HE ALREADY TURNED AND WENT ON HIS WAY. - “I WILL NOT BECOME STRONGER. PERHAPS I WILL STAY AND COLLECT INFORMATION.”

-Before the Nightmare-
- THEN - IN A MONTH. I'LL BE BACK - NERO SAID HIS GOODBYES.

WHEN NERO RETURNED, KYRIE WAS VERY HAPPY TO SEE HIM.

NICO, TOO, SIGHED IN RELIEF, BUT DID NOT HAVE TIME TO REST, AS NERO SAID:

“NICO, MAKE ME A PROSTHESIS.”

AND SO, WITHOUT ANY REQUESTS, SHE WANTED TO GET DOWN TO BUSINESS, BUT WHEN SHE HEARD WHAT IT WAS FOR NOW, SHE REALIZED THAT THERE WAS NOT LONG ENOUGH TIME TO DO IT.

NICO INITIALLY THOUGHT OF A REINFORCED PROSTHESIS. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF SHE COMBINED THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGNUS AND DO IT BETTER THAN HIM, SOMETHING THAT COULD DEFLECT ATTACKS AND AT THE SAME TIME ALLOW HIM TO MOVE FINGERS ... THE TROUBLE IS THAT THE IDEA WAS AHEAD OF TIME. AN ORDINARY PERSON COULDN'T MAKE IT.

NERO WANTED SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM NICO. HE WANTED STRENGTH, NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR THE HAND.

AND HAVING ONLY A MONTH FOR IT DIDN'T HELP.

NICO HAD ALREADY FIGURED OUT THAT THE IDEA WOULD TAKE SIX MONTHS, NO LESS, AND THE NEW DEADLINES ARE DAMN LITTLE.

“HOW'S THE THING GOING?” NERO ASKED ON THE SECOND DAY IN THE EVENING.

NICO THEN LEFT THE GARAGE TO UNWIND AND SMOKE, AND STUMBLED UPON NERO, WHO WAS JUST RETURNING FROM THE STORE WITH A BAG.

- DON'T TALK NONSENSE, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M MAKING A PLASTIC MODEL! - NICO MUTTERED AND TOOK A CIGARETTE IN HER MOUTH.

NERO FROWNED - HE HATES SMOKERS SO ENDURING THAT IS DIFFICULT IN ITSELF.

“IF YOU NEED HELP, LET’S ASK MORRISON, HE WILL DRIVE SOMEONE HERE FOR YOU. MAYBE IT WILL WORK?” - SUGGESTED NERO.

NICO ALMOST BURST WITH ANGER.

- DO NOT MIND IT. NOTHING FOR ALL THE IDIOTS TO STAGGER AROUND.

SHE DID NOT KNOW MORRISON, BUT IT SEEMS THAT IT WAS HE WHO FLEW NERO BY HELICOPTER, AND THEN LEFT HIM AT THE HOUSE IN FORTUNA. BUT KYRIE APPARENTLY MET THIS MORRISON WHEN SHE WITH NERO. NICO, HOWEVER, WAS STUCK IN THE GARAGE AND WORKED TIRELESSLY.

- SOMEHOW I MISSED HIM. HE DID NOT STAY FOR A CUP OF TEA, DID NOT CHAT WITH KYRIE AND DID NOT LOOK AT BEAUTIFUL ME. SUCH AN UNLUCKY PERSON.

ON THE WORD "BEAUTIFUL" NERO ALMOST BURST OUT LAUGHING. NICO NOTICED THIS AND MADE SUCH A GRIMACE THAT NERO CHANGED HIS EXPRESSION, LOOKED AWAY AND MUTTERED EMBARRASSEDLY:

- WELL, WHAT CAN YOU DO ... RENTED VEHICLES, IT IS NECESSARY TO RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

THE OLD MAN LEFT HIS CONTACTS AND TOLD NERO TO CALL IMMEDIATELY IF SOMETHING HAPPENED, BUT NICO REGRETTED NOT MEETING HIM IN PERSON, SINCE THERE WAS SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY: IN FACT, MORRISON IS DANTE'S AGENT, WHICH MEANS HE GIVES HIM JOBS. AND HE PROBABLY KNOWS A BUNCH OF STORIES ABOUT THE LEGENDARY MERCENARY. SO, SURELY, HE KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT HER LATE GRANDMOTHER, NELL GOLDSTEIN.

- SO WHAT? HOW'S IT TURNING OUT? - NERO ASKED AGAIN ABOUT THE PROSTHESIS.

NICO SET FIRE TO A CIGARETTE, DRAGGED ON AND ANSWERED HIM:

- HONESTLY? I HAVE NO IDEA.

- COME ON? IN TWO ALL-NIGHTERS, NO RESULTS? SERIOUSLY? - NERO SAID DISAPPOINTEDLY.

NICO GOT ANGRY:

- "AMATEUR! THE MOST IMPORTANT PART IS THE PLANNING STAGE! DO YOU WANT TO END UP WITH AN ARM LIKE A PIRATE HOOK?" OR A PROSTHESIS WITH A MINIGUN? IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT I'LL MAKE AS MANY AS NEEDED" NICO SAID.

FROM SUCH A RATIONAL RESPONSE, EVEN NERO DIDN'T HAVE A COMEBACK, WHICH IS RARE FOR HIM.

- I'M JUST IMPATIENT BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME... - SAID NERO, IN A CALMER TONE WHILE LOOKING AT HER APOLOGETICALLY.

“I KNOW. AND I ALSO WANT TO HELP DANTE, SINCE HE LOST TO THE DEMON! I WANT TO MEET HIM AND ASK ABOUT MY GRANDMOTHER! AND LOOK AT EBONY AND IVORY! IF YOU COMPLAIN AGAIN I'LL MAKE YOU AN ARM THAT YOU CAN EAT PASTA WITH.”

NICO NOW STARTED BLABBERING WHILE WORKING, WHICH MEANS: THE SITUATION HAS BEGUN TO SPECIFICALLY ENCOURAGE HER. OF COURSE, NERO HAS BEEN WAITING FOR A PROSTHESIS FOR A LONG TIME. WELL, IF THEY DON'T DEFEAT URIZEN, THEN THE WORLD IS DEFINITELY GOING TO END.

NICO'S BRAIN WAS NOT IN GOOD SHAPE TO GIVE OUT SMART IDEAS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE FATE OF THE WHOLE WORLD WAS AT STAKE.

- OK, I'M SORRY. I WILL WAIT." NERO SHRUGGED AND STEPPED BACK FROM NICO.

SINCE NERO LOST HIS HAND, THE JOKER AND PAIN-IN-THE-ASS JULIO NOTICEABLY QUIETED DOWN AND IN HIS FREE TIME BEGAN TO WANDER AROUND THE CITY, ASKING HERE AND THERE WHETHER ANYONE NEEDED HELP OR IF THERE WERE ANY ODDITIES. IT SEEMS THAT THE GUY SERIOUSLY DECIDED TO HELP NERO WITH THE AGENCY. HE SUDDENLY CAME TO THE GARAGE:

- NERO! DEMONS! - BREATHING WITH DIFFICULTY, HE SHOUTED AND STOPPED.

NERO INSTANTLY CHANGED AND LEANED TOWARD THE BOY.

- WHERE?

- IN THE FOREST OF MITIS!

- ARE THERE ANY INJURED?

- NO... I TOLD EVERYONE TO HIDE AT HOME.

“OKAY, I GET IT,” RISING, NERO RUFFLED JULIO’S HAIR. –

“GREAT JOB. COME ON HOME, LET KYRIE KNOW TOO.”

- AHA!

SEEING THAT JULIO WAS LEAVING, NICO CALLED OUT TO

HIM:

- Before the Nightmare -

- HEY, WAIT! - THE BOY STOPPED, AND SHE THREW HIM A BAG. - TAKE IT WITH YOU!

NERO, HAVING HEARD THE THING, FROZE FOR A COUPLE OF SECONDS.

- ARE YOU COMING WITH ME? HE SPECIFIED.

- WE NEED TO UNWIND, MAYBE IT'LL BE GOOD TO SEE A DEMON IN ACTION.

THE OPTION IS NOT SO BAD - IT'S BETTER THAN SITTING IN THE GARAGE. EVER SINCE NICO SETTLED IN FORTUNA, DEMONS HAVE REPEATEDLY APPEARED HERE - BUT NERO DEALT WITH THEM HIMSELF, AND NICO FOR THE MOST PART STUDIED HER FATHER'S NOTES. BUT ENOUGH THEORY IS LEARNED, IT'S TIME TO PRACTICE. IF NICO GOES ALONG WITH NERO, SHE WILL SURELY SEE A REAL DEMON, WATCH HOW THEY FIGHT HIM, AND SHE WILL PROBABLY COME UP WITH SOMETHING.

- OKAY, NOW HEAR ME OUT. FIRST OF ALL, DON'T BOTHER ME! AND DON'T JUMP IN FRONT OF ME! DON'T COME TO THE DEMONS! STAND BEHIND ME AND WATCH! - NERO

ORDERED NICO, POINTING HIS FINGER AT HER. SHE CALMLY LISTENED AND SMOKED A CIGARETTE.

“I’M NOT INTERESTED IN DEMONS, SO FORGET IT,” SHE SAID AND WAVED HIM OFF. - AND DO NOT POINT AT PEOPLE. HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU NEED ME TO REPEAT?

NERO GASPED FOR AIR, LIKE A FISH THROWN ASHORE, BUT COULD NOT REMEMBER WHAT HE WANTED TO ADD, GAVE UP AND WANDERED TO THE GARAGE.

Devil May Cry

-Before the Nightmare-

NERO HAD NOT BEEN TO MITIS FOR A WHILE. SOMETIMES DEMONS JUMPED HERE, AND IN THE PAST NERO OFTEN CHOPPED THEM BETWEEN TREES, BUT OVER TIME THE DEMONS BECAME SMALLER AND SMALLER, AND THEN COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED - SO NERO STOPPED GOING TO THE FOREST.

- PLACE IS EMPTY.. MAYBE A BEAR ATE THEM?- NICO SUGGESTED, WALKING BEHIND NERO, WHILE HE MADE HIS WAY THROUGH THE GRASS THAT WAS TALL TO THE VERY CHEST.

- BEARS ARE NOT FOUND HERE. PLUS, THE LOCALS WOULDN'T CONFUSE DEMONS WITH ANYTHING. WE SAW THE ALREADY GOD KNOWS HOW MANY TIMES" NERO OBJECTED, AND NICO CAUSTICALLY REMARKED:

- Before the Nightmare -

- LOUSY CITY.

- WOULD YOU SHUT UP! AND DO NOT LEAVE ME. A DEMON CAN ATTACK FROM ANYWHERE.

RESIDENTS OF FORTUNA DON'T LIKE THE FORREST MITIS. ONCE UPON A TIME, KNIGHTS TRAINED HERE, CLERGYMEN RODE AROUND, BUT THE ORDER OF THE SWORD FELL, ALL INSTITUTIONS WERE DESTROYED, AND THE LOCALS DID NOT WANT TO GO TO A PLACE WHERE THERE WERE TRACES OF THE ORDER. SOME STILL WENT FOR FIREWOOD AND MUSHROOMS AT BEST.

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, TOA, A MERCHANT OF WOODEN TRINKETS, - HE PROBABLY TOOK WOOD SOMEWHERE FROM THE EDGE OF THE FOREST. IT TURNS OUT THAT HE SAW A DEMON IN THE SAME PLACE. BUT WHERE DID IT GO? NOTHING WAS TO BE SEEN.

-Before the Nightmare-
NERO STOPPED AND TURNED TO NICO AND SAW THAT SHE WAS BREATHING HEAVILY. - SERIOUSLY? ALREADY EXHAUSTED? WEAKLING!

- I'M SOMEONE USED TO STAYING AT HOME, NOT A PERSON WHO NEEDS STRENGTH! AND I'VE BEEN WORKING NON-STOP FOR 2DAYS AND 2NIGHTS, IT'D HELP IF YOU SLOWED DOWN A LITTLE.

- IT HURTS THAT YOU ARE LOUD FOR A WEAKLING..

NERO WAS SURPRISED THAT NICO WAS WEAK, BUT HE DECIDED THAT SENDING HER BACK IS DANGEROUS. THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF DEMONS, THUGS AND INCONSPICUOUS KILLERS, READY TO ATTACK AT ANY MOMENT. IN GENERAL, YOU CANNOT SEND NICO ALONE.

- HEY, LET'S GO ALREADY! IT WILL SOON BE COMPLETELY DARK.

NERO WENT TO HIS COMPANION AND ALMOST TOOK HER HAND, WHEN SUDDENLY A SHADOW FELL ON HIM.

REALIZING THAT THEY WERE ABOUT TO BE ATTACKED, NERO PUSHED NICO AWAY.

SHE SCREAMED AND FELL ON THE GROUND, AND NERO GRABBED BLUE ROSE AND POINTED THE BARREL UP.

- SET AN AMBUSH, YOU BASTARD?

AS HE EXPECTED, THE DEMON JUMPED ON HIM FROM SOMEWHERE ABOVE, FOR WHICH HE RECEIVED THREE BULLETS IN THE BELLY: AFTER EACH SHOT HE WAS THROWN BACK A LITTLE. BUT THE STRIKING POWER OF THE SHOTS DID NOT ALLOW THE ENEMY TO BE THROWN BACK. NERO QUICKLY CAUGHT WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND ROLLED AWAY, LETTING THE DEMON LAND.

HIS CLAWS WENT DEEP INTO THE SOIL. JUST WHERE NERO WAS EARLIER. AND NERO SEIZED THE MOMENT AND RELOADED BLUE ROSE. IT TURNED OUT VERY SKILLFUL - IN THE PAST HE OFTEN MANAGED WITH ONE HAND SINCE HE WOULD BANDAGE THE OTHER ONE TO HIDE IT.

THE DEMON DID NOT RECOVER IMMEDIATELY, BUT WHEN HE RECOVERED, HE IMMEDIATELY BECAME AGGRESSIVE.

“THIS ONE, EH?” NERO THOUGHT MENTALLY AND LOOKED AT NICO, WHO HAD ALREADY MANAGED TO JUMP TO HER FEET. IT SEEMS THAT HE REALIZED THAT SHE HAD FALLEN FOR THE ENEMY - SHE PROBABLY TOOK THAT UP FROM AGNUS.

IT WAS A BLITZ.

NERO COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHO CALLED THE POOR DEMON THAT, BUT THE RECORDS JUST CALLED IT BLITZ.

BLITZ HAS A FEW FEATURES, OR RATHER, TWO: HE HAS NO EYES AND FRIES WITH ELECTRICITY.

- Before the Nightmare -

AND HE TRACKS THE VICTIM BY NOISE. IT TURNS OUT THAT HE ATTACKED WHEN NICO AND NERO WERE ARGUING.

BUT NOW BOTH WERE SILENT, AND THE BLITZ DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR THE VICTIM. HE REALIZED NICO IS STANDING IN ONE PLACE BECAUSE SHE MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THE DETAILS FROM AGNUS' RESEARCH.

ALONG THE WAY, WONDERING WHAT TO DO, NERO SILENTLY STRAIGHTENED HIS HAND AND AIMED THE BLUE ROSE AT THE ENEMY, CONTEMPLATING WHAT SHOULD BE DONE.

THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT IF NERO HITS, NICO WILL NOT GET HURT, KEEPING IN MIND THAT BLITZ IS A DAMN FAST DEMON. JUMPING LIKE CRAZY IF THEY REALLY NEED TO FIGHT.

""IF ONLY I HAD THE OTHER HAND.."" - NERO THOUGHT FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME. ""THEN I WOULD HAVE SEIZED THE DEMON AND DRIVEN IT INTO THE GROUND!""

BLITZ COWERED SOMEWHERE - HE WAS PROBABLY TAKEN ABACK, NOT UNDERSTANDING WHERE THE VICTIM WAS.

NOTICING THIS, NERO TURNED TO NICO AND GESTURED FOR HER TO MOVE AWAY.

NICO JUST KEPT STARING AT THE DEMON IN AWE, IGNORING NERO.

NERO SIGHED AND, HAVING DECIDED, RUSHED FIRST:

“HEY! PUP!” BLITZ SHARPLY TURNED AROUND AND, LIKE LIGHTNING, DARTED TOWARDS HIM. “GOOD BLITZ, COME ON!”

NERO UNLOADED THE ENTIRE REVOLVER INTO THE DEMON. HE SHOT ALMOST POINT BLANK. THE BLITZ HOWLED, TWITCHED, JUMPED NEARBY – AND IT WAS HARD TO AIM.

“NICO, RUN WHILE THERE IS A CHANCE!” NERO SHOUTED, RELOADING THE REVOLVER, AND NICO DIDN'T

EVEN TURN. SHE STARTED SCRIBBLING SOMETHING INTO HER MEMO PAD INSTEAD.

“I GOT ONE! I GOT ONE! I GOT AN IDEA! I’M A GENIUS!”

“ARE YOU SERIOUS?!” – YELLS NERO

AT SUCH A PACE, THE BLITZ WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE THROWN ITSELF AT NICO, AND NERO GRABBED THE HANDLE OF THE RED QUEEN AND STARTED CHARGING IT, SINCE THE BLITZ RUSH AT THOSE WHO MAKE THE LOUDEST.

BECAUSE NERO CHARGED THE WEAPON - THE SWORD ENGINE IS MUCH LOUDER. IT WAS AS IF NERO HAD ORDERED THE DEMON TO JUMP TO HIM, WHICH IT DID.

- Before the Nightmare -

- HERE YOU ARE!

RELEASING A PACK OF BULLETS, NERO IMMEDIATELY SLASHED THE DEMON WITH THE HEATED SWORD. THE BLITZ RECOILED FROM THE BULLETS, AND THE RED QUEEN HIT THE TARGET QUITE ACCURATELY - NERO WAS SHOCKED ANYWAY.

THE PAIN IS TERRIBLE, BUT THE HUNTER DID NOT DROP HIS SWORD.

THE STANDARD TACTIC FOR BLITZ IS TO SHOOT FROM AFAR UNTIL YOU HIT AN ELECTRIC FIELD, AND THEN GOING AHEAD AND CHOPPING IT WITH YOUR SWORD.

BUT NERO WENT AHEAD INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE STRATEGY, BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO PROCRASTINATE WITH NICO AT POTENTIAL DANGER.

-Before the Nightmare-

- DIE ALREADY, MAN!

THE BLADE DUG DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE SKIN OF THE DEMON, AND NERO TURNED THE GEAR TIRELESSLY, CHARGING THE FIRE INSIDE.

THE BEAST WAS DESPERATELY TRYING TO GET RID OF THE SWORD, BUT SOON CEASED TO RESIST, AND THE RED QUEEN CUT IT IN HALF.

THE DEMON STILL HOWLED IN AGONY AS NERO SAT DOWN ON THE GROUND.

“HERE’S AN AMBUSH ... HELL ...” AFTER THE INVIGORATING ELECTRICITY, NERO’S BODY WAS PRICKED, BUT IT SEEMS HE REMAINED INTACT. “HEY NICO, HOW ARE YOU?” - TURNING, HE CALLED OUT TO HIS PARTNER.

-Before the Nightmare-

SHE STOOD UP WITH A PLEASED LOOK AND PUT THE NOTE IN HER POCKET.

“THE HARD TASK IS TO KILL THE DEMONS. BUT THE CROP IS GOOD. I KNEW THAT I NEEDED TO SEE A REAL DEMON! - ANSWERED NICO, NOT AT ALL EMBARRASSED BY THE FACT THAT SHE ADDED SOME PROBLEMS.

FROM SUCH IMPUDENCE, NERO ALREADY LOST THE DESIRE TO ANSWER. HE ONLY SIGHED WEARILY AND STARTED WALKING TOWARDS THE VAN.

“COME BACK” NICO SAID, AS SHE POINTED TO THE CORPSE OF THE DEMON NEARBY. “WE NEED TO TAKE THIS!”

NERO COULD NOT BELIEVE HIS EARS. HE LOOKED AT NICO, THEN AT THE DEMON. THEN AGAIN TO NICO, THEN TO THE DEMON ...

-Before the Nightmare-

- WHAT?! SNAPPED NERO.

ALTHOUGH WHAT ELSE TO EXPECT FROM NICO?

- I CAME UP WITH AN IDEA FOR THE ARM! BUT I NEED A DEMON CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING ELECTRICITY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IT, AND THIS HERE WOULD HELP.

NERO COULD NOT FIND WHAT TO SAY.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT, TO MAKE A PROSTHESIS OUT OF IT?” - HE ASKED, GRABBING THE CORPSE OF THE BLITZ.

NICO LOOKED AT THE GUY AND SHOOK HER HEAD.

- OF COURSE NOT. I JUST NEED A SAMPLE. THE MAIN PROBLEM IS THAT THE PROSTHESIS LACKS POWER. THE SIZES ARE SMALL. THE EASIEST WAY IS TO TAKE SOMEONE’S ORGANS AS A BASIS ... WELL, FOR AN ORGAN GENERATOR. IF YOU CAN RECREATE THE ORGAN-GENERATOR OF THIS DEMON, THEN WITH THE POWER, I CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN. I WOULDN’T USE THE ORGANS OF THE DEMON ITSELF IN THE ARM! I JUST NEED IT FOR REFERENCE.

NERO DID NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THESE LONG EXPLANATIONS, BUT NICO CAUGHT A CONFIDENT TONE RIGHT AWAY.

OF COURSE, NERO DID NOT YET KNOW WHETHER THE PROSTHESIS WOULD BE THE SAME FORCE THAT HE SO DESIRED, BUT AT LEAST SOME PROSPECTS WERE OUTLINED.

“DO YOU NEED MORE IDEAS?” THEN GO HUNTING WITH ME AGAIN” NERO SUGGESTED, PULLING THE BLITZ ON TOP OF HIM.

AND NICO, LIGHTING UP, SAID “OKAY!”

-Before the Nightmare-

RED GRAVE CITY HAS BECOME A REAL HELL.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CENTRAL SQUARE, THE QLIPHOTH TREE SPREADS, GROWING EXCEEDINGLY FAST. ANYMORE AND IT MAY CLOSE TO THE SUN, AND THE HUMAN WORLD IS GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO THE WORLD OF DEMONS.

“IF YOU THINK SO ...” THE BIRD SPOKE WITH V, WHO HE WAS SITTING ON A SMALL HILL IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE CITY, WHERE THE SPOILAGE HAD NOT YET REACHED. “... MAYBE IT WOULD BE WORTH TAKING PEOPLE AWAY EARLY, HUH? FROM THE CITY?”

A FAIR REMARK, AS THE QLIPHOTH FEEDS ON HUMAN BLOOD. IF THE SOURCE WERE NOT NEARBY, THE TREE WOULD NOT GROW.

“NOBODY WOULD BELIEVE US” V SAID BLANKLY.

WHO WOULD ACCEPT SUCH A CLAIM AT FACE VALUE? CALLING IT AS AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM SOME LARGE ORGANIZATION – SUCH AS THE ORDER OF THE SWORD - AND THEN IT IS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MATTER. THEN IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND EVACUATE THE CITY, BUT V HAD NO TIME OR INFLUENCE IN THE POLITICAL WORLD.

ALL THAT REMAINED WAS TO DO WHAT WAS POSSIBLE.

AND STILL, V WAS BITTER WITH POWERLESSNESS, FOCUSING ON HIS MAIN GOAL.

“FORGET IT,” THE BIRD ORDERED, AS IF HE HAD GUESSED THAT THE MASTER WAS DISTURBED.

MANY RESIDENTS MANAGED TO NOTICE: SOMETHING IS HAPPENING IN THE CITY. SOLDIERS WERE TRANSFERRED FROM NEIGHBORING REGIONS, BUT THE TROUBLE IS THAT NOT A SINGLE MODERN WEAPON IS CAPABLE OF KILLING A DEMON. IT TURNS OUT THAT THOSE MILITARY

ARE WAITING FOR A DARK FATE - TO BECOME AN OFFERING TO THE QLIPHOTH.

“BY THE WAY, WILL NERO BE BACK?” - THE BIRD REMEMBERED NERO’S PROMISE TO RETURN IN A MONTH.

“PERHAPS HE WILL BE BACK. HE IS NOT ONE OF THOSE WHO ACCEPT DEFEAT” V ANSWERED, AND THE BIRD SNAPPED ITS BEAK, LAUGHING.

“DOES HE REMIND YOU OF ANYONE?”

“I DON’T KNOW” HE ANSWERED AND LOOKED AT THE PAGES OF THE BOOK HE WAS HOLDING IN HIS HAND. IT WAS AN OLD COLLECTION OF POEMS. AS A BOY, V LOVED THEM.

-Before the Nightmare-

TURNING OVER THE PAGE, HE CAME ACROSS A VERY ODD LINE:

“AND IT GREW BOTH DAY AND NIGHT, ‘TILL IT BORE AN APPLE BRIGHT.”

IRONICALLY, THE POEM WAS CALLED A POISON TREE. AND HE DEDICATED IT TO THE QLIPHOTH.

RECALLING PAST SHAMEFUL DEEDS, V GRIMACED AND SLAMMED THE BOOK. THE BIRD NOTICED HIS CONFUSION AND BOWED ITS HEAD INQUIRINGLY, BUT THE OWNER DECIDED TO REMAIN SILENT.

DUTY CALLED THEM. DUTY TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE.

“COME ON,” V ORDERED AND WALKED OFF. THE BIRD FLEW AFTER HIM.

-Before the Nightmare-

- COME ON? WHERE? HE ASKED.

- TO SAVE PEOPLE FROM THE QLIPHOTH ROOTS, IN REASONABLE QUANTITIES.

“SAVE!?! YOU!?! THE HUMANS!?! SERIOUSLY? DID YOU HIT YOUR HEAD OR SOMETHING?”

THE BIRD WAS SURPRISED FOR A REASON. A SECOND AGO, V COULD NOT EVEN THINK TO BECOME A HERO, BUT AS SOON AS HE REALIZED THE HORROR OF THE SITUATION, HE CHANGED AT ONCE.

AND V LIED TO NERO: NO INFORMATION WAS NEEDED.

HE ALREADY KNEW EVERYTHING: THE CAUSE OF THE DISASTER IN THE CITY, THE TRUE GUISE OF URIZEN AND HOW IT ALL BEGAN - ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING.

- Before the Nightmare -

AND HE WAS INACTIVE BECAUSE HE DID NOT LIKE LONG TRIPS - THEY WERE TOO TIRED. IN ADDITION, POISON DESTROYED HIM FROM THE INSIDE: A MIRACLE IF HIS BODY LASTS UNTIL THE END OF THE MONTH, AND FOR

THIS DAY V TRIED TO ACCUMULATE AT LEAST A LITTLE STRENGTH.

BUT NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK OF HIM, V STILL TRIED TO HELP THOSE WHO FELL VICTIM TO QLIPHOTH, EVEN IF THIS MADE NO SENSE AT ALL.

- “HEY V, WAIT! ARE YOU SERIOUSLY DOING THIS? YOU DON’T HAVE TO, BUT I’LL HELP!” – GRIFFON SHOUTED PIERCINGLY.

IT’S A BIT TOO LATE, THE QLIPHOTH’S GROWTH CANNOT BE SLOWED DOWN, EVEN IF YOU SAVE A COUPLE OF LIVES. YOU CAN WIN ONLY A LITTLE TIME ... ONLY A FRACTION OF THE TIME, NO MORE.

BUT THE HEART PROMPTED V: THIS MUST BE DONE. EVEN IF ALL IT GIVES IS A FEW MORE SECONDS.

“I’M DOING WHAT I SHOULD ... THAT’S ALL ...” V MUTTERED AND STEPPED FORWARD.

“NERO WILL BE HERE IN A MONTH, NOT EARLIER, AND TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY IN TROUBLE – IS ONLY FAIR TO BE DONE WHEN IT’S IN MY POWER.” V DECIDED



“DID YOU FORGET ANYTHING?” – KYRIE ASKED NERO JUST BEFORE THE DEPARTURE. NERO NODDED.

- YOU BETTER NOT FORGET WHAT YOU PROMISED.

- I REMEMBER. UNTIL EVERYTHING IS OVER, DO NOT GO ANYWHERE, DO NOT LET CHILDREN OUT. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY” KYRIE REPEATED OBEDIENTLY, BUT SHE STILL LOOKED UPSET.

ALTHOUGH WHY BE SURPRISED? KYRIE HAD ALREADY HEARD FROM MORRISON THAT THE JOB TENDS TO BE DANGEROUS. IT'S NOT A JOKE - THE WHOLE WORLD CAN DISAPPEAR!

-Before the Nightmare-

AND, BESIDES NERO, HARDLY ANYONE CAN HANDLE IT. SO KYRIE WENT TO SEE HIM OFF.

SHE COULD NOT STOP HIM, AND HOW COULD SHE? HE SAID THAT HE WAS GOING TO THE RESCUE OF DANTE, AND KYRIE WAS OBLIGED TO HIS KINDNESS, SO THERE WAS NOTHING TO OBJECT TO.

- MORRISON PROMISED BRING SOME PEOPLE TO FORTUNA TO PROTECT IT TOO, SO DON'T WORRY. THEY'LL GUARD THE CITY WHILE I'M NOT HERE" NERO TOLD KYRIE AS SHE NODDED.

NERO WONDERED IF HE SAID EVERYTHING HE HAD WANTED TO, BUT THEN HE WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE LOUD SOUND OF A HORN. NERO DELIBERATELY TURNED SLOWLY: HE WAS STARED AT BY THE DISPLEASED NICO. HE SAT DOWN IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, GOT READY, AND NICO SPOKE:

-Before the Nightmare-
"HOW LONG ARE YOU WAITING FOR, MORON? COME ON IN, IT'S TIME FOR US TO GO!"

- SHUT UP ALREADY, I KNOW!

KYRIE WAVED TO HER, AND NERO TRUDGED ALONG THE VAN, DISPLEASED, TO SIT ON THE OTHER SIDE.

IN JUST A MONTH, HE AND NICO PUT THEIR MOBILE OFFICE ON WHEELS. EVEN THE DEVIL MAY CRY SIGN WAS HITCHED.

WHEN NERO CLIMBED INTO THE PASSENGER SEAT, NICO SHARPLY TURNED THE IGNITION KEY AND LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW:

“DON'T WORRY, KYRIE!” WITH YOUR HUBBY IS A BRILLIANT MASTER! I WON'T LET HIM DIE!

“THAT'S RIGHT” THOUGHT NERO, BUT HE DIDN'T PARTICULARLY SAY IT.

THERE WAS NO TIME TO BICKER – SO THEY SET OUT TOWARDS RED GRAVE CITY ON THE SCHEDULE PREVIOUSLY DECIDED.

- ALRIGHT GOOD, LET'S GO! - SAID NERO.

NICO PRESSED THE GAS PEDAL TO THE FLOOR AND THE CAR STARTED TO STAGGER.

“BE CAREFUL!” SHOUTED NERO.

NICO GLOWED WITH JOY. SHE TOLD HIM WITH A SMILE:

- THAT'S RIGHT, RUNNING IN. FIRST IT WILL SHAKE, AND THEN IT WILL STOP SHAKING AND DRIVE OFF.

THEY DECIDED IN ADVANCE THAT NICO WILL DRIVE, SO SHE DRIVES AS SHE LIKES. NERO SIGHED AND GLANCED AT THE PROSTHESIS IN THE CASE.

THIS WAS HIS NEW “POWER” THAT NICO CREATED IN A MONTH. WHEN THE PROSTHESIS IS NOT NEEDED, IT IS STORED IN A FOLDED STATE, IN A SPECIAL CASE. NICO

IMMEDIATELY THOUGHT ABOUT THE CASE - SHE BROUGHT IT ALONG WITH THE MAIN DEVELOPMENT.

AT FIRST, NERO DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE POINT OF THE COVER WAS. WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT A PROSTHESIS? PUT IT ON AND WEAR IT. BUT THEN NICO CLEARLY EXPLAINED THAT HER OFFSPRING ARE POWERFUL, BUT FRAGILE. MISUSED IN ATTACK; AND IT'D ALREADY NEED REPAIRS. THIS IS BECAUSE NICO WANTED TO MAKE THEM LIGHT AND COMPACT, ALTHOUGH NERO ASKED FOR MORE RELIABILITY. BUT HIS DOUBTS INSTANTLY CAME TO NAUGHT, IT WAS WORTH ONLY TESTING THE PROSTHESIS. THE PIECE CAME OUT POWERFUL, AS NICO HAD PROMISED.

“SO YOU LIKE THE ‘DEVIL BREAKER?’” - SHE ASKED, NOT DISTRACTING TAKING HER EYES AWAY FROM THE ROAD.

-Before the Nightmare-

“DEVIL BREAKER?” ASKED NERO. HE HAD NOT HEARD THIS WORD BEFORE.

“THAT’S WHAT YOUR NEW POWER IS CALLED” NICO SMILED. “EACH MODEL HAS ITS OWN NAME INDIVIDUALLY, BUT IT’S A NAME FOR ALL PROSTHESES AT ONCE” SHE BLURTED OUT, NOT HIDING HER PRIDE, BUT NERO UNDERSTOOD NOTHING.

“WELL, WHAT’S IT MEAN?”

- EVERYTHING SHOULD HAVE A NAME, RIGHT? THE MINIGUN, THE SHOTGUN, RIGHT? INDIVIDUAL NAMES. BUT BOTH ARE CALLED A GENERAL NAME WHICH IS FIREARMS OR GUNS. SO ‘DEVIL BREAKER’ IS STRAIGHT TO THE POINT, IT BREAKS DEMONS!

AFTER HEARING THE EXPLANATION, NERO ONCE AGAIN LOOKED AT THE PROSTHESIS IN THE CASE.

-Before the Nightmare-

- AND THE NAME IS NOT BECAUSE THEY BREAK THEMSELVES?

NIKO FELL SILENT WITH AN INSULTED LOOK, BUT THEN ANSWERED:

- AND IT DEPENDS ON YOU. THERE ARE NO DEFECTS IN MY DESIGN. YOU CAN TAKE SEVERAL PROSTHESES AND CHANGE THEM ON THE GO, SO THINK WITH YOUR HEAD AND GET USED TO IT.

NERO SHRUGGED, BUT DID NOT OBJECT:

- WELL, YOU DID YOUR BEST. I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BE ABLE TO DESIGN TWO DIFFERENT ARMS IN JUST A SINGLE MONTH!

A FEW DAYS AFTER THE SKIRMISH AT MITIS, NICO MADE HER FIRST "DEVIL BREAKER". SHE CALLED IT "OVERTURE" - IT HAD A GENERATOR DEVICE THAT GENERATED ELECTRICITY, WHICH GAVE NERO MORE OPTIONS TO FIGHT. WELL, PURELY A PRELUDE TO A REAL BATTLE.

NERO WAS ALREADY HAPPY THEN. YES, THE DEVIL BREAKERS BROKE, BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS A SPARE AT HAND, SO YOU CAN COULD KEEP GOING.

OF COURSE, AFTER MITIS, NICO WENT HUNTING WITH NERO A COUPLE OF TIMES AGAIN, BUT NEVER PARTICIPATED. IN ONE OF THE ATTACKS, SHE STUDIED THE REMAINS OF THE ENEMY AND CAME UP WITH ANOTHER ONE - "GERBERA".

SHE SAID THAT IT DAWNED ON HER WHEN SHE SAW A GERBERA FLOWER, BUT WHETHER IT IS SO OR NOT, IS HARD TO SAY. NERO NEVER NOTICED WHETHER NICO LOVED FLOWERS. BUT THE WHOLE POINT OF THE NAME, NERO UNDERSTOOD ONLY WHEN HE TESTED THE NEW PROSTHESIS OUT.

-Before the Nightmare-
- A COUPLE MORE IDEAS WERE LYING AROUND, BUT THE DESIGN DID NOT FINISH YET. THERE IS NOT ENOUGH MATERIAL NOR TIME AT THE MOMENT.

- WE HAVE A WORKSHOP WITHIN THE VAN?! - NERO SHOOK HIS HEAD, POINTING SOMEWHERE OVER HIS SHOULDER.

AND THERE, BEHIND THE BACKS OF THE ARMCHAIRS, THERE REALLY WAS A WORKSHOP IN THE BACK OF THE VAN, EQUIPPED WITH EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO RIVET AND REPAIR THE ARMS.

“THE DEMON CORPSES FROM YOU — THE DEVIL BREAKERS FROM ME” NICO ANSWERED SHORTLY, AND NERO GRINNED.

WHEN THEY HAD JUST MET, NERO COULD NOT EVEN THINK THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO EVER BECOME A PARTNER! DAUGHTER OF AGNUS HIMSELF - THE SWORN ENEMY OF NERO!

“I WONDER WHAT DANTE WILL SAY WHEN HE FINDS OUT?” - NERO ESTIMATED AND LOOKED DOWN. - NOT HEARING FROM OR ABOUT DANTE FOR A WHOLE MONTH. DID HE REALLY LOSE TO URIZEN? “SOMEHOW I CAN’T

BELIEVE IT ... BUT A MONTH HAS PASSED. MAYBE HE REALLY LOST? THERE IS NO PARTICULAR CHOICE. IF HE'S ALIVE, I'LL SAVE HIM, IF HE'S DEAD, I'LL WILL AVENGE HIM" NERO THOUGHT, WHILE THE VAN WAS DRIVING HIM TO RED GRAVE CITY.

"WAIT FOR ME, DANTE ..." MUTTERED NERO, HOPING THE DEMON HUNTER WAS STILL ALIVE.

NERO KNEW: THE STAKES ARE NOW HIGH. AND IT IS NOT DANTE WHO NEEDS TO BE SAVED, BUT WORLD IN ITSELF.

HE HAD TO CORRECT HIS MISTAKES, AND TO FIX HIS NAME.

HE HAD TO PROVE THAT HE WAS NOT 'DEAD WEIGHT', AS DANTE HAD CALLED HIM.

THAT'S WHAT NERO THOUGHT. THAT WAS WHAT STOOD BEFORE HIS MIND - TO PROVE AND SHOW HIMSELF.

THE CLOSER RED GRAVE WAS, THE MORE NERO'S PULSE STUMPED. IT WAS AS IF SOMETHING WAS STIRRING INSIDE HIM, YET THERE WAS NOTHING LOGICAL TO TAKE FROM IT.

BUT NERO WOULD LATER FOUND OUT THAT IT WOULD WAS A SIGN OF A NEW STRENGTH...

Devil May Cry®

-Before the Nightmare-