

— *October 14, 1906. Weser River, 9:44 P.M.* —

Johanna remembered the first time she interacted with Vergil. She had lived in Ruheplatz all her life. She had been friends with quite a bit of the village boys. She had her childhood flames here and there, but none of them ever spoke to her on a spiritual level. It didn't help that she was a psychokinetic girl in rural Germany, so her parents and grandparents kept getting her to settle down with a nice psychokinetic boy and raise loving, innocent, magical children, but in their world, it was increasingly harder to come by.

She thought back to that fateful winter day in 1887. She was only 20 years old at the time. Johanna's parents took her to this psychokinetic heritage festival in a Hesse town called Weisheitsbach. Johanna had heard stories about the Schumacher's only son. They had met a couple of times before in formal settings, but neither of them were brave enough to confront each other. She was strolling through the snow-coated streets one night, a type of cold that coated windows with such a thick frost that you couldn't even see through them. The gas-powered street lamps barely helped illuminate the streets. All she could do was slowly trudge through the streets with a nose and cheeks rosy like a ripe tomato, her wool mittens and scarf unable to keep out the biting chill. Suddenly, an unfamiliar warmth enveloped itself around her arms. A 25-year-old Vergil had embraced her from behind. When asked why he did something as improper as hugging a stranger in public, he retorted simply with, "You looked cold."

This was back when Vergil's hair was still a full jet black, back before the wrinkles on his face made him look like an extreme hardass. Johanna fell in love with him due to his brazen confidence to show his affection wherever he went. It was so appealing to her, she didn't even mind the blatant gap between his two front teeth. He was the perfect guy for her: confident, assertive, handsome, but at the same time was expressive about his emotions.. And most of all,

he was a psychokinetic! Not just any psychokinetic, a bloodline connecting all the way back to Ancient Rome! It sounded too good to be true. If only she knew at the time...

Fast forward years later, and Johanna is now 39. Vergil was now a stranger to her. The man who once lifted mountains just to make sure he had time for his lovely wife didn't even breathe in her direction. Every point she made was immediately shot down by him, his only reference being he was the man of the house and he had the ancient bloodline. Yet, there was one woman he would listen to: That whore of a housemaid. Irma was much younger than Johanna, a lot prettier. Johanna felt like vomiting every time she looked at her. The way she could casually prance around the house attending her duties as if her husband wasn't constantly leering at her with his wandering eyes, the way she would smile at him knowing he was constantly eyeing her. Johanna's been having dreams for days replaying the day Irma first accepted her maid job. A bright and plucky teenager eager to earn her goldmarks. *Recommended by Vergil*. She should've slammed the door on her. Stomp on her feet, spit in her face, poked her in the eyes, left her out in the snow. But no, that no-blood harlot had to enter their house. She had to make a place for herself and steal her husband from her.

Frieda was the last straw. In her hands she held in her shaky hands a birth certificate. She stole it from Irma's room, while the maid slept soundly and guilt-free. It was dated April 16, 1900. *Frieda Altergott*. Irma's child. And by this point, she knew all too well who Frieda's father was. Adopted child, her ass. That lying, cheating bastard had to gall to make her live with his illegitimate child. Aigis was best friends with her half-sister this whole time, and didn't know. Every time Johanna would try to squint at Frieda and try to see her as a little clone of Irma, that gap in her teeth pulled her back to that harsh reality. No matter how much Irma she tried to see in her, she was still Vergil's child.

But Johanna couldn't do anything. The children didn't notice Johanna's increasingly bitter and resentful mood. Vergil took this opportunity to invalidate her opinions by joking that she had lost her sanity. But she heard the conversations he had with the maid late at night when they thought she was asleep or not listening. Vergil wanted to commit her into a sanitarium "if she didn't start acting sane soon." He had plans for his new family. She was the only obstacle in his way.

Johanna spent her days before tonight like a lobotomized robot. Staring up at the ceiling in her bed, doing daily household chores without a single Aura of life flowing through her. She would only speak when spoken to. Vergil couldn't have planned this better. He was now the head of the house, and what he or Irma said went. He could finally get rid of the psychokinetic hag he called his wife and take her spot. She was like a worn porcelain doll now, sitting on the curb and waiting for the garbage collectors to take her away. She retreated by the Weser River, miles away from their home. In a trance-like state, she's been using her powers to pick up little pebbles and fling them into the river, watching each individual ripple fade into the moonlit water. When she left the home, Aegis and Frieda were playing house with each other while Irma watched them, crocheting. Nobody knew she was out here.

Then the sound of leather boots crunching against the grass crept its way into her ears. She didn't bother to look at who it was.

"It's a bit chilly to be out here wearing that, don't you think?"

Vergil. Her eyes didn't dare leave the river, and she didn't turn to him. She didn't speak. He came a bit closer to her.

"I noticed you weren't anywhere in the house, so I came looking for you. A bit of a walk as well."

“What do you care?” she snapped back. Her voice was scratchy from disuse.

“You haven’t been yourself lately. I’ve been fearing the worst—”

Johanna stood up slowly. “Spare me the pity, Vergil. I know you don’t mean it.”

“What brought this on?”

Johanna moved her fingers around. “I know she’s yours, Vergil.”

Vergil furrowed his brows. “Who’s ‘she’?”

“Don’t play coy with me,” She shook her head without raising her voice. But even as calm as her voice was, she made her anger quite clear in her tone. “Frieda. The spitting image of Irma, but that gap in her teeth? Just like your ugly mouth.”

He didn’t respond. He crossed his arms and looked her in the eye with an indifferent expression. Johanna continued her rant. “Why do it? What does Irma have that I don’t? A no-blood of all women?”

“Are you saying Irma ‘stole’ me from you?” He finally spat out. His frame bounced as he let out a graveley cackle. “Then allow me to put your anxiety at ease. I never loved you in the first place.”

Johanna paced back a couple of steps. “What?”

“Mhm. I had no intention of being with you for my whole life.”

“Vergil... We’ve been married for 19 years.”

“19 years too long if you ask me,” Vergil shrugged, looking up at the pale, glowing moon. “My parents were introducing me to psychokinetic girls left and right, trying to arrange a bride for me to carry the bloodline. Out of all the ugly cows they tried to hook me up with, you were the most tolerable option. Then when I heard about your bloodline, I realized something.

We could breed the perfect psychokinetic child, the strongest one alive in Europe. Hell, possibly the world.”

Johanna began playing with her earring. 19 years of marriage. Of being with Vergil. Yet this was how she saw her. A puppet. A babymaking, dolled-up, geriatric marionette, tossed aside the moment he saw the next youngster in line. To be preyed upon by him simply because of her bloodline. She grabbed onto her bare arms, which were now sprouting goosebumps, and not just from the chilly autumn night.

“What about Aigis is so important to you?”

Vergil shrugged, smirking. “None of your business, hag. I need Aigis.”

“Frieda’s your child too. And she has psychokinetic potential.”

“Your point?” Vergil scoffed.

“Why not train her as well?”

Vergil stuffed his hands in his coat pockets. “I love Irma because she doesn’t have to deal with psychokinetic burdens or familial obligations. She lives her life, free like a bird. I want her daughter to live that same life.”

“Yet you can run your firstborn into the ground by slowly killing her?” Johanna bit back. Vergil looked away.

“It’s what’s best for our people.”

“Our people? Or best for *you*?”

“If I were you, I’d stop asking questions,” He cryptically threatened. “Now I’d suggest coming back inside before you catch cold.”

Vergil turned around and began walking in the direction of home, which was about a dozen meters from where they were. Johanna decided that she would try something. She had no

clue what this someone would lead her to, but she had no will or motivation to worry about the consequences of what it would be.

“Maybe I’ll train Aigis.”

Vergil stopped in his tracks. He turned around without flaw, like a machine. “What?”

“I’m doing what you want. It’s clear you don’t want me in your life anymore, so I’m leaving. But Aigis comes with me.”

Vergil marched furiously toward Johanna. He stopped a few centimeters in front of her. “You are NOT taking my daughter away from me.”

“OUR daughter, you mean? Forgetting your own words already?”

Vergil huffed, glaring at his dead-eyed, defiant wife. “What’s your plan?”

“Dunno,” She shrugged. “Maybe I’ll take her someplace like Spain, England, Denmark, France, anywhere away from you. I train her MY way. Let her live a life of her own. Get married, don’t get married. Be a teacher, a nurse, or whatever she desires. Away from her authoritarian, abusive father.”

Vergil grabbed onto her left arm. The arm that was decorated with scars. Johanna flinched in shock, as he clutched onto her arm tighter, almost clawing into her flesh.

“You’re not going anywhere, bitch.” He tightened his hold on her, then squeezed his grip. Her skin singed and tingled with a muted, spreading pain as his finger tips cut deeper and deeper into her. The moment a wince escaped her mouth or a tear wrong itself from her eye, he would have already won. Johanna concentrated the entirety of her focus into that one area. His hand. A burst of flame shot out from her hand and caught the sleeve of his coat on fire. Vergil released her to aimlessly swat at the embers catching his other clothes on fire.

“You’re not laying another grimey hand on Aegis.” She declared, planting her bare feet into the grass.

Vergil finished patting out the sprouting fire on his arm. “Don’t do this. You know I’m much more powerful.”

She took a step forward in his direction, causing him to jump back.

“Do you even value your life?” He questioned, his voice quivering a tiny bit.

“Not enough to leave my child behind.” She continued to advance towards him. The moon added a faint glow to her skin, causing her figure to look as pale and ethereal as an angel. With a snap, tiny snow flurries surrounded her hand and she launched them at Vergil’s eyes, blinding the man. She began to run past him, but Vergil slammed his fist into the ground, causing the earth to shoot towards her. A gust of wind lifted her above the fracturing earth and she threw her hand at him, using heavy gravity to pin both feet into the ground. Vergil managed to pry his eyes back open, except now they were bloodshot. Johanna was about to strike him again before he shot his arm upright, summoning a giant bolt of lightning. It struck Johanna midair, briefly paralyzing the woman. Vergil then took the time while she was stunned to grab one of the rocks from the fractured ground and flung it at her chest, sending her back down to the ground. Mud and dirt covered her as she skidded toward the riverbank.

Johanna tried to get up before Vergil could approach her, but he was wildly flinging rocks and tree branches at her to make her stay down. The rocks scratched her face and arms, leaving light red marks all over. The rock struck her torso, tearing the dress around the hem, and there were several spots of blood oozing from the exposed areas. Vergil loomed over her, his palms clenched. He was now towering over her, his bloodshot eyes peering into her gaze as she could

only helplessly peer into his. He planted his foot in her lower abdomen, expelling the remaining oxygen from her lungs. His dirt-covered boot stained her dress as it crushed her diaphragm.

“It’s over now,” he spoke calmly. “Do you surrender?”

Johanna didn’t answer. Vergil knew what it meant.

“I thought not.” He resigned, bringing his hands together. A blue energy orb began crackling and expanding itself inside his fists, growing bigger as every second passed. Johanna scanned his body, looking for any sort of attack opening. Since her palms were face down in the grass, it gave her an idea. Without lifting her palms, she sneakily charged up a golden orb of energy in both hands. Her fingers obscured the glow enough for Vergil to not notice. As he brought his hands down to deliver the final strike, Johanna quickly flashed her hand and launched it at his torso. The orb exploded, staggering him. He fell off the woman, who then got back up on both feet. Still in his stagger, she spawned another orb in her hand and brought both together, creating a bigger ball of energy. Without wasting a single breath, she swung her arm and let the ball of energy rip into him. A wet, squishy sound spurted from his body. A waterfall of red gushes from Vergil’s chest, him letting out a guttural shout. A huge, red scar, running from his right shoulder to the left underside of his ribcage, bled from his chest. A perfect tear in his clothes exposed it in all its full, gory glory. Vergil tried to remain upright as he struggled to stay conscious, but his dark baggy eyes couldn’t stay open.

This was her chance.

Johanna wasted no time in trying to escape from the bleeding tyrant, trying not to trip on her dress as her body pounded like a hammer against the ground. The weight from his blows slowed her movements down. Vergil growled as he looked at his limping wife in front of him with blurry vision. His arms tensed up as he glared at her. His plan was perfect. The kids

would've been oblivious, Irma would be the only one by his side, and the broken woman that was once his wife would've been too powerless to stop him. Why'd she have to be so defiant? Everything was going to fall apart. He didn't care what happened to *her*, but if Aigis died or got taken away, his entire life would've been all for nothing. It didn't matter who or what stood in the way, his plans had to be followed no matter what.

Right as Johanna was about to run past Vergil, he let out a primal, guttural scream that pierced the night sky. He weakly brought up a hand and pressed it against Johanna's belly, over her navel. An energy so powerful that it was painful to even release made his hand tremble. Johanna's face lost all emotion, all activity in that moment. Just an open-mouthed look of stiff horror. Vergil shot a beam that only exited through her lower back, puncturing the spine. All she could let out was a choked grunt before her legs gave out and she flopped onto the grass. Her body rolled down the hill and landed in the Weser. Her hair split into millions of strands in the moonlit freshwater and swirled like seaweed. Her head, arms, and feet were the only parts of her above the crimson-stained water. Vergil stood up and balanced himself on the tree, looking down at the body of his now ex-wife as the river carried her away gently towards the North Sea. Luminescent green Aurae drifted from her body in large numbers, joining the stars dancing in the clear night sky. Clutching his chest, his fingers staining with blood, Vergil limped back home.

Irma was crocheting a new blanket on a rocking chair while she watched young Aigis and Frieda play with dolls. Irma figured that doing something nice for Johanna would at least help in improving her mood.

"Did you hear? Herr Shuler is coming!" Aigis waved the doll around, imitating a Berliner accent.

“The Kaiser’s right hand man?” Frieda also attempted, albeit in a much worse impression. Aigis giggled at her attempt.

The door swung open. Vergil, covered in blood, tree branches, mud, and a big, torn scar running across his chest, stumbled in. He dragged his boots to the doorway, leaning on the frame while panting heavily, beads of sweat pouring down his brow. Irma dropped the needles and blanket.

“Mein herr!” She shrieked, putting her hands all over the man. “What happened?!”

“Bandages now, questions later.” He muttered under his ragged breaths. Irma nodded and ran across the whole house, nearly tripping over herself. As Vergil eased his breathing, Aigis ran towards her father.

“Papa, what happened?!” She shrieked. Her big, blue eyes locked with his. Pushing past the burning hot pain in his chest, he knelt down to her eye level.

“Aigis,” He began. “I have something to tell you about mama.”

“What about her?” That gap in her teeth. Those damn eyes. He had to look her in those deep blues and tell her what happened to her mother. He took a deep breath. He could smell his blood mixing with his hers. The smell of rotting leaves, and water with a tinge of saltiness.

“Your mother decided to run away.”

Aigis stepped back a bit. Her face barely shifted a millimeter. She didn’t get what he meant.

“She told me that she didn’t love you anymore.”

Aigis’ bottom lip quivered. Frieda stayed quiet. She knew better than to get involved in adult business. “But... But she read to me every night. And baked me honey cakes.”

Vergil shrugged with one arm, painting his own face an indifferent look. “She told me that she was so tired of getting hurt during our training sessions because you weren’t obeying me. So she packed up her things and left Germany.”

The 7-year-old lowered her head, her blonde hair obscuring her eyes. She sat down in front of her father with her legs criss-crossed. She put her head in her arms. She started sobbing. Her shoulder trembled as the tears rolled out of her eyes and leaked through the cracks between her fingers. Vergil turned around to sit and watch her wail in pain, without a single hint of regret or doubt showing on his face. He may have just mended his plan.

“I do have some good news,” Vergil smiled, forcing Aigis’ tear-stained head to look at his. “For both of you.”

“G-Good news...?” Aigis whimpered, her voice weak and trembling.

“That’s right. I have a secret to tell you girls. Your mother forced me to keep it a secret,” He smirked. He used his index finger and middle finger to point at each girl. “You two are sisters.”

Frieda and Aigis didn’t move, speak, or make any sort of facial expression. Their eyes didn’t widen, but it looked more like the eyes of the dead.

“I... I thought I was ad— ado— adopt—”

“*Adopted?*” Vergil corrected the 6-year-old. “That was a story I had to make up. She didn’t want you two knowing you’re both my daughters. That’s why you both have the gap in your teeth. Like me.”

The two girls glanced at each other. They were each other’s best friend for as long as they could remember. All this time, they were half-sisters.

Vergil and Irma laid in the master bedroom. Vergil was shirtless, covered in the gauze and bandages across his whole chest. Irma was next to him reading a book. He told her everything that happened dozens of meters away from the house. About their fight. About Johanna's dwindling sanity. And about her eventual demise.

"What's the matter?" Vergil cooed, looking the young maid in the eye. "We're in the same bed now? You don't have to frown."

Irma sighed, setting her book down. "Frau Schumacher was still a friend of mine. She treated me as if I were a part of the family when I had nowhere else to go. I wish she didn't have to die."

Vergil huffed lightly at the gloomy room. "*A friend*, you say?"

"Is there something wrong?"

"Irma, would a friend sleep with her husband and carry his bastard in her belly?" He asked sharply.

"You wouldn't keep your hands off of me," Irma started to argue, shifting her body around. This caught the man off guard. Irma had always kept her mouth shut, afraid to offend him in the slightest. "With the way you're always around me, in my face, giving me things, it was difficult for me to conduct myself."

"Yet, you still gave yourself to me," He rebutted, almost with a king-like pride. "You can blame me for seducing you all you want, yet it was you who ultimately decided to go through with it."

Irma sunk her shoulders in defeat. She owed this man too much to fight him on this. "I'm sorry, Herr Schumacher."

Vergil put a finger on her lips, splitting them into perfect two. “It’s just us now. Call me Vergil.”

Aigis and Frieda were in their room. All candlelight had gone out for the night. Aigis knew she should’ve been asleep by now, but the young child couldn’t help but compulsively hug her stuffed animals. She had already cried out all of her tears. She couldn’t help but imagine her mom walking in, patting her shoulder, asking her what was wrong, and coming in with another storybook about an ancient psychokinetic legend. She kept telling herself that at any moment, Johanna would walk through that door. Whenever she had bad anxieties, whether it be from bad dreams, a storm outside, or a bad injury, her mother would always be there. She would always ease her fears, tell her everything was going to be okay, and tell her a story that always had a happy ending. But every time she looked, the door stayed shut, trapping them in darkness.

“Frieda?” Aigis called out. The room was so dark, she couldn’t even see the canopy flowing over her bed. “Are you awake?”

Some silence. “Yeah.”

“Why’d she have to leave?” Aigis wondered. Her question was met with silence, as Frieda didn’t exactly know the answer to her question. “She always made us honey cake, read to us, bought us new clothes and toys. She had to have loved us, right?”

“Grown-ups lie sometimes,” Frieda reminded, staring out at the ceiling with her blanket underneath her tiny chin. “They think we’re dumb.”

“I see.” Aigis resigned. More silence.

“I know we just found out like 10 seconds ago,” Frieda began. “But if you ever feel lonely, I’m there for you.”

Even though she couldn't see it in the blinding dark, Aigis smiled at Frieda silently. It helped her feel a little less alone.

“Do you think Mama went to the Promised Land?” Aigis asked with uncertainty. Frieda overheard many of the legends Aigis heard and about this so-called “Promised Land”. Frieda didn't really get what that whole deal was all about, since Johanna never really elaborated much. Still, she was engrossed in the idea.

“That's where she went. I know she did. And if I want to follow her there, then I need to train. No matter what.”