

# Brothers In Arms

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## Chapter 5

Dante, figuring that Nero and Atsuma would finish this fight any time now, retreated to look after the fourth member of their little group who'd sunk to the floor due to sheer overexertion. Deactivating his *Devil Trigger*, he strolled to the blue-clad student as the other two were landing the finishing blows on their gigantic friend and met the dulled eyes with a half-grin of his own. Kneeling down next to him, he followed the younger man's line of sight. Beastie was just ascending to a higher plane of existence in form of a huge puddle of sticky goo and the hunter nodded to himself.

This fight had been interesting. More than that, actually- not only had it been a challenge, it had also caused him to go through one roller-coaster of emotions, all things considered. Even though nothing could've kept him from smiling like some sort of madman when he saw both Atsuma and Nero awakening their inner powers to finally take their opponent down, he *was* going to give Nero an earful for his stunt earlier. His heart had stopped for longer than just a second when he'd seen his last living relative *throwing himself* right into a handful of gaping jaws with teeth longer and sharper than he cared for. Unlike Nero, Dante had actually *seen* what this idea had done besides blowing up a couple heads- which, admittedly, had been a good shot. Namely the long tooth not only impaling his younger friend, but the blast knocking it back almost causing him to tear his own leg off entirely. It couldn't have been more than an inch or two of skin and muscle remaining to keep it attached to his body. Relief had flooded him upon seeing his partner on his knees, but intact.

Only to be replaced by worry and a slight hint of panic again when almost a dozen heads had risen to shower Nero with the acidic substance at the same time. He hated to admit, but if it hadn't been for Tōya- who's rational and calculating mind was still working despite the immense fright he'd obviously felt for his childhood friend-, that might have been the end for Nero, and maybe even himself, too. Even if he *had* managed to get close enough to do something, he was still at a loss as to *what* he could have done to get them both to safety. But his client had motioned to him that he'd take care of Nero while at the same time asking him to help Atsuma, something he'd immediately agreed to. He'd already seen enough of Tōya to figure that he had to have an idea if he was dishing out plans like that. So while the student had taken to save his relative's butt, he'd jumped in to get Atsuma out of the assaulting heads, the young man thankfully fine aside from a few scratches and bruises.

From then on, the fight had been difficult, but not nearly as bad for his heart. Sure,

he'd startled as well when beastie had decided to cause a freaking earthquake, especially when Atsuma had lost his footing and fallen into one of the rips in the ground, be as soon as he saw both Nero and Tōya rushing over to help, he had no qualms about leaving it in their capable hands, instead opting to keep their enemy busy and their backs free. Which had been kinda fun, too, and that was always a plus.

Dante had felt that strange surge in both familiar and unknown energy as well, his demonic heritage reacting to it erratically, but he'd been too busy playing catch with a dozen heads to actually check what was happening. Seeing the two youngsters return, both their incredible powers unleashed and proceeding to pound their beast-friend into the ground had been more than satisfying.

And here he was now, Tōya's arm slung over his shoulder and leading the both of them to their friends who were still on all fours due to overwhelming exhaustion, but conscious and, in Atsuma's case, mostly unhurt. His client let go of him in order to walk the last few steps to his childhood friend on his own, plopping down on the ground next to him, as Dante made his way over to Nero. Crouching down, he placed a hand on the younger part-demon's shoulder, taking in how he was staring at the ground beneath them with unfocussed eyes, hair drenched with sweat.

"You okay?", Dante asked quietly, looking for any hints of lasting damage, as unlikely as they were. Nero's healing factor was a little weaker than his own when in human form, but definitely not while they were triggered. He hadn't seen anything that would have caused him any lasting injuries, so there shouldn't be any on Nero, either, but better be safe than sorry.

"Nothing a good night's sleep won't fix. Damn, I'm *spent*", the hunter muttered, a wry half-smirk sneaking onto his lips. "Don't just stand there. Help me up, man", he ordered, his voice tired, but humorous. Dante let out a small laugh before obliging, putting one arm around Nero's waist to assist him in getting into an upright position. As soon as he was standing, the younger man stretched, his spine popping back into place loudly and a groan escaped his lips. Stepping away, slightly wobbly, but otherwise fine, he rolled his shoulders and turned to face Dante properly.

"I guess we're done here, huh?"

Shrugging, Dante crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"You'd know better than me. You're the one with the D-dar."

"Yeah, that one's still feeling kinda funky right now... But I don't think there are any demons left." He turned to the other two who were now sitting next to each other, talking quietly.

"You guys ready to go back?", he inquired, noting mildly curious how they seemed to be both focussing on Atsuma's artificial limb. Mismatched eyes shifted to meet his own and a sheepish grin appeared on the tanned face.

"I will be in a moment, but I think Tōya's going to need some help."

"I'd appreciate if you didn't decide that for me. But I'm afraid he is right. I've consumed a *God's Ambrosia* to heal my bruises and accelerate the rate at which I naturally replenish Ether, but I fear I overexerted myself." Upon finishing, his cool demeanour slipped and he shot a look of sheer incredulity at the two demon hunters. "I don't understand how you can be *fine* like that after this. I thought Atsuma's stamina is ridiculous, but the two of you are something else entirely." And then something akin to miraculous curiosity entered his eyes as if they were objects to be studied.

Nero merely shrugged his shoulders and looked away, uncomfortable under the scrutiny once more, whereas Dante merely laughed.

"That's demon-hybrids for you. Plus we're kind of used to this, it *is* our job, after all."

Tōya muttered something under his breath aforementioned hybrids couldn't quite make out, but Nero had the feeling it was nothing overly flattering- an assumption supported by the fact that it was now Atsuma's turn to look pole-axed, hissing "Tōya!" to reprimand his friend. He and Dante snorted in tandem, not offended at all. They'd seen enough of the blue-clad student to know that he didn't mean any harm and was merely worn out beyond the point of keeping up his normally distanced and calculating behaviour, making him actually seem like the young man he was. Nero was just about to suggest weaving through the tears in the earth to return to *Yokohama City* when he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his ear. Letting out a surprised "Ow!", he whipped around, foreign fingers still clamped around his helix and found himself face to face with Dante who growled at him. Bringing up his hands to slap the abusive fingers away, he was stopped mid-movement when his older relative poked him into the chest *hard*.

"What the hell is wrong with-"

"*That-*", Dante began his explanation, the word empathised by twisting his fingers sharply, tearing another yelp out of Nero, "is what you get for nearly giving me a heart attack. I should ask what the hell is wrong with *you* for throwing yourself right a bunch of beastie's heads."

"But that-" His protests were cut short by another twist.

"Hush. I know why you did it and it was a good shot, but that was still beyond dangerous and reckless, even for the likes of us. Just imagine how you would feel if you had to watch dear old me pulling a stunt like that."

Not waiting for an answer, he finally released Nero's reddened ear who reflexively brought his hand up to gently rub the abused body part. As soon as Dante turned away, however, Nero glared at his back, cheeks flaming, & muttered "Good riddance..." under his breath to no one in particular. Dante's ear twitched.

"What was that?"

“Nothing! So you going to help Tōya? You've probably got the most energy left out of all of us”, the young hunter suggested, changing the topic as he tried to will the blood out of his face. Tōya looking amused and Atsuma grinning like a lunatic weren't helping that, either. Dante didn't even bother to reply and instead just went over to their client, crouched onto the floor and offered his shoulder. After some shuffling, Tōya's arm was securely slung around the hunter's neck as the latter lifted them both into a standing position. Nero went over to Atsuma and held after a brief moment of hesitation his left hand out to help him up as well. The latter smiled wryly as he took it.

“Not gonna risk another strange reaction, huh? Well, it's not like I can blame you. That was *weird*.”

Nero merely nodded as he pulled the older male to his feet, both of them turning around to follow their friends who were already strolling ahead. Making a short bee-line to pick up his *Red Queen*, which had still been lodged in the ground where he'd left it when the pseudo-earthquake started, all four of them made their way through the remains of the plains, carefully avoiding all the spots that looked unstable. Their way back was mostly silent, neither being in the mood for idle chatter, but rather mulling the things that had transpired here today over. Some of them were most fascinating, after all.

The sun was beginning to set by the time they arrived back at *Yokohama City*, filthy and their clothes in tatters. Especially Nero, with his jeans bearing little resemblance to actual legwear anymore, was drawing attention to their little group, but neither of them particularly cared. The young part-demon made a quick stop at the car he and Dante had arrived in to dig their spare clothes out of the trunk- they were going to stay for the night. Tōya had offered them a room in the university's dormitory as well as free meals this evening and the next morning before they'd start their two-day trip back to *Capulet City*. Atsuma had looked a little doubtful at that, but Tōya had waved him off, stating with a tired but mischievous gleam in his eyes that he could pull some strings as headstudent and resident genius. And thus, the two hunters, not *particularly* in the mood to be sitting in a cramped car for the next 40 hours, had quickly accepted.

Agreeing to meet in the cafeteria again in about an hour, the two half-demons headed to their designated room. It was simple and clean, offering everything that was necessary for a student. Two beds were situated in opposing corners, two closets next to them and a pair of desks with some shelves were the only furniture. A quick look revealed that the door between the beds led to a small, but functional bathroom. Grabbing his change of clothes and throwing Dante's on one of the beds, Nero instantly announced that he'd shower first. Getting out of his now rather crunchy jeans that were scattering flakes of dry blood like snow with each of his movements was his top priority. Dante merely waved him off as he begun to peel himself out of his shabby-looking coat.

About 30 minutes later, both part-devils were clean again and had changed into their spare attire. Nero had had to say adieu to his jeans, the remaining scraps far beyond salvation. Dante, realising his younger partner wasn't up for conversation right now,

just watched him leave the room again. Although Nero knew he was too early, he already made his way back into the now-deserted cafeteria. The sun had almost disappeared behind the horizon now, colouring the sky in a deep red streaked with orange. He settled on a chair next to the opened door leading outside and put his feet on another. The part-devil could hear some rustling behind him and then the smell of fresh food entered his nose. With his stomach growling in response, he leaned back, putting his *Devil Bringer* behind his head and fondling *Blue Rose's* handle with the other.

Roughly half an hour later, Dante entered the room, followed by Atsuma and Tōya and all three joined him at the table. A minute later, a waitress brought over plates with steaming food, her smile looking more than a little tight, not particularly happy with having to serve customers- and strangers at that- at this hour. Most of the meal went over in silence, each of them lost in their own thoughts, aside from a few snide remarks concerning the amount of food Atsuma wolfed down. Who merely buffed himself up in response, flexing his pretty impressive muscles and claiming he needed it to feed these guys, not himself. It didn't take long until they were finished, and thanks to the waitress standing nearby, glaring at the four, both students excused themselves, prompting Dante and Nero to return to their room for the night as well.

They plopped down on the beds, silence still surrounding them. Dante, leaning against the wall, propped his elbow in his knee and regarded his younger partner carefully before speaking up.

“So, you going to tell me now what happened back there?”

Nero plopped on his back, throwing his human arm up to cover his eyes. He felt *so strange*. He *knew* he'd said he'd tell Dante about it and he fully intended to, and yet... there was a part of him that didn't want him to, to keep this to himself. Maybe it was because although his *Devil Bringer* looked and behaved normally again, it still felt different. It was neither heating up nor glowing, obviously, but the hum was also gone. But if he focussed, he could still feel *something*, ever so faint, shifting along his veins as he flexed his fingers. He had no idea what it was, either. All he *did* know was that it was because of that weird reaction earlier, caused by his demonic arm touching Atsuma's artificial one. Maybe... Hadn't Atsuma said his arm was partly sentient, the same as his, and also liked to absorb things left and right? Perhaps that was the reason they'd resonated with each other so strongly.

Trapped in his own thoughts, he felt his frustration growing bigger at the obvious lack of answers. He knew it seemed out of character for him, but he couldn't help but find himself wanting explanations most likely no one could ever provide. Nero had had this arm for multiple years now and they hadn't gotten any closer in finding information on it. Sure, he knew what he could do with it, but what it was there for? Why he had it? What else it might be capable of? They'd sooner hunt demons on Uranus than find any of these answers, he pegged. And from what little he knew- *again, he knew so little and it was aggravating-*, Atsuma's arm was over a thousand years old. Fat chance they were going to find anything out about that one, too.

Thankfully, Dante didn't probe any further, instead just watching his young protégé as

he was struggling with his own thoughts. It wasn't as if he was any smarter concerning this issue- he was probably even more confused by what had transpired earlier than Nero and Atsuma were- but he wasn't directly involved. He knew he *hated* it when he wasn't in full control of his body, be it manipulation, poison or whatever, so having one of his limbs doing whatever it wanted whenever the hell it wanted would leave him clawing at the walls, too. Even with his vast knowledge of demons and the underworld, not even he could hazard a guess as to what had happened.

The silence continued between them for a while. Time was passing slowly, lazily ticking away without any regard for the young people struggling with themselves. After a while, Dante had entered a light doze- he wasn't going to fall into a deep slumber in a situation like this, but no point in counting the tiles in the ceiling. Nero, however, felt just as restless as before. After he'd just turned in his bed for the umpteenth time, he cursed in his head and stood up. Figuring he shouldn't cause a ruckus at this time of night, he silently pulled his boots on, leaving his coat and left the dormitory room, a pair of half-opened, grey eyes following his movements.

After a brief moment of orientation, the part-devil headed towards the middle of the complex. He needed some fresh air, maybe that would help him in getting rid of these pesky, stubborn thoughts roaming in his mind, causing more questions than they answered. Heading outside, he was greeted by a sight he had not expected.

The garden in the courtyard seemed to be glowing in the moonlight. Small, white lights were scattered around, illuminating the otherwise barely visible paths. Nero was almost expecting them to move as if they were a peculiar kind of fireflies. Closer inspection, however, revealed they were the star-shaped flowers he'd seen earlier that day, buds now opened and emitting a gentle light. His worries briefly forgotten at the marvellous display in front of him, he almost didn't hear the footsteps approaching. His *Devil Bringer*, however, was telling him exactly who it was.

"You can't sleep, either, huh", Atsuma stated as he came to stand next to Nero. The latter threw him a brief glance before shrugging, his attention returning to the display in front of him. This university was *amazing*. He flexed the fingers of his demonic arm, trying to get rid of the somewhat pleasant tingling that was appearing, however faint. Atsuma, a lot less subtle, threw a look at his own hand, brows furrowed, as he shook it a couple times.

"Yours is still acting up, too?", Nero asked, voice quiet in the silence of the night. The older male let out a long sigh as he stopped his endeavour.

"Yeah, it's different again, though... But man, that was *weird* today."

Nero laughed without a lot of humour. "You're telling me."

They were silent for a moment before Atsuma turned to face the demon hunter, face unusually thoughtful.

"You know... I don't think I've thanked you for saving me. So, uh... thanks a lot."

Nero merely shrugged. "Just returned the favour." Atsuma, however, shook his head. "Nah, you'd have been fine. Though I gotta say, I haven't met a lot of people able to lift over 200 pounds as easily as that."

Now Nero snorted, shooting a both amused and critical look at his new friend's rather impressive figure. Sure, he and Dante were anything but lanky, but Atsuma's arms looked like they were solely made out of pure muscle. There didn't seem to be an ounce of fat on that guy. "Says the guy who caused a minor earthquake by punching the ground."

Atsuma laughed as he shook his head. "That wasn't all me. Ether manipulation again."

Nero kept eyeing him.

"When you punched through that knight's armour *and* ribcage, too?"

After a short pause, the red-clad student smiled sheepishly and scratched the back of his head, his biceps, fully visible without the jacket, playing about at each movement. "Okay, I guess you got me there."

Feeling oddly satisfied at having won this mock-argument, a small smirk curled the corners of Nero's lips upwards. The restlessness he had been feeling up until now was fading away, most likely thanks to the company. He couldn't pinpoint the exact reason, but there was something about Atsuma that just made him feel comfortable. It wasn't unlike Dante's effect on him- even though they usually seemed to be either trading insults back and forth or were poking fun at everything the other did, he knew Dante was always watching his back and vice versa. What made this situation so strange was the short time it had taken for this feeling to come into existence, although it didn't take a genius to figure the reason for *that* out.

"You can feel it, too, can't you?", Atsuma asked silently, his tone calm yet also slightly wistful, mismatched eyes shifting between his own artificial limb and Nero's *Devil Bringer*, free for all to see without his coat. The older male was studying it intently now, taking in how the scales went up to his biceps, fading into skin around his shoulder. The soft, blue glow from his leathery palm and the lines weaving through the hide engulfing the limb in a gentle light. Feeling slightly put on the spot, Nero shifted a little under the attention but forced himself to keep his arm where it was. There really was *no reason at all* to try and hide it from Atsuma. He eyed the other man who brought his left hand up to run his fingers over the smooth scales of his demonic arm. They felt cool to the touch, making it obvious that his *Devil Bringer* still wasn't at its normal temperature. Unexpectedly, Atsuma's expression didn't change. He still looked sombre and contemplative.

"It's strange", he begun, voice halting for a brief moment as he rested his left hand on Nero's demonic arm. The fingers of his right hand twitched. "I never thought I'd meet someone else like that. Like... me. You know, at first, when my arm seemed to be drawn to yours- to you- I was only confused. But when you told me your story... It probably makes me look like a shitty person, but I was also kind of glad to have met you. I wasn't alone with this anymore. You know what it's like, don't you? To hear

voices, too feel commands, to have your arm telling you what do to without wanting to. Tōya knows about all this, too, but he can't understand the way I- we do."

Nero could merely nod, the words reflecting some of the thoughts he'd had without realising what they were. But now that they were given shape, spoken out loud, he couldn't help but agree with them wholeheartedly. As much as he appreciated Dante and their relationship, his *Devil Bringer* had always been a weird subject. Partly because Nero never knew how to explain the things surrounding it and partly because- well, Dante couldn't know and never would. Unless he suddenly grew a demonic limb as well.

"You know, earlier, when our arms touched- I told you about *Infinity*, haven't I? I haven't heard my arm speaking to me in years but at that moment... It was different, though. It was... distorted, the commands were not clear, but it still felt as if it was telling me to do *something*. Even though I learnt to control it back then... I almost lost it today. Took all I had to force the voices back, to stay myself."

Nero's mouth suddenly felt dry. He had an idea where that came from- he'd felt a slightly different urge from usual as well, after all, much more primitive and feral than the cutting, striving demands for power his *Devil Bringer* had used to whisper into his ear- still did, occasionally. He shifted, trying to pull his arm back, but the fingers around his forearm tightened like a clamp, keeping it where it was. Atsuma's mismatched gaze slowly rose to meet his own, making the part-demon feel uncomfortable.

"That was because of you, wasn't it? The voices from your arm reawakened the ones in mine. Even made them stronger." It wasn't a question. Nero hesitated for a moment before he nodded.

"Most likely."

"I see." The death-grip around his arm, however, was as tight as ever. Nero was starting to worry about what was going to happen now- maybe this strange feeling of comradeship in their shared circumstances didn't extend to the possibility of one causing the other to go utterly haywire. Atsuma had still looked pained about his memory of going out of control multiple years ago. His uneasiness, however, dissipated in an instant when the older male suddenly smiled at him, his grip loosening.

"But it was also thanks to you that I could fight it back again. It figured if you were able to ignore the voice of your arm, I could do it, too. Gotta set an example as your senpai, don't I?"

And just like that, the nearly tangible tension that had risen around them just disappeared like a puff of air. The older male laughed as he finally let Nero's arm go before pumping his fist and presenting the younger male his best, blindingly bright smile.

"That's it. If you've got any issues with your arm, just come hit me up. I know they're not exactly the same, but I still have some more experience with those and who

knows, maybe that might come in handy some time. I'll tell Tōya to give you my number- I can't remember it for the *life* of me."

Slightly flabbergasted, Nero couldn't do anything but nod, even if he also felt a smile tearing away at his lips. He turned to face his companion fully and held out his left hand.

"You guys already have our number. If you ever have any issues with demons- or anything else- don't hesitate to call. We'll make some space in our schedule." Not that it was that loaded to begin with.

"You bet!", Atsuma exclaimed cheerily, his grin stretching from ear to ear as he slapped his hand into the offered palm.

And with that, the depressing and sombre mood had vanished entirely. The two of them spent some more time talking and laughing beneath the stars, surrounded by softly glowing moonflowers before the exhaustion of the day finally caught up to them. It didn't take long until Atsuma was yawning throughout each of his sentences and even Nero had caught himself just staring blankly ahead at times. They finally bid each other a good night, spirits lifted, and headed for their respective rooms, the barely recognisably hum in their arms not unsettling anymore, but rather easing them into a peaceful sleep after a day filled with extraordinary events.

The next morning came far too soon for Nero's liking. He could already hear Dante shuffling around in their room as the younger hunter piled some more blankets onto his head. His older relative hadn't been asleep when he'd returned last night but at least pretended to, fully content with seeing him back safe and in an obviously better mood than before. Nero knew he wasn't going to get out of the needed conversation, but even that couldn't hamper his spirits as much as they did before he'd talked with Atsuma. Screwing his eyes tightly shut, the part-devil pressed his face into the pillows some more when the shuffling got louder. The way he figured, Dante would amuse him for only a few more minutes until he was going to be thrown out of bed- literally, if necessary. So even though he felt extremely comfortable in his current position on his stomach, sprawled over the entire bed with one hand dangling off the edge as well as half his leg, he prepared himself mentally for having this pleasure taken away soon enough.

And he proved to be right. Exactly two minutes and thirteen seconds later, he could hear an amused snort from above before a leather-gloved hand shook his shoulder. In a futile attempt of resistance, Nero merely swatted with his *Devil Bringer* at the intruding limb, tearing a laugh out of Dante's throat.

"One minute before I'll *make* you get up, kid."

"Try me."

Dropping his demonic arm back onto the mattress, Nero gave a slight moan and counted to twenty before finally forcing his eyes open. Pulling the pile of blankets off his head, he rose to a sitting position as a long yawn escaped his mouth and he

stretched. As much as he wanted to keep the sleepiness, instincts and habit left him wide awake sooner rather than later and after a brief trip to the bathroom, he found himself fully clothed and ready to go. Attaching both *Blue Rose* as well as *Red Queen* to himself again, the two part-devils soon made their way to the cafeteria to meet up with their clients for the promised breakfast.

Despite the early hours, the hall was bustling with activity. Students were running left and right and it would have taken the two of them a moment to locate their companions- at least it would have if Nero hadn't known exactly where to find them and determinedly pushed his way through the masses. A small case with what appeared to be the university's logo was sitting on the table between the two students who were chatting among themselves. As soon as they saw the two hunters approaching, they waved.

The meal didn't take long. Piling the used dishes onto each other and setting them to the side, Tōya pushed the black case towards Dante and Nero. With a nod and a slight smile, he clarified: "Your payment."

Both demon hunters were about to object- albeit for different reasons- but as soon as they opened their mouths, Tōya raised his hand to stop them.

"I figured you'd be unwilling. I took the liberty to do some research and have gathered that you- both of you- tend to let assignments go unpaid in certain circumstances. I'll let you know, however, that this was an official assignment I gave to you in my function as headstudent of *Yokohama University for Enchantment* in order to protect both its students and staff as well as the civilians living in this city. So I must absolutely insist the two of you take your rightful payment."

Dante and Nero shared a long look, their tendency to consider jobs like these personal favours rather than business battling with their client's logic. Ultimately, they both gave in and Dante took the case while inclining his head.

"Much appreciated, then."

The very moment the school bell rang, signalling the imminent start of the first classes and causing students left and right to startle before jumping from their seats to rush out of the cafeteria, also meant the end of this trip. The two demon hunters rose to their feet, about to say goodbye, but both Tōya and Atsuma also stood. Atsuma grinned and pointed with his thumb to his childhood friend.

"Headstudent. He pulled some strings so we have the day off. We'll see you guys out of town, at least."

And with that, the four of them made their way out of the tall structure before leaving the campus. The festival, which had been in full blast and was also being fully ignored upon their return the previous day, was only starting to come back to life now. Most of the stalls were still closed, only very few were being set up again already. The journey to their car took only a few minutes. Dante put both their weapons as well as the case on the back seat before taking the keys out of the pocket

of his coat.

Nero had just turned to Tōya and Atsuma for a final farewell when he heard Dante's "Here!" before he raised his hand and caught the keys blindly. Tōya blinked at him while Atsuma's grin only widened as he winked. Nero returned the gesture before holding out his left hand once again, shaking theirs one after another.

"You see, if you ever feel like letting me do some research-", Tōya started, but Atsuma quickly put a hand on his friend's mouth, muffling his voice.

"Don't listen to him. And you, Tōya, *behave*. I swear you're getting crazier for stuff like this by the month... Anyway. I hope we'll hear from you guys soon, okay? Have a good trip back!" And then he leaned forward, his childhood friend still in a headlock in order to keep him silent. "Our private numbers are in that case, too. I told Tōya to put them in there, so don't be a stranger, okay?", he added quietly.

"Thanks." A slightly crooked smile sneaked onto Nero's lips as he nodded once before turning to the car and seeing Dante waving at their new friends as well. The younger hunter opened the door and dropped into the seat, hands on the steering wheel and key in the ignition, not even bothering to give Dante any more seconds than necessary to get in as well. The entire vehicle shook as the older hunter forcefully plopped into the passenger seat, causing wariness about its condition to rise once again.

"Ten hours, then it's your turn."

"Yes, yes, whatever you say, Mister All-I-Needed-Was-A-Friend."

Nero didn't even bother to look or reply as he started the car while clonking Dante over the head with the hilt of his *Blue Rose*, soon leaving their waving friends behind on their way back home.