

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 5](#).)

Akuma pulled his hood up over his head to hide his horns. He moved off into the forest into a small clearing surrounded by a thicket. In the center sat a small house. It was quiet; pale green light shining through the veil of the trees with sunbeams. A single apple tree stood outside the house, blooming with flowers. He approached slowly and stood next to the tree, staring at the house. The sound of a creaking door made him jump up onto a low branch. A young man with black hair, blue eyes, and glasses came out of the door. He wore a black turtleneck, a green coat, and black jeans. His hands rested in his pockets and he looked calmly at the hybrid. "Back again?" he asked softly. Akuma frowned slightly, watching him cautiously. "Come inside if you want," the man added before turning and walking back in. Akuma knew this man as Dion, a lab scientist; the one who set him free. He wouldn't call him a friend though; their relationship wasn't very close to his concern. But Dion had always offered him food and shelter. The hybrid waited a minute before finally following inside.

The boy paused in the doorway, looking around. Dion had stepped back over to his desk, which had papers strewn about it. He brushed them together into a single stack and looked over his shoulder at the hybrid. "Are you hungry then? Or injured?" he asked. Akuma grabbed his stomach lightly, hinting to Dion what he needed. The man smiled and said, "Hungry it is then." He walked into the kitchen and grabbed an apple, throwing it to the hybrid as he came back. Akuma mumbled and walked to the couch, plopping down. "Not your favorite I know, but I know you aren't eating as much fruit as you should," the scientist said with a slight laugh. The hybrid sank his teeth into the apple, munching quietly. Dion crossed the room and closed the door before returning to his desk. Then he asked, "On that note, need a checkup?"

Akuma looked at the floor and nodded. A large ruckus outside caught his attention. "What is...?" Dion murmured before he walked to the window and looked around outside. He saw the trees rustle, but nothing was in them. He squinted through the thicket, seeing the form of a boy with a black hooded light jacket. "Ah, just a kid," he said quietly as he walked back to his desk. Akuma's teeth sliced through the apple in a snap as he heard Dion's declaration. He jumped up and ran to the window. A growl escaped his throat as he recognized the figure through the trees. Dion glanced up, adjusting his glasses and asked, "Is there a problem?"

The hybrid gritted his teeth in silence for a moment. "Him," the boy grumbled. Akuma moved to the door and stepped outside, seeing what this human wanted now.

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [Chapter 7](#).)

Many people had returned to the city now, picking up rubble and cleaning up the place. A few dragons

were helping out as well, adding an odd mix to the group. "Hey, let's get lunch, eh?" Rika said to Albel with her hands on her hips.

"Sure," the hybrid grunted, following after her into the woods.

Rika stopped by the river and crouched, looking in the water. "Cooked fish sounds good," she murmured.

"Look at this," someone called. "A halfbreed and an ape." Two black dragons landed nearby.

The young woman turned and straightened herself. "And what do you overgrown iguanas want?" she snapped as she placed hands on her hips.

One of the dragons sneered, "We were just thinking about lunch. I like a little spice in mine."

The woman retorted, "Heh, you'll die if you try."

Albel smirked arrogantly and said, "Pathetic worms. I've no interest in trouncing weaklings. But if you so insist." The dragons were the first to attack as they charged at their prey. One turned and swung his tail as Rika drew her sword. It caught her in the gut, but she held on as it swung around. As the tail slowed in its course, the hunter stabbed her sword into it, gouging what she could. The dragon yowled and threw her off. Rika hit the ground with a grunt and rolled back to her feet.

The other dragon charged with her horns at Albel. The hybrid grabbed onto them, sliding back a few feet and then lifting the beast up by her horns and slamming her down on the other side on her back. The first dragon, enraged by his tail, threw a magical ball of energy at Rika. The hunter swung her sword, its enchanted properties activating and deflecting the ball to the other dragon. As the second dragon was hit off guard, Albel jumped on her and drug his claws across her windpipe. The first dragon saw this and roared angrily. He charged at Rika and snapping at her with his teeth. The hunter brought her sword around again, slicing his mouth and cutting his tongue off. The dragon yelled out again, turning to fly away.

Rika yelled after him, "Nah uh uh, you're missing the main course!" She took her bow off her back and fired three arrows, ripping the dragon's wings. He crashed to the ground and she ran forward, dragging her sword up along his chest and throat, killing him. She moved to the river and cleaned her sword. Once she was done, she sheathed her now clean sword and said proudly, "Stupid lizards. They go after civilians and think they're tough. This is what happens when they fight a real hunter." Albel chuckled, his eyes glowing from the blood giving him the hunter's mode. Then she looked at her companion and muttered, "Mind if I borrow your katana? Makes a better spear than a broad sword." The hybrid snorted and unsheathed his blade, handing it to her. A while passed and Rika skewered up a pile of fish. She picked up the tails and walked down stream. "Well let's go," she said.

"And the dragons?" asked Albel, who looked to the dead bodies.

The hunter scoffed, "Who cares? I got all my hunting equipment already. I don't need their hides." Once they got farther down, Albel returned to normal as he no longer smelled the blood anymore. Rika made a fire pit and gathered kindling. "Lend a hand?" she asked, pointing at the pit. The hybrid spat a fire ball onto the wood and it took ablaze. The woman propped the fish on sticks against the fire. "Wonder who this Woltar is. Dragon by the sound of it," she said as the fire crackled. "Don't really care or nothing if he rebuilds the city. Works for me," she laughed again.

Her friend added, "Curious more what the sudden interest in humans is."

Rika sat down in front of the fire, "Heh, well, we'll see."

Dion glanced at the door as Chi entered. He sighed quietly, seeing Akuma was still in one piece. He didn't know how to manage the boy either. The hybrid was certainly marching to the beat of his own drum. The man looked over, seeing Akuma back on the couch, marshmallow bag in hand and woofing them down. At least he still had some childish tendencies to him. *'I'll have to show him how to roast them,'* Dion thought with a faint smile. He grabbed the wooden whistle off his desk and slipped it into his pocket before looking back to Nick. "Ready to get started then?" he asked.

The mage walked over to him and took a seat near the desk. He looked at Dion intently and answered, "Yeah, I'm ready, I already have an ideal spell in mind, just tell me what to do."

The scientist leaned over his desk and grabbed the sketch he had made during Nick and Akuma's scuffle. He showed it to him and said, "Just a parasite to go and attack the barrier here." He pointed to its location on the drawing. "It needs to dissolve into the DNA afterward. Chi's magic will take care of the painkillers," he explained.

Then Nick nodded before he inquired, "But first, I must ask, what is that whistle for?"

Dion was caught a bit off guard by the question about the whistle. He smiled and laughed quietly, "Ah, don't worry about that. If it's necessary, I will use it. It's a sort of... call you could call it." He reached his hand in his pocket and ran his fingers over the wooden whistle. He hadn't touched it in years even though he had it. It was mostly from fear for his own life, but he figured it would need to be settled soon. Especially with Fayt being cured. He sighed quietly and adjusted his glasses, setting the paper down. "All clear then? Also, I suppose it will have to be something small enough to ingest without choking on it."

Nick nodded and turned his palm face up, a small glow starting to focus into the center of it. The boy closed his eyes and concentrated as Chi and Dion watched him in silence. A few seconds later, Nick

opened his eyes and looked at his palm. There was a small glowing orb resting in the center and it was about the size of a marble. "It will be dormant until it is ingested. He said as he looked over at the female hybrid and extended the orb to her. He looked at it intently for a second before looking back at Chi, "Alrighty, go ahead, work your magic, Chi!"

The girl nodded and took it in hand as she murmured, "Let's see..." She hummed quietly until the ball glowed briefly. "I think that one will do. Ah it looks pretty," she said, seeing it had a faint green glow to it now. She turned and showed it to Dion as she chirped, "All done! One cure for the hunter state." She held her palm flat out with the ball in it for anyone to take it from her.

Dion stared at it before clearing his throat, "Yes well..." He paused for a brief thought about the orb's effect. "We don't know if it works. Or if it will hurt anyone who ingests it..." he trailed off.

Chi smiled and offered, "I can test it if you'd like."

The man shook his head and told her, "You're the one with healing abilities. If you were injured, no one could heal you." He rubbed the back of his head and looked to the side. His eyes settled on Akuma in thought.

The boy continued to wolf down marshmallows until he noticed Dion staring. He swallowed a mouthful and glared back. "What?" he grumbled. Dion's look slowly transferred to Nick in a silent exchange of curiosity.

The mage nodded at the scientist before he took the orb from Chi's hand. He rolled the orb before his fingers for a bit, looking it over. Slowly, his brown eyes left the glowing ball and fell upon Akuma. He held it out for the hybrid boy to see in-between his thumb and index finger. "This," Nick started to tell him, "Has the potential to cure your hunter's state." Chi laced her fingers behind her head as the others went silent. She looked off in another direction, not liking where Akuma's attitude would mostly likely go. The mage offered, "How would you like me to take the first step in amending the sins my race has committed." He started to walk towards the male hybrid. "What do you say?"

Akuma had paused in his scarfing down of marshmallows as he looked at the little ball. That's right, he had almost forgotten why they were all here. He looked at the orb in silence, his mind clicking over the possibility. Then again, they really didn't know if it worked. Didn't Dion said the DNA had to be rewritten? That sounded painful in the least. Akuma bared his fangs and scooted to the other side of the couch as Nick moved towards him. "Yeah, except you don't know if it's dangerous. Bet you'd just love it to kill me," he growled. The boy had no reason to believe he wouldn't be writhing in pain on the floor in the very least from the mystery cure. He didn't like being the lab rat.

Nick bit his lips and looked back down at the orb. "Yes, it is dangerous," the mage stated as he stopped walking forward. "You don't have to use it if you don't want to, it may very well kill you. I would expect it to be painful as well." He paused for a moment before speaking again. "You have been through enough

in your lifetime, my apologies, I shouldn't have expected you to be willing." His hand closed around the orb and he turned away from Akuma.

The hybrid boy sat up and narrowed his eyes at the mage, seeing that he was essentially calling him a coward. His fingers dug into the couch. *'Going to do it that way, are you? I can do it too,'* he thought with a sneer. Akuma tossed the marshmallows onto the table and looked back at Nick. Seeing how the mage had his back turned to dismiss him, the hybrid bared his fangs again and silently leapt up. He used his flash ability to quickly close the distance between them and jumped on Nick, forcing him to the ground with a heavy thud. The boy swiped up the marble sized cure and swallowed it. There was an awkward silent period where Akuma sat on Nick's back. A weird tingling suddenly filled his head followed by dizziness. It was quiet again and suddenly a burst of pain his like a train. "Haaaaaaa," he exhaled loudly, hugging his arms and flopping over onto the ground. He writhed on the floor while clawing at any and everything around him as he very vocally protested. Nick quickly got up and rushed to his side, while avoiding the wildly flailing claws. The kicking and yelling stopped suddenly in an eerie silence where Akuma laid unnaturally still.

The mage dropped down to his knees at the hybrid's side and placed two fingers to the side of his neck as if checking for a pulse. "He's alive, but it's a weak pulse," he said as he let out a breath.

"Here let me see!" Chi exclaimed, kneeling next to the boy as well. "He's probably just exerted over the structure change. I can assume that one's body does not adjust well to that kind of change... but..." She sang softly for a minute, healing the unconscious boy as Nick closed his eyes in relaxation. She stopped when Akuma stirred. The mage backed up as the hybrid boy's eyes fluttered open, but looked anything but focused. His head lolled around, taking in his surroundings. It didn't really help much since everything was spinning. He groaned and pushed himself up, trying to stand. The spinning only made him flop back to the floor.

Dion crouched down next and spoke his uncertainty, "Seems he's a bit dizzy still. But... I wonder if it worked?" Akuma seemed alive at least, that was a start. The man was just curious if the whole process had even proved successful.

Nick pulled out a blade and said, "Well, there's only one way to find out."

Dion glanced over at the mage, who held out the blade over his arm. "Wait--" he said shortly. But Nick had already cut himself. The man grimaced and sighed.

Blood began to trickle out as Nick moved closer to Akuma, holding out the injured limb for the smell to affect him. "How you doing Akuma, feel like you're going to lose control or anything?" he asked.

Akuma's eyes blinked at Nick's arm. His mouth twitched in attempt to bare his fangs, but his eyes remained the same. There was no unusual hostility. Dion looked taken aback and breathed, "I... think it worked."

Chi looked down at the blood and however, reacted differently. Her eyes turned to slits and she grabbed Nick by the front of his shirt, jerking him forward. "WELL LOOK AT YOU! Taunt my little friend here into taking some experimental thing and almost get him KILLED. BETCHA THINK YOU'RE SO GOOD FOR MAKING THAT CURE!" she yelled, shaking him a bit.

The mage looked shocked as he asked, "Chi what's gotten into..." Then he had a look of realization on his face as he murmured, "Oh..." The hybrid girl had entered her Hunter's Mode.

Dion looked at Chi evenly as she went on her rant. He removed a small vial from his pocket and uncorked it, waving it in front of her face. Chi jumped back and snorted. Her eyes returned to normal and she backed away further. The scientist looked to Nick as he corked the vial. "Smelling salts," he said simply. "Works great on humans, even better to their sensitive smell."

The mage glanced at the girl and said, "I can see that it works well, it snapped her out imminently."

Akuma swung his claws out, latching on to Nick's shirt next. He looked at the mage half-dazed, but also half with a glare. He pointed weakly at him. "You..." he paused to regain some sense, "You're a bastard."

Nick got mad and rebutted, "I'm a bastard? You're the one who tackled me and ate it yourself. I was just going to ask Fayt to take it first, but no you just had to tackle me and take it yourself. You did this to yourself. Just think though, you're cured now."

Akuma scoffed at the scolding he received in return. He shook his head, tightening his grip. "You... taunted. Oh, that makes it better? Kill Fayt instead? Smart idea there. I'm sure Albel will be convinced you made that all by yourself!" he yelled, shutting his eyes so he could keep his senses long enough to say it all in one go.

The mage explained, "It wasn't made to kill anyone, it was made to cure the hunter state. I would have explained to Fayt the dangers and it would be his choice. Just like it was your choice to take it."

Akuma sneered and growled, "Yeah sure, or you'd hold it over my head." He didn't want to give anyone a reason to be able to look down at him or call him a coward. The hybrid boy released Nick and swung out his claws at the mage's face. He faltered, not quite reaching as his claws missed the mage who backed away a bit. Instead, the boy flopped back to the ground. Akuma tilted his head back to look at Dion. "If Fayt takes that cure, Albel will find out one way or another... and..." he paused, rubbing his head. "He'll come after you," he said flatly, though his eyes were half-lidded and his mouth tilted into a frown. The hybrid had a few run ins with Albel before. Those few times had taught him to keep his distance as Akuma loved to run his mouth and Albel was not very tolerant.

Chi tapped the side of her face thoughtfully, "Oh, he has a bit of a point... Since no one knows how the hybrid genetics work aside from the scientists." She looked at Dion and asked, "How do you propose

that's handled?"

The man rubbed the back of his head. "Well, I figured this would happen eventually," he laughed quietly at his own stupidity. "Doesn't matter I suppose. A cure is owed to them after what we did," he trailed off.

Nick looked down at Akuma and said, "Doesn't matter what you think. I'm done dealing with you. You're an immature asshole with a temper to boot."

The hybrid boy pushed himself up again. He glared at the mage and warned, "Heh, a temper that's not done with you. Better watch your back or my claws will rip through it." Dion grabbed his arm, helping the boy to stand again. The man shrugged faintly at Nick as he continued to hold onto Akuma after he was standing. It was partly so the boy wouldn't lunge at the mage again.

Nick closed his eyes and several more golden orbs formed in his palms and he turned towards Chi with his hand outstretched. "If you wouldn't mind enchanting these, Chi?" he asked.

Dion looked to the girl and suggested, "Yes, and perhaps you should up the dose."

Chi crossed the room again and put her hands over the orbs before humming again. "If that's that, I may take my leave as well. I don't mean to clutter the place," she chirped, smiling and turning on her heel. The girl walked through the door and stretched her wings out once she was outside. Being inside was such an odd feeling with no place to spread her wings. Akuma grumbled and separated himself from Dion. He fumbled over to the table, grabbing his marshmallows. He went outside and dropped the bag. He shifted up to his dragon form and spread his own wings out. His size made his wings nearly twice Chi's wingspan. He glanced over and smirked, picking up his bag in his teeth as he flew off. "Showoff," the girl rolled her eyes.

Nick shook his head after the hybrids' departure before looking at the orbs. Sighing, he closed his hands around them before he turned to Dion and said, "Did you want to keep the other three orbs, in case any more of your hybrids show up and want a cure? I only need the one for Fayt." He lifted up his hand as he opened his closed fingers and offered three of the orbs to the scientist.

Dion's eyes shifted down to the orbs and said, "I suppose that would come out helpful, yes. If Albel hunts me down, perhaps I'll have something for him." The mage left out a disgruntled huff when Albel was mentioned. The man laughed humorlessly as he took the orbs from Nick and set them on his desk. He smiled and rubbed the back of his head again. "I would tell you to give Fayt my best, but... you know."

As the mage put the last orb in a small pouch that was attached to his waist at the belt, he asked, "Why does Albel hate you so much?" He pulled the drawstring and closed the pouch before walking to the window to see outside.

Dion looked silently over his shoulder at the glowing orbs on his desk. His face slacked a bit from the question Nick posed. Dion heaved a heavy sigh, his eyes traveling around the room to show obvious discomfort. "It's... complicated..." he sighed, rubbing his arm. "Albel was difficult to manage. He refused to listen to anyone but me and I didn't have much control if he really didn't want to do something. My superiors got sick of it. They figured he was too independent to be a soldier. So they wanted to terminate him. I didn't want to but... they said if I didn't, they would and put his brother down too as punishment to me. It seemed he was dead either way, so I chose to save Fayt and do it myself... That went very wrong as you saw," he said, waving his hand briefly over his chest where the scars were. "I think he just thought I would bleed out after that but... I debatably got lucky..." The man shook his head and breathed, "Shouldn't have messed with the lab in the first place."

Nick nodded sympathetically and said, "The more I hear about these labs, the more I hate them." Looking out the window again he let out a sigh. "As much as I would love to stay, I should get going back to the city, won't rebuild itself you know." And with that, he showed himself out the door.

Akuma landed next to the river and set his marshmallows down on the grass. He stuck his maw into the water and snapped his teeth around for fish. He wasn't very experienced with fishing as he managed to just make the fish swim away from him as he splashed about. Akuma jumped into the river after a while of unsuccessful catches. Fed up, he let out short electrical wave that shocked a couple fish. They floated to the top of the water and the boy snatched them up before climbing back out onto the river bank. Hungry from all the fighting, he tore into them immediately. At least being cured would make hunting things easier since he wouldn't be drained of energy from the blood.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 8](#).)

Rika walked back towards the city with a fish stick in hand. Albel followed behind and looked around as they walked. A good portion of debris had been taken out now. At least the cleanup was going fast. People were eager to rebuild for their own safety. Fayt wandered over to them as they approached, "Think we should mention something about the mystery dragons?" he asked.

The woman stared at him blankly, taking a bite from the fish. "And who exactly would you report that to?" she asked, chewing her food. "We don't exactly have a hierarchy right now."

The white hybrid turned back to the city and murmured, "Ah, maybe we should get back to helping the city?"

Rika huffed quietly, "Maybe those Aquarians will just do it for you. Why bother?" She laughed quietly; it seemed the dragons were there to help anyway, why not see what they would do?

Fayt shook his head in response. "I wouldn't put all my hopes on it. I just like to be prepared..." he said, looking around again. His eyes settled on Nick in the distance. The boy seemed to be all but lost. *'Maybe he's looking for something?'* he thought. Of course, that seemed silly in a pile of rubble. "Nick!" Fayt called, waving his hands in the air.

Rika followed the sight and snorted, "Oh great, the dragon hugger."

Turning around, Nick called out, "Fayt, there you are, I was just looking for you."

Fayt smiled as the mage came running over. So he'd been looking for him all along. "Looking for me?" he asked curiously with a laugh.

Once Nick was close, he pulled the little pouch from his belt and produced a little glowing orb. "I found a cure for your hunter's state!" He had a big grin across his face as he said it. "You could live a normal life now!" the boy explained happily.

The hybrid's face dusted at his declaration. Fayt blinked for a moment and asked quietly, "Excuse me?"

The mage nodded and said, "Yup, a cure!" He held the green orb up to the fading sunlight, letting everyone get a better look at it.

Albel's brow furrowed instantly, sneering at the potential cure. Rika disregarded Nick's question and stepped forward. "Waaaaaaaait wait wait," she waved her hands. "Just how did you manage that? Their hunter mode, according to these guys, is weaved into their DNA. How do you just know how their genetics work so well that you just know how to change the exact right thing?" she asked.

Fayt lightly took the orb from Nick and rolled it in his fingers. "A fair question; how do you even know it works?" he asked.

There was a pause as the boy furrowed his brow. Quickly returning to his smile, he exclaimed, "It was easy with a little magic and some help from some others. Remember the hybrid we saved earlier? It was him and another hybrid named Chi who helped with it. We even tested it on Akuma, the hybrid boy."

Fayt looked at the orb in his hand curiously. It certainly did seem to have magical properties. And the green glow hinted at Chi's healing abilities. Albel tilted his head slightly; his face contorted in disbelief. "There's so many holes in that excuse, you could drive a bus through it," the black hybrid growled as he stepped forward. "Chi has the ability, but not the brains behind out genetics, and that pipsqueak Akuma wouldn't care less." He jabbed at Nick's chest and went on, "Even more, how did you get your hands on it? You couldn't possibly figure that out by yourself."

The boy narrowed his eyes and explained once more sounding thoroughly annoyed, "I said it was magic." He crossed his arms.

Fayt had a temptation to try it, but wasn't quite sure how the reaction would be for his body. "Akuma tested it?... How is he?" he asked, curious if the boy had made it through unharmed. It didn't sound like a simple cure.

Nick looked thoughtful for a moment, as if thinking, before replying, "He looked really tired as if he hadn't slept for a while, which was also probably a factor in it. He hadn't gotten any good sleep for a while it seemed, but it worked all the same."

The white hybrid looked up at him and said, "I have to admit... I appreciate your effort for a cure, but... Albel's suspicion is plausible. If Chi knew how to do this... she probably would have cured us a long time ago..."

Nick looked sad and held out his hand. "If you don't want it then give it here, I guess."

Fayt recoiled at the boy's sudden tone change. That was... oddly placed. He retracted his hand and shook his head. "I did not mean I don't want the cure. But you must understand the strangeness of this? It's not something that can so simply just be magic." His voice rose slightly in tone to show concern. His mind clicked back to earlier when he thought of Dion and Nick asking about it. He wanted to downright ask if the scientist was out there, but with Albel here...

"You're a bad liar," the dark hybrid said simply, staring at Nick with his arms folded across his chest.

"Oh but magic can do a whole host of things," Nick told the hybrids with a grin forming across his face.

Rika jabbed at the mage's chest and scolded, "No, magic doesn't work like that. You have to control it. Now how do you know how their genetics work? I wasn't born yesterday, I know how magic works!"

Nick shook his head and answered, "The process is so complicated that just the mere process of explaining it to you would take me years to accomplish."

The woman squinted her eyes at his response. Her fingers twitched to wring his neck at the thought she would believe that. *'Does he really think I or they are that dense?'* she thought, narrowing her eyes at him. She grabbed the front of his shirt with both hands and said loudly to his face, "Don't get cheeky with me, kid. If you're going to lie to me, at least make an honest attempt. The next time you talk to me like I'm dense, I'll break your legs."

The mage flinched and protested, "I wasn't calling you dense."

Rika snorted at Nick and rolled her eyes, "Yeah ask me to believe something stupid and then say you don't think I'm dense. Ok, sure..."

Fayt laughed awkwardly, reaching out and gently prying his friend off the boy. "So uh... How about I try out that magic ball thing?" he asked. Nick brushed off his shirt and looked at Rika with an impish grin for a brief moment before it was gone again.

The woman rubbed the side of her head, thinking of possibilities of how the cure was made. It couldn't be the lab; Albel had thoroughly destroyed the data there. "Well?" she said impatiently, looking at Fayt. "Try it," she added.

The white hybrid blinked, just remembering the cure and looked down at his hand. "Right..." he breathed. Fayt popped the orb into his mouth and swallowed it down. There was a pause before he silently doubled over, clutching his side. His teeth were gritted to hold in sounds of discomfort as the cure worked. Another moment passed and he stood upright again. He looked at his hands and then to the others, "Well?"

"Hmph," Rika huffed. She took out a small knife and gave herself a small nick on the back of her hand. She waved it in front of Fayt's nose. The hybrid's nose scrunched slightly at the smell, but he otherwise remained normal. The woman cocked her eyebrows and chuckled in disbelief, "No shit. It works." Nick looked satisfied and delighted at the orb's success. Albel picked up the scent next, his eyes slitting down. He snarled and moved suddenly at Nick with his claws raised. The boy took a leap back to get out of the way. "Down boy," the woman said, pushing the dark hybrid's chest back. She reached into her pouch and put a bandage over the little cut. A minute later, Albel again returned to normal.

Fayt looked back to Nick and gratefully said, "Thank you."

The mage nodded his head and gave him a warm smile. "Anything for a friend," was all he said, shrugging off the thanks.

The white hybrid laughed quietly, his ears tipping back. He looked at Albel and asked the mage, "Oh, do you have more? For the others?" He briefly locking eyes with his brother before looking at Nick again. Fayt felt great having the cure and all, but he wanted to make sure the others got it too. It didn't seem fair he would be the only one with a cure to his hunter's mode. It seemed Nick only had one on him. That meant he had to remake it, right? The hybrid was sure they would get a hint of how he made it then. He didn't like to pry at Nick seeing as how the boy went through the trouble of making a cure, but he couldn't help himself about wondering just how he got his hands on the genetic code. It made him only more skeptical about seeing or rather thinking he saw Dion before in the flames.

Nick answered truthfully, "Yes, I can make more. But I also need Chi for the second half of it and I have no idea as to where she ran off to at the moment." Glancing over at the city, he asked, "So have any of those Aquarians shown up yet?" Then he wondered aloud, "The city isn't even done yet, I wonder what

they will think."

The Aquarian subject had dropped like a rock. Rika looked at the mage again and studied him. She snorted and put her hands to her hips. "Tch, right. They're coming tomorrow you dope," she retorted, waving her hand off. Nick just grunted in response.

Fayt felt awkward by the sudden change in topic and wanted to get back to the original subject at hand. "Umm... yeah so okay. We'll have to find Chi... and perhaps she'll..." he trailed off. *'Be more informative...'* he thought, smiling nervously at the thought of it really being Dion. Of course, between the laugh and smile, the hybrid looked like he had a few screws loose.

Nick nodded and said, "Oh yes, I'm sure she will be able to confirm my explanation."

"Alright then. Let's find Chi," Rika declared. Fayt rubbed the back of his head. He hoped he didn't start anything bad. If it was Dion, it would certainly provide a different issue next. The hybrid looked at Albel, who simply smirked in return.

Albel moved forward, looping around close behind Nick. He bent down slightly to be at ear level and said in an odd tone, "I'm sure you wouldn't be lying. Boy, do I hate liars." The dark hybrid could smell the boy's nervousness, despite his seemingly calm exterior. He straightened up and moved out towards the forest. "This way, and bring pipsqueak," he grunted, walking into the woods.

Rika moved behind the mage next and gave him a light push in the general direction. "Come on then," she coaxed, walking forward with Fayt.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 9](#).)

Akuma walked back from the river, now in human form and licking the remains of the fish from his fingers. A tree house came into view rather fast. "Hey Chi!" he called up. The girl's face poked into view as she stepped out onto the mini terrace. "Spare a pain killer?" he grumbled.

"Mmm," she took a small pearl-like object from her pocket and tossed it down to him. Akuma popped it into his mouth and cracked it in his teeth. He sniffed quietly once and paused. He sniffed a few more times. The boy whirled on the spot, not seeing anyone... yet. He scaled the latter to the house quickly. "What's wrong?" Chi asked.

"Someone's coming..." he muttered, going inside.