**Chapter Thirty-Six**

Weiss had been woken up long enough to drink her dinner, minor injuries starting to visibly heal as she’d fallen back asleep, still in her combat uniform. Class the next day, she’d been subdued, approaching Pyrrha after Tim’s class, while Blake went to go set up her lesson on three-dimensional movement along with Yang, Ren, and Nora. As the team chef, our resident cat-girl had asked for grilled tuna, and I already had a recipe in mind, but I held back, lingering by the doorway to the kitchen as the heiress, nodding to herself, walked up to my gladiatrix in our room.

“Pyrrha?” she asked, hesitating, “Could you, could you spare time to help me improve my combat capabilities? Specifically projectile deflection? I *thought* I was good but recent developments have shown me to be *lacking* in that.”

The redhead, expression neutral, turned to the girl. “Of course I can help, but have you asked Ruby?”

Weiss frowned, “I, what could *she* show me? Her Semblance lets her dodge, and I can’t do that. Besides. . .” she trailed off, almost pouting.

“Besides,” Pyrrha echoed gently, interested but not judging.

“She’s younger than I am!” the white-haired girl snapped. “Fine, she’s better at fighting, like a *brute,* but I’m not going to lower myself to ask *her* for help!” Weiss whined.

The redhead leaned back. “But you’ll lower yourself to ask for my help?” she questioned.

“You’re *Pyrrha Nikos!* It’s not lowering myself; it’d be an honor!” the heiress objected. “You’ve won the Mistral Tournament four years in a row! You’re not some nobody-” she cut herself off, wincing, obviously not meaning to say that. “You just have more *experience,*” she stressed, putting Ruby down for her age with the subtly of a blind bull.

I winced, having thought, with how things were changing, that the rich girl had gotten over herself on her own. *Apparently not.*

My lover, thankfully, was better at handling something like this than I was. “Being well known has nothing to do with skill, Weiss,” she chided. “Many well-known fighters I was able to handle with ease. In fact, those I *didn’t* know about were some of my toughest matches. And we’ve seen Ruby deflect Russel’s shots a few weeks ago. Age is no determination of experience, and even though she has less than I do, she could still help you.”

“Then, you won’t help me,” Weiss sighed, hanging her head.

“Oh, I never said *that*,” Pyrrha smiled, the other girl perking up in hope. “But I do have one condition.”

“Wha- oh,” the white-haired girl sighed. “I need to ask Ruby for help. Don’t I?” My lover just nodded, smiling. “Fine. If that’s what it takes, I will!”

Pyrrha nodded, “How was Mrs. Sepper’s class, by the way? Ren was light on details.”

“It was the *worst,*” Weiss stated with vehemence, now that she knew she had a sympathetic ear. “She *shot us.* Who *does that?*”

“My trainers,” the gladiatrix offered, laughing at the other girl’s scandalized look. “How did you think *I* learned, Weiss? They used soft rounds, of course, nor did they have me doing anything else at the time. However, Mrs. Sepper obviously has certain expectations of where we’re all supposed to be.”

“She’s a *teacher*, she’s supposed to *teach!*” Weiss complained. “What did she expect us to do, teach ourselves?”

Pyrrha nodded, “Or ask our teammates. She *was* clearer in that respect than Ms. Goodwitch was. I was actually talking with Jaune, and we discussed how Mr. Port’s class as well is layered similarly, teaching us how to get tactical information from locals,” she lied, as I’d never mentioned that, assuming it to be obvious.

“Wait, we were?” Weiss demanded, shocked, eyes darting back and forth as she put things together. “Oh my goodness, he *is.* Why didn’t he say so!?”

My lover shrugged, “Perhaps he thought he didn’t need to? If you want, I can give you some pointers now? We have an hour before Blake is ready, and we can use a corner of the space she has reserved.”

“I, *yes,*” the heiress nodded, thankful. “I’ll go get Myrtenaster!” she exclaimed, running off.

Pyrrha turned to look at me, smiling. “Don’t you have dinner to cook?”

“I’m going,” I replied, smiling back, taking out my phone to open a portal. “Just, thanks for helping Weiss. Even if she’s being a bit of a brat about it.”

My lover laughed, “Well, how can I not help someone on *our* team, Jaune?”

<DR>

The next day, we were in the shop, Yang and I having *finally* gotten the internal gyroscopes to work with the thrusters for auto-stabilization, when we heard Amakuni sigh loudly enough to be heard over the machinery. “Everybody! Put what your doin’ down. I’m only gonna explain this once.”

Exchanging a look with Yang, we landed our one-tenth model bike and joined the others, Kobe and Steff looking very nervous as the teacher leaned against their workstation. “You are the fifth class to ask me about multi-Dust-Forging, and I’d bet that the Juniors are all gonna ask me about it tomorrow too. How many of you know anything ‘bout Dust-Forging?” A half dozen hands went up. “Any of you try it?” They all went down.

The cow Faunus snorted. “*Good.* Dust-Forging when you don’t know what your doin’ is a good way to lose a hand, or worse. You can’t automate it, ‘cause to do it you have to make whatever it is by hand *while* Dust Casting with what you’re forging into it. Has Tim talked about multi-Dust Casting?”

We nodded, as he had. The short version was *don’t.* The long version was that the difficulty jumped sharply with every new type you tried to use at once, and controlling two at once was close enough to using their component parts you’d think you’d have a handle on it, but different enough that you *really* wouldn’t.

“Dust-Forging is easier than doing anything *special* with Casting, or else it’d be rarer than it already is,” Amakuni informed us. “But most smiths aren’t casters. With some training, almost anyone here could Dust-Forge with any kind of Dust, and maybe a third of you could handle two.”

“So whoever made Mrs. Sepper’s sword must’ve been *really good!”* Ruby commented in awe.

“Whoever made ‘Mrs. Sepper’s’ sword was a freakin’ *idiot*,” Amakuni shot back. “Using a dual-forged weapon for its specialty, like fire and lightning for plasma, is useful, but not only is it harder to use, it’s use for fire *and* lightning will be cut back, and *those* two play nice. Fire and water? Unless you’re making steam, good luck doing anything but the most basic tricks.”

Reaching into a pocket, the woman pulled out a blue-tinged steel rod. “This is forged with Water Dust.” With a flick, it sent a ball of water to hit the far wall, the one we directed to use as firing target, given it was made of reinforced panels, splashing down and flowing towards the drains in the floor. “That trick any of you could figure out in a month or three. This,” she indicated, forming a thin arrow which fired at the wall, notching a steel panel slightly before bursting and flowing away, “Would take you a few more. *This,”* she smiled, spinning the rod over her fingers water flowing and forming a swirling serpent, “would take you a *year*.” The snake blasted forward so fast it almost blurred, tearing out a huge chunk of the reinforced section of plating, still together as it whipped it’s mouthful of steel to the side, going for another strike before it burst apart, the rest of the serpent shooting forward, so it’d all destabilize in the firing range, “or *more*.”

The weapon specialist looked over us. “Using *that* monstrosity of hers, the time it’d take to learn an advanced technique would be needed to use the most basic, or more. If you try, you’re more likely to blow yourself up. It’s not some super-sword. What’d that Senior call it? Right, yeah, it’s not ‘Dust-caliber’, it’s an overengineer piece of *crap*,” she scoffed.

“Then why use it?” Yang asked, frowning.

“Do I look like I care?” the Faunus asked dismissively in turn. “It’s *dumb*, and even if you wanted to be able use every type of Dust in a fight, there’s easier ways to. My first few years of teaching, had a Senior do it better. Looked kinda like you, actually,” Amakuni noted, nodding to Yang. “She Dust-Forged blades of each type, and made a sword hilt that’d let her switch between ‘em when she sheathed it. Easier to use, and *didn’t* require someone of Tim’s skill to make. We’re not doin’ Dust-Forging this year, if you want it take my advanced class your Junior year. If anyone else asks about it, I’m kickin’ you out of the lab for a week. Got it?”

Everyone nodded, and the woman gestured for us to go back to work, students returning to their projects. Yang, however, looked troubled. It took her a moment to realize I was looking at her, as she sat in front of our model air-bike, not really seeing it. “Huh, need somethin’ Arcs?”

“I think the question is do *you* need something?” I asked, having an inkling of what was troubling my teammate.

“No,” she said, shaking her head, but I just *looked* at her. “Okay, yeah. That student prof mentioned, you think it might’ve been. . .” the blonde brawler trailed off. “I mean, I *kinda* look like my mom, so maybe. . .”

“Ask her next week,” I suggested, as Amakuni, visibly annoyed, stalked around and looked over everyone *else’s* work. “We can’t go hunting her down until after we graduate, so we have time. It *might* be nothing,” I warned, knowing it wasn’t, remembering Raven’s odd weapon. At my partner’s disappointed look, I added, “It *might* be, or might not, don’t get your hopes up, but still *follow* up. ‘kay?”

Yang frowned, working that idea over, before nodding. “Fine. Yeah. I don’t suppose you could ask for me?” The dry look I gave her, by her wince, conveyed the correct amount of ‘*How well do you think that would go?’* I was feeling. “Okay, I will,” she nodded, focusing back on our floating model sky-bike. “Now, we got this puppy balanced, but how we gonna make her *soar?*”

<DR>

That afternoon’s field trip was another Grimm-Extermination one, clearing out the Grimm which had started to gather in the Emerald Forest, right outside of Beacon, and where we’d done our initiation. According to Oobleck, they pre-cleared it a week before initiation, specifically going after anything large enough to pose a problem. When Weiss had, in my opinion, *completely rationally* demanded to know how a tank sized Deathclow, and a *plane sized Nevermore* counted as ‘not large enough’, he’d at least had the good sense to be a bit abashed.

Apparently the bird had flown in during the test, which was odd but not unheard of, and while they *had* known about the Death Stalker, to disturb it a student would have to ignore the ancient carvings they made sure were easily visible. At that point the teacher said it was “A self-selecting criteria for passing or failing.” That was. . . harsh, but not exactly *wrong.*

When I’d pointed out that we *hadn’t gone in the cave,* he’d started to disagree, *almost* calling me a liar, before theorizing that, with the size of the aura, any fear or worry I felt might’ve been enough to reach the creature dwelling within.

The field trip itself was a cakewalk, and having a *professor* back our claims of fighting what I was now realizing were only *mid-*level Grimm was rather nice. I’d given the guy who’d suggested we hadn’t before our first trip a significant look, the boy, not meeting my gaze.

We’d bagged our quota of a dozen Beowulfs in fifteen minutes, and then fell back, Peach sending us out to check on a few teams that hadn’t reported in. They hadn’t needed our help, but had appreciated that, if they had, we would’ve been there.

Now, though, most of my team had gathered, along with Charlie and Steff, the nine of us kitted out and waiting in combat class. Pyrrha and I had already given the place a thorough look over, and if Mrs. Sepper was lying in wait, we couldn’t see her.

The bell rang out, announcing the hour, and the door opened, our instructor striding in, glancing over us as we stood, tense, and the shadow of a smirk crossed her severe expression. “Do not worry. You passed your test. You deserve to be here.”

In an instant, mid-step, she was in front of us, waving two fingers for us to follow, before taking another shifting step to the stands. Reaching inside a pocket, she pulled out a single grain of dully glowing orange Dust, tossing it down with a twist, a stone stool forming. Primly, she sat, gesturing for us to take our place down on the lowest level of the stands. We did, still a little tense, but I for one was more interested than worried. Oz might’ve overlooked the danger of Cinder as a visiting student from another school, he almost certainly did so because he was trusting in the word of one of the other headmasters. Oz had hired Sepper *himself.*

We sat, still a little on edge, as the combat instructor looked us over, back ramrod straight as she waited. Finally, she nodded, asking “What is the point of this class?”

“To learn how to fight?” Blake asked after a moment, glancing around for confirmation.

“Close,” Mrs. Sepper noted, nodding minutely, once. “You are here to learn how to kill.”

“K-*kill?*” Ruby sputtered. “I don’t want to kill anyone!”

The combat instructor turned her gaze on the tiny team lead, and for an instant her expression softened, but it was back to her professional mask. “Then leave. To be here you have enough proficiency to pass the standards Ozpin set. Your graduation will not be restricted. Your career as a. . . Huntress will be short.”

From beside me, I could practically feel Yang’s outrage. “What’s *that* supposed to mean?”

Sepper met the teen’s glare with cold indifference. “She will die. Or she will kill, and she will retire. It is a common enough fate. To think one could protect others without removing the threat is childish. Some never grow out of it. One way or another.”

“Destroying Grimm isn’t *killing*,” Nora argued. “I mean, yeah, we’re kinda killing, but they’re not really *alive.* What?” she asked, as Sepper gave her a dry look.

“I may be incorrect, but Goodwitch did not have you fighting Grimm in these classes. Did she?” the teacher asked archly.

“I mean, *no*,” Yang agreed. “But if you can beat someone ‘till their Aura breaks, you can tie ‘em up, and problem’s solved!”

It was Ren who replied before our teacher, his voice quiet but firm as he stated, “No, it isn’t.”

Sepper nodded to the teen, looking back to Yang. “And if your opponent possesses a Semblance that lets them disintegrate what they touch? One that lets them transform their body into living lightning? Would restraining your previous teacher eliminate her as a threat? Short of continuous torture, there is no way to deny one their use of their Aura. Would you do so?”

“No!” Ruby replied, looking sick to her stomach, “That’s *horrible!”*

“That is reality,” our teacher replied, not judging, only stating fact. “Semblances are wild cards. Semblances make each person dangerous in their own way. Semblances can never be overlooked without consequence. All of you have been doing the last.”

She stood from her stool, and started to slowly pace. “Grimm are a danger. Their varied nature means they can take an experienced fighter by surprise. However, they are nothing to humanity, and, to a lesser extent, Faunus.”

Blake surged to her feet, demanding, “What do you mean *lesser?”*

“Faunus share personality traits with their animal counterparts. This makes them predictable,” the teacher noted, standing, and waiting until Blake sat back down. “Canine Faunus prefer team tactics, and will defend their pack when one is threatened. Feline Faunus prefer to pounce on their prey, attacking and retreating, and will break away from a show of force. Bird Faunus prefer quick and overwhelming attacks, and failing that, they flee. Ursine Faunus stand and fight instead of moving.” She looked directly at me, the only *obvious* Faunus in the room. “Lizard Faunus wait, then move with purpose, and rarely break off from a course of action unless they have to.”

Which was, of course, the exact *opposite* of what I’d done the last time we’d met, preferring immediate action, pressing the attack whenever I could, and shifting strategies as soon as they didn’t work.

“However, Faunus are chaos incarnate when compared to the forces of Grimm,” Sepper noted. “They, like Humans, think, use tools, and have Semblances. They, like Humans, can also destroy and kill where even a Tide would fail. Port’s class teaches you about Grimm. Going into the field teaches you how to eliminate them. Oobleck’s courses teaches you about people. This class teaches you how to eliminate them. Timonious’ and Amakuni’s give you the tools to do both.”

Looking around, *no one* liked what Sepper was saying, but no one was disagreeing either. From Jaune’s memories I *vaguely* remembered the way that Huntsmen were regarded. They were borderline superheroes, as close as you could get in this world. Problem solvers, protectors, and more, the idea that they were *killers,* while obvious in retrospect, was something everyone just. . . didn’t think about.

“Understood,” I said, attention shifting to me. “Is that why you want us to train our Semblances? The unpredictability we’d have?”

“Indeed,” Sepper noted. “As Ms. Nikos could attest, a basic level of combat ability is required. After that proficiency in their Semblance is what makes a foe dangerous.”

Pyrrha winced. “She’s, she’s correct there, Jaune. Using weapons only, I can guess what an opponent can do. Mechashift complicates things, but it’s once Semblances get involved that fights become difficult. No offense meant, Ren.”

“None taken,” he replied, looking to our teacher. “Though I must ask. If this class is to be Semblance specific, what am I to do?”

“Learn to better use your Aura,” the instructor replied. “Few enough people do so effectively. It serves the same purpose. Combine it with tools. Then you will be as much of a danger as your teammates.”

Ren nodded, thoughtful, leaning back with a “Thank you.”

Before anyone else could object to our teacher, I stood. “Alright. I don’t like it, and if I can capture, I will, but. . . what do I need to do?”

“Jaune!” Ruby objected. “You’d *kill* someone?”

I sighed, “If the alternative was that *you* die? ***Yes***. I don’t like it, but,” I nodded to Mrs. Sepper, who watched our byplay without comment, “things aren’t always the way you’d like them to be, and the thing about combat is that *stopping* it needs to be unanimous, and as long as the others die *can* fight, they get a vote. I’m still going to try to capture though, professor,” I stated, turning to our teacher, and she met my gaze without any indication of what she was thinking. “Thing is, I have to ask, from what I’ve seen, most criminals *don’t* use their Semblances. Why?”

“I actually know that one,” Charlie spoke up, and I turned to the black-clad geokinetic. “Semblances are unique. If you can identify the Semblance, you can identify the person. It doesn’t matter if you’re wearing a mask, if your hair catches fire,” he gestured to Yang, “Or you do a shadow image leap thingy,” a gesture to Blake, “it’s obviously you. Enough that it’s been used as evidence in a trial. Then, in most places unless you’re a Huntsman or in the guard you’re not even *supposed* to have your Aura unlocked, so it’s hard to test it.”

Connecting the dots, I checked, “So they don’t train with it, so they’re not good with it, so even if they know how to use it, they wouldn’t even if things looked bad, because they might get away without using it, but they won’t if they do?”

The stoic team leader nodded, “And, like my mother says, you fight like you train, so even if they’re going to lose, they’re panicking, so they don’t.”

“And the criminal who uses their Semblance will be the one that will kill you,” Mrs. Sepper added with iron-clad certainty.

“Met one of those,” I noted, and the woman’s attention latched onto me with such intensity it was a little intimidating.

“Who.”

Quickly I summarized my short encounter, the others staring at me and Yang, “And then she left, but I couldn’t track her through her illusions.”

The woman gave me a long look, before nodding a single time. “Good job,” she stated, *actual* approval, curt as it was, in her voice. I blinked, surprised, as she turned to the others. “That is the kind of threat you are training to fight. Of those here, Ms. Nikos might survive if she felt the metal this ‘umbrella’ concealed. Ms. Belladonna might have, able to dodge instantly and without warning. That would be all.”

She gave everyone a serious look, and they nodded, Yang glancing at me, and nodding as well, as we’d already talked about how, despite her bravado, the blonde brawler *would’ve* lost against Neo.

“Now, I have talked long enough. Stand and spread out, recruits. I will be going to all of you individually. I will be suggesting methods of discovery your Semblance’s true potential. Mr. Arcs, you and I will talk to the Headmaster after class,” she rattled off, and I winced, but she shook her head minutely. “If there is a changeling in Vale, he needs to be made aware. Whether that man does anything is neither of our responsibilities.”