

I am not currently going out of business so I ain't Roosterteeth. Nor do I live in a two-tier police state, ergo, not British. (Not certain what is really going on there since I'm not on the ground, but it doesn't look good...)

Anyway, here is the next chapter of ***King of Champions***! Hiryo hasn't gotten ***MW*** back to me yet, but I am confident he will. Work on Stallion is... slow. I am having trouble using my Dragon Naturally Speaking with it for some reason. It's not working and editing is taking three times as long as it should, so I'm just writing it out, which means I am only finishing like 4,500 words a day instead of my normal 7-8,000 words. UGH. Still, I should finish it by Wednesday. That should let Tomon and Hiryo have enough time to go over it before I post it.

Chapter 12: While Pieces Can Change, So Too Can The Players

Lisa Lavender was a woman who knew precisely what she was. Gorgeous, the kind of beauty only a lifetime's work and a lot of money could buy. Well-spoken, able to convey both simple and complex items to the masses in a way to not only gain interest but also convey understanding. Quick-witted, never caught on the backfoot without a quip to hand. More than that, though, Lisa Lavender was a vulture.

A vulture, a teller of tales, a voice piece at times to the people in power, a rabble-rouser at others. Someone whose carrion call on the news lines could rouse the mob if she and her bosses felt it would be better for ratings.

Yes, a part of Lavender's mind knew that calling herself a vulture wasn't exactly healthy, but she didn't care. Lavender had no time for self-delusion. She was very good at her job of finding stories and reporting on them and had created a lot of contacts throughout the city of Vale to help her in her endeavors.

Contacts. Never spies. Wording was important, after all. Something that Lisa knew all too well.

What Lavender also knew very well was that as a reporter/professional vulture, she had to occasionally keep extremely strange hours. Thus, when it was pushing three in the morning, and she got a call from one of her contacts down at the docks, she was able to rouse herself within minutes, call up one of several cameramen she had on her speed dial, and get down there in time to see the police starting to wall off a significant portion of the dockyard area that was devoted to heavy freight.

That wall wasn't complete, and Lavender knew she could get past them, but such things often weren't necessary, and irritating the police was never a good idea. Turning aside from where she had just been ordered to back off by one of the beat cops on duty on the outer edge, Lavender shook her head. "Rolfe, call up the agency. I want our helicopter in the air in half an hour, getting us some video of the battle zone in there. All I'm getting out of the police is that some Huntsman were involved in something here. That's not enough. Especially not enough considering the number of fires we can see from here."

Lisa's palms were sweating, a sure sign that this was a big story. Or at least a salacious one. "There's something important or juicy going on here, and I want to know which it is."

"The name's Ralph, not Rolfe, but I can do that..." the large man grumbled before pausing, staring over Lavender's head as a blush, barely visible in the lights of the police cars, appeared on his face. "Oh, wow! Are those two who I think they are?"

Ralph had barely a moment to raise his camera and start recording before Lisa had twisted around, staring at where he had been looking. Sure enough, two extremely well-known blonde women were marching out from deeper within the dockyards as several bullheads marked with the lighthouse symbol of Beacon rose into the air from within the docks.

Lisa absently noted that, but most of her attention was on the Dark Queen, Arturia Arc, and Glynda Goodwitch. The strict disciplinarian was often Headmaster Ozpin's hatchet woman when it came to dealing with the public and the Council of Vale, and Lavender had locked horns with her several times over the years.

Instantly, Lisa began to stride towards them, her handy microphone in hand, while behind her, her cameraman dutifully kept his camera on the two women. She arrived just in time to hear Arturia finish taking one of the senior policemen to task in no uncertain terms. "... Spoken to the EMTs on this, but you will respect their rights as individuals. If I hear of any kind of mistreatment or withholding medical aid until they start talking or some such foolishness, I will come down on you personally like a ton of bricks."

"And I am very certain that the headmaster and the Council would be very angry if you further damaged human-faunus relations in this parlous time."

For once, Goodwitch was acting out the role of the kind cop rather than the angry cop. Which, Lisa thought dryly, was probably a new experience for the woman. It was also very evident that she wasn't doing a very good job of it, judging by the way the man quailed under the dual blonde gazes locked on him.

She waited until Glynda had turned away and marched back into the docks before launching herself forward. Lavender and Glynda had locked horns before, and Lisa was in no

rush to try that woman's patience again. The younger blonde, on the other hand, was a practical unknown for all of her fame as a Huntress. Arturia did not do public functions, she did not use her fame in any kind of way, and only rarely had ever spoken to any reporter outside of strict tournament-type interviews.

"Huntress Arc, Lisa Lavender, Vale News Network. Would you care to comment on events here? What exactly is happening down here that demanded at least three teams of Hunters to be deployed? Are the White Fang involved, and if so, were they stopped from executing whatever scheme they were here to fulfill?"

The bullheads that had lifted off a few moments ago were the small, incredibly speedy sort that the Vale Council and Beacon used to get teams of Hunters to emergency zones quickly. They were not exactly pleasant to ride in, something that she knew all too well, having once been embedded in a Hunter team as they raced to help a beleaguered settlement under assault by Grimm. They also had a limited carrying capacity; hence her guess on how many teams had been here. The overheard conversation had told Lavender that the White Fang might be involved.

If her jab had hit anything, Arturia did not let it show. Instead, she cocked her head to one side and nodded slightly, her voice overly polite and droll. "What sharp little eyes you have."

With that, Arturia turned away, marching back into the dockyard past the police cordon, leaving Lisa Lavender floundering behind her, for once completely thrown off by being so dismissed. She recovered quickly and began shouting questions at Arturia's back that were ignored while her misnamed cameraman snickered quietly to himself.

Both the cameraman and Lavender missed the matte black limousine that slowly pulled out of one of the side streets leading into the dockyard area, smoothly entering traffic right behind where the news van had stopped. Inside that limousine, an elderly gentleman leaned away from his window, shaking his head quietly. "So that is the Dark Queen that General Ironwood has attempted to bring into the fold so often. She is quite an interesting sort, able to just turn and walk away from a reporter like that. Does that mean that she is uncaring of the public fallout of such a thing, or she just did not consider it?"

Unable to spot a rhetorical question if it came up and bit her on her rear, Penny Poledina, proud owner of at least three friendships after the past day and a half in Vale, smiled brightly. "I believe there is at least a sixty-five percent chance that Arturia Arc understands that public image is important and that Miss Lavender may make trouble for her. But there is at least an eighty-five percent chance that she just doesn't care. From what little interaction I had with her throughout the day, I conjecture Arturia Arc is exceedingly straightforward and does not like

rudeness of any sort, which would include shouted questions or crowding her personal space. This is all supposition, of course. Unlike friend Ruby, I only spent forty-two minutes, thirty-five seconds with Arturia Arc during the day, and due to your recall, I could not speak to her after the battle here.”

“Yes, a battle that you took part in. Showing off quite a bit of your skills, things that we wanted to keep secret.”

Penny looked down at that as the old man gazed at her before sighing faintly and reaching over to pat her knee. “I know that it’s hard to always follow the rules, my dear. That is why I did not object to you running off leaving poor Ciel on her own, despite how worried the young lady was for you.” The older man watched Penny’s face scrunch up a little before smiling gently. “I’m also very happy that you made friends. However, orders are meant to be obeyed. You should not have gotten involved with that kind of fight at all. Although you did do properly and call it in the moment violence actually began.”

“Thirty-two seconds after father. I waited a moment to listen to Ruby’s orders on what she wanted us to do. Friend Ruby was actually quite impressive,” Penny said, starting off slowly, then with more animation, actually beginning to wave her arms to either side. “She correctly interpreted the layout of the land in the dockyard area, a battlefield that I have not had any experience in training within, and then successfully created a semi-cordon around where the battle had already begun, leading both her team and those allied with us into combat in such a way that we were able to pin the White Fang against the water!”

“All of that will sound fascinating to the general but not to me,” the older man stated, shaking his head. “What is interesting to me is settling your punishment for this. I believe that spending a week in detention, and spending that time on repainting the vehicles will be a good use of your time.”

Militaries throughout the galaxy had always needed some kind of scut or scrub work to foist off on those unfortunate Privates or Seamen First Class who earned the ire of their higher-ups. Repainting surfaces was an old and tested method: tedious, hard work, and mind-numbingly boring.

Of course, Penny had an inbuilt way to get around at least some of that drudgery, and the old man waited for a moment as Penny nodded resolutely and the limousine left the last road leading into the docks behind, heading deeper into the semi-quiet city beyond. “Yes, father.”

Doctor Geppetto nodded, then added almost as an aside, “And I’m going to be password-locking your Dust Network privileges during that time. If I allow you to retreat into

your own head when you're supposed to be doing drudge work, how exactly are you going to be punished?"

Penny slumped in place, and Doctor Geppetto chuckled. "Now, before all of that can begin, give me a rundown of your new friends. I'm not interested in the fight, but their Semblances and their attitudes."

As Penny began to excitedly talk about her new friends and acquaintances, Lisa had gotten enough information out of a few of the policemen to start to form a picture of what had gone on. Eager to make certain that she retained this scoop, Lisa signaled her cameraman to start recording live rather than to tape. They could come back later and create a full version, but right now, she wanted something out on the airwaves.

"Ladies and gentlemen of Vale, this is Lisa Lavender, coming to you live at around four in the morning at the dockyards of Vale. Earlier tonight, this picturesque, often quiet area was the site of a full-scale battle between the terrorists the White Fang and several teams of Hunters led by the Dark Queen, Arturia Arc. The battle is over and the Hunters have won, but there have been numerous casualties reported, although this reporter was not allowed to enter the actual zone of conflict. Several of the police have been willing to admit to me personally that this seems to have been an unsanctioned mission, with no police backup whatsoever. Is there a reason for this? Is there a reason why the Dark Queen led several impressionable groups of students from Beacon into an off-the-books mission? Only time will tell on that, but there are some facts that we know now."

With studied ease, Lavender weaved made-up 'facts' with some real information, framing the narrative in the way her employers would want and which would garner the highest ratings among the people of Vale. She mentioned that there had been several deaths, both among the terrorists and among security guards within the dockyard area, fanning the flames of anti-faunus sentiment while at the same time pointing out that the Hunters and Huntresses had killed the terrorists.

No one liked it when Hunters, those strange individuals who willingly allowed their Auras to be unlocked, to become targets for Grimm in order to fight them, turned their abilities on common people. Not even criminals. There was always resentment, misunderstanding and wariness at how... inhumanly strong and durable those with their Aura unlocked could become. As for the concept of Semblances, those were disturbing, too.

The sight of several dozen bodies being removed, along with more White Fang members being hustled into police wagons, emphasized that. "The White Fang were not targeting any old shipment. Once more, we see that the White Fang and their human quislings, Roman Torchwick and his associates, are seemingly mad for dust. Tonight, they targeted a shipment of Fire Dust,

one large enough to completely refill stocks across the city. What all they could be planning with that amount of dust is anyone's guess, but it is sure to be horrifying to normal citizens."

When the camera panned back to her, Lisa continued trying to hint at something going on with the Dark Queen and the ship that had been attacked. That would be the third point of her trifecta; possible secrets and dirty dealings were always good news. But what is most interesting is that they seemed to know that a large shipment of fire dust was coming in from Minstrel. The company doing the shipment and, indeed, the home company that owned the dust itself are not among the normal White Fang targets. Iron Shores Shipping is a mid-tier shipping company from right here in Vale, one with no record of anti-faunus sentiment this reporter could discover. Further, Norssken (Northern Lights) is a brand-new company on the commercial Dust scene. It's been making waves recently in Mistral, but this was the first official shipment to Vale."

Lavender let that sink into her audience, whatever that audience might be at this time of night, for a moment. Then she continued.

"It is unknown to this reporter why the White Fang decided to target these companies, but it is very clear that somehow, the Hunters knew they were doing so in enough time to be in a position to be able to stop them... without involving the police. Why that could be, we will learn in time. For now, we can only hope that more knowledge of this travesty against the peace of our city will come to light in due course. And if you want to know more information on this point, you know to watch: Vale News Network, your only source for real news. This is Lisa Lavender, signing off."

OOOOOO

How Lisa Lavender had known about what was happening so quickly was something that Ozpin was going to have to look into later he decided, shutting down his scroll for a moment. He had allowed the students time to head to the baths, and watching Lisa do her normally excellent job of appealing to several different portions of Vale's demographic at once was always fascinating. Now, though, all the teens who had been involved in the battle in the dockyard with Arturia were in front of him, which included one non-student, and one missing student. *Start simply, I suppose.*

"Before we begin, I will note that while Nora is the only member of Team Anvil, young Mr. Topaz is the only member of Team Garnet missing. Is there any reason for this? Both why Nora was involved in this at all, and why Mr. Topaz is missing when all three of his fellow teammates were equally involved? I would be most amused to hear you all thought this was the Huntress equivalent of a girl's night out but would have to question your common sense if so."

Yang, Mila and Sun Wukong were the only ones to laugh at Ozpin's little joke, yet he still received an answer, a blunt one from the habitually blunt Tia Arc. "Apacci's busy getting laid," she said simply, causing Ozpin to chuckle and Glynda to growl.

"Er, we saw him entering a club in the arms of a young woman, and considering that later that night, we attempted to call his scroll and found he had turned it off, we were able to connect the dots, so to speak," Sung-Sun explained hastily. "If you want to know where to gather him up, we do have the address for the club they were in when we spotted him."

"Is it routine for Mr. Topaz to leave his scroll off when he is away from your team?" Glynda demanded, scowling angrily. "That is against the rules of Beacon."

"While normally I would never say that a young man should not have fun while off duty or away from classes, there is a limit to such things. Mr. Topaz will face detention for at least three days for having his scroll off while away from Beacon," Ozpin agreed. "And your involvement Miss Valkyrie?"

"Um... well, it's true, we, er, we really were all out on a girl's night, Professor," Ruby began, but Ozpin held up a hand, silencing her.

"Miss Rose, while I appreciate the effort to build on my little joke, I am neither a mushroom nor an incompetent to be fed a pile of fecal matter like that. Did you honestly think we were not aware of the fact that Ms. Belladonna had run away from Beacon and that you all had gone in chase of her? I commend your dedication to your friend but not your common sense," Ozpin drawled.

"I, it's my fault!" Blake stated hastily, stepping forward from the crowd. "I dragged them into..."

"Whose fault it is has yet to be determined. I have no doubt that you're at the heart of this matter, Ms. Belladonna, and there will be consequences for that. But do not attempt to prevaricate or lie here." With it clear that the students were still a little too high-strung from the battle, and, in many cases, perhaps their first brush with fighting individuals who did not have Aura to protect them, Ozpin decided to continue things in this more serious mien rather than attempt to lighten the mood as he had hoped to do with his earlier questioning about miss Valkyrie's involvement. "Separate yourselves into teams, please and spread out a bit. My office is more than big enough for all of you to do so."

In doing so they would lose some of their solidarity and be forced to face his desk as individuals or as teams was a psychological tool. As was the fact that he didn't offer any of them chairs, despite having had plenty of time to ask the maintenance workers to bring some up for this meeting.

“Now, let us begin. First, Arturia, as I understand it, you were the one to spot team Ruby’s wayward member. Explain what happened when you caught up to them, and also why young Ms. Belladonna is apparently in cahoots with an escaped felon,” Ozpin stated, letting his eyes slide over to the blonde man standing in among the others.

“Hey! I’m not a crook. I was just a stowaway...” Sun began before being smacked upside the head by Sung-Sun and then glared into submission by Goodwitch.

“That, almost by definition, does make you a felon, Mr. Wukong. But I am well aware of your being a student at Haven. Luckily for me, time zones are a thing, and my old friend, Headmaster Lionheart, was actually awake and able to answer questions about you. Your team, by the way, has also been informed of your escapades and are already being punished for it. Haven believes in punishing the team for the actions of the individual even more than we here in Beacon.”

“Oh, man...” Sun muttered, his tail drooping as he scuffed his feet. “Damn, the boys are gonna be so pissed at me.”

“Personally, I recommended that you be removed from your leadership position,” Glynda growled. “Losing your wallet is one thing. Stowing away on a ship for fun? That is another thing entirely.”

Seeing an opportunity to play the good cop, Ozpin interjected, “Especially when you leave your team behind. Any such action should involve your team, Mr. Wukong. Leaving them for any reason while in the field is foolish and almost always suicidal.”

“Er, right, got it, Professor,” Sun answered.

Having impressed upon one of the two non-Beacon students in the room why this was so serious, Ozpin turned his attention to the others, gently coaxing them into explaining the battle from start to finish. However, this ran into one major issue right off the bat.

“I’m sorry, could you repeat that, Arturia? Not only did Ms. Belladonna ignore your orders to stay put, but she charged in and attempted to, to what, take Roman hostage in the face of the White Fang? To berate them into turning against him?”

Glynda was furious. The cold, biting words coming out of her mouth should have told everyone that, and most of the students flinched most satisfactorily. The glare on her face added to the impact enough that Ruby was trying to hide behind Yang while Weiss looked as if she was contemplating the same thing, and Mila wished she could hide behind Tia. Nora was already there, though, peeking out under one of Tia’s arms.

But Blake was either made of sterner stuff than most or perhaps did not realize the full severity of what she had done (and Ozpin's opinion was on that last being the case rather than the first) for she spoke up quickly. "It makes no sense! Why in the world would the White Fang, who are as antihuman as they are pro-faunus, work with a known criminal and racist like Roman Torchwick! He was berating them, deriding them even as we watched. I thought that if I..."

"That if you, a former member, tried to bring them back to the straight and narrow it would work?" Glynda's glare told everyone her own opinions on that score, and Blake bristled before slumping in place as she remembered that she actually hadn't done all that well when it came to talking the White Fang down.

"Very well. I will make a note of the fact that you both disobeyed a direct order from a credited Huntress and... that you called them brothers as well." Ozpin shook his head faintly at that. "We will see if that comes up in the assessor's investigation of the scene of the crime and if it was recorded. It was recorded. You might be forced to make some public statements in the near future, Ms. Belladonna. I do hope that your father passed on to you some measure of his skill at public speaking."

Seeing Blake wince, Ozpin offered her some advice, watching as Weiss, Ruby and Yang all started to gather around the girl in support. That was good. It meant that whatever else, a weakness festering in the foundation of Team RWBY had been repaired. *Excellent. That will make them all more valuable in the future. And Blake's knowledge of the White Fang will also come in handy. That was the entire reason why he had allowed a former terrorist into my school, after all.*

"What do you mean, headmaster?" Ruby asked for her friend. "Er about Blake needing to give a speech. And, um, what are assessors?"

"While your acquaintances might be willing to keep your secret, it is very doubtful that the entire fight went without being recorded, Ms. Belladonna. And there is only so much I can do about shutting those recordings down before they are loose on the Rem-net. Therefore, your fellow students here in Beacon might find out about her heritage. Those poor humans among them who are not already aware anyway," he said dryly, causing many in the group of students to twitch, although it was interesting to note that Yang and Tia did not.

Yang knowing about Blake's secret was one thing. The two girls had been practically joined at the hip since initiation, far exceeding their teammates in their closeness. That Tia knew was interesting, and part of Ozpin wondered if that meant that Mr. Arc also knew, and if so, how. At present, it didn't matter, but he set that thought aside for the future.

"And as for assessors, surely Ms. Rose, you did not think that the damages done to the dockyards could be so easily repaired? There is a limit even to what Glynda's Semblance can

do.” Admittedly, quite a bit of that damage **had** indeed been repaired, but obviously, that wasn’t always the case. “Whenever a Huntress or Huntsman is forced to fight either Grimm or human opponents in a built-up area like the city, there must be an assessment of damages done to the surrounding landscape. Depending on the severity of those damages and the reasons behind the battle, the Huntsman in question can be held liable for twenty-five or up to seventy-five percent of the damages, which would then subsequently be taken out of their pay until they have paid it off.”

Ruby, Yang, Mila and Nora’s faces all turned white at that, while Weiss and Sung-sun’s eyes narrowed in thought, and Blake almost looked catatonic at the news. Seeing this, Ozpin had to hide a smile behind his raised mug of coffee. A necessity at nearly four in the morning rather than simply because he enjoyed it. And no, he wasn’t addicted to coffee, whatever Glynda said.

“Because this was an unauthorized mission, the damages that you all would pay for would be higher than the normal low rate of 25%, but because she was the leader of this operation, Miss Arc will be doing the lion’s share of that payment. And no, Miss Yang, your tuition to Beacon does not cover violent actions taken out in public.”

Yang sheepishly lowered her arm, shrugging. “Unless you, like so many of your fellows, would like to start your post-Beacon career as Huntsman heavily in debt, I suggest you take that under advisement.”

“Or just not get caught, gotcha, Professor,” Yang bounced back easily, earning her a glare from Glynda that was so cold it might well have been made out of liquid nitrogen.

This worked to break the momentary tenseness of the atmosphere. *And those are some interesting looks now being sent Ms. Weiss and Ms. Greenscale’s way by their teammates*, Ozpin mused, amused as always from the first sight of Huntsmen who realized they might be on the hook to pay for any damages they cause.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Weiss spoke up hesitantly, raising a hand almost as if she were in class. “Headmaster, if there is such an onus to be paid off, I can volunteer to...”

“Let us leave that to the assessors. Considering that this involved a battle with the White Fang, and you were able to stop them from escaping with any of the Dust they were there to steal, the assessors will take all that into consideration. In Vale, they are a quasi-independent group made up of ex-Hunters and Huntresses who are no longer able to take to the field.” Ozpin was quite smug about that, as that had been something he had put in place over time, ever since the end of the Colors War, in point of fact, through two different lifetimes.

“However, we now come back to the actual battle. Please begin from when Roman broke away from Ms. Belladonna’s attempt to hold him at gunpoint. Arturia, you can begin this as you already stated that you were the first one to arrive on the scene after that moment.”

As he had come to expect from the woman, Miss Arc’s answer was quick, concise, and to the point. It was altogether professional, painting the setting quickly and efficiently in such a way that both Ruby and Sung-Sun had actually pulled out their scrolls and were taking notes. That was excellent. It would serve them in good stead in the future. Arturia then went into greater detail on the first few moments of fighting, the arrival of Roman Torchwick’s associates, and the overall plan she had hastily relayed to Ruby and Sung-Sun as she ran in to help Blake.

“I suppose the first mistake I made was to not make certain that I had Sung-Sun’s scroll number as well as I did Ruby,” Arturia mused. “But even so, despite needing to relay through to Sung-Sun via Ruby, I believe that in terms of our overall coordination, we did quite well. I could have used my sister, but Ruby was a far better choice, and she proved a quite competent stand-in for me after I engaged as well,” she finished, causing Ruby to nearly go red as her cloak in embarrassment.

Ozpin nodded at that, although he was far more interested in the Semblances being shown than even his pleasure at how well the Silver-Eyed girl was coming along. “And you are certain that you faced two **different** Semblances that targeted your senses? One that created illusions that fooled the eye but could be shattered, and the other one that apparently **directly** attacked your mind?” He nearly demanded, his voice becoming intense.

“I am positive. Both the girl in the mask and the other one attempted to hinder me from the start of the fight, but it felt as if the woman with the mental manipulation Semblance wasn’t as well-trained and couldn’t deal with the overall chaos of the battle,” Arturia answered firmly. “I was able to tell when changes were being made occasionally and distract her further, breaking her hold on my mind. Further, if she had been able to, I’m certain she would have tried to direct hallucinations into all of our minds, not just me. Ergo, we can assume she either cannot or lacks in training to target multiple people at once.”

Ozpin did not look over at, instead, seemingly nodding his head, muttering aloud how unusual it was to have an illusion-type Semblance, let alone a mental assault-type Semblance. He kept talking until Glynda had pulled up the information both of them were wondering about. When she spoke, Glynda had some trouble keeping her interest and an undercurrent of satisfaction from her voice as she held up an image of a young, heavily tanned young woman with green hair being laid out on a stretcher, the sheet having been set over her body rapidly turning red around her stomach area, another sheet placed over her face. “Miss Arc, is this the individual you fought?”

Looking at the image that Glynda had just sent to the large screen set to one side of Ozpin's desk had many of the younger students recoiling. Ruby, in particular, looked as if she was going to throw up. Weiss, Yang, and Mila all went pale as their minds instantly saw something else: that the woman was probably not alone in death. That there were others in the background laid out on stretchers with small cloths placed over their faces in the background. Blake also looked disturbed and distressed at the sight of so many dead faunus, faunus killed in a fight she began.

Such was the consequence of individuals who had no aura fighting those who did, and it was only one aspect of why those with Aura were looked at warily by normal societies the world over. Ozpin could see the fact they had killed people tonight finally sink into the minds of most of these young women. Even Tia and Nora looked grim, although Ozpin was not surprised to see that Tia's lack of emotional range carried over into this area. Nora also had her own past circumstances.

She and Mr. Lie alike, Ozpin thought sadly. The life of orphans, especially orphan survivors of Grimm attacks, is never an easy one.

Ms. Arc, however, did not waver. She calmly took in the image, peering closely at the skin and hair of the woman visible beyond the covered area of the sheet, then shrugged her shoulders. "If you want me to go down and identify her, I suppose I can do that. The only aspect I would be certain of, however, was her skin color and the few glimpses of her real hair color that I saw. Most of the time, she was messing with my mind, or her companion, the little ballerina-like girl with the multicolored hair, was doing the same thing with her illusions. I will say, though, that I saw no sign of that body after my final confrontation with them. I suppose she could have simply collapsed exhausted and fell badly, but it seems unusual to me."

"Hmm... she could have been slain by your last attack," Tia spoke up, surprising many. When they all looked at her, she twitched, pushing her lower face deeper into her scarf. Yet even so, she continued. "The other one could have been nearby and forced to cover them both to hide herself."

"Possible, but doubtful. She didn't make a sound when pierced entirely through by something? The ballerina's illusions couldn't cover sound, I do not think," Arturia stated, pointing at the side of the dead woman where a trail of blood could be seen underneath her body as well as on the sheet covering her chest. "That doesn't seem likely."

While Ozpin was almost dancing a jig on the inside, he noted how disturbed and green the youngsters were looking and decided to change the subject. "We will follow up on what exactly happened to this young woman. Hopefully, once we remove her Grimm mask, we will

discover more of her actual identity as well. Still, regardless of anything else, removing a Semblance like that in the hands of a criminal is a very good outcome for us, I think.”

This is it, this random element, this random event. We can use this to turn the tables on Salem and whoever she is working with. Qrow’s description of the three attackers had been spotty at best, as they had all retreated the moment he appeared on the scene, using some kind of hallucination to distract Ozpin from their actual location, just like what Miss Arc had described during her battle. In fact, given how jumbled that report was, he was going more by the description of how the Semblance impacted Ms. Arc’s brain than anything else.

But it was still a start. Everyone in the world had some kind of record, some kind of background. Eventually, Ozpin would be able to use this woman’s body to discover something of her companions. *It might not even be day yet, technically, but this is shaping up to be a most glorious one!*

He asked Arturia a few more questions, then directed several dozen questions to the students, breaking them out of the stupor that the images of the dead White Fang members had evoked, although Blake was looking not just shellshocked but guilty. Still, given the closeness that he could see among Team RWBY, he felt that he could let that in their capable hands.

The discussion continued for several moments before Ozpin was satisfied. He handed out punishments, very minor ones, considering the fact that they did indeed stop a large-scale crime from happening, but still enough to enforce that they shouldn’t go looking for trouble. Each girl was given a separate punishment, as Ozpin firmly believed that the punishment should fit the criminal. While he was in no position to truly punish Mr. Wukong, other than confining him to Beacon and making it clear to his own headmaster Ozpin’s thoughts on his feckless actions, his own students were fair game.

While he was proud of them, for the most part, taking the law into their own hands could not be condoned. If only so that the Council of Vale didn’t breathe down his neck any worse than they already were.

For Weiss, this meant writing an essay on faunus rights and the importance of faunus to the history of Vale. If Ozpin had thought she would be able to find any history texts about Atlas’s internal history that actually credited faunus with their actual achievements, he would’ve made that the assignment, but as it was, several hundred years of discrimination had done away with any such book. Even here in Beacon, finding history books that didn’t have a pro-human/Atlas stance to them was hard, hence why Mr. Arc and Professor Oobleck had started so many arguments.

As for Weiss's teammates, Blake had the most normal punishment. She would spend several weekends being worked into the ground as a gopher for the various professors. Which was not exactly a sinecure considering Professor Port's activities. Tia and Sung-Sun would join her on that punishment detail, while Ruby would not be allowed cookies for a week. As far as Ozpin could tell, Ruby had done pretty much everything right in terms of her leadership of team RWBY during the battle and had been far more mindful of the damages they were doing to the dockyards than her sister, who would no longer be allowed to go to Vale for the next two months, including going into Vale to access her personal storage area and Bumblebee, her bike. Mila would be forced to help the nurse and Professor Peach in particular.

As for the last student at Beacon, Miss Valkyrie looked horrified at the punishment he had come up with for her: she would no longer be able to get pancakes from the cafeteria at all. Not for breakfast and not during the day for snacks. "And I trust that Mr. Arc will also have his own punishment in mind for your role in this. Let this be a reminder to you all," Ozpin said, removing his gaze from Nora to sweep it across the rest of the group, hiding any amusement he took from her horror. "The outcome here was good, but you cannot, I repeat, cannot take matters into your own hands within Vale. We Huntsman are enforcers of the law and defenders of humanity... And yes, Miss Belladonna, humanity does include faunus, regardless of your animal traits. Nor can we act without consequence."

He waited until all of the students glumly nodded, then dismissed them, asking only Sung-Sun and Ruby to stay behind. As the doors to the elevators shut behind their friends, only now did Professor Ozpin ask the two young ladies to sit across from him at his desk.

"Now that I have handed out the proper punishment for this night's work, let me tell the two of you that you did magnificently from what I have been able to discern so far. You followed Arturia's orders, you created a true ambush, taking on a numerically superior opponent, one with several individuals among them who had their or unlocked. Not only that, but you kept the damages done to the dockyards at as minimum a level as you could. Ms. Valkyrie and Arturia are apparently the ones who did the most damage there."

He glanced over at Miss Arc, who had stayed where she had been the entire time, standing at parade rest, staring back at them thoughtfully. "And she is in a far better position to deal with the consequences of that. Moreover, not one of your teammates came through this battle with any injury. This is not the kind of baptism by fire that we here at Beacon generally approve of giving our students, but I think it has been an amazing one for you all."

He watched as both young women brightened noticeably, Ruby mostly coming out of the funk that she had fallen into after seeing the bodies of the White Fang captured in the picture that Glynda had shared. The girl hadn't even reacted to not being allowed any cookies

from the cafeteria for a week. “That being said I would like to hear your thoughts now as leaders as to what happened. You will note that I am not asking either of you to write up after-action reports. I will have Arturia do so as the company leader and I see no reason to pile on still more work on the pair of you when you haven’t yet finished the after-action report for the Remembrance.”

“I can’t... This whole thing is my team’s fault!” Ruby blew up, as Ozpin had predicted. “I should’ve known Blake was a faunus, at least. Yang did! I should’ve tried better to keep her and Weiss from blowing up again at one another after the day of them butting heads. I should never have let the two of them be alone. We should’ve sat them both down, made them talk it out!”

“There are few things in this world that can truly be pared down to getting people to talk it out calmly, Ms. Rose,” Glynda said, her voice cutting across the younger girl’s words and bringing her self-recrimination to a halt. “And you, young woman, are several years younger than your teammates and are thus not nearly as socially aware as your sister or any of your fellow students. You could hardly be held accountable for the fact that you could not tell that Ms. Belladonna was a faunus when she was doing everything, she could to hide that fact. Perhaps you did make a mistake in thinking that the troubling discussions between her and Miss Schnee were over for the day after having been at loggerheads for so long. But that is a mistake many would make. Do not beat yourself up about it.”

“Agreed. There had always been the chance of a blowup between Ms. Schnee and Ms. Belladonna from the moment the two of them were randomly placed on the same team. Ms. Belladonna’s running away is also part and parcel of her general personality. The fact that you were able to meet up with her and that Ms. Schnee was able to make nice with her after the battle says a good deal about how close the four of you have become in a short amount of time, and that has everything to do with you as a leader. Keep it up, and I feel that your teamwork will continue to get better,” Ozpin said, pausing to sip at his coffee.

Ruby nodded, and then shook her head with a smile. “Harry said something like that too. Guess it’s true, then.”

“Indeed,” Ozpin allowed a smile on his own face, even though inside he frowned a bit, as it sounded as if Ruby felt the young Arc’s words carried as much weight as Ozpin’s or Glynda’s. That was strange, but admittedly not all that unusual given the number of times Harry had been forced to lead not only his own team but others in combat. Still, it was something to watch for. *I want to tie him to me, not let Harry and Evig Låga grow to become a new power in the world, that would make keeping Salem in check far harder, with her proven ability to suborn humans and faunus alike.* Indeed, at present he was contemplating subtly releasing information about their plans and other clandestine means to put pressure on Evig Låga through economic and

social means. Meanwhile, here in Beacon he would try to push other leaders forward in class and in exercises, taking the shine off Harry's position within the freshman class.

Ozpin kept those thoughts off his face and out of his voice with ease as he continued. "Now, was there anything as a leader you thought of during the battle itself?"

"... I think we were too used to having room to maneuver," Ruby said slowly. "Trying to stay put, to defend a specific position was way harder. I also think that I seriously need to get my team some of those earbuds that Nora and her team all have. I don't want to wait until our second year to do that."

"I will send you the forms to fill out," Glynda said approvingly.

Ruby nodded thankfully at the older woman, then continued on. "Weiss and me, I think we need to work better on our close combat skills. We both relied too heavily on hit-and-run attacks, and we nearly let the cordon deteriorate a few times while Yang was busy holding down the fort near the bullheads, keeping the White Fang from trying to escape with the fire dust already inside them. I've been thinking about that since starting my report on the Remembrance, but this made it even clearer to me."

She then looked a little miserable. "Um, can I ask if you know anything about Penny? She disappeared so quick after Arturia ran off after Torchwick and the rest that I was kind of worried about her."

"If this Penny is who I think it is, you need not worry about her, Ms. Rose. I believe she is a student from Atlas and trust me when I say they do not lose students," Ozpin soothed. "She was undoubtedly ordered to return to debrief, and that is an order no student of the Atlas Academy will ever be allowed to ignore, whatever is going on at the time."

"Er, that is both good to hear yet disturbing," Ruby muttered, to which Sung-Sun and Arturia both nodded.

"It is good to always play to your strengths, if possible, but one should not allow weaknesses to grow. It is good that you recognize where you came up short in this fight and where you can improve." Ozpin ignored that as he finished his small pep talk to Ruby before turning his attention to Sung-Sun. "Ms. Greenscale?"

"To be honest, sir, my team is not nearly as well rounded as Team Ruby, nor do we stack up well when it comes to teamwork, although there at least we are getting demonstrably better. Still, we don't match Team Ruby in any one area, let alone Team Anvil." Ruby puffed up a little, wanting to protest that her team was better than Team ANVL, but as Sung-Sun looked at her sideways, she didn't say anything. With two powerhouses like Pyrrha and Harry on their team, it

was true that ANVL was a step above the others in the freshman class. Or maybe the whole school, Sung-sun mused.

“Tia is the only truly skilled front-line combatant on our team. Mila has the weapons and style but not the experience or Aura reserves. Apacci and I are both speed-type skirmishers. Leaning on Tia as heavily as we do in team combat is frustrating in the extreme. Looking into the future, I am also wondering what we are as a unit. What our specialty should be, I mean. We did well tonight, but it showed how dysfunctional our basic combat styles are and how we need to improve.”

Ozpin nodded again, as that matched with what he'd thought himself. Sung-Sun's team was not nearly as important for his long-term plans as team Ruby was, or Ruby herself as a Silver-Eyed warrior. But even so, he would prefer that Beacon turn out another good team rather than a so-so one. Even if, like Arturia's team, he felt that they were destined to split apart upon graduation. “It does sound as if you have some thinking to do going forward. The library may be a major help to you in that event, as could some of the teachers here. However, I would say that perhaps looking deeper into becoming an anti-criminal unit would be very interesting. There are Hunter teams that specialize in combating the criminal element after all rather than Grimm directly, and you all may benefit from learning more antihuman tactics and gaining nonlethal skills.”

Sung-Sun's eyes widened then narrowed thoughtfully, a faint smirk appearing on her face. “Well, now, that is a fascinating idea professor. I may indeed look into it.” *If only because so many of my family would probably die of shock and the sheer irony of one of the Greenscale clan taking up police work.*

Ozpin talked to the two young women for a few more moments, embedding his impression as an advisor, a guide that they could come to if they were troubled despite the mistakes that he'd made on team Garnet earlier in the year. Then he let them go, watching the door slide shut behind them. As it did, he turned to Glynda. “Glynda?”

“Neapolitan is known to the police force. Semblance was unknown before this. She is an assassin, a murderer many times over. She isn't a madwoman by any means, but she has been linked to several murders over the past five or six years, and she is a known associate with Torchwick. I've been trying to match green hair or dark tan skin to any known criminal element here in Vale, and I haven't found any. Wherever she originated from, it isn't here in Vale.”

“Send out her face to all of our contacts, official and unofficial, when we get it later this morning. We have been handed an amazing gift here, and I refuse to believe that there are two young women with the same kind of Semblance that Qrow reported he ran into when he chased away Amber's attackers. We must use this opportunity to find the other two and thwart

Salem's current plans, whatever they may be," Ozpin ordered, his voice cold, utterly devoid of the warmth he had a moment ago.

Glynda nodded resolutely and turned to her scroll. As she did, Ozpin turned his chair around, staring out the nearby window, pondering how best to use what had happened to his advantage.

OOOOOOO

While waiting with the others for their team leaders to come down and join them in the small foyer leading into the elevator up to the headmaster's office, Blake and Weiss slowly moved apart from everyone else. The pair had things to say to one another, though neither had any idea on how to start the conversation. Yang let them go, instead moving over to talk to Tia and Mila, wanting to ask the two of them about their opinion on armor and whether or not she should start looking to incorporate some into her Huntress outfit.

Considering all the cleavage Yang shows off, that could probably be a good idea, Blake reflected. Although I wonder whether or not armor will stop her Semblance from working as well, considering it's based on how much actual damage she was taking.

Shaking her head of thoughts of her partner's boobie window (awfully hard to do, those things had their own magnetic field, she swore), Blake turned her attention back to the more important thing: the young white-haired woman standing across from her and their unresolved issues. "So..."

"Yes," Weiss answered, nodding her head in shared social awkwardness for a moment, something that she, as a Schnee, had never really dealt with before. The feeling fit her poorly, and Weiss pushed her way through it quickly, pulling up from her mind an idea for a conversation starter she had heard before. "I propose that we exchange five questions, and then, we leave all this White Fang and Schnee nonsense behind us, agreed?"

"Agreed. Although I reserve the right to not answer if I don't want to. If that is the case, you can ask another question," Blake agreed with relief.

"Eminently suitable. First, I have to ask, were you involved in any assassination missions or, or missions with the clear aim of killing people rather than any other reason?" Weiss stated, seeing no reason to beat around the bush even as a chill went through her at the memories her own words evoked. "I, I know far too many families and even people who disappeared due to the White Fang. Family friends even some of their children..."

"No, never," Blake answered instantly, any urge to smirk at how Weiss had instantly assumed she should ask the same question drowned by the seriousness of the question. "I was sort of born into the White Fang, but I never did assassination missions. Those only became a

thing in the last three, four years or so, and I was **never** involved in them. The closest I ever got to something like that was when we attacked an Atlesian nobleman's house to free some of his faunus slaves. And I didn't kill anyone then."

"Slavery, truly a reprehensible thing," Weiss mumbled, her voice an alloy of anger at that idea and relief at Blake's answer. "If you were aware of such and the authorities could not do anything or were willfully ignoring the problem, I can only say violence was justified."

Blake nodded; the pair united in their hatred of that kind of thing for many reasons. "I agree at the time, although obviously changing the society so such things cannot happen or can at least be found out and handled by the authorities would always be better. But, speaking of something that's close to slavery... you, you've never been to one of your family's mines. I think you mentioned that once. I just want to be clear; you've never seen the conditions faunus miners are forced to work in for your family, and you, you don't have anything to do with running the Schnee Dust Company?"

"No," Weiss stated just as firmly as Blake had answered her first question. "None of us, my younger brother, my older sister and I, were kept well away from the... Call it the nitty-gritty of where our company first made its money. I was far more involved in the CCT network, and a few outreach programs our family runs to improve our public image,"

Blake smiled then, a little mischievously. "I actually think I've heard some of your songs. They're not my taste, but I can definitely say they're good."

To her delight, Weiss flushed almost rosily at that, apparently not being very used to taking compliments on her singing voice from people whose opinions she actually cared about. "Well, thank you." Then, her face became serious. "What exactly was the tipping point for you? To leave the White Fang, I mean."

Her smile disappearing into a wince, Blake sighed faintly. "Myself and Adam, we had been working together for two years, mostly in large groups he led on specific missions. I, we were fighting the good fight, striking at Vacuan crime gangs taking advantage of faunus, hitting Mistrali communities that treated faunus like beasts, and Atlas, of course. But over time, the missions got bloodier. And then, one day, the two of us were sent on a special mission. We were supposed to steal an entire truckload worth of Dust."

At that, Weiss's eyes widened. "The Autumn Gale heist."

"Right..." Blake trailed off, but Weiss just gestured her to continue, making no more mention of the fact the shipment and train alike had been owned by the SDC.

"It should have been an easy in and out, but instead, your family had loaded the train with two Atlas robots and those soldiers, along with a few real soldiers, to help the train

conductors. I had just finished a fight with some of them, only to, to find Adam basically executing most of the crewmen of the train. He and I argued about it, but he said that he had permission from the higher-ups. I still don't know if that was the case or not, but while I might have been fine with killing someone in a fight, killing someone after they surrender, that's something different."

Weiss hummed at that, shivering a bit, and Blake realized with a start she might have killed someone tonight and had almost certainly not dealt with it yet. "And so, you left."

"And so, I left," Blake agreed. "It wasn't easy, but that was the final straw. The White Fang had changed in ways I could no longer agree with, and Adam was at the heart of it all. But I still wanted to fight the good fight, to make a difference in the world. So, I decided to become a Huntress."

Weiss bit her cheek thoughtfully, saying nothing, and Blake posed her own question. "I can understand why you react to faunus the way you do but, but I hope that our burying the hatchet has helped there. Is there anything else I can do to, to help you get over your hangups, I guess? About faunus in general, not the White Fang, I mean."

"Hmm... I will need to think about that. If you're thinking of some manner of shock therapy, please don't, though," Weiss finished in a droll tone, shaking her head. "I like to think I'm far better about faunus than my family, but I have realized since coming to Beacon that's a low bar and that I still have a lot to do to truly be comfortable around faunus. Perhaps some time around you and Velvet will help? But otherwise, I believe that is something that can only come with time." She then chuckled wryly. "While this is a line more often used in a relationship when you're trying to end things, the phrase 'it's not you, it's me' springs to mind."

Blake snorted at that, and the two girls shared a smile before Weiss went on. "But speaking of that kind of thing, did you have any plans to ever reveal your faunus heritage to us?"

"Honestly?" Blake paused thinking about it, then sighed for the second time in this conversation. "Probably not. It was very nice not to be judged by my cat ears, to just blend in like a human for a bit, even if a few of the faunus students could tell I was one of them. I was more worried about someone like Apacci outing me than you all noticing. Right up until Yang came out and admitted she knew too." She then smirked slightly. "Although Harry knew I was a faunus right away. Apparently, he knows a bit more about recent history than you do, as he recognized my last name."

Weiss scowled a bit. "Belladonna, yes, I looked that up after Harry mentioned to Ruby that it was how he knew you were a faunus. I can't say I'm happy to have forgotten that detail, but is it true..."

"It is. My parents lead Menagerie," Blake answered easily before looking away quickly. "Not that most people know they even have a daughter, let alone one that stayed in the White Fang after they left. We hadn't talked in years, but I've kind of made up with them lately."

"Ha, you won't get any pushback from me of all people on that score. I can understand being at loggerheads with your parents all too well. My own certainly aren't going to win any awards, except possibly worst father of the decade," Weiss snarked.

That caused Blake to look at her quickly, her eyes flicking up to the scar on Weiss's face. The opera singer caught that look and shook her head quickly. "Oh, he was never physically abusive. But there are other ways to hurt someone."

"True." Blake nodded at that, adding that she had gone through something of the sort with Adam, only realizing after she had left him that their relationship had begun to be a bit too one-sided, a bit too much like he was trying to influence her. "He never hurt me on there, but he was certainly starting to control me in a way that, looking back on it, I really don't like."

The two short girls were reminded of the world at large in no uncertain terms as Yang pulled them both into a hug. "Wow! This conversation turned dark. And if this Adam guy ever shows up, Blakey, I'm going to have to introduce him to Ember Celica! I take it the two of you have made up completely now?"

Having learned from long experience to just go with it when it came to Yang, Blake made no effort to escape the hug. Instead, she leaned slightly into it, the cat part of her reveling in the fact that even when she wasn't using her Semblance, Yang's body ran at around fifteen degrees higher temperature than most people's. "You might say that," she mumbled into Yang's chest. *Gravitational forces, I swear!* "We've shared a few very secrets. I suppose that always brings people closer."

"True. And Blake," Weiss looked across Yang's obnoxiously-sized chest to the other girl, for once not trying to fight out of being hugged like that. "I think you would've done yourself a great disservice to not share your heritage eventually with us. I understand that is exceedingly strange coming from me and how I acted during our arguments, and I probably would not have reacted well to it at first. But I've gotten to know you, and ears and all, I quite like what I have seen, enough so that the faunus aspect just adds to the overall picture in a very uplifting manner."

It took even Blake a moment to translate that, but after she did, she smiled, pushing through the urge to purr with some difficulty to reply. "You're not so bad yourself, Ice Princess."

Yang grinned at that and released Weiss from the hug, continuing to hug Blake with one arm around her shoulder as Weiss rolled her eyes. "Awesome! But now that the cat is out of the

bag...” Yang paused a moment, reveling in the groans this awesome pun elicited before going on. “We gotta talk about the most important thing. Exactly how many puns I can make out of this.”

“Xiao Long, no!” Weiss growled, actually wagging a finger in Yang’s face.

“Xiao Long, yes!” Yang retorted before turning away to look at the elevator as it opened, even as Blake finally escaped her hug. The two team leaders smiled at seeing their teams there waiting for them and moved forward, joining them as they walked out of the building, explaining what they had been kept behind for.

Outside the building came a surprise, or rather, a surprise to everyone but the two Arcs. The remaining three members of Team ANVL were waiting for them, despite the fact that it was around four thirty in the morning by this point and on a Sunday to boot. “Howdy all, I understand you all had a most interesting night,” Harry drawled.

“Ren!” Nora shouted, at the same time that Sun shouted, “You!” pointing at Harry dramatically.

Ignoring the site of Ren sidestepping a lunge from Nora before the other man gathered her arm into his own and pulled her into a sideways hug and a fierce whisper, Harry cocked his head thoughtfully as he stared at the monkey faunus. “Oh, the stowaway. Questions are beginning to multiply.”

“Yeah, yeah, broke myself out on my own recognizance, met a cute cat girl, got into a fight. More importantly, dude, you’re the one that helped capture me!”

“Well, me, Arturia, and your own idiocy,” Harry replied bluntly. It was four-thirty in the morning, and he had been woken up forty-five minutes ago by an all-team report from Professor Ozpin about how Nora had been involved in a fight with White Fang. He was in no mood to be polite. “If you break the law and get caught, you only have yourself to blame for being thrown into prison.”

Sun growled a bit but decided he was far too tired to do anything about it tonight. “Apparently, I’m stuck here at Beacon and am going to be forced to join your classes going forward. So, dude? You, me, combat class.”

Smiling beatifically, Harry nodded at that. “Get Goodwitch to agree, and I will cheerfully spar with you.” With that, Harry looked over the rest of the group. “It is far too early to go over everything right now, but I really would like to hear what happened and why both my sisters and my teammate were pulled into this.”

He then pulled Tia into a hug as she came close to them, beating her to it by a mere second, even as he continued to look at the others. "I'll just say now that the three of us are happy all of you are alright. And we can move our little feast to another weekend. Maybe after the finals at the end of the year?"

This caused some weary cheers from all of the teens, who had slowly begun to crash as they waited for Ruby and Sung-Sun to join them. Soon after giving Harry and his companions promises that they would talk about what happened later after they got some sleep most of Team GART and Team RWBY walked off, with Sun following after them, asking, "What's this about a feast? Could I get in on that? Or at least, break into the cafeteria? Man does not live on apples alone."

Tia stayed with her brother, smiling over his shoulder at Pyrrha, who smiled back. She stayed there for a second to whisper something into Harry's ear, which Pyrrha couldn't make out, although she could see his back stiffened a bit, and his eyes tracked to the entryway leading into the headmaster's tower like a gun turret. Then Pyrrha was too busy hugging Tia and then being dragged into a four-way hug by Nora to comment.

The look on Harry's face was quite Grimm as he watched Arturia exit the building, having stayed behind a few moments more with the headmaster and Goodwitch to describe the sensation of the green-haired girl's Semblance. She smiled widely for a moment at seeing Harry there along with his teammates, but her smile slid off her face as she saw the expression on Harry's. "Well, drat. Why do I think that Tia has been telling tales?"

Tia turned around from the group hug, looking at her older sister and shaking her head. "It's not tales if it's true."

Harry scowled a little, then shook his head and moved forward, pulling Arturia into a hug, amused anew that he had grown taller than his older sibling. *I might not have Violet or Tia's inches, but I'm taller than everyone else.* "Come on, you can stay with us for what little remains of tonight, and I can make breakfast tomorrow for us all, at least. You and I will talk then, Arturia."

Arturia hung her head a little but still smiled as she nuzzled lightly into Harry's chest, letting him direct her to follow the other teens toward the townhome where Team ANVL made their home.

OOOOOOO

Rage was too small a word for what Cinder Fall was feeling currently. **Far** too small a word, so much so that she had lapsed into several other languages, two of them extinct by her

Mistress's hand to try to find a way to express how wrathful she was feeling. She still failed, but not through lack of trying.

Nearby, Mercury cringed, his entire body tense like a string, waiting for his Semblance to warn him of if Cinder should lash out, giving him enough time to duck out of the doorway leading into Cinder's office here in their suite in Mistral. It had been a good twenty minutes, and he didn't think that his boss had repeated her curses more than once since receiving the news of Emerald's death.

Mercury's thoughts on the matter were much simpler. Sad that they had lost a powerful ally, sadder still that he had never figured out a way to talk his way into her pants, and annoyed that she had gotten in the last jab when they had separated.

He waited several minutes by the clock before hesitantly saying, "Boss, we need to start thinking about the bigger picture here."

The look he got in return would have incinerated a normal man, perhaps literally. But after a second, Cinder's anger faded. Well, more was banked, brought back under control, really. Just like a fire in a furnace, the temperature had been turned down a bit, but it was still waiting to ignite once more at the slightest prevarication. "You are right, Mercury. There is precious little time to waste. Roman..."

Her teeth clenched at the name, but she went on, shaking her head violently. It sent her raven black hair everywhere, causing Mercury to stare at it for a moment, then resolutely set aside any thoughts on how hot his boss was, even now as furious as she currently was. "Roman got the report to us about what happened in Vale quickly, but that does not mean that we can be slow to respond to this."

She began to pace, three steps one way, then three steps in another, then a third, pacing in a triangle shape rather than back and forth like most normal people. That almost weirded Mercury out as much as her ranting, honestly. "First things first. Get the Cowardly Lion on the scroll. Tell him he's to wipe out all records of our team at Haven. Come up with some kind of cover story that we died on our recent mission. We need to no longer exist in the system within a few hours."

Mercury blinked at that and only slowly realized why that would be necessary. While he very much doubted that Emerald had kept any identification on her, her face and general appearance **were** in the books at Haven Academy here in Mistral. It had been one of the many steps put in place to help the three of them gain access to Beacon, where Ozpin had undoubtedly hidden away the Fall Maiden.

“Damn, that’s a lot of time and money wasted, boss. Nearly a year of Emerald and me going there on and off, and you too the past few months as a ‘former apprentice’ transferee.” Honestly, part of him still wondered how Cinder could fool so many people that she was a university student when she looked and acted so much more mature, but the rest of him knew that if he wanted to live, he should never bring up a woman’s age, whatever the actual topic. “Do you think I should go over and speak to them in person?”

“No. Send a message and threaten the Cowardly Lion a little bit if he tries to argue. If need be, I can send one of my lady’s Seers over to explain the facts of life to him,” Cinder snarled. “After that, get with our hacker here in Mistral. I want **everything** about our team to be scrubbed away. Public records, pre-Haven identification, my own so-called apprenticeship to Neva Blacknote. All of it. You and I will assume new identities here in Mistral, and I will need to come up with another way into Beacon.”

Neva Blacknote was the Huntsman that the ‘transfer student’ Cinder Fall had apprenticed with. He was also dead and had been for two years rather than the six months in the official records. According to those, Cinder Fall had been trained by the man since she was a young girl, and only had been transferred into Haven to fill in one of two missing places on Emerald and Mercury’s team, their former teammates having truly died on a mission about two weeks before their ambush of Amber. Such things were not uncommon, young Huntsmen dying anyway, although Cinder had garnered some interest due to her being older and having followed the far older apprenticeship type of education rather than the typical schooling.

Even as her now only remaining minion left the room to go about her bidding, Cinder barely contained her fury enough to keep thinking logically. It was hard, very hard, but she forced herself to face how badly this would impede her plans going forward. Neapolitan’s Semblance could only do so much to try and fool other people, especially since Ozpin and his coterie of followers would undoubtedly have also been informed of her abilities. Knowing about them and doing something about them were two different things, but even so.

And I cannot trust Neapolitan, Cinder knew. Her loyalty was to Roman and only Roman, that had been made clear from the outset. Further, now that she was thinking about things, Cinder was beginning to wonder exactly how Emerald had died. Roman’s report had said she had been slain by Tia Arc after the younger girl arrived in time to save Arturia Arc from finally being overwhelmed. But Roman’s words were the only proof of that, and no one in their right mind would ever believe a thief’s word alone on something so important.

I agreed that attacking a shipment loaded with fire dust from Evig Låga was a good idea, we needed to figure out what was happening there, a thought that has only been sustained since Mercury and I came to Mistral. The place has been in the news at least five or six times

since then for various reasons. But that would've been secondary to defeating Arturia Arc. The Dark Queen is too damn dangerous to be allowed to live near Beacon. But neither succeeded, blast it! All because of an ex-White Fang member, a cat woman. Emerald's death made a mere setback into a fucking disaster! And... and has weakened my ability to threaten Roman and Adam somewhat. Which is probably all the reason he would need to remove her if he thought he could get away with it.

For just a moment, Cinder's self-control failed again, and her hand caught on fire as eh thought of that. *If I learn you indeed were the ones to kill Emerald, Roman, your usefulness will not save you from my wrath!* The fire did not burn her, of course, but it slowly turned the metal medicine ball she had grabbed up a few moments ago for stress into so much molten metal running through her fingers, the heat barely registering as a faint tingle.

Alas, Cinder could not blame a Roman entirely for this. Tia Arc was more to blame, if she truly was the one to kill Emerald. If not, then for her sudden arrival which saved her sister, whose death Cinder would have counted as a major victory.

Yet Cinder knew she was also to blame. *I have become arrogant since gaining half of the maiden's power, too arrogant in my ability to cow these underworld types, in my ability to move, invisible to Ozpin's eyes. I must plan everything out from here on this very carefully, and worse, after I am done trying to salvage our plans going forward like this I, I will have to report to Salem that I lost one of my pawns. I will need to have the means of recouping that loss in place before that conversation though, and I can only be thankful that Salem's attention has also turned towards Evig Låga, if Hazel's being here in Mistral, is any indication.*

Wiping the molten metal off her hand, Cinder moved over to her desk, picking up a notebook, her thoughts turning to Roman again. *I will need to play him and Adam off one another. Make it so Adam knows the fault for this debacle lies solely on Roman and bring him into Vale earlier. I can redirect a shipment of weapons to Vale too, get him and those who arrive with him better arms. The Paladin delivery can be pushed forward as well. That will make rallying more faunus to their cause easier, giving him more than enough numbers and hitting power to keep Roman and Neo in line.*

As much as she hated it, Neopolitan at least was far too important for their plans going forward for anything permanent to happen to Roman. *But he has gone from being someone who I can use to someone who I must be wary of.*

With that, Cinder began to go through everything. Everything they would need to be changed, everything that she would need to do going forward.

OOOOOO

Even as Cinder thought of him, Adam was leaning back in a chair he was using as a makeshift bed for a night in Vale, not the city, but the city-state. Adam was bunked up in a guesthouse of a small family in a small faunus-only farming town. They'd been having trouble with Grimm and were not willing to assume that even Beacon, which was supposedly pro-equality just like Shade in Vacuo, would be fast enough to send help to them, Sienna Khan had sent Adam and two others here to deal with the Grimm.

Normally, Adam disdained this kind of hearts and minds mission, but he'd been out in the wilds for several weeks prior to his arrival here, and being greeted with homegrown food was nice, at least. What wasn't so nice was the conversation he'd ended with Bonesaw not twenty minutes ago, during which he had learned about the operation that had cost the White Fang in Vale so many men and women. As well as the very small positive that Bonesaw had been willing to share.

Adam had several questions about that operation, frankly. Why in the world had Torchwick and the White Fang working with him gone after a shipment from some no-name Mistrali community? No matter how large the shipment itself, that didn't have nearly as much prestige as a Schnee shipment, and one of those had been due in Vale in a few days. Furthermore, how did the Hunters gather so many of their detestable group together in order to attack the White Fang with such strength? *Could it be an inside job?*

"No," Adam said to himself, shaking his head instantly. "No, this isn't an inside job... or isn't one as I would use the term these days. No, someone got lucky, and I know who, too. Belladonna! Blake. On a team with a Schnee!"

That piece of information from the new spy that Bonesaw had been able to bring in had infuriated Adam to the point he had nearly destroyed his scroll with his bare hands.

Yet Bonesaw did a magnificent job keeping young Apacci away from anyone who could recognize him. That means he's still available to give us information on Beacon. And now, I have two very personal reasons why that is a very good thing. Getting Blake to come back is one thing. Killing a Schnee is always a positive in my book. Doing both at once? Priceless.

"For now, though, I need to get to Vale as fast as possible," Adam mumbled. "That insufferable human in the high hat needs to remember that he's not the driving force of this little tête-à-tête. That bitch might've been able to force me to agree, and the guns and money we've been getting is nice. But I will not have her or Roman continue to use our men and women as disposable lackeys! As mere workers. That is the exact same kind of thing that most of us have rebelled against from the very beginning!"

His thoughts were interrupted by his scroll going off again, and he frowned, picking it up and staring at the number. Growling angrily, he opened the connection, staring into Cinder falls face. "What is it, Witch! You did not catch me in a good mood."

"I don't know if you would understand what a good mood is if it came up to you holding up a neon sign along with an instruction manual," Cinder drawled, shaking her head. "Yet I find myself in much a similar frame of mind. I have not called you just to needle you, Adam. No, things have gone awry elsewhere. I need to send you to Vale in a maximum of three weeks. But I can send you loaded for Goliath. Are you interested?"

Adam's eyes widened a little behind his ever-present mask, then he smiled grimly. *Well, it seems as if whatever happened, Roman may be getting some of the blame from this bitch as well as my own ire. Good. Although I sure as fuck won't tell her about young Apacci. A spy in Beacon is going to be my hidden ace. "Funny you should mention that..."*

OOOOOOO

The next morning, Arturia woke up to the smell of bacon being sizzled somewhere nearby. She smiled, stretched luxuriously, and then slowly and very carefully pulled herself out of the group hug that Tia and Pyrrha had apparently latched into place once the three of them had fallen asleep. Tia being a hugger was something that Arturia had a lot of experience with. Pyrrha, though, was still a surprise, as had finding herself in the middle of the two other girls. *I could have sworn I was on Tia's other side when we fell asleep. Is that what my dream of sailing over an ocean with massive waves was about?*

Keeping an internal grumble about the comparison between her own chest and that of her younger sister inside with ease, Arturia turned her attention to Pyrrha. *Waking up to a head of red rather than blonde is certainly an interesting experience. I'm not certain how I feel about it, frankly. Before this, I would have said I was strictly straight. But now? I am not averse to admitting Pyrrha is attractive, yet that is still a far cry from being attracted to her.*

Luckily, Pyrrha was also a deep sleeper, and all of the team had turned off their alarm clocks the night before so they could sleep in a bit. *Although judging by the smell, Harry, at least or perhaps Ren, is already up. Even I cannot tell Harry's cooking from someone else's by smell alone.*

Taking care of her morning ablutions took a few moments, but after making sure she was showered and her teeth brushed appropriately, Arturia made her way downstairs. Like Tia and Pyrrha before her, she paused at the top of the stairwell to stare at Harry moving around the kitchen, slowly licking her lips as she watched him do so clad only in a pair of shorts. *Well, I suppose that is official. Man or woman, it doesn't matter. We all like the sight of someone sexy cooking for us.*

With that in mind, she moved down the steps on silent feet, putting all of her stealth skills to a wholly new use as she snuck up behind Harry. She waited until he had set one of the pans down and was reaching for another before snaking her arms around his waist and another reaching up to his chin. Pulling his head around, she leaned in, kissing him ardently.

Harry's eyes only had a second to widen in surprise before he found Arturia's lips on his own. But he quickly began to give as good as he got, turning around in her one-armed hug to put his own arms around her, pulling her into his chest and slowly trying to dominate the kiss a bit as he pushed her away from the kitchen stove towards the island. The first part didn't go so well, although Arturia's hum of appreciation told Harry she enjoyed it at least, while he was far more successful at the latter.

When Harry made to pull at her hair, Arturia's eyes flashed. Her grip around him tightened to the point of pain, and her own hand moved from the small of his back up to grip his far shorter hair. But before she could do so, he had moved down to nibble at her neck, whispering heatedly between nips, "You can't take risks like that!"

Through the haze of her arousal, Arturia blinked a bit, trying to think and failing miserably as Harry nibbled at her collarbone, jolting her hips against his own. "What, what are you..."

"Last night." Harry pulled back from her, leaning his forehead against hers, and it was only now that Arturia realized that somewhere in the last few seconds, Harry had lifted her up onto the island and was slowly grinding his short-clad dick into her panty-clad pussy. "You ran off after Torchwick and his allies! Tia said you were on the verge of losing when she caught up to you."

The arrogant part of Arturia wanted to shout Harry down, to declare that she wouldn't have lost last night. But Arturia was also a capable tactician and knew precisely how close she had come to being overwhelmed. "I... agree." She grumbled. "Roman was no threat on his own, a decent fighter, but one without any ability to overcome my Aura or match me in skill. The little one, the one with the multicolored hair, she was tough. Her illusions were annoying to deal with. But I could keep up with her movements. It was the other one, the one with green hair and her ability to mess with my mind directly that, as much as I hate to admit it, truly would have won the day for them if not for Tia."

Breathing a sigh of relief that Arturia understood, Harry slowly pulled away from her, hearing movement from upstairs. "I reaaally want to lay into you more for that. You can't buy into your own hype, Arturia. I know you made a living going on missions on your own since graduating from Beacon, and I know how many Grimm you've killed and how many fights

you've been able to win through. But you let your arrogance get the better of you when you chased after them like that."

Arturia grumbled at that, but Harry went on before she could say anything. "We're not in a safe profession, but we need to do all we can to minimize that danger. I don't want any promises from you. I just want you to tell me you'll do your best in the future to not fall into that trap again. I don't want to lose any of you, not you, not Tia, not Pyrrha, not **anyone** I care about."

Arturia looked at Harry thoughtfully, her brows furrowing. Then she shrugged, setting aside the odd intensity in Harry's words as simply his way of showing he cared just a little bit more. "I can agree to that. So long as you do the same, my Harry." She moved forward again, this time giving him just a light kiss on the nape of the neck before pulling away as the sound of the shower upstairs cut off far faster than it would have for any woman.

Harry nodded and quickly turned back to the hashbrowns, finishing them off as Ren came down. The two men talked quietly for a few moments, with Ren's eyes going wide, but Arturia could make out what they were saying, having turned aside and headed over to the table to set it up. Apparently, whatever argument they were having didn't last very long, as Ren slowly nodded before holding up one finger. At that, Harry nodded back, and the two of them turned to finish off breakfast. By the time Nora and the others rolled out of bed, all of the food was already on the table, hash browns, bacon, and peaches in a kind of just slightly tangy sauce, which added a bit of a kick to the meal somehow.

All of the girls sat down, eager to tuck in, with Nora gesticulating wildly as she continued to explain the fight from last night to Pyrrha, who was smiling and nodding along. However, Nora's face froze in horror as she finally turned away from the redhead to start piling food onto her plate. "Wait, we're missing the most important thing! Where are the pancakes?! Where're **my** pancakes, Renny!?"

"Headmaster Ozpin informed us of the punishment he handed out to you for your pardon last night's fight. I'm not going to be nearly as evil as that, cutting you off from pancakes for a week. I mean..." Harry began only to stop dead at the horrified expression on Nora's face.

Even as all life seemed to leave her eyes, Nora began to laugh, a half-sobbing, almost broken sound. "Hahaha, good joke, fearless leader! You're not really going to try to keep me from my pancake goodness, are you? That would be, that would be cruel! No, you're not going to do that, are you? Nora needs her pancakes!"

"Nora should never speak in the third person again, lest Harry decide to extend her punishment," Harry snickered, shaking his head as he took a bite out of his bacon. "You can deal with it for one meal, Nora."

Nora leaped on that, almost looking as if she was going to reach across the table and grab Harry and shake him, but Pyrrha and Tia held her back, admittedly with some difficulty. “One meal! One meal! That’s going to be enough to kill me without my pancake intake! Come on, fearless leader! Please! Ren could do the cooking and...”

“And I am still quite miffed that you didn’t call me to come and help,” Ren said from where he sat calmly nearby, sipping at some fragrant tea as he stared at his best friend. “You went into harm’s way without me. I don’t like that. I don’t like that one bit. I know full well how capable you are Nora, and how capable your companions were. But that is a far cry from being there myself to watch your back. I am somewhat displeased if you cannot tell.”

Nora stared at Ren, her face going a little red at the intensity of his words and gaze, and after a few moments, she slumped back into her chair, looking down at her still-empty plate. “Sorry, Renny. We should have called you and the rest of the team in when Arturia contacted us about finding Blake.”

“So long as you understand that, that is a start.” Ren smiled then. “So, what kind of flavor pancake do you want for lunch?”

That brightened Nora up considerably, only for her to realize that most of the bacon had already been taken and placed on the other’s plates. “HEY!”

When it ended, Harry had enough of an idea of what happened the previous night to no longer need to ask any questions of Nora, Tia or Arturia. He had also taken Arturia to task again on her running off after the fight, this time coming at it with more facts and not just as a worried lover but as a fellow leader. “YOU left the freaking scene of the battle without giving any orders about cleanup or checking in with the rest of your company!?”

As the meal was being cleared up by his two blonde girlfriends, Harry put an arm around Pyrrha, looking at his teammates and into the kitchen at the two of them. “Considering how long we slept in and due to all the activity last night, I don’t think any training should be done today. I’m going to be busy in a bit with something else entirely, but all of you can have the day free.”

“I prefer not to miss any training days. I think I will go to the training area at the very least, perhaps look around the training rooms for anyone up for a spar,” Pyrrha said, slowly and very reluctantly pushing her way out of Harry’s arm.

He nodded but tapped her hand lightly to get her attention, then made a wait motion with the other hand before looking over at Nora and Ren, asking them what they would be doing. Ren agreed with Pyrrha, while Nora, despite having had her fill of combat last night for,

oh, at least another few hours, agreed to go with them. Soon, Ren and Nora headed upstairs to change out of their sleepwear.

Once they were gone, Harry looked over at Arturia. "I still owe you a date, Arturia. Although, how would you feel about making it all four of us? At your place?"

"I think I will need to get going quickly in order to meet with the assessors and the police to follow up on the White Fang. Hopefully, with the right kind of persuasion, we will be able to figure out where the White Fang and Roman have been storing their Dust, at the very least. I spent some of the time we were waiting for the White Fang to show up last night looking up how much Dust it actually been stolen since Roman went on his spree, and it's an appalling amount."

But then Arturia smiled, moving out of the kitchen and into the dining room, where she leaned over and kissed Harry slowly, lingeringly, the kind of kiss that would normally lead to more bedroom-type activities. As Pyrrha watched on with a face full of mixed emotions, Arturia slowly pulled back, smiling so widely that anyone who had ever seen her in public under her Dark Queen persona would've been stunned into silence. "But I have no objections to hosting the three of you at my home tonight, Harry. Just tell me what ingredients you want me to pick up."

Pyrrha smiled and nodded as Harry looked at her, her earlier mixed feelings giving way for a second, then Harry looked to Tia, who also threw him a thumbs up from where she was drying the remaining dishes. But Arturia looked at Harry quizzically. "But you said you would be busy. With what?"

"Speaking to the Iron Shores Shipping, making sure that they didn't lose any people, and preparing Norssken's local response to events of last night," Harry reeled off quickly.

The three girls all nodded, understanding that. But even though she, as the senior Arc in vale, should have taken on the task of creating a public statement for Norssken, Arturia made no move to volunteer to do so. First, there would be a conflict of interests if the lead Huntress who had taken part in the battle spoke on what had almost been stolen. And second, Arturia was not part of Norssken's organizational structure, whereas Harry was, and had been so since before arriving at Beacon.

After a quick exchange of kisses, Ren and Nora came back down, and soon, Harry was left alone. Tia headed out to meet with her team, and Arturia headed into Vale while the rest of team ANVL headed out to the training rooms.

Harry spent a few moments simply sitting there on the couch, contemplating what he was going to be telling his girlfriends tonight. It'd been a spur-of-the-moment decision, but he

had been thinking for a while now that he needed to come clean to them about his real past soon if he was going to do it at all. He wasn't certain he would tell them about being sent here by Death itself, though. That was probably too far-fetched to be believed. But reincarnation, at least, was a somewhat known topic of debate on Remnant, much like faith in the Brothers.

He had no idea honestly how his story would be taken, but hopefully, all of them would at least believe some of it. He knew that Arturia and Pyrrha had quite a few questions about how quickly he had begun to use his Semblance and how multifaceted it was. This would answer those questions, but that didn't mean that Harry wasn't nervous about how they would take it. *Regardless, it's going to be nice to be open about it all. Sitting on a secret like that has been hard.*

Shaking off that maudlin thought, Harry took out his scroll and called Iron Shores Shipping. After passing through a series of secretaries, he finally spoke to the president of the company, extending him his condolences about the attack on the ship. "Please tell me that there was no one aboard the ship that late at night and that the damages are minimal?"

"There was not. As this is our home port, most of my sailors and cargo handlers all have homes they can return to whenever they dock here. There's been some damage to the ship, but nothing major save the loss of one of its depth charge launchers. We lost at least one box full of Fire Dust, too. Luckily, we do have some measure of insurance, so neither your town's company nor us will miss out on the profit."

The speaker was an elderly gentleman with a mustache to give Professor Port a run for his money, although he didn't have a goatee to go with it, instead having a full head of hair down to his shoulders and, quite quixotically, a golden hooped earring. It made him look like a pirate who had decided to go straight after reaching his fifties.

The two of them spent a few moments exchanging documentation about insurance, the exact details of the damages and so forth, then the older man asked, "I always find it better if the corporation that owns the freight and we who actually ship the stuff have our stories clear for the reporters. I am actually going to have a brief public statement airing this afternoon, so if you want to write one up for your company, I can pass it on to the reporters at the same time. I know you're handling this solely as your family's representative here in Vale and I doubt you want the publicity of that coming out."

"Thank you, and oh my word, is that an understatement," Harry answered feelingly, causing the older man to laugh. "I'll get a written statement out to you in the next hour after we hang up. We'll play it modest on our part. We're thankful for the help from the Huntresses who responded, especially our homegrown heroines, Arturia and Tia Arc. We can be upfront about

that connection but will also state unequivocally that we had not asked them for any special dispensation or guard while here in Vale.”

The old man smiled wickedly. “We could also say that you decided on that because you trusted in the Vale police force and the security on the docks. If you really wanted to twist the knife a little.”

“We could, but there’d be no point,” Harry laughed. “Instead, we might want to follow up on another angle, that we are wondering **why** the White Fang attacked us. We are a brand-new company and have a lot of faunus employees, several of whom are in positions of authority. Evig Låga might own the rights to that mine, but it would be next to useless without Sunflash to head operations there.”

He looked at the older man thoughtfully. “In fact, maybe you can follow up on that angle too. I don’t suppose any of your seamen are faunus?” When the older man nodded, Harry asked if they would be willing to make a statement.

“I think that would depend on what kind of statement.” The old man answered cautiously. “You realize that as faunus, they also have to be seen to be at least a bit accepting, if not outright supportive, of the White Fang. They are so popular among the faunus community that it’s almost impossible to speak out against them and not be labeled a turncoat. We can hate their actions, but not the organization.”

“I understand, and I don’t want them to do anything major, simply stating that they’re sad that their livelihood came under attack from the White Fang, and also wondering why they wouldn’t do the kind of background the White Fang normally does before launching such attacks. Whatever else they want to say, we can leave it up to them.”

The old man stroked his mustache with a few fingers for a moment, then nodded. “That sounds like a good idea. I will ask for volunteers.”

“Good. And if you do, are you going to reward them, or should I? I can transfer funds to you for that purpose.”

“No need.” The old man smiled faintly. “Volunteers always get paid a little more than they would otherwise, regardless of what they’re volunteering for. That’s a policy I’ve had since I was just a ship’s captain with only my ship to my name.”

Harry grinned at that, and the two of them exchanged a few more pleasantries before ending the call. Harry was true to his word, though, because as soon as that call ended, he pulled up the writing app on his scroll and began to compose a formal public statement for Norssken. He didn’t sign it with his own name, though, simply saying that it was from a spokesperson for the company.

With that done, Harry looked at the time, and saw it was pushing three in the afternoon. The group had woken up at around eleven, so that made sense. He stared at the clock thoughtfully, thinking about whether or not he should meet up with his team or do something else. After a moment, the image of a certain black-haired, black-eared young woman came to his mind, and he pushed himself to his feet. No, his team would get along with him without him for a bit longer. Harry had someone else he wanted to talk to today, more as Harry Potter, the Man Who Won, than Harry Arc.

With that in mind, Harry made his way over to the dormitory for the freshman class and up to the second floor, where he knocked on Team RWBY's door. Luckily, Blake was there, along with Yang and Ruby. Weiss wasn't, although Harry had seen a flash of white hair up on the roof as he came towards the building. "Ladies, do you mind if I talk with Blake for a bit? Alone, if possible."

"What's the matter stud, Pyrrha alone not enough for you?" Yang jeered, snickering as she saw Harry roll his eyes.

"Is this about last night?" Blake asked. When Harry nodded, she sighed, then headed towards the door. "I'll be back, you two. I suppose I owe Harry an apology for leading his sisters into a fight like that. And I'd rather that yelling be in private, too."

"I don't think there will be much yelling, although what I have to say is probably stuff you want to think about before sharing with anyone else. I'm not concerned so much about the fight itself as about the implications," Harry answered obliquely. This confused all three girls, but he said nothing more, simply holding the door open for Blake before letting it close silently behind them as she walked through.

Back in their room, Yang looked at the door and then back to her sister. "What do you think? Should we follow them?"

"Nah, Harry probably just wants to vent at her a bit, maybe call her an idiot for running away from us like she did and what her being a faunus might mean in the future, especially since we all might have gotten on the White Fang's bad side after last night" Ruby stated authoritatively.

Harry and Blake remained quiet on that score for now, making only some small talk as they passed through the hallways of the dormitory and out into the grounds beyond. For a moment, Harry wondered where to lead the two of them, but Blake was already heading away, and moments later, it was with a small start of amusement that Harry realized she was leading him to the same small area with the tree, where he and Pyrrha had their little adventure a few weeks ago.

Once they were sitting by the tree, Blake made to speak, but Harry held up her hand, politely asking her to wait for a moment. "I am not going to pile more on top of you in terms of your running away from your team, Blake. I presume that your team has done a good enough job on that score already. Instead, I am going to talk about your actions last night. Not finding the White Fang. From your perspective, which makes sense, and at least you didn't try to refuse Arturia's 'offer' of help." Blake snorted at that, and Harry smiled thinly. "No, I have an issue with you running in as you did."

"I know it was stupid, but I had to talk to them." Blake's tone was almost mule issue as she answered, scowling a little. "I know I disobeyed Arturia's orders on that score, but my former White Fang brethren working with Roman Torchwick, it doesn't make sense!"

"No, it doesn't," Harry agreed, taking some of the wind out of Blake's sails as she stared at him. "And I think we all need to be a little concerned about what they are doing with all the Dust they've stolen over the past few months. However, that isn't what I wanted to talk to you about, Blake. Do you know what a martyr complex is?"

Somewhat thrown by the random question, Blake answered in the affirmative. "It's when someone wants to sacrifice himself or something else, right? He's got an urge to end his light or her life in a glorious blaze of glory."

"Something like that." Harry fell silent, staring at Blake.

It took a moment to get what he was implying, but when it did, Blake somewhat surprised him by not paling or simply being shocked but instead getting angry. "Hey! I don't have a martyr complex! I wasn't looking to die there, and I've never thought that my death would be so important it could change everything! I wanted to make the change, not be another martyr for the cause!"

"So, you won't charge in like that again?" Harry demanded. "You won't go looking for the White Fang, trying to redeem them, or, worse, try to somehow change them by proving they've strayed from the path you think they should be on?"

Blake blanched at that. She had, in fact, been thinking that morning that she needed to follow up on the battle last night to figure out how deeply embedded the White Fang was with the faunus population of Vale and if she could somehow wheedle out any more information about their long-term plans. Plans she was certain would do more harm than good for the faunus cause.

Harry grunted, apparently able to follow Blake's thoughts all too easily. "That's what I thought. Blake, you are not responsible for the White Fang."

“I am!” Blake shouted, leaping to her feet. “I was part of the White Fang, the daughter of their former leader. I could have seen how the White Fang was changing, voiced my concerns, tried to change them—”

“And been silenced, sidelined or forced to leave,” Harry interrupted. “And now you’re looking to rush out there, to fight the good fight, against a whole terrorist group? With your weapons and your words. Smart.”

“You don’t know anything!” Blake growled.

“I know that if you rush out like that, Ruby, Yang, Wiess and even the rest of our friends will follow you into danger. And I know if Tia or anyone else gets hurt by doing so, in fights where they are forced to fight and kill other humans, and yes, that includes faunus, I will bury you myself.”

Harry’s cold threat brought Blake up short like a cup of cold water to the face. Having realized where Harry was going with this, Blake had expected sympathy maybe then a demand she change her ways; not such a cold threat from the man who everyone in their little group saw as their leader.

“And you won’t want to live with yourself if that happens, either,” Harry went on, shaking his head, a bottomless kind of grief from somewhere filling his voice. “Leading your friends into death, that’s a burden few can carry.”

That was a burden Harry knew all too well. All his friends, Ginny and her family, in particular, had been targeted by Riddle for being close to Harry. He had led them into fights they should never have been forced to face. Looking back on it, Harry could admit that the adults in his life back then had been woefully unwilling to do the right thing on their own. But that hadn’t automatically meant it was his responsibility to take up the slack instead. And now, in a world with adults who were far more capable and willing to act (he hoped) than his last one, seeing Blake acting in a way he could see his younger self doing was quite painful, to be frank.

Harry’s words silenced the small bit of ire Blake had been feeling at his words, and she nodded slowly, yet Harry continued. “And don’t try to run away to deal with it on your own either. Real friends will chase you down and support you, regardless of what you want. They’re pushy like that. As you should know after last night, as without them, you would be one dead kitten.”

“I, I can’t just do nothing! The police, they’ve got no idea about what to do about the White Fang. And Ozpin and the other Huntsmen. They don’t deal with threats like them.”

“They don’t, you’re right. And maybe you’re right about the police, too. It takes time to gather evidence, something police need before doing anything. But you have to see, Blake, that

you can't change the White Fang on your own. Your actions can maybe change how people think about faunus in a little way. You might be able to make yourself feel better. But will that change the White Fang as a whole? No. Will it change how faunus are treated in a large way? Probably not."

Blake opened her mouth to protest, but Harry overrode her. "If not for the sheer size of the fight last night, would your presence have even been noticed? Will it make a difference on its own? Two faunus stopping the White Fang alongside a company of Huntresses? It will be a good color piece, but it won't last. You need to find some other way to fight that fight, if you want to at all, instead of just thinking you can solve everything on your own. Because the more you try to solve a problem bigger than one person alone, the more you find yourself drowning."

Harry stood up, staring down at Blake from his taller height. "Find a way to make a real difference, Blake, without leading your friends into a fight they aren't prepared for, physically or emotionally. Because if you don't, what happens to them will truly be your fault, unlike what the White Fang is doing."

Without another word, he turned and walked off, leaving Blake staring at the ground, his words echoing in her head, dueling with long held beliefs of her role in the world. Which would come out the victor was unknown for now.

OOOOOO

Harry found the rest of his team where he had expected to, within one of the training areas. To his surprise however, they were not fighting one another, but rather Nora and Ren were watching Pyrrha fight a quartet of older students alone. Harry didn't recognize them, so he thought they might be seniors.

Most of the time, seniors were not around the school, that year being more devoted to missions and networking than anything else. It wasn't uncommon for a team from Shade to be stationed here in Beacon or a team from Beacon to be in Mistral.

Sidling up to Ren, he tapped him on the shoulder, then settled down on his rear as he watched Pyrrha positively go to town on the quartet, asking dryly, "What brought this on? One could almost say it was a one-sided handicap match, but looking closer, it becomes unclear which side is being handicapped."

Nora grinned while Ren chuckled and shook his head. "Well, fearless leader, it started like this..."

Flashback:

Giggling quietly at Nora and Ren's back and forth about which of their weapons was better, Pyrrha led the trio toward the training area. The three had decided between them that today would start with an unarmed combat free-for-all but with Semblances active. It would be very interesting to see how Nora utilized that, considering her Semblance needed an exterior source for lightning, and Harry wasn't with them at the moment. Ren's ability to keep calm and make everyone else calm and unemotional would also be interesting in a combat setting, but the four-time champion felt she usually kept a handle on her emotions during a battle regardless, so she did not anticipate that it would impact her combat abilities all that much. *Nora, on the other hand, hits like a truck even without access to lightning to feed her Semblance and is always fun to fight.*

Ren turned away from a joke from Nora to speak to the assistant professor on duty, who informed them which of the training areas was free at the moment, before signing them into the book there. As he did so, Pyrrha's thoughts shifted to Harry, and not in a romantic way for once.

Why do I think he was somewhat furious when Arturia told him about Blake rushing ahead like she did? He tried to hide it well, but something about the way Blake acted at the start of the battle got to him more than simply endangering Arturia and the others so foolishly? While Pyrrha did not like to think poorly of her friends, it was rather sad to hear about how Blake had rushed forward so unthinkingly.

And when Arturia had told them about how the fight had actually begun Harry had looked more than a little dyspeptic for a moment. It seemed to Pyrrha at the time that it had resonated with him in some fashion, calling to a memory perhaps? Regardless, it hadn't been a good one, and he had questioned Arturia closely on what Blake had said to the White Fang, and how she had acted during the fight.

Sometimes, my Rigas acts far older than his years would suggest. Or... not so much older, as with simply a greater depth of knowledge and experience than someone our age should have. It's very strange. Almost as strange as his ability to utilize his Semblance to such an incredible degree right off the bat way back in Chian when we first met. He told me once that he would tell me how he could do so, but we haven't yet had that particular conversation. I wonder, is that the reason why he wants to have a group date at Arturia's?

The idea of learning more about her lover, her man, thrilled Pyrrha. It could only bring them closer, and she was all for that. *Whatever his secret is, I will accept. And not just because of my Oath to be his órkos aspídas either, although I have no doubt, he might think it is because of that, Pyrrha thought lovingly. But also, because I love him.*

She hadn't said those words aloud yet. But they were there inside her heart, waiting to come out. Given how Pyrrha's life had changed, given how close they had become, how Harry had changed her for the better, and his hopes for the future, how could she not come to both respect and love Harry?

Her somewhat mushy thoughts on that score were interrupted by a theatrically loud voice declaring, "Well, that's the Invincible Girl over there, ladies and gentlemen. She doesn't look so tough to me," nearby.

Glancing in that direction, Pyrrha saw four students she didn't recognize offhand. They were older than her by a few years, two men and two women, much like ANVL. None had animal features, although the two men looked like they were related in some fashion, with the same black hair and blue eyes. Still, one of them was far bulkier than the other, wearing armor that almost looked like a much better-made and far heavier version of Cardin's. The shorter, more spare man wore armor more root reminiscent of Pyrrha's own, and indeed shared some of the style with hers as well, looking almost like an ancient Greek hoplite, sans the shield. Instead, he had twin swords on his back. The one in the heavy armor wielded a large hammer, and he wore a shield as well.

The two women were also a study in contrasts. One of them was short, wearing a heavy cloak that did very little to hide the fact that she was also almost as stacked as Tia, with what looked like a sniper rifle on her back the size of Crescent Rose but of even larger caliber. Unlike Ruby, she also had what looked like several daggers in her belt, and there was a gleam of matte black armor on her forearms underneath her cloak's sleeves. The cloak itself seemed to almost be manufactured of something or perhaps being affected by a Semblance because it seemingly blended into the background to a certain degree, making it hard to make out much of her features under the cloak's hood.

The other woman was dressed to show off, although in contrast to her shorter companion, she... didn't really have much in the way of curvature. She was taller than even Pyrrha, coming up almost even to the bulkier of the two brothers, with a fit, trim sprinter's body, her thin but well-muscled thighs on display thanks to the short shorts she wore, and the long, heavily built-up boots she wore. Pyrrha could tell at a glance that those boots had something special inside them, either built to take the recoil of heavy kicks or with some kind of weapon built into their bottoms. Her forearms, too, were armored up to her elbow, with heavier portions on the outside that could perhaps hold some kind of gun or thrusting weapon. From her current angle, Pyrrha couldn't tell which.

It'd been the one with twin swords who had spoken, his back deliberately towards Pyrrha as he talked to his team. "Mind you, I've been hearing stories that that Invincible Girl

label isn't all that accurate, you know? Apparently, she got beaten up by the lottery winner in one of their spars under Goodwitch during personal one-on-one training. And then again when his big sister showed up."

"I know, right?! Having a semblance that allows you to manipulate matter like he does, with the typical Arc Aura reserves, that really **is** winning the genetic lottery right there," the armored man answered, shaking his head dolefully.

"And then to be paired with someone like Pyrrha, someone so well-trained yet so biddable apparently..." the taller girl snickered, trailing off with a leer on her face half-visible from where Pyrrha stood.

Pyrrha's hackles rose, although she did note that the short, unassuming girl seemed to almost shrink back into herself as her three companions spoke, her eyes widening visibly under her hood. The taller woman continued, sending a faint sneer over her shoulder towards Pyrrha. "Yeah, I gotta say I have not been impressed with what we've heard about her. Sure, she's got skills, but enough to be given a label like the Invincible Girl? Just goes to show that the Mistral Tournament isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"Let me at them, Pyrrha!" Nora growled, having turned from her own conversation with Ren to overhear that last comment. "I bet that bitch will bounce quite nicely when I hit her with Magnhild."

Instead of answering, Pyrrha moved down the walkway between the training areas until she came to the crossway where the older team of Huntsman was talking. They looked up as if surprised that she was making her way towards them, but Pyrrha could see that they were hiding grins. Evidently, they had wanted to egg her into a fight. *Well, be careful what you wish for gentlemen and ladies. You might just get it.* "I'm sorry, but I could hear you talking about me. Do any of you have an actual problem with me?"

"Nothing much! Just the fact that you're here takes away a lot of our thunder. Normally, various news agencies cover our exploits. There've even been times when a reporter's actually been embedded in one of the graduating teams, eager to show the folks back home how good we are as Huntsmen. It helps us get work later on from the Vale Council and from the other city-states too. Only this year, when we were approached by one of the news networks that usually does that kind of thing, all the reporter wanted to ask about was you!"

The taller woman picked up from where the twin swords user had spoken, her voice a mocking singsong. "Is it true Pyrrha Nikos killed a Nuckalevee before she became a student at Beacon? Is it true that she's still undefeated? What can your school actually teach her, really? Shouldn't the Invincible Girl have just gone straight to becoming a Huntress?"

Her voice flattened them, while behind Pyrrha, Nora and Ren both stiffened at the reminder of that particular type of Grimm. Harry hadn't told Pyrrha about his talk with Ren on that score, not thinking it was his place to do so, and in any event, she missed it at the moment, listening as the woman continued. "Instead of asking us about our future plans, about our tactics, about how we've melded as a team, about our expectations for when we graduate, it's all been about **you!** And frankly, I don't believe the hype."

"Good!" Pyrrha grinned widely. "I don't believe my own hype either." *Arturia's near-death experience last night shows that any of us can be overcome. If I didn't already know that from how Harry always works me to the bone occasionally or the beating Arturia gave me, she thought ruefully.* "So let us cut to the chase. You talked deliberately loud enough for me to overhear and now are attempting to draw me into a fight. I am not one to back away from such a challenge. What manner of fight do you want it to be?"

"Wait, what? What do you mean what manner of fight?" The larger man asked, looking a little confused, while two out of three of his companions grinned triumphantly. The short girl had seemingly stepped to one side so that she could bow in place towards Ren and Nora, her hands actually clasped in front of her as she did in a typical Oriental fashion. Ren replied in like kind, while Nora simply waved her hands cheerfully before turning her attention back to the other three.

"Do you want unarmed combat, one on one, or four-on-one?" Pyrrha allowed an edge to enter her voice and body language as she leaned forward, clenching her hands into fists. "Whatever choice you go with, it doesn't matter to me."

"Damn, you are arrogant! We're not a team of young, susceptible freshies, we're graduating this year, babe! We're so good, the headmaster decided that we and the rest of the graduating classes can't take part in the Vytal Festival because we'd school everyone involved too easily!"

Pyrrha blinked at that, tucking her head to one side before she remembered that the Vytal Festival was indeed supposed to happen near the end of the year, in fact, it was only four months away or so. *Strange to think that that hasn't registered on my personal radar, considering how important the Festival is supposed to be, and how like to the Mistral Tournament it is. Actually, I wonder what Harry's plans for it are? It's up to the team leader whether or not the team participates at all, but I've not heard him speak about it.*

For a moment, thoughts about her leader/lover threatened to derail her current aggressive frame of mind, but the sneer on the taller woman's face brought Pyrrha's desire to rearrange the woman's face back into prominence. "Then I hope that this is a challenge. But you did not answer my question, what method of combat do you wish?"

“Well, if you think you can take all four of us on, let’s see you put your money where your mouth is,” the tall man stated firmly, getting nods of agreement from two out of three of his teammates. The last simply sighed but nodded, going along more for solidarity’s sake than anything else. “And as for the type of combat, we’ve got our weapons. Why don’t you go get yours and we’ll head down to one of the training areas and wait for you.”

Moments later, Pyrrha stood across from the four of them. They had spread out, and Pyrrha was fascinated to note that the shorter girl’s look did indeed seem to have some kind of technology or Semblance on it that allowed the girl to blend into the background. It had noticeably changed color since she had seen it in the walkway outside. It was making keeping track of her with just Pyrrha’s eyes quite difficult. Unfortunately, the girl was carrying quite a bit of metal on her person, which meant that any attempt to hide herself was doomed to fail against Pyrrha. One of the many things that she had been working with Harry and Professor Goodwin on was to better develop her metal sense rather than just her ability to use large-scale Semblance-based attacks.

As that thought occurred to her, she wondered if she should use her Semblance, and if so, in her typical subtle fashion or not. *Let us start with not and work our way up to it if I have to.* Anticipation roiled within her as Pyrrha looked over to where Ren and Nora stood, with Ren having raised his hands in the air.

He dropped it, and instantly, the twin swords user thrust his swords out, showing that along the backside of the swords were two rifles, which began to shoot at Pyrrha almost like Storm Flower, Ren’s personal weapon. At the same time, a large blast of fire roared out from the center of the taller man’s shield, and the mousy-looking woman took her under fire while the taller woman leaped into the air, bringing her foot down towards Pyrrha’s position.

Using it to first deflect the bullets coming her way, Pyrrha then flung Akuo forward into the incoming fireball, disrupting it as she rolled to the side. In the same motion, she fired up at the woman above her, hitting her several times before whipping around in a circle where she landed, her leg cutting the other woman’s legs out from under her, an elbow blow ending her twirl into the woman’s side, hurling her sideways into the incoming fire from the shorter woman. Then she flipped backward as the twin-tailed man seemingly zoomed forward a short distance. This was very obviously a Semblance, which acted almost as if he had teleported into close range, where he brought his swords down on her former position.

The two of them exchanged a few blows as he followed Pyrrha’s movements quite well before her shield flashed down, almost slamming into the back of his head edge first. A shout from the larger man, who was lumbering towards her slower than the others, caused the man to duck out of the way. Pyrrha raised her arm, and Akuo slid back onto her forearm, where she

used it to block a kick from the woman and then a blow from one of her arms. As the older girl struck, her forearm guard opened up, a dagger shooting out almost at point-blank range.

Pyrrha bent backward for a moment to avoid it, the butt of her spear coming up into the woman's chest, sending her stumbling. A second later, Pyrrha was forced to jump up and over a blow from the hammer-using man. A double kick sent him stumbling, his other hand coming up to rub at his face for a moment before Milo turned into a rifle for a second, firing at the shorter girl. This caused her to yelp and roll away.

At the same time, Akuo was once more flung through the air to crash side-on into the twin swords user, who grunted under the impact as he was hurled backwards. This left Pyrrha in close combat with the woman and the taller man.

Pyrrha took a half step backward, avoiding the head of the hammer by a hair's breadth as it would have impacted where her head had been a second ago. At the same time, Pyrrha's now unarmed hand flashed up to grab onto the shaft of it, letting it drag her forward for a second as Milo turned into her xiphos form, slashing several times at the larger man's armor, causing loud ringing noises to reverberate, even as the armor withstood her strikes. Then she was flicking the blade's tip up towards his eyes, causing the man to flinch, just as many of her opponents had, the moment she decided to go for their faces here in Beacon. *Odd how most people aren't trained out of that kind of thing, even with Aura. I suppose it's only a Mistrali thing to go for the head that often.*

The next second, Pyrrha wrenched the startled man's hammer out of his hand and hurled it towards the sidelines, where a gleeful Nora leaped up and caught it, shouting out, "Out of bounds~!" in a singsong voice.

The woman slammed a kick into Pyrrha's side, but Pyrrha was already twisting around and away with it, although the force of the blow caused the crack in the air as something like Ember Celica's shotgun shells exploded on impact. This hurled Pyrrha away despite the fact that she had moved with the motion.

She stood up, casually flicking Milo into rifle mode again, firing at where the shorter girl had just sent a round her way, the round missing by a bare inch. She whined as she dodged through LB's bullets quite well, yelling out, "I told you this was a bad idea! My Semblance can't do much in a training area. There's nothing to work with!"

The twin swords user didn't reply to that. Instead, he had actually been able to grab Akuo before it could bounce completely away from him from the strike earlier, and now, he hurled over towards where Ren and Nora stood before picking up his other weapon from where he had dropped it to do so. "Shut up, Belle! You might be at a disadvantage, but..."

He seemed to falter as he looked up at where your aura scores were and noted that Pyrrha's had only fallen into the ninety percentile from the one strike from the taller woman, which had got through her guard. Belle was down to eighty. The taller man, whose name was Rupert Brownfoot at least had some serious reserves to them, as he was still around 97%. But he was also without a weapon.

The loud man shook his head suddenly, gathering his courage again even as Pyrrha began to duel with the kickboxer, dancing around her blows, using her as a shield against Belle's incredibly accurate fire. The shorter woman wasn't actually hitting her teammate, diverting her shots at the last second to go past the two combatants instead whenever Pyrrha was able to get the other woman twisted around properly, even as she danced away from the larger man.

"We can still take her!" He shouted as he raced in. "Don't give up now!"

End flashback

"After that, it seems as if Pyrrha basically decided to disarm them slowly," Nora said, kicking lightly at the small collection of weapons at her feet. This included a forearm brace, a short sword, and, the latest addition, a boot. "She seems to be having a lot of fun."

Harry nodded, looking up at the screen. His girlfriend was down to sixty percent of her Aura at the moment, which told him that the seniors had gotten in some solid blows. However, Belle was down to twenty-five percent aura, the sword-wielding man who was currently furiously attacking his partner with a look of pure frustrated rage on his face was down to forty-five, and the taller girl was pretty much the same. Brownfoot was also down to around seventy percent.

He leaned in, whispering to Ren, "And has Pyrrha used her semblance at all?"

"I do not believe so other than her metal sense. Even that has given her a major edge," the ninja replied.

Harry nodded at that, leaning back slightly to put his back against the outer wall of this training area. "I'm kind of torn right now. On the one hand, I can clearly see that Pyrrha is having a lot of fun. But on the other hand, she **really** needs to start using her Semblance in larger, more destructive ways more automatically..."

"Well, she could always use that big guy as a weapon, you know?" Nora said, leaping to her feet and cheering a second later as Pyrrha upended the twin sword wielder, Alexi Yellowtouch, who Harry supposed was some kind of cousin to Rupert rather than brother, despite how alike they looked, into a charge from Rupert. Pyrrha then leaped up over the two of them, lashing down into Rupert's back head and rear before landing, rolling under a kick from the now far slower moving Catherine Rødtslag (Redstroke). She took several strikes from the

distant Belle at the time but caught the next kick from Catherine by leaning forward, letting the woman's foot pass her by, grabbing onto it with her arm, and then slamming the tip of Milo into the woman's back leg right behind the knee.

The message there was easy. If the woman hadn't had Aura, that strike would've crippled her.

Then Pyrrha grunted, hurled away from her opponents. She had held the position with Catherine's foot for just a moment too long, and Rupert had caught her with a punch. But she recovered quickly, dodging a strike from Alexi, Milo once more in xiphos form as she blocked, dodged, and redirected his strikes adroitly, switching to rifle mode twice to hammer out blows towards Belle despite how hard the others were pushing her.

One of those hit strikes landed on her foot, of all things, upending Belle to the ground for a second. With a quick twist around Alexi, Pyrrha raced in the shorter girl's direction. Alexi fired after her, striking Pyrrha in the back several times, dropping her aura reserves from to fifty, but not before Pyrrha fired into Belle several times, then flipped up and over the girl, landing behind her and slicing at her back as Milo shifted into its xiphos shape. A red buzzer announced that Belle was out, and the sniper slumped before trudging over toward where the younger teens were sitting down.

She blinked then and hesitantly raised a hand, waving at Harry, her features still hidden under her color-shifting cloak despite her low Aura. "Er, hello. Sorry about this."

"Judging from how obnoxious the reporters have been, I have to say that some of the anger you seniors are feeling is perfectly justified if aimed in the wrong direction," Harry joked, gesturing the shorter get older girl to sit down with them for a bit. She didn't look at all exhausted, which was a good thing. Aura reserves were not physical endurance, after all. If you could keep on fighting or running away once your Aura reserves gave out, that was a very good thing in Harry's opinion. He was amused to note that the girl kept her hood up, hiding many of her features, although from what Harry could see, she was quite a pretty little thing. *And that's not even mentioning that chest on that short body. And I thought Ruby was the quintessential shortstack.*

"I know. A Reporter wanted to join us on our latest mission, and it was just as bad as Cathy and the rest said to Pyrrha earlier," Belle answered glumly. "Ugh, I don't know why we even bothered. I've never seen the point of having a reporter, with a camera of all things, along with us."

"Certainly, in your line of expertise, being well-known would be a marked detriment," Ren agreed, reaching over to pat her on the back lightly, causing the girl to smile under her hood even as Nora began to growl a little, grabbing at Ren and pulling him into a sideways hug.

Yet even so, Ren continued. "And Pyrrha will never turn down a challenge, never fear. She just hates it when people talk about her behind her back and don't give it their all because they're certain that they'll lose regardless. That second does not seem to be the case with your team."

"True enough. Team Berry tactics, and er, attitude, might be a little too straightforward for me to really shine most of the time, but there's never been anything wrong with our attitude," the girl said just a bit proudly, even as they continued to watch the remaining three members of her team be picked apart by Pyrrha. "Can I ask what her Semblance is?"

Harry shook his head. "She's not using it." Technically, she was with her metal sense, but Pyrrha couldn't turn that off. It was only because of training that it'd reached the point where it was helping her to the degree it was now.

Turned away from the show to stare at Harry, then over to Nora and ran. Ryan said nothing, simply watching the fight, while Nora nodded in agreement. "Oh... So maybe she does deserve that Invincible Girl appellation."

"No one's invincible. Not Pyrrha, not me, not any of us or even my big sister." Harry said, growling the last few words just a tiny bit. He was still incensed at Arturia's moment of sheer stupidity from last night, but he didn't want to bring it up again just now. He'd already done so with her several times that morning, once in private in the kitchen, then again at the breakfast table. No need to do so again here with a complete stranger. "Labels and appellations, they only matter to the masses, to the news people who try to make their headlines with that kind of shit."

Belle nodded thoughtfully, hearing the sternness in Harry's voice, glancing at him sideways, then back towards where Pyrrha had just finished off Catherine with a boot to the head that looked remarkably painful despite the fact that it did no damage due to her Aura. Rupert was then tricked into punching Alexi as Pyrrha performed a perfect split, Milo's javelin's tip took Rupert in the center of the chest, sending him stumbling backward before Pyrrha rolled forward. She then kicked backward in a mule kick, catching Alexi, although he was able to get his arms up to block the blow. "Well, I suppose all of us always have something more to learn."

Harry laughed at that as Ren did the same, and after a second, Belle joined them as Catherine stomped over towards them, cursing under her breath.

Pyrrha remained in a good mood the rest of the day as Harry put the entire team through several endurance exercises and one-on-one drills. Deciding that Pyrrha had enough fun for the day, he fought Ren hand-to-hand, getting completely schooled by the ninja but learning several nice tricks. Then Harry fought Nora, similarly being reminded, not for the first

time admittedly, that the girl's strength while being raised by her Semblance wasn't entirely dependent on it, just like Yang.

Two rather amusing losses later, he repeated the words he had told Belle as he stared up at the sky with Nora's foot on his chest. "Well, I suppose all of us have something more to learn."

This caused Nora to collapse into laughter, while Ren simply chuckled, and Pyrrha leaned down, pulling Harry upright, before blushing rosily as he stole a kiss. Turning to the other two members of Team ANVL, Harry went on. "Ladies and gentlemen, that's enough hand to hand, I think. Now, since Pyrrha's had her turn as the target of multiple people at once, I think it's my time. Only this time, I think it's Semblance is active people. And don't worry, Nora. I'll hit you with a bit of lightning to jolt your system before we start."

Nora whooped, the objection she had been about to spout disappearing from her mouth. She and Ren moved to the other side of the training area, and Pyrrha sighed theatrically, gave Harry a kiss on the cheek, and moved to the side where she would act as referee once more.

It was as he tossed Nora off her feet with an adroit Flippendo that Harry and the others realized they had garnered a few watchers. Team GART was there, along with Apacci this time, watching from over the smaller wall leading out into the paths beyond. He waved at them, moving in their direction around the outer edge of the training area as Harry used his Semblance to capture Ren in mud for a moment, then used it to dodge up and over a charging Nora, lashing down at her with a burst of air that sent her flying into the upper body of her teammate. The site of Ren partially buried in a momentary pit of mud with Nora's chest shoved down into his face, keeping him there as he flailed, was hilarious, and Apacci and Mila both burst out into laughter.

"Hello again!" Pyrrha said, smiling cheerily at all of them, but especially Tia. "Looking forward to tonight?"

"Somewhat. So long as the stories Arturia tells don't embarrass me as well as Harry," Tia said, smiling behind her ever-present scarf as she leaned her shoulder lightly against Pyrrha's, who returned the gesture, putting an arm around the other girl's waist. While they hadn't repeated the experiment the two had done during the Remembrance two days back, they had started to show a marked interest in cuddling with one another, which was more than enough for both.

"What's this?" Sung-Sun asked, looking at Tia quizzically. "You said you weren't going to be with us for dinner tonight but didn't tell us why."

“Arturia invited us over for dinner. She’s decided it’s time to tell embarrassing stories from Harry’s childhood,” Pyrrha said with a smile. “Although how much of that has to do with timing and how much of that has to do with getting some revenge on Harry after the talk, he had with her about acting arrogantly in a combat zone, I can’t tell you.”

“I was wondering if he would take her to task about running off as she did. At the time, I thought nothing of it, but that was because I didn’t see much of the hallucinations Arturia was dealing with almost throughout the entire fight,” Sung-Sun murmured, nodding her head. Then she smirked a little. “But by my count, you’ve met his father, you’ve been introduced to his family, and now you’re being told baby stories. My word, but you do move fast, don’t you, Pyrrha?”

Pyrrha blushed a bit at that, remembering some of the more physical things she and Harry had done, and Mila grinned, leaning forward while out in the training area, Harry finished off the VL pair. “OOOh... that blush tells me something steamy’s been going on. Tell, girl!”

That caused Pyrrha to stammer a bit, shaking her head wildly in denial as she tried to move away from the other girl. But as strong as Pyrrha was, Mila was a strength type. She wasn’t as strong as Tia or Yang but as a lion faunus, she was quite powerful, and Pyrrha couldn’t break the half hug, half chokehold that the other woman had on her. “Come on, talk! With Apacci searching farther afield, I’m kind of lacking in partners these days. Let me live through you at least a little bit, Big Red!”

“Now, now, Mila. If she doesn’t want to tell you anything about what happens between her and Harry, that is her right,” Sung-Sun began before smirking a little as Pyrrha practically drooped with relief. “After all, there is a time and place for such things, and most decidedly, when the man in question is walking towards us is not the time for it. We can grill her some other time.”

As Mila laughed and released Pyrrha from her hold, Harry ran, and Nora reached the others, and Sung-Sun spoke up shaking her head. “You know, I feel it is truly unfair that your team has both Pyrrha and you on it, Harry. Perhaps we could switch Arcs? We would have to change our team names, I suppose, although I would be more than willing to step down from my leadership position.”

“No way!” Her combat outfit still smeared with mud from Harry’s little mud trap, Nora grabbed Harry from behind, pulling him into a bearhug that had him gasping, as the girl was still riding high on a few lightning blasts he had hit her with at the start of their spar. “No way! Absolutely not! You are not taking our fearless leader away from us. He’s Ren’s brother from another mother, and even if he is a cruel dictator who refused me pancakes this morning, he’s still too awesome to leave us, right?”

“I’m not going anywhere, Nora. Unless it’s the infirmary if you break my ribs!” Harry groaned. There was only so much that Aura could do for sheer compression. Physics could only be fought so far.

Stumbling forward after Nora released him, Harry nodded to the rest of Team GART, his eyes lingering on Tia for a moment as he winked at her, then turned to Apacci, smirking a little. “Apacci. I heard you used last night in a far better manner than the rest of these girls did. I hope she made the upcoming detentions with Professor Goodwitch worth it?”

“Yeah, well, I definitely learned a lesson about not turning my scroll off when she called me into her office this morning. Goodwitch railed at me for nearly forty minutes about why that was a bad idea,” Apacci said, shaking his head wryly while inside, the deer faunus was sweating bullets a bit. Still, he had worked out the story he was going to tell his team and everyone else with Bonesaw and Terry when he and Bonesaw returned to the temporary headquarters, and one of the faunus under Terry even volunteered to let him use her scroll number as ‘proof’ of the night before. “But all in all, I do have to say it was kind of worth it. She’s into a bit of a... Freaky scene, I’ll admit, and she seemed really disappointed that I have Aura but also really impressed at the same time. We’ll see if anything permanent comes of it.”

Inwardly, Harry was a little surprised that Apacci was using terms like that. He’d always acted like a wannabe playboy before this. Still, he nodded, and wished Apacci the best of luck, saying aloud, “That for sure certainly sounds like a better way to spend your time than an unofficial mission.”

“You say that, but we did do some good last night, you know,” Sung-Sun said, taking her fellow leader’s ribbing calmly. “That shipment of Fire Dust was from your hometown was in it?”

“It was, and I’m not denying that you guys did good. I want you to know how ill-planned it all was. And the fact that you didn’t call the three of us in to help,” Harry said, gesturing to Pyrrha and Ren.

“That, I will grant you,” Sung-Sun said. “But I wanted to ask you if you and I could talk for a bit. I need another team leader to bounce ideas off of in terms of both training and perhaps upgrading some of our equipment.”

Harry nodded, then turned back to his own team, telling them to hit the showers. They were done for the day. “I will see you all back at the townhome when I’m done talking to Sung-Sun. And Tia, come by around six, and we’ll all head into town to Arturia’s together. I can’t say I’m looking forward to being embarrassed, but such is life.”

That caused Ren and Apacci to laugh while Mila and the other girl snickered quietly, and the group broke up. All the while, Apacci pondered about the mission he had been given by

Bonesaw: observe, catalog, and look for a way to get a team of specialists into the school. A team of assassins whose target would be Weiss Schnee.

OOOOOOO

Given the cover story that the trio had come up with for the three of them heading into Vale to have dinner with Arturia that night, none of them had dressed up for the meal. Even taking along clothing to change into once they arrived seemed a bit much, although Harry hoped to make up for that with what he would be cooking. Something he refused to share with Tia and Pyrrha, who spent the time on the bullhead getting Pyrrha into disguise for the short trek through the city.

When they arrived at Arturia's apartment, they found that she had gone out of her way to make the setting more romantic despite knowing it would be a group date. A few of the lights had been turned off, while the others had been given new lightbulbs that changed them from a normal color to a slightly reddish tone, not overmuch, but just making it seem a little more soothing and romantic. Classical music played in the background as Arturia opened the door for them.

Arturia smiled at them all but mostly at Harry, who reflected that while Arturia hadn't done anything special clothing-wise, there was a vast difference between that and not looking good. Her around-the-apartment clothing consisted of tight boy shorts that showed off Arturia's rear, of which, Harry was certain, sculptures could be made to rival anything from antiquity. Up top, she wore a crop top shirt, completely contrasting her normal, semi-formal yet skintight style of everyday and combat wear.

A moment after the door closed, Harry found himself in a hug and quickly came to the realization that Arturia also wasn't wearing a bra. As he kissed her back, he felt nipples hardening under the shirt quickly. *Well, I suppose that tells me where she wants tonight to go,* he thought ruefully, even as most of his concentration was on twinning his tongue around Arturia's.

Once more, Pyrrha found the sight of her friendly rival kissing Harry somewhat off-putting, but she allowed it for now. *This is her night, after all, and her apartment. I'd rather like to not get kicked out for fighting with her.* With a shake of her head, Pyrrha headed deeper into the apartment to look around alongside Tia, who simply patted her older (if shorter) sister on the shoulder before following.

It took Harry and Arturia several moments to pull away from one another, a string of saliva connecting their mounts for a few seconds before it was wiped away as Harry leaned his forehead against hers. "Been missing our romance time, have we?" he murmured, his voice a little lower and deeper than normal.

The sound sent a thrill up Arturia's spine almost as much as feeling the reaction to their kiss in his pants. "MMMM, by the feel of it, I would say I wasn't the only one," Arturia admitted with a throaty little chuckle, which broke off quickly into a low moan, the loudness of which caused Pyrrha and Tia to turn around in surprise as Harry found that point on her collarbone that was so sensitive.

It took Arturia a few seconds to recover, even as Harry turned his attention to her neck and then up to her ear. "I, mmm, was honestly more afraid that something would come up. We have been interrupted twice before. Annnnmm, any more and I would have to consider it enemy action. And you have precisely forever to stop doing that, Harry..."

"The night is still young. We can all still be interrupted again, you know," Pyrrha joked. The glare she got from over Arturia was scalding but only caused the four-time Champion to laugh. "Now release our boyfriend, Arturia. I don't know about the two of you, but Tia and I are hungry."

"I only had a smoothie for lunch so that I could eat more of Harry's food," Tia agreed with absolutely zero shame, pulling down her scarf and smiling her small, insanely warm smile at her brother.

Harry chuckled at that, and as a reluctant Arturia released him, he headed over and gave both his other girlfriends kisses before heading into the kitchen. "In that case, Pyrrha, if you could start some cutting for me? The faster we get the prep work done, the sooner the meal will be ready."

The other two girls eagerly joined in, a conversation starting up between Arturia and Pyrrha about some things that had been going on back in the Mistral Tournament scene. Both of them had flatly refused to have anything more to do with it, but that didn't mean that they had stopped following a few individuals they both knew from their time there. A new young man who had taken on the moniker 'Ajax' of all things was making some waves on the sands, and the two women spent some time dissecting his personality and style, concluding that he would be no threat to either one of them. He played to the crowd far too damn much for either woman's sensibilities.

"I mean, I know that my original set of armor and style was built around flair and overly excessive movements, but I never stopped mid-fight to wave at the crowd or flip away from my opponent to gain enough distance to taunt them," Pyrrha said, her tone as censorious as Harry had ever heard her. It reminded him of the way she occasionally spoke when correcting some of the other freshmen for mistakes that had somehow seeped into their styles. Pyrrha took combat seriously. "I admit I still have problems with keeping the unnecessary movements to a minimum, but that is vastly different to playing to the crowd like that. UGH."

“Too True. If Ajax, and can I say that’s a truly presumptuous name, tried anything like that with me, he would eat an Excalibur blast faster than he could blink. Too many people think if they disarm me, that means I can’t use my Semblance. Wrong~,” Arturia said, chuckling quietly. “Then again, I suppose we shouldn’t be too surprised. There is a reason why we both rose so high in the tournaments, only to leave it all behind and become far better for doing so.”

“Pride goeth, and you’ve already nearly had your fall,” Harry said, not looking up from where he was some pieces of lamb with a special sauce. “Remember that. There’re always ways to improve.”

Arturia blanched but nodded readily in agreement, although she growled a little bit as Pyrrha murmured, “I wonder how my polarity semblance would work against someone with a hallucination? Would they be able to fool my metal sense? If the woman doesn’t know about it, how could she interfere with a type of mental input she doesn’t have herself?”

“Hmm, doubtful. You might actually have more trouble with the other one, Neopolitan is her name. She has a style much like your own, but with her glass-like illusion, she was quite hard to pin down. If she discarded her weapon, she might be able to best you,” Arturia answered.

The talk continued in that vein for a while, with Tia actually taking part now, talking more than she normally would in an entire day in the next hour, although perhaps this had more to do with the fact that she could go over and hug Harry from behind, or exchange kisses with him occasionally throughout the cooking process rather than the actual topic of conversation. Not that either Arturia or Pyrrha made any effort to stop the darker-skinned girl. That would’ve been very stupid of them, considering the pair of them were doing much the same. By the time the meal was done, and they all sat down, Harry’s lips were looking just a little bit redder than normal from all the kissing despite his Aura, and all three girls were extremely happy already with how the night was going.

Looking at the meal Harry had prepared for the four of them only made them even happier. “My word, Harry, when you set your mind to it, your meals are magnificent pieces of art rather than simply culinary masterpieces.”

Harry had prepared canon of lamb, with artichokes, tomatoes, a lamb sauce, salsa verde with a pom puree. It looked amazing on their plates, and smelled divine.

Smiling at the compliment, Harry leaned down and beginning to cut into his own lamb. It wasn’t normally a fan of lamb like this, preferring it in smaller kebab-type meals, but he knew Arturia was a carnivore of the first degree, and this night was mainly for her. “If you think this is something else, I hope you leave room for dessert.”

“The giant choux Bon things you put away?” At that point, Harry had ordered the girls out of the kitchen for a time so he could keep the desert a secret, but Arturia knew what he had had her buy, so was able to at least make some kind of guess.

“You’ll see.” Harry refused to answer, and soon Pyrrha pulled the others into a conversation about Evig Låga and what was going on there. For his part, Harry let the conversation flow over him rather than take part, working up his courage to talk about one of the main reasons why he had asked Arturia to allow Tia and Pyrrha to join them on what should have been just Harry and Arturia’s postponed date night. Eventually, as the girls started to really get into the food and the conversation started to ebb away, he spoke up. *Courage Harry, Gryffindors charge! You might not be a Gryffindor anymore, but you are an Arc (if adopted) and they’re not known for cowardice.*

“So... I know Pyrrha has had a lot of questions at the back of her mind since she first unlocked my Aura, um, about my Semblance, about how good I was with it right off the bat. I know you have some questions about it too, Arturia...”

When Harry trailed off, Arturia nodded, finishing the bite of lamb she was happily chewing on, enjoying all the different spices that Harry had worked into it. “I do. It seems to be a little too powerful, and the number of different ways you can use it, plus the impact on your aura reserves, do not match any other known matter manipulation or create energy creation type semblance I’ve seen. Not even Glynda’s is that energy-efficient.”

Harry nodded, glancing over at the table to Tia, who simply gazed back, shrugged, and then began to play footsie with him under the table, having somehow kicked off both her shoes and socks with no one the wiser. “You’re Harry. I love you. I don’t care about anything else.”

That simple, honest declaration from Tia caused Harry, Pyrrha and Arturia to all blush to various degrees, but it emboldened Harry to go on. “Well, thank you for that Tia, and I love you too.” He took in the now slightly wider-than-normal warm smile on Tia’s face for a second, staring into her eyes before shaking his head and going on. “But there are some things about me that you might find surprising. First, though, I’m certain all of you know about it, but what are your thoughts on the idea of reincarnation?”

Reincarnation was a concept that was sometimes connected to the faith of the Brothers. Although only one in every fifteen people still believed in the twin Gods, the idea of the Two Creators was still around in various forms. The Brother of Light, in particular, was connected to the idea of reincarnating those who died as innocents. At least, according to some sects of his believers, anyway.

Pyrrha looked at Harry thoughtfully, sitting aside her knife and fork for the first time since she had sat down. “I take it, my Rigas, that you are about to tell us that you are a

reincarnation of someone else? And that you remember your past life, hence your instant mastery of your Semblance?”

“Intelligent lovers are a treasure,” Harry quipped, nodding his head. “That is it precisely. Or, it is my past life and what kind of life I lived there that has given me my abilities in this one.”

Arturia frowned but slowly nodded. “I have frequently noticed that you are more mature for your age than you should be given the life that I personally know you have lived. Not just in how certain of yourself you are, but in the fact that that certainty has very little to do with arrogance, rather simply knowledge of your abilities and the strength that comes from that. You also took to strategy and tactics, and even logistics, astonishingly enough, far better than anyone would normally be able to. But you’re saying that your special abilities with your Semblance also come from your past life?”

“Most of them. A lot of what I can do here on Remnant isn’t quite the same as it was back in my past life, but my magic does come from that past life, even if it was locked behind my Aura until Pyrrha somehow figured out the right key to undo that particular lock,” Harry said, deliberately using the word magic.

Even Tia blinked at that, her foot stopping its journey up Harry’s inner leg, making Harry wonder idly what book she’d read that kind of thing in. It seemed a little too tame for some and a little too suggestive for others that he knew Tia had reread since the two of them had gotten together. “Magic?” She asked, cocking her head to one side. Her face was in its normally inexpressive countenance, but something in her eyes told those around her that she was fully invested in whatever this conversation was.

“Yes. Magic. To start with, I should say that in my past life, I wasn’t on Remnant at all.”

That bombshell drew the greatest expressions of shock that Harry had yet seen, but he continued, explaining about Earth for a bit. Once he had the setting fully outlined, he talked about the Wizarding World and then about magic in general.

All of these were revelations to his three listeners in various ways.

Pyrrha was startled by how advanced this other world seemed to be, as well as the idea of other worlds existing at all. But this was her Rigas, her lover telling her these things as a prelude to speaking about himself, and so she accepted them.

Arturia didn’t so easily accept what Harry was saying, but that was more about the fact that there were no Grimm on Earth than any other reason. A world without Grimm was an astonishing one. But when she came to accept that, everything else made some more sense. “I can see humanity being able to expand and grow technologically as you say your old world did

without them around. Although if you tell me that it was some kind of utopia, Hadrian Arc, I will no longer be able to believe anything you say.”

“Then it’s a good thing I’m never going to say that at all. There was still a lot of conflict, still a lot of people who thought that because they could use magic, other people shouldn’t, and that those who couldn’t use magic should be controlled by those who did. I’d liken it to people with Aura simply deciding that those without should be second class citizens, sort of. With the additional caveat that those with Aura were able to hide their presence away from those without.”

“Oh dear. Prejudice like that is never a good thing, and I know of several times in Mistral’s past where those with Aura believed that they should try to lord it over those without. I can believe that Harry.” Pyrrha smiled when suddenly, reaching over and taking Harry’s hand in her own, bringing it up to her lips to kiss the back of it. “I think, my love,” she said, using that phrase for the first time and feeling a thrill as Harry’s eyes widened as he looked at her, then turned tender as his hand gripped her own. “That you have given us enough background.”

“Truly,” Arturia agreed, even though her eyes watched Pyrrha’s actions with some annoyance. “Now speak of this Harry that we did not know. Were you named Harry in your old life, too?”

Harry had to take a few seconds to marshal his thoughts against the shock of hearing Pyrrha use that term of endearment for him for the first time, but when he went on, he was smiling brilliantly at her, and even as Harry turned back to his other two lovers, he did not relinquish it the hold on her hand. “I was, although unlike with Hadrian, it wasn’t short for anything. My name in my past life was Harry Potter, and you could not find two upbringings more different than my time as an Arc in this lifetime and my past. The Arcs, even though I was a foundling, they treated me like any part of the family. I love them all, for it.”

He winked across at Tia and Arturia. “Even if my love for two of their daughters shifted over time, shall we say?” Even Tia let loose a laugh at that, and Harry went on, describing first his life with the Dursleys and then the why of it; that he had been placed there by Albus Dumbledore in an effort to both hide him away from those who would do him harm because of what he supposedly had done as a baby, and as a method to control him.

The tale of Tom Riddle took a few moments to explain, as well as how Harry believed he had been stopped that night, then why the whole Boy Who Lived nonsense came about. The jeers that won Harry from all three of his lovers made him smile. Even Pyrrha, who had believed in the term destiny in some fashion when they first met, hated the idea of prophecy. Worse was the idea of adults putting all that weight on a young person rather than doing what they should and solving their problems on their own.

By the time he had finished, everyone was done with the meal, and the questions had stopped, as all three of his listeners instead simply listened to the tale. Which, in Tia's words, "Sounds like a children's fantasy novel."

The trio of women there thinking about things as he entered the kitchen, and began to put together the final touches for dessert. As he did, Arturia and Pyrrha began to ask a few questions. Pyrrha concentrated on the fact that his friends had left him and how often Harry had been forced to essentially solve problems that the adults should have. Arturia was more interested in magic in general and how it differed from here on Remnant, as well as the fighting Harry was involved in against other magic users.

When Harry returned to the table, however, all three girls stared at the giant bonbon-like things that Harry had created. There were four large Choux Bon pastries dusted with raspberry powder, topped with a brandy snap, meringue, lemon segments and fresh raspberries.

As the one whose apartment they were currently in, Harry let Arturia take the first bite. She did so by first cutting into the Choux Bon, finding the inside was filled with Raspberry Italian meringue, lemon verbena, fresh raspberries, crème patisserie and lemon curd.

After gathering a large spoonful, Arturia chewed on it in delight, amazed by the flavors and how they all worked together. "MMm...amazing! I cannot say that I enjoy knowing that cooking was foisted upon you as part of your chores by such unfeeling brutes in your first life, but at least in this life, you have a family and lovers who truly appreciate your abilities in the kitchen," Arturia announced before she began digging in with gusto.

The others both followed her example. For several minutes, Harry simply smiled and ate his slowly, watching as the three girls all finished their confection far faster than he did before eyeing his plate hungrily. Yet before he let the trio of puppy dog eyes start to erode his willpower, Harry needed to know something first. "So, does this, does this change anything?"

"Not for me," Pyrrha answered promptly from her chair beside him. "I was more than willing to follow you as my Rigas, more than willing to come to love you as my boyfriend before knowing your past. Now, knowing how hard your past life was, it simply means I respect you more."

"For my part, I only have a few questions. You mentioned your friends and this Ginny girl. Was she truly your only girlfriend in your past life?" Arturia asked quizzically. "Honestly, while your skill in combat certainly can be held up as evidence of your past life, your lack of experience when it comes to relationships and girls in general is somewhat startling coming from someone who is, however, technically, middle-aged."

“I suppose I could’ve had other girlfriends after Ginny, but by that point, I was pretty bloody jaded. My friends had walked out on me. A lot of my acquaintances paid the price for being near me. I had also finally woken up to the reality of how badly Dumbledore and all the other adults had not only failed, but manipulated me. Letting anyone close to me at the time was not something I was comfortable with simply because I wouldn’t be able to figure out if they were approaching me because they knew Harry the individual or Harry the image, the magnificent Boy-Who-Lived,” he ended with a sneer.

Both Pyrrha and Arturia nodded at that, with Pyrrha squeezing his hand underneath the table. Out of all of them, Pyrrha knew best what it was like to have a public persona, but even the Invincible Girl carried far less weight than the Boy-Who-Lived or the Man-Who-Conquered.

Harry squeezed her hand back, smiling at her more for her earlier words than the moment of support, but both of them were precious to him. “I was entirely alone and had no wish to open my heart up to other people. So, you could say I wasn’t exactly in a happy place when I decided to go through the Veil.”

That was the story that Harry had told them. Since none of his lovers were followers of the Brothers’ faith, he felt that learning that Death, one of the most powerful forces in the universe, could appear in front of people as an individual was a bit too far. Especially given the negative connotations that being known as the tool of Death could bring with it. And frankly, given how little information Death had given Harry of what was going on in Remnant he doubted that telling them about his mission would help.

Instead of speaking about Death or what he offered Harry, he had simply said that he had fallen through the Veil and then been given visions of Remnant before arriving in his baby body. At which point, most of his memories went away for a good while because a baby’s brain was in no way able to sustain such. That caused Tia and Arturia to laugh and for Tia to look far happier for a time. Why that was, Harry didn’t know, but she seemed the least interested in the fact of his reincarnation among the three.

Now she repeated her earlier words, standing up and leaning across the table to gently run a finger down Harry’s face. “You’re still Harry. I still love you. Your past might have shaped you, but you are here now. With me. That’s far more important.”

Harry stared into Tia’s deep blue eyes, becoming lost in them. He smiled widely, reaching up to return the caress as the pair lost themselves in one another for a second.

Because of this, Harry missed Arturia moving until he heard the sound of cutlery smacking against one another. Pulling back from staring into Tia’s eyes, he looked down and to the side, where he saw that his plate had been pulled into the center of the table. Currently, Arturia and Pyrrha were exchanging blows from fork and knife as one attempted to cut into his

dessert, while the other attempted to both protect the dessert and pull the plate back towards herself. Not, Harry noted dryly, towards him, though. *I suppose chocolate trumps fairness in Pyrrha's world.*

Shaking his head, Harry dared to put his hand down where the cutlery was flashing. Grabbing his plate, he pulled it back towards him, laughing quietly. "Were those your only questions, Arturia?"

"Pretty much, yes. While your reincarnation is astonishing, Harry, it doesn't change who you are or how you have acted in this life. If anything, it simply makes me appreciate you more." Arturia smiled and then deliberately let her eyes flick down to the desert.

Harry laughed at that but did not give into the trio of puppy dog eyes for two more bites, a feat of truly heroic willpower. Then he quickly divided it up, pushing the portions over onto the expectant plates of his three girlfriends.

Around twenty minutes later, the group left the table.

Harry would've been hard-pressed to understand what kind of mental gymnastics the trio of girls had performed between them to get him and Arturia heading towards Arturia's bedroom while Tia and Pyrrha were cleaning up. There had been no discussion between the trio, at least nothing that he had heard, and despite the fact that he had known at least Arturia and Tia his entire life, he still couldn't figure out what the glances and slight head tilts between the women had meant. Still, he was here now, and he was going to make the best of it.

Lime start:

Arturia moaned as Harry once more found that place on her collarbone that threatened to turn her entire body into jelly. She made no argument when he pulled away from the wall where she had pressed into him, and if anything, moaned louder as his hands trailed down her back, gripping her rear before twisting them around and pushing Harry toward the bed. Once his calves hit the side of the bed, Arturia pounced, bringing him down onto his back with an 'oomph'. Then she kissed him again, grabbing one of his hands and forcefully pushing it up underneath her crop top.

Unhesitating for even a second, Harry's hand began to play with her breast, one finger slowly circling her nipple while the rest of his hand began to knead the soft, pliant flesh. His other hand remained on her rear, occasionally lifting up to give her a light smack. Arturia didn't seem to notice the pain at all, which, considering the fact she had Aura, probably was kind of obvious.

Arturia pulled away from Harry for just a moment, pulling up her shirt and tossing it to one side, letting Harry free access to her chest for the first time. Her chest was smaller than

Pyrrha's but barely, and her nipples were actually a good bit larger than his redheaded girlfriend's, while also looking a bit darker in tone, a sharp contrast to her pale skin.

Instantly, Harry took one of them in his mouth while his other hands changed positions, one going around Arturia to her rear, the other coming forward to work on Arturia's other breasts, while Arturia moaned on top of him and slowly began to grind against his core. Her own hands had mostly been occupied with getting entangled with his hair for a bit, but now, they worked down his body in turn and into his pants. Moments of fumbling had her undoing the buttons and pulling them down, even as she kept her position on top of Harry somehow, letting him lift himself up off of the bed for a moment, causing her to gasp as his shaft, still within the confines of his boxers, rubbed up against her own boy shorts clad core.

As Harry pulled away from her nipple, Arturia dove down, kissing him hard, dominating the kiss for several moments as she held him down against the bed, grinding her core against his erection until one of her hands was in between them, slowly working its way up and down, giving both Arturia a bit more stimulation, and Harry quite a bit more. Then she slowly pulled away from the kiss and began to nip and bite at his ear instead while Harry pushed her off him just enough to get back to work on her chest.

Back in the main room of the apartment, Arturia and Tia finished loading up the dishwasher and putting away what little leftovers there were. Once Pyrrha was done finishing wiping down everything and Tia had placed one of the soap cubes into his little cubicle within the dishwasher and started up, Pyrrha looked over at her quizzically, hearing the moaning from Arturia and the grunts from Harry coming through the open doorway into Arturia's room. "So, what do you think we should do with our time?"

Tia smiled, staring back at her with her head cocked to one side as if asking if that was really a question. She then opened her arms, and Pyrrha willingly stepped forward, the two girls hugging one another, then, much more hesitantly, kissing as they had that night in the small pool that Harry had found for them in Mountain Glenn. This time, of course, their clothing was still on them, but by the time the pair had reached Arturia's sofa, both had given into the horny and divested themselves of their shirts, leaving their upper bodies clad only in their bras. Unlike Arturia, obviously, the two of them had had to get here from the bullhead landing port.

How long they kissed, or how often one or the other was on top, neither could say. But soon, they could hear Arturia's moaning becoming louder. That somehow gave Pyrrha the courage to work one of her legs in between Tia's. Tia let loose a loud moan, overriding the sound of her sister's. Seeing the reaction this garnered, Pyrrha began to slowly rock her knee against Tia's moist pussy.

“Ahhh, mmm...” Thinking through the pleasure, Tia decided to do the same. She pushed her knee up a little too hard, causing Pyrrha to hiss in pain at first, before Tia, greatly daring, let her legs fall back and then reached between the two girls, sliding a finger up and down Pyrrha’s shorts. That seemed a better idea to her.

Arturia heard her sister’s moan and broke off, turning to stare out of the open doorway over her shoulder for a second, but that only let Harry quickly latch onto that point in her collarbone again. “Ahh, no!” She nearly wailed, as that proved to be just a bit too much stimulation. “HAARRRRYYYYY!” For the first time in the relationship, Harry made her come, and she moaned continually for several moments as her body shuddered through the orgasm.

Collapsing on top of Harry, Arturia pressed her chest into Harry’s, hugging her tightly as she began to slowly shift herself again, her hand on his shaft working up and down between them, kissing his lips, then his cheek, then his neck, feeling his hands on hers working her up again but determined to make Harry come first this time.

She failed, but it was the most magnificent failure because this time, Harry pushed one of his other hands down and around in between them as well, working his fingers underneath her boy shorts. He started to time his finger’s movements with her own along his shaft. “Together, Arturia, together!”

“Yes, yes!” Arturia squealed, a sound Harry had never thought to ever hear from his refined, calm older lover. It shot straight to the pleasure center of his name, aided by the way she moaned his name.

When Harry added a third finger, she spasmed again, coming hard, nearly drenching his hand as Harry did the same, soaking his chest and her own with his seed. Arturia slumped again against his chest, and Harry slowly rolled them over until they were laying side-by-side. “MM, that was lovely!” Arturia said, leaning in to kiss Harry on the lips before nuzzling into his shoulder, ignoring how sticky the pair of them were right now.

End Lime

She shook her head as a loud pair of moans came from the main room, her eyes widening slightly at the implications. “Was that, was that Pyrrha and Tia?”

“A, heh, I think the two of them are very interested in experimenting a little bit. And I can’t say that it bothers me all that much. Quite the opposite, in fact,” Harry said, remembering the insanely hot image of Tia and Pyrrha making out in the water from a few days ago.

Arturia blinked at this before she stared between them, feeling Harry’s rising erection once more. Seeing that, she chuckled throatily. “Well now, that’s interesting. Just don’t expect me to kiss Tia. I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Outside on the sofa, Pyrrha and Tia had also finished and now were cuddling side-by-side, exchanging small kisses. They were thus able to hear the conversation occurring out in the bedroom, and Tia chuckled a bit, cocking her head as she looked at Pyrrha. "What about you? Do you want to kiss Arturia?"

"No," Pyrrha said firmly, her eyes twinkling. "I have no desire so far to kiss Arturia as I do you or anything else we just did. Spanking her, though? That I could see myself doing."

Hearing that, Arturia growled, pulling away from another kiss from Harry, to turn away and shout, "I heard that! Given what happened the last time we fought, I think I will be the one giving out the spankings!"

"Would you like to wager on that?" Pyrrha shouted back, and Harry dissolved into laughter as the two girls continued to exchange taunts and jeers from separate rooms. Life, he decided, was good.

OOOOOOO

On Monday, despite the various dramatic events of the weekend, school resumed with all the placid momentum of an avalanche made of Jell-O. Sun's inclusion into the freshman class was met with very little in the way of fanfare, although the monkey faunus proved he had absolutely zero shame when he freely admitted to why he had come ahead from his team and his role in the battle over the weekend.

This, oddly, took some of the heat off Blake, who had followed everyone's advice and decided to come out about her cat-girl heritage. To her shock, this didn't really matter to much of the freshman class. If anything, she was simply a little more popular, especially with the boys, which Yang put down to "the Bellabooty plus cat ears combo is a killer!"

The fight between Harry and Sun occurred on Friday. Glynda had refused to seem to reward any of the fighters involved in the battle at the docks, so none of them had been allowed to fight on Monday. Yet, to his chagrin, the duel did not allow him any chance to shine in front of Blake.

"Come on, man, fight fair!" Sun shouted as he tried to pull himself out of another mud pit on the floor, only to feel a stone fist slam into his hastily crossed forearms. This flung him out of the ring. "Aw, man!"

"You've got great mobility, and you probably could have beaten me if you would take me up on my offer of making it a weapons only fight. You're the one that demanded I fight you with the same Semblance I used to slow you down when we first met. You've only got yourself to blame," Harry said, shaking his head and turning aside, nodding to Professor Goodwitch before returning to his seat next to his redheaded girlfriend.

Despite Harry's easy dispatch of Sun, he slid in somewhere between Ruby and Tia on the combat ability scale. He wasn't quite up to fighting Yang in an arena fight, and when he challenged Pyrrha the next Monday, he found himself being schooled despite having taken her up on the same offer Harry had given him. The two of them fought in much the same manner, constant movement, quick attacks in and out, taking as few actual hits as possible. But Pyrrha could tank more hits than Sun could with Akuo, and in every other aspect Pyrrha was simply better than Sun, including endurance and Aura reserves.

Life continued on campus, with the next week passing somewhat similarly, with no big events or anything whatsoever from the student's perspective. Arturia, on the other hand, unfortunately, had a call from home. Evig Låga had brought in so many settlers that the council decided it was time they start expanding out into the territory between the actual town and the mines, and her parents wanted her home to help lead the militia in the efforts to clear that area of Grimm. After another date just between the two of them, Arturia left for home, much to Harry's annoyance.

That wasn't the only annoyance that entered his life, however. Pyrrha also had to deal with a new demand on her time three days after Arturia had left. A few local gyms were attempting to use clandestine pictures taken from when she and Harry were out on the town mixed with some sold to them by various students on Beacon as part of an ad campaign. While Pyrrha had no issue with anyone taking pictures of her and keeping them, such was an uncomfortable part of being a celebrity. She did take umbrage to people selling those images to others, feeling that went beyond the pale. If it had been for charity or a one-time thing, that would have been okay. This was anything but.

Harry helped her find a local lawyer, and with Glynda helping discover the students who had taken the pictures, the process quickly started to find the students involved and punish the chain of gyms involved. But this took Pyrrha's time away from romance-type time.

Surprisingly, Team GART began to come together more over this time. Sung-Sun now had a direction she wanted to take the team. She wanted to make them capture specialists, a team that could work with the police or local constabularies to deal with criminals that were beyond the normal policeman's ability to deal with in a way that wouldn't cause public turmoil or damages. With that in mind and fueled by ideas from Harry, Arturia and others, Sung-Sun began to introduce new tactics to her team, including Tia. These emphasized takedowns, captures, and equipment that lent itself to that area, such as net throwers, specialized Dust ammunition, glue guns and so forth. This gave them a wide bag of tricks to use in combat class that started to take other freshmen by surprise.

Apacci's new attitude also helped the team come together. No longer was he flirting with Mila or even any of the other girls in Beacon. He seemed to have settled down and seemed to even be putting more effort into his classwork than he had before.

On the other hand, he spent practically every night down in Vale. Not just going into Vale, but staying the night, only coming back in the morning. That was somewhat against the rules, but it was a rule not even Goodwitch employed.

"Your girlfriend might be a little too demanding of your time, you know," Mila said one day as the group gathered in the cafeteria for breakfast. Tia had joined them with an offer of Ren-made bagels, which complemented the so-so sausages and bacon that the cafeteria gave them. *At least there's only so much you can do to mess up bacon*, she thought, taking a big bite of bacon before waving the rest of the slice at Apacci like a pointer. "Seriously, dude, you're in Vale every night! Is she that good?"

"She is!" Apacci answered with a laugh, having gotten used to lying to his teammates. Lying to Mila was a bit of a wrench, considering that she was another faunus, but lying to the unemotional doll and Little Miss Rich Bitch was easy enough on his conscience. "Who knew that cuddles after hard-core BDSM sex could be so good? Besides this, you can't complain. I've been holding up my end of this team way better than I was before."

"Indeed, not only is your mysterious girlfriend giving you an outlet for your desires, but she was able to get it through your skull that you needed to put in more effort in school. She sounds like a fallen angel of some kind," Sung-Sun teased.

Apacci mimed throwing his bagel at her, hiding a sneer inside. After all, it was very easy to catch up on schoolwork when you had someone doing your work for you and giving you the answers to the tests the night before to memorize. "Fine, I suppose you can say that finding a good woman makes me want to be a better guy, all right?" Apacci said, turning away as if embarrassed.

"Which really only leaves one question, for me at least," Mila snickered, leaning forward and grabbing Apacci in a chokehold so he couldn't escape. "Exactly who's the Dom in this relationship?"

While Apacci was getting used to lying to his teammates and dealing with Mila's teasing, and team ANVL continued to train while also dealing with exterior issues, the same could also be said about team RWBY. Specifically, Weiss had to deal with exterior issues in the form of a very unwelcome call from her father.

This was entirely unlike her call on Sunday, where Winter called her. While Winter wasn't exactly clear how she had seen a video recording of the fight when it hadn't been shared with

the public yet, but she had seen recordings of Weiss engaging the White Fang on the dockyards. That conversation had been immensely pleasant and quite fun for Weiss, telling Winter about her team and making certain that her older sister knew that she was all right with the idea of Blake being on her team despite Blake being a faunus and gaining some advice on how to become friends with people who were so different than she was.

This conversation was anything but. "I'm sorry, what!?" Weiss growled.

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" Her father said on the other side of the scroll. Thankfully, he hadn't bothered activating the video pickup, so this was simply a voice-only conversation. "Hadrian Arc is a local factor for Norsken, a new Fire Dust trading company that is cutting into the profits of our Vale and Mistral branches at an unreasonable level. We have almost entirely lost the Fire Dust market in both nations! Fire Dust might be only a percentage of the overall Dust market, but it sets a bad precedent if our monopoly is broken like this. I refuse to allow it. Other efforts are being put in place to put pressure on their trade, but there's always other means."

"You know, Father, I've doubted your basic sense of ethics and morals for quite some time. Now I am past certain of it. I'm also concerned about your basic mental stability! Why would I help you in any way, shape, or form? Let alone in such a way that might harm the family of one of my acquaintances here on Beacon?"

"Because you have some measure of loyalty to your family? Because the money you so like to throw around comes from our monopoly of dust more than anything else? Because I'll cut you off from that money if you don't?" Her father answered in an almost saccharine tone of voice. Then his voice hardened, and despite being separated by several continents worth of distance, Weiss flinched. "I was not asking. Find some dirt on Hadrian Arc within the next month, or you can kiss your monthly stipend goodbye!"

Weiss glared at her scroll as her father hung up, then shook his head her head, turned it off, and headed back to her team. If her father did cut her off, she would worry about it then. *Thankfully, I've already begun to siphon money from the account my father knows of into a separate bank account in a local bank. It won't be the end of the world, and if Father thinks I will simply cave to his blandishments, he will find that I am made of sterner stuff!*

OOOOOO

There were other reasons why the Schnee patriarch wanted to put pressure on Norsken, but Harry was unaware of most of them. The Council of Evig Låga was more than capable of blocking that pressure up to and including the Mistral Council's demands that the previously bucolic farming community start paying as much as other mining communities in terms of taxation to the central city-state.

There was little precedent for a community to change from one type to another, but there was some, and it was firmly on the side of lower taxation. The same could be said for doing so to the change in the town's overall population. The phrase 'until stabilization of both the economy and population occurs, there will be no change in the overall taxation methodology' was stated so often to the Mistral Council and to the news agencies covering the growing tensions that many of them began to get sick of it and look for ways to change that ancient law instead of simply bothering the Arcs and their associates.

This was a good thing, considering the economy of Evig Låga, while strong, wasn't really all that inclusive yet. They didn't have any kind of factory capacity or metallurgy, and now, most of what they were producing in terms of food went to feed their growing community.

Some new arrivals were more important than others, and Guld Arc smiled as he held out a hand to two such arrivals, who had very adroitly called ahead. "You would be Ghira Belladonna, correct? I've seen pictures of you before, most admittedly unflattering, but a few actually caught your good side."

While his companion stiffened at that, Ghira merely laughed, although there was an edge to his words as he replied, "I don't doubt that most of the pictures you see here in Anima about me aren't exactly flattering. Still, it's nice to know that you think I have a good side, at least. This is my aide, Fennec Albain. Between us, we're here to make certain that what Sunflash has grunted at us over the scrolls is accurate: that you are really treating your faunus citizens fairly."

Hazel stepped forward and shook the two men's hands herself, examining Fennec for a moment. Fennec was a dark-skinned man who sported a pair of fox ears that stuck straight up from the top of his head. He wore his hair styled in a mohawk with shaved sides under a hood which had holes in the top for his fox ears. He stood straight, his eyes wary as he looked around them, and it was clear to those who knew what to look for that he was hiding a pistol or some kind of weapon at the small of his back under his tunic.

He's White Fang, or I will eat my hat! Still, if he's here, at least he's willing to listen.

"Welcome to Evig Låga," she said aloud. "We know about how horrible the jet lag is from here to Vacuo, let alone Menagerie, so we've already secured a motel room for you. It's in a relatively new building, and I'm afraid you'll have to do with a lot of construction noises, but it's pleasant enough. Tomorrow, we'll start the tour, and you can head out to try to speak to Sunflash in person."

"Although if you expect him to be any more verbose when you're talking to him face-to-face than he is over the scroll, you might want to tamp down that enthusiasm a bit," Guld spoke up once more. "Still, I think you'll find a lot here to your liking..."

OOOOOOO

In Vale, another faunus was arriving to much less fanfare around two weeks after the battle on the docks, completely below the radar of Ozpin or anyone else in Beacon.

Hastening inside the warehouse, Adam pulled off his hood as water dripped from his cloak. He shook hands with Bonesaw. Good to see you, Bonesaw. Sorry it took me so long to get here, but I needed a few weeks to organize everything.”

“Fantastic to see you here at all, Adam! Perhaps with you here, we can finally force Roman to start taking our suggestions and our people more seriously!” Bonesaw growled, taking in the two trucks that were rolling into the warehouse behind Adam. “It’s been an uphill battle since the fight on the docks. That asshole’s lost a lot of respect for us if he had any in the first place. Besides Terry and his group of bookkeepers and organizers, we’ve been entirely sidelined.”

Adam smiled thinly. “Oh, don’t worry about that.” Behind him, several other faunus began to pull tarps off of crates at the back of the trucks quickly. Many of Bonesaw’s people, all five of them that he retained beyond Terry’s smaller cell, which was busy elsewhere, were there. Soon all of them began to exclaim about the weapons, with one of them asking what was under the giant tarp on the back of the second truck. “Hell, some of these weapons look like modern Atlas Military models!”

Bonesaw did not look away from Adam, from his leader, as this happened, instead watching as the last few of Adam’s group came in. The doors to the warehouse closed behind them, the screeching covered by the heavy rain outside. As it did, the group behind Adam lowered their hoods.

Taking in their features, Bonesaw began to chuckle low and dangerous. “Damn. I take it it’s two birds with one stone time, sir?”

“Exactly. I think you’ll find that we brought more than enough muscle to force Roman to see reason. And to follow up on our more important missions. Now, when can you introduce me to this young Apacci Topaz?” Adam asked his eyes alight with all the strength of a fanatic... or perhaps, spurned lover behind his mask. “I am just... dying to know more about Beacon.”

OOOOOOO

Stacy looked up quizzically as the door to her upscale apartment practically rattled on its hinges as someone knocked on it. “What the?”

Grabbing up a knife, the former Arc moved to the door, hiding the knife along her forearm just in case as she cautiously opened the door. Opening it, she found herself staring at

the chest of a man even larger and brawnier than her brother Guld. Craning her neck, she looked up at a man with a small, well-trimmed beard and dark brown eyes. “Who’re you?”

“Stacy Arc?” the man asked. When the woman didn’t respond, he sighed but continued on. “I have a proposition for you. One that will give you a lot of money.” The woman made no move to let him in, and he continued. “It involves telling me more about Evig Låga, things your former family might not want you to share.”

Stacy stared at him for a moment, then shrugged. “Well, why didn’t you say so. Come in, and let’s talk specifics.”

OOOOOOO

For his part, Ozpin was quite frustrated. With his attention completely diverted from the mystery about Harry Arc and his magic, he had hoped that the hallucination-inducing woman’s death would give them some way to hunt down the other two people who had attacked Amber. Unfortunately, it seemed as if they had covered their tracks far too well for any of his people to discover anything about them. Worse, even though he had been in Vale for the last three weeks, Qrow had not reported having any luck whatsoever. All the previous known faunus hangouts or underground contacts and proven empty. The faunus were still there, but they certainly weren’t willing to speak to a human about anything important, and any hints that they had ever had any dealings with the White Fang were gone.

Roman and Neapolitan were proving equally hard to nail down, and worse, the attacks continued. Sporadically now, but once more, not a dust store was safe throughout Vale. It was only that the thefts were happening far more quietly and clandestinely now. They weren’t doing nearly enough to cause fear, but they were still causing economic issues for certain.

It was time, he thought, to be subtle, staring at a picture of Blake Belladonna as he decided on an appropriate course of action.

End Chapter