**Winter Hunt - Spring Hunt - Summer Hunt**

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**Winter Hunt - Spring Hunt - Summer Hunt**

by **Bookah**

**Summary**

**UPDATES Mondays**

Friends and companions have died, teams have been destroyed, and everyone's faith has been shattered. In the wake of the attack on Beacon and Vale, Team CFVY is left adrift, uncertain what their futures hold. But when a star pupil leaves behind her team to hunt down the ones who did this, Team CFVY rallies to follow her lead, whatever dangers that may reveal. But what will be the true test for Team CFVY? What they find at the end of their journey, or the secrets they've brought with them from their pasts?

(Warnings: Not all of the ships mentioned in the tags will go the way you want them to. Further, this story does include sexual activities and behaviors that aren't fairy tale in nature. Finally, if you've paid much attention in RWBY, you know it's not a pretty, fluffy place, and this story won't be lightening the tone up one bit. Just saying...)

(Also, this story is running concurrently on a certain other fanfic site as well. So don't freak out and think someone is plagiarizing.)
Beacon Academy

“Ruby’s gone!”

Coco Adel looked up from the book she had laid out on her desk to observe Velvet Scarlatina. Velvet, the team’s only Faunus member, was poised in the door frame of the borrowed room Team CFVY had been living in since the Battle of Beacon, a hand grasping each side, and her legs nearly as spread out, as though she was bracing herself against something. Her tall rabbit-like ears were perked up even more than usual, and her normal meek and mild expression had been replaced with one of agitation.

It was almost a good look on Velvet, in Coco’s estimation. It may not have been a positive emotion, but it was still more assertive than the poses Velvet usually held. Usually she held herself in a somewhat reserved pose, meek and unassertive, as if she were prey trying to remain unnoticed by a predator. Velvet’s rare aggressive moments were actually damn fine to watch, in Coco’s excellent judgement.

Despite the improvement in appearances this created, the cause of Velvet’s agitation was probably best dealt with quickly. Coco turned around in her chair, picked up a steaming mug of the coffee that shared its pronunciation with her own team’s name, and took a sip. She lowered the mug, then slid her glasses down her nose with her free hand to better focus her warm, brown eyes on her teammate and friend, and addressed Violet. “What do you mean?”

“I went to see how Yang was doing,” Velvet replied. “Losing her arm has been hard on her, and with Ruby being in a coma for a while… It just seemed like the right thing to do.”

Coco nodded. Velvet had been making occasional trips out to visit both girls ever since the battle that had disrupted so many lives. Classes still had not resumed for Beacon’s students, and half of the student body had been forced to find new accommodations, such as the case was with Team CFVY itself. Fear and doubt had flooded the air of Vale like a miasma, filling the city with a nervous tension. Velvet had taken to visiting the Xiao Long household every couple of weeks as a means to burn off her own palpable worry.

The bunny eared Faunus woman continued speaking, her voice a touch frantic. “When I got to their house over on Patch it was…” She let go of the door frame and shook her head, entering the room proper. “It was awful. Her father was so upset. He was just falling apart. He kept trying to find tracks in the snow around the house or on the path even though the path was clear of any snow! And Yang… She refused to see anyone. She just locked her door and didn’t respond to anything.” Velvet wrapped her arms around herself in a sign Coco had learned long ago meant the Faunus was worried.

Velvet, you’re entirely too kind and sweet. It’s why we all adore you so, but. . . She sighed quietly and turned to close her book, taking time to add a bookmark to save her place.

Across the room, Yatsuhashi lifted his seven foot, muscular frame up from the corner where he had been sitting cross-legged on the floor. He typically spent at least fifteen minutes a day that way, meditating and centering himself. Not, in Coco’s opinion, that he needed it. The giant man was a veritable rock, emotionally. He walked over to Velvet’s 5’6” frame, dwarfing her like a self-mobile wall and set a hand on the little Faunus girl’s shoulder. “Did anyone say where Ruby’d gone?”
“Haven, I think,” Velvet replied. “She’d been talking about it for days, ever since she’d woken up. Her dad told me once I got him to acknowledge I was there. Apparently she thought that what had happened here might happen there as well. She felt she had to go there and try to keep that from happening.”

From atop his bed, the fourth member of their team gave a small cough that was his way of calling for attention. Red haired and dark skinned, the lanky man named Fox sat up, dropping a magazine. “She may be onto something. Ruby has demonstrated a considerable amount of luck in finding the White Fang.” He swung his feet over the edge of the bed and stood to begin pacing, counting things off on his fingers as he continued. “She interrupted them at the docks when they were attempting to steal an entire shipment of dust, and again during their attempt to use the old train tunnels to breach Vale’s defenses and let Grimm in. During the Battle of Beacon she appeared armed and ready in the stadium before anyone else.”

“Not with her own weapons,” Yatsuhashi pointed out. “She used that Atlas’ student’s swords.”

“Yes,” Fox acknowledged. “But while everyone else was still reacting, she was acting to defend Pyrrha.”

“Yeah…” Velvet quietly whispered, as each briefly lost themselves to remembering their fallen classmate.

Coco quickly shook that off. **Best not dwelled on. The past is the past. For now there are more immediate concerns.** “You think she’s on their trail again, Fox?”

Fox shrugged, but Yatsuhashi nodded. The big man turned to take a seat along one wall, not bothering with a chair. “She certainly has reason. They killed her friends, maimed her sister, and shattered her team. If I was her, I’d certainly be looking for some paybacks.”

Coco felt warmed by the idea of Yatsuhashi being that fond of his team. She’d worked hard to make them an integrated whole during their first year. Yatsuhashi, the most phlegmatic member of the team was the one least likely to express strong emotions over anything, so hearing him admit to understanding the desire for vengeance for one’s teammates was quite the testament to her work.

“Ruby can’t do it on her own,” Velvet asserted. She was shifting from foot to foot, clearly concerned. “She’s an amazing fighter, and a good strategist. One of the most promising of the first year students, in fact. But she’s always shone best when she had a team behind her, backing up her every move. Alone, she’s just one 16 year old girl going up against…” Her words stumbled to a halt.

Coco nodded as Velvet’s voice faltered. The poor thing had never been comfortable discussing the White Fang even as a vague entity. Bringing them up specifically had always been nearly impossible for the girl. There was a block there, somewhere, she had never revealed, and the team had never pried.

Coco took mercy and finished Velvet’s statement for her. “Going up against an entire fanatical terrorist organization with years of experience she lacks and hundreds, maybe even thousands of combatants.”

“Yeah.”

Coco thought a moment, gauging the mood of CFVY’s dorm room. They were all aware of what Velvet was asking for, even if the girl hadn’t vocalized her request. Ruby needed backup, with a full and capable team that knew the business if she was going to stand any chance against the White Fang. Her own team was scattered or crippled. Who, then, was there for her?
The problem was that, if Team CFVY agreed, they were putting themselves at risk, and not just physically. They were all planning to be huntsmen and huntswomen, and were prepared for the dangers that entailed. But this went a bit above and beyond what they had trained for. They had been learning to fight the creatures of Grimm. But Faunus weren’t Grimm. If Team CFVY went, they would be called upon to fight, and even to kill, other people rather than monsters. What would they become if they followed that path? Would they still be huntsmen and huntresses, guardians of humanity, if they themselves began taking those lives?

This wasn’t a decision she could simply make for the team. It was too big for something like that. Each of them would have to face the consequences, and so each would have to make this decision for his or her own.

Coco turned in her chair to face the slender red-head seated on his bed.

“Fox?”

The dark skinned redhead tapped his head once. His expression was thoughtful, and she could tell he was having similar thoughts to her. However, there was no uncertainty in his voice when he answered.

“You know I always welcome a chance to test my skills.”

Coco nodded, then turned to look at Yatsuhashi.

The giant met Coco’s eyes directly. “You know the professors are trying to rebuild the school. If we’re gone when they restart classes it might hurt their efforts. We might not even be allowed to come back if we see this through. If we even make it back.”

Coco nodded. It was not a minor consideration. What they did now could affect more than their own futures.

Still, Yatsuhashi shrugged. “It might be nice to go home for a visit. I haven’t been back to Mistral since I came to Beacon.” He leaned over and patted Velvet on the shoulder, not needing to stand to do so. “Besides, you know she’ll go without us if she has to.”

Coco gave a curt nod and picked up her beret. She took a deep breath, then settled it on her head, cocked at an angle. “Alright. Start packing. Ruby… She’s good, but she’s still only a first year. She’ll need help, and we’re going to give it.” She stood and pretended to dust off her dark colored pants, then quirked a grin. “Besides, they destroyed my favorite school. The White Fang has it coming.”

The look of gratitude Velvet gave her was worth every bit of risk she knew she was about to ask her team to take.

Patch

The island of Patch lay just off the coast of the Kingdom of Vale. The island’s forests were home to a population of Beowolves that stubbornly refused to be wiped out, but it was a relatively peaceful and safe place by most standards of judgement. Home to Signal Academy, it had a large enough population to maintain regular transportation connections to the city of Vale, even during the crisis that had shut down so much of the world’s communication and transportation network.

Being that it was the last place Ruby had been seen, it was the first place Coco brought the team. While they knew her origin point (home) and destination (Haven), they didn’t know the path she was planning to take to get there. The one thing they could be sure of was that there would be no direct
flight to Haven, for Ruby or for them. None of the Kingdoms appeared to trust each other anymore, and so travel was pretty much the venue of the hardy types willing to get there through whatever ad hoc arrangement they could make. For the most part, that meant the good old fashioned foot.

Feet had been the first clue they’d gotten as to Ruby’s path. They hadn’t bothered to interrupt Yang or Taiyang at the Xiao Long household. Velvet had already learned as much as they were likely to during her first visit. Any further attempts would likely have been nothing more than an intrusion on what had to be a difficult moment for a family that had already had more than their share of such things. Instead they, like Taiyang, had chosen to search for tracks in the snow.

They’d finally found them on a side path near the main road to the house. The four teammates now looked down solemnly at a carved stone bearing the name of Summer Rose, and pondering the words “Thus Kindly I Scatter”.

“Those were definitely Ruby’s tracks,” Yatsuhashi commented. “I can’t think of any reason anyone else would have come here.”

Coco nodded, but turned back towards the woodline behind them. “Honestly, I’m more concerned about the tracks over there. There were at least two, maybe even three people following her. A woman and one or two men, I think.”

Fox nodded. “That’s how I read the tracks as well.”

Velvet looked worried again. “Do you think it was them?”

“The White Fang?” Coco shrugged. “Maybe. I mean, they might have been watching for her to leave the safety of a home with two other huntsmen and a huntress living there. Still, would they be so frightened of one little girl that they would spend several weeks watching her home?”

“Two huntsmen?” Fox asked. “I thought they lived alone with their dad.”

“Their Uncle, Qrow,” Velvet replied. “I noticed him there a couple of times when I was visiting Ruby. I didn’t see him this morning, though,” she mused.

“That’s not particularly important at the moment,” Coco commented. “What’s important is where she went next.”

“She would have flown back to Vale,” Fox responded. “There’s nowhere else to go from Patch. But she wouldn’t have been able to catch a direct flight to anything near Mistral from there. Not with everything that’s happened.”

“No boats, either. Not from here, at least.” Yatsuhashi added. “Everything shipped to Patch comes through Vale, first.” He held up his scroll. “I checked.”

“So that leaves the mountains,” Velvet responded. “She’d have to go through one of the passes and head east.”

“During the winter?” Yatsuhashi looked down at Velvet. “Why not go by sea from Vale? It would be much safer, and more comfortable.”

“She could,” Velvet replied. “If she could talk her way aboard something traveling between Vale and Mistral. Since the Kingdoms aren’t exactly encouraging foreign visitors after what happened to Beacon...”

Coco nodded. “Adorable as she is, I doubt Ruby could convince someone to risk the wrath of any
harbor inspectors at Haven. After those broadcasts showing Yang and… well… the other fight…” She shook her head. “Beacon students are likely to be rather unwelcome guests. The best way to get there would be a route less guarded.”

“Which brings us back to the mountains,” Yatsuhashi nodded. “I see where you’re going with this. Once through them she could take a smuggler’s ship to the west coast of Anima, then walk to Mistral. I should have thought of that.”

“Hardly,” Coco reassured him. “Smuggling yourself between kingdoms isn’t exactly something we’ve had classes on. Which pass would she have taken, however? There are several ways through the mountains.”

“Forever Fall,” Fox replied. “It’s ideal. It runs deep into the mountains, and even has a train that runs through it much of the length. She could have hitched a ride on it, then headed into the mountains on foot. It’s quick, convenient, and warm and gets her right to the start of her trip. And no one would ask questions. No one’s worried about someone trying to leave Vale. Just getting in.”

“Alright,” Coco said. “Any other candidates?”

“What if she went through Mountain Glenn?” Velvet asked. “I know that would take her Southeast at first, but she already has experience with it. Didn’t she fight those people there at one point? She may have decided to pick up their trail there. She could be trying to figure out what their plan is before she actually arrives at Haven.”

“That’s a good thought, Velv. It’s what I would do in her shoes.” Coco turned to the remaining member of the team. “Yatsu?”

“I don’t know. I’m not from around here. I just know some good spots to find a boat out on the coast, and either choice would get you to them. Get me to the coast and I’ll be a bit more useful. But for now?” The big man shrugged.

“What if she didn’t take either path, but is planning to take a different pass?” Fox scratched his head.

“It’s possible,” Coco admitted. “But I doubt she is. None of the other passes are as convenient as the train, nor do they have evidence to the White Fang’s activities like Mountain Glenn does. It’s all of the disadvantages without any of the advantages.”

“Makes sense.”

“Alright,” Coco nodded. “Let’s catch an airbus back to Vale. We’ll start looking there and see if we can figure out which way she went.”

Vale

The train station at the Vale end of the tracks was not in Forever Fall. Rather, it was tucked neatly between the commercial district and the industrial district of Vale. This allowed Schnee Dust Company shipments easy access to both, whether it was finished goods headed to stores or raw dust
crystals heading to factories. Shipments came in like clockwork from the mines and refineries located at the far end of Forever Fall, along with frequent commuter trains for mine employees.

Because of the commuter trains, the station included a passenger terminal. It was there that the hunt for Ruby began in earnest. While Fox and Yatsuhashi essentially cased the place, checking odd corners on the slight possibility that Ruby would be hiding in one waiting for an evening train, Coco and Velvet waited at the ticket counter.

As a lull developed between trains, Coco took advantage of the lack of customers. She strolled up, her confident swagger in full play, a slightly salacious smile on her lips.

*First impressions set the tone for everything that comes after, my dear. Let’s knock ‘em dead.*

“Excuse me,” she asked the man behind the counter. “We’re looking for someone who may have come through here this morning.”

The ticket agent had stirred from his malaise as Coco approached, watching with interest as she approached. After hearing her question an expression of surprise mixed with an eagerness to help crossed his face. “Yes?”

*Score one for the ‘do me’ hips,* Coco thought. She turned to the girl beside her. “Velvet?”

Velvet stepped up next to Coco and held up her camera. She powered it on and showed the agent the photo on the back.

“She’d have been calling herself Ruby Rose, most likely. She’s on the short side, and probably would have babbled a bit.”


The man briefly looked over Velvet’s ears for a moment, his face shifting from pleased to carefully neutral, but then turned his gaze on the scroll. His look at the picture was much briefer than Coco would have expected. Seeing as many people every day as he usually would, she would have thought he’d have needed a few moments to match memories to faces. He seemed quite certain as he spoke, however.

“Nope. Just the same as I told that other girl as was asking. Haven’t seen that one. I’d remember that cape.”

Coco felt herself go stiff, though she fought to keep it from showing. Beside her, she felt Velvet shift under the hand Coco still had on her shoulder.

“Other girl?” she asked.

“Yeah. Strange little thing she was. Showed me a picture of that same girl what was on your scroll. Never said a word, but I knew what she was askin. No other reason to show me the photo, right? Just like I told you, said I hadn’t seen who any of you are looking for. She in trouble or somethin? Seems a bit young for that.”

“The girl who was asking, she wasn’t a Faunus, was she?”

The man snorted. “Not as I could see. She had black hair, black and white outfit, frills and lace. Kinda fetishy, you ask me. Oh, and she had her hair up in twin tails.” He then grinned. “She walked just as saucy as you, I can tell you that.”
“Saucy?” Coco felt her eyebrows rise behind her sunglasses.

Next to her, Velvet muttered a quiet “It is rather saucy…”

The man straightened up, his face suddenly neutral again. “No offence.”

Coco shrugged. *Maybe a little less ‘do me’ hip next time.* “None taken. Where’d the girl you talked to go after that?”

“Dunno. Walked out the door as pleased as could be.”

“Thanks.”
Vale

“She walked just as saucy as you, I can tell you that.”

“Saucy?”

Despite her worry for Ruby, Velvet felt a small smirk form at the ticket agent’s description. “It is rather saucy…” she muttered, then clamped her mouth shut when she realized she had spoken aloud.

The ticket agent held his hands up in front of him. “No offence.”

The warmth of Coco’s hand slipped off Velvet’s shoulder as her team leader shrugged. “None taken. Where’d the girl you talked to go after that?”

“Dunno. Walked out the door as pleased as could be.”

“Thanks.”

Velvet turned with Coco as the two walked away from the counter.

“So, I guess Ruby’s pursuers aren’t White Fang?” Coco mused.

“They still could be.” Velvet shook her head. “Not all Faunus have really obvious traits like these.” She made a gesture towards the rabbit ears the ticket agent had clearly been bothered by. “Ears that are a foot and a half long may be impossible to conceal, but some Faunus can hide who they are with the right clothing, and a few don’t even need that much to disguise who they are. I once knew a puma Faunus who couldn’t be recognized unless his claws were extended.”

“So this mystery girl still could have been White Fang.”

“Yeah.” Velvet nodded, but lapsed into silence as Coco gathered Fox and Yatsuhashi. She didn't like thinking about the White Fang, even when it looked like they would be dealing with them quite a bit in the future. Thinking about them brought up thoughts and memories she really didn’t want to recall, and awoke emotions she’d spent half her lifetime trying to suppress.

“So, what next?” Fox turned to Coco as he asked the question, and Velvet silently thanked him for the distraction from her own thoughts. “We could take the train ourselves and try getting ahead of Ruby.”

“Assuming we guess which port she’s headed to correctly.” Coco shook her head. “It might be easier on us if we do, but we now know beyond a shadow of a doubt someone is also looking for Ruby, and that they could be White Fang. What happens if they find her, alone?”

Yatsuhashi shuffled from one foot to the other. “So we see if we can find signs of Ruby or the White Fang in Mountain Glenn, and if we do, we hunt.”

Coco nodded. “We hunt.”

Deep inside, something within Velvet growled.

Mountain Glenn
Velvet could smell the cinnamon of Coco’s bubblegum drifting to her over the crisp, clear air in Mountain Glenn. All four of Team CFVY were puffing out clouds with each breath as they trudged through the snow covering what had once been a major street. Low, grey clouds hung above their heads, threatening to add even more white to the already frosty ruins. Velvet wasn’t certain she had ever been in a place so quiet in her life.

“It’s kind of pretty, really,” Yatsuhashi said, his voice almost reverent.

“Bones always are, when covered in soft white skin,” Velvet replied. She looked away as Coco turned to give her a curious glance.

The beret clad woman turned back to the scenery around them. “Without any industrial activity, or traffic, I suppose there isn’t much to stain the snow. Relatively few animals, too, since most of it is still concrete.”

“Just Grimm,” Yatsuhashi agreed. “Not as many as I expected, though.”

*Of course not,* Velvet sighed quietly to herself. Many of them were killed in Beacon. *And the rest are still being pulled toward that thing Ruby froze to the tower.*

Velvet quietly shook her head. There had been quite a bit of speculation about how the silver eyed first year had done that, and what it meant. Many people made references to old legends of silver eyed warriors, but without knowing quite what any of them meant. Others remained unconvinced that Ruby had done it at all, but instead pointed fingers towards Professor Ozpin (who remained among the missing of that day) or to some Atlas superweapon. Usually with dark mutters and darker implications.

The one time Velvet had seen Ruby awake, Ruby herself seemed confused about it, and muttered something about Qrow not fully explaining everything. The girl had still been recovering, so Velvet had let her get back to sleep rather than pestering her about it. She’d make certain to ask when they caught up to the girl.

“It’s starting to get dark.” Fox’s comment drew Velvet back to the present. He usually roamed a bit ahead of the group when they moved, scouting out ahead for any threats or clues, but had dropped back to rejoin the group. Velvet looked around to realize that the already gloomy location, shadowed by the heavy clouds overhead, was indeed getting darker. She tucked her coat more tightly around her, anticipating the drop in temperatures the night would bring.

*Why couldn’t you run away in the spring, Ruby?*

“It is,” Coco replied. She stopped in the intersection they had been pushing through, and paused to knock a little snow from her stylish, fur lined black boots. “Velvet?”

Velvet stirred herself from any remnants of reverie still clinging to her and focused her attention on her surroundings. She could hear the faintest of hums as a soft breeze set dangling cables to dancing and played empty windows like mournful flutes. Everything else was stillness and silence. She shook her head. “I don’t hear anything.”

“Yatsu?”

The big man turned slowly around, gazing at everything. Merely human in spite of his bear-like bulk, his eyes weren’t as sharp as those of a Faunus, but Coco insisted that the extra foot and a half of height he had on the rest of the team gave him a better vantage point with what strength of vision he had. Yatsuhashi always indulged her. “I don’t see anything.”
“Fox?”

Fox gave a long suffering sigh. “I suppose you expect me to say ‘I don’t smell anything.’ ‘Fox’ is only a name, Coco.”

Velvet felt herself smirk just a little at the joke, her spirits lifting a bit in spite of the somewhat gloomy setting.

“Alright. We’ll set up camp for the night in that building over there. Velvet, Fox, you can get started on that. I suggest the third floor. It looks intact. Yatsuhashi and I will do a fast look around and see if maybe we can find tracks, or an opening into the underground before it gets too dark.” Velvet watched Coco shelter her eyes against the first few flakes of snow beginning to fall. “I suspect any tracks will be gone by morning.”

Velvet watched as the big man and her team leader walked off into the slowly descending flakes. She then turned and followed Fox into the building.

Fox stopped her at the top of the second flight of stairs by holding a hand out behind him. His eyes turned back quickly to see that she had stopped, then he silently slipped into the hall and across into the room that had been their goal.

Velvet had no time to fret as he returned almost instantly. “Come on in.” She finished the last few steps then walked into the room before sliding to a halt. Several sleeping bags and pillows lay near the remains of a fire. Fox picked one of the pillows up and slapped it, launching a cloud of dust.

“Several months, at least. Someone left in a hurry.” He tugged at one of the sleeping bags. “Light weight, better suited for summer or early fall. Still in good shape though.”

Velvet surprised herself with a laugh. “Well, we found Ruby. Just, not the Ruby we’re looking for…”

Fox gave her a long look.

“Well, RWBY, not Ruby. I mean, I know they sound the same, but…” She laughed again. Then started over. “Look, this is where Team RWBY must have camped out. They didn’t have time to pack up before fighting…” The laugh died away and she turned to evaluate the room. “Fighting them.”

Fox nodded, giving Velvet a sympathetic look, then began sliding the remnants of the old camp aside. Velvet thrust her inner thoughts aside and threw herself into helping to get the room prepared for the night.

An hour later, Velvet dusted her hands off after finishing boarding over the room’s window with Fox. They had debated leaving it open to serve as a lookout before deciding that any ability to look out came with an ability for anything outside to look in. Grimm may have been almost oblivious to visual cues, cuing into emotions rather than images, but if any White Fang were about, they’d be more likely to spot the glow of the small camp fire in the room than anyone in the room were likely to spot any White Fang patrols. Hiding their presence seemed to be the better course of action.

She turned to look over at the snow coming in through a small section of collapsed roof in one corner of the room. The flakes were falling in earnest, now, promising to add several inches to the half-foot already on the ground outside. She found herself fidgeting as she watched them float down, and her eyes turned to scan the door to the room for any signs of motion on the stairs beyond.

Fox rested his hand on her shoulder, a move the entire team had developed a habit of using whenever Velvet felt herself beginning to squirm with worry.
“They’ll be fine, Velvet. Coco knows what she’s doing, and Yatsu could probably wrestle a Goliath into submission bare handed.”

“I know. It’s just…”

Fox gently pulled her around to face the fire and pushed her down to sit on her bed roll. “They’re fine. Eager, even. It’s you we’re all more worried about.”

Velvet felt surprise at Fox’s quiet statement. “I’m fine.”

Fox shook his head, settling onto his heels next to Velvet.

Velvet sighed and slumped. Of course Fox would know better. After almost two years the team knew one another pretty well. Certainly they all had their secrets, but when it came to reading one another’s moods there was no hiding the truth. “Sorry.”

“Want to talk about it?”

“I…”

Memories stirred within her, ones that she tried to keep from contemplating most times. It was a litany of images and sounds, painfully reminding her of betrayals and broken promises she’d tried to rise above, and awakening flashes of anger that slumbered only fitfully at the best of times. She felt her hands knot into fists and forced them to open.

“Sorry, Fox. I’ll just mention that it’s not just humans that have suffered because of the Wh… Because of them.” She sighed. “I don’t really want to talk about it.” Or think about it. Or feel it. Or anything it, really.

Fox nodded and quickly put an arm around Velvet’s shoulder. She felt herself pulled over for a quick one-armed hug, and then the taller man released her and began rummaging in his pack. “It’s alright. I understand.” He arched an eyebrow. “Stew?”

“Just no jokes about extra carrots, okay?”

Fox smiled. “Okay.”

Coco and Yatsuhashi came in a short time later as Velvet was scooping dehydrated onion bits into the stew that was simmering at the edge of the fire. Coco elegantly sniffed at the air, and nodded her approval. Yatsuhashi gave no such gesture but simply brushed snow off his broad shoulders before settling down to roll out his sleeping bag with a grunt.

Velvet watched as Coco sat down, stretching one long leg out while casually hugging the other to herself to so she could unlace the boot. “No tracks,” the woman said. “But we did find a hole leading down to a subway. It might even be one of the holes created by the White Fang this fall. We can drop down into it tomorrow and look around, see if we can find anything.”

“How’s the weather out there?” Velvet nodded toward where the snow was continuing to drift down through the hole in the roof.

“Heavy.” Yatsuhashi smiled. He took off his coat, then leaned over the fire and began warming his hands. “If no one spots our tracks within the next hour or so, they never will.”

“We’ll still want to set watches,” Coco pointed out. “I’m taking no chances, knowing that someone else is also looking for Ruby.”
“I’ll take first watch,” Fox commented, stirring the soup.

“Way to take one for the team, Fox.” Coco grinned. She finished wrestling her boots off and quickly took off a fur lined coat, draping it over their knee high tops. She twisted to grab her sleeping bag and a pair of blankets, then began unrolling them. “Yatsu, Velve, scoot your blankets over here.”

Velvet blinked. “What?” She stared at her leader, uncomprehending.

“Get over here. It looks like it’s going to be a cold one. Sharing body heat is a wonderful thing on nights like this.”

“You want us to…” Velvet’s words stumbled to a halt.

Coco gave patent grin, throwing a small eyebrow waggle into the expression. “Come on, honey bun.”

Velvet quickly turned her face away as she began tugging her sleeping bag towards where Coco sat, hoping no one could see the color in her cheeks.
Mountain Glenn

Waking up was proving to be particularly difficult for Yatsuhashi. His thought processes were slow, as though everything had been packed in cotton. He just had this muzzy sense of contentment, an impression that all was right with the world, and that he shouldn’t disturb it by waking. Nothing more mattered than extending this peaceful, relaxing moment not just to himself, but to the world simply through nuzzling further into his bed and sleeping in.

Something soft wiggled itself a bit more firmly against his stomach.

Suddenly, Yatsuhashi was very awake.

The snow in the corner was several inches deeper than it had been when he’d gone back to sleep after his watch. The fire had burned down to coals, a sullen red light glowing in the mostly darkened room. Coco was sitting in the doorway, casually wiping down her handbag. A fuzzy brown ear was flopped across his neck.

Velvet wiggled her butt against his stomach again and snuggled even more tightly against his chest. She’d curled up in her sleeping bag and somehow wormed her way under his arm in her sleep, only her ears sticking out of the top of the bag. Yatsuhashi could feel her heat seeping through the bag to warm his torso.

Another source of heat warming his back had to be Fox.

Uhm…

Yatsuhashi lay there, analyzing the uncharacteristic moment. Sandwiched between his two teammates, the odds that any motion on his part would disturb their sleep were high. Fox could simply deal with it, if Yatsuhashi woke him, but Velvet… Yatsuhashi would chew his arm off, first. He couldn’t help it. It was very hard not to see her as a soft, vulnerable girl who deserved protecting and comforting.

He snorted, only for the expression to almost become a sneeze as Velvet’s ear twitched up to tickle his nose in response. Velvet was far from vulnerable. He’d watched her kick and carve her way through Beowulf, Goliath, and Nevermore like they were nothing, and even observed as she took one of Atlas’ latest war machines apart single handedly. She had a determination in her studies that put her amongst the topmost of her peers in school. And her ability to simply swallow abuse that others would snap over was nothing short of astounding.

But, curled up against him like that, she seemed as gentle, and in need of protection, as a newborn. Just as cute, as well.

Best not dwell on that last bit.

The problem was that he had certain urgent needs to attend to, as evidenced by the quite uncomfortable stiffness Velvet’s wiggle was embarrassingly bumping. Even if he wasn’t mortified at the thought of the girl waking up to that particularly awkward bit of male normalcy, the pressure that was building was growing painful.

Dammit, gotta piss…
Slowly, Yatsuhashi began to carefully extract himself from his entanglement. Coco stopped polishing and turned her head, watching with an expression of amusement as he more or less slithered his way out of his bag, trying not to rock Fox or Velvet in the process. Eventually he succeeded with only a few inarticulate protests from Velvet and a typical silence from Fox. He opened his sleeping bag and draped it, warm side down, over the ball that was Velvet, then stepped out past Coco into the darkness of the hall beyond.

Coco spoke quietly as he returned from his attending to morning necessities. Her eyes briefly dropped in examination, leaving him feeling the need to cover himself despite certain morning commonalities having receded.

“You looked … comfy.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. His breath puffed out into the chilly air, and decided to take her comment at face value. “You were right about the body heat. I hadn’t thought it would get this cold, even with the fire.”

Coco dropped her teasing. “It’s about as cold as it will get. The sky is already starting to lighten up outside.” Coco tossed her chin towards the gap in the roof. “That’s not to say it will warm up all that much. Not with this cloud cover. But at least things won’t get chillier.”

“It doesn’t get quite this cold in Mistral.” Yatsuhashi stepped over to the fire and began stirring the coals before adding more wood. “Even though it’s a bit further north.”

“Blame the ocean for that. Mistral’s not far from an inland sea, which helps keep the temperatures relatively even. Vale, though…” Coco shrugged. “We have an ocean current running past us that originated near Mantle. It makes the summers nice, but when the wind blows up off that during the winter…” She gestured towards the hole in the roof.

Yatsuhashi nodded. “Makes sense.”

“So,” Coco’s voice grew even quieter. “What do you think? How’s she doing?”

“Hmm?” Yatsuhashi looked up from the freshly crackling flames.

“Velvet.”

“Ah.” His gaze turned over to the bundle beneath his sleeping bag. “You noticed that too.”

“She’s been a lot more edgy, since we found out Ruby’s gone after the White Fang.” Coco sighed. “Do you think she might have a history there?”

“No. At least, not a direct one.” Yatsuhashi set one last chunk of scrap wood on the fire, then set a pan full of snow directly beside it. “You don’t have to for it to be a sore subject. Not when you’re a Faunus.”

He turned and settled with his back to the fire, letting it warm him as Coco gave him a look that urged him to continue. He composed his thoughts for a moment, then let out a sigh. “Mistral and Atlas have always had closer relations than either does with Vale. So it’s no surprise that the Schnee Dust Company has a larger presence in Mistral than in Vale.”

“It’s still pretty large,” Coco commented.

“True,” Yatsuhashi acknowledged. “Which is why you should be able to relate to what I have to say. Tensions have always been a bit high between humans and Faunus in Mistral, maybe even moreso
there than here in Vale. Still, things were working out well enough, I suppose.” He closed his eyes. “I never really noticed any really big tensions, at least. Maybe that’s just because I was only a kid at the time. Then the White Fang started painting the town crimson.”

“I was eleven when I heard about the first attacks against restaurants that wouldn’t serve Faunus,” Coco nodded.

“All four of us were. I remember the kids at school. They went from too young to care about if someone had ears or a tail, to suddenly having very adult fears of anyone who wasn’t clearly human. You didn’t know if the kid you’d teased yesterday would snap and beat you up today. No one wanted to play with Faunus kids anymore. No one wanted to sit next to them. No one wanted to even pass one in the hallway.”

“I remember. Things got pretty tense at my school. Many people started avoiding the Faunus there as much as they could.” Coco shook her head. “What was worse were the people who went the other direction. Faunus became a sort of acceptable target, especially if you wanted to look big and bad and scary enough to take on dangerous animals.”

“I never really had any problems.” Yatsuhashi awkwardly scratched his head. “I was always big, you know. There weren’t very many people who were willing to mess with me, Human or Faunus alike.”

Coco smiled and leaned over to punch a bicep. “Big lug.”

Yatsuhashi grinned, but then let his face sober up. “So life changed for you and I. We suddenly discovered the world wasn’t a sweet and friendly place, because bad people might hurt you to make a point. Now, imagine what it must have been like for a twelve year old to find out everyone thought she was one of the bad people.”

Coco grunted, a small puff of frost puffing past her lips. “I suppose I never thought of it that way.”

Yatsuhashi shrugged. “Most never do. They don’t really need to. But Velvet? She not only grew up with that, with being the Faunus no one ever wanted to play with, but now that she thinks she’s able to do something, to prove that Faunus are really good guys, the White Fang commits the worst terrorist act in history, and targets her very own school.” He sighed. “I’d be a bit shaken up too.”

Coco looked thoughtful a moment, then turned brown eyes back to him. “Did she tell you all this?”

Yatsuhashi shook his head, and turned as he heard the sound of water beginning to boil. “No. But it makes sense. Been thinking about it since yesterday.” He turned as he heard the sounds of Fox beginning to stir. “Do me a favor, dig out the coffee. I think they’ll be wanting it shortly.”

Coco turned and began rummaging in her pack.

“While I’m at it, how about we start breakfast.” Coco smiled and handed him the coffee bag. “You looked like you wanted to scramble Velve’s eggs, after all.”

“Coco…”

“What? You had your beater primed and ready!”

“COCO…”

Mountain Glenn Underground
“The problem isn’t getting in. It’s getting back out.”

Yatsuhashi nodded in agreement to Coco’s pronouncement as he stared down into the hole the pair had discovered the previous night. The top of the rubble pile below had to be forty feet down, if not fifty. While they all had dropped far greater distances, (a certain moment involving “landing strategies” came to mind), jumping back up them was a tad trickier. Gravity only worked in one direction, after all.

He contemplated a moment, then shrugged. “I suppose that, if we needed to get back up, I could toss the rabbit.”

Behind him, Fox gave an uncharacteristic snicker while he caught Coco smirking out of the corner of his eye.

“What?”

Velvet seemed oblivious to whatever had the other two amused. She nodded as she, too, stared down the hole. “I think that would work. I’m light enough. He could use the flat of his blade like a bat.”

“Exactly. A fastball special, Team CFVY style,” Yatsuhashi said, grateful at the easy agreement. The gratitude was short lived, however, as Velvet followed up.

“By the way, I’m not a rabbit. I’m a hare, Yatsu. Look at these ears! Do they look floppy and cutey to you?” She gestured to her second most noticeable features.

“She has you there,” Coco chuckled, but then she sobered up. “Still and all, it’s a good idea, Yatsu. Let’s go.”

With a nod, Yatsuhashi took a casual step forward and dropped down through the hole, landing on the snow covered pile of rubble below. The others landed behind him, each quickly turning to face outward so that all potential approaches were covered. They paused a moment, checking for any unwelcome eyes, then straightened when nothing presented itself.

“Looks like a railway tunnel,” Coco commented. She gestured to where two lines of steel tracks disappeared off into the darkness.

“It’s the same here,” Velvet replied, gesturing the same way. “Do you think this was the tunnel that was used… then?”

Yatsuhashi turned to watch Velvet out of the corner of his eye, observing her somewhat guarded stance. His conversation with Coco was still fresh in his mind.

“You mean the one Team RWBY fought in? Involving the train?” Fox sounded thoughtful. He looked down at his feet to contemplate the pile beneath him. “It could be. This rubble looks pretty fresh.”

Yatsuhashi looked down at the snow covered stone he stood on. The edges were still jagged, without the rounding and blunting that tended to come with erosion. He then glanced over at the wall beside him. He pointed at blackened pockmarks in the vertical surface. “Those look like blast marks.”

“And those are definitely chunks of train. Not spare parts, just… shrapnel.” Coco gestured towards twisted axles and wheels.

“This has to be it,” Fox confirmed.
“Alright.” Coco looked down the tunnel and removed her sunglasses, tucking them in a pocket. “Let’s head away from Vale. The train would have come from whatever base they had down here. Vale and Atlas likely stripped anything that could be used for fighting, but maybe we can get a sense of where the White Fang went after starting the train.”

“Hold up.” Fox stepped in front of the group, holding up a hand. He climbed down to the edge of the rubble pile, to where only a skiff of snow had managed to settle before being stopped completely by the remaining roof. “Footprint.”

The rest of the group came down to look. Together they examined the icy imprint. A light dusting of snow had settled into the hollow where a foot had come down in slush, pushing a half frozen slurry aside before it froze solid once more.

“Yesterday, I think,” Fox said. “If it was fresh we wouldn’t have any snow in it. If it was more than a day old it would have melted. It was pretty warm two days ago.”

“It looks like a woman’s foot size,” Coco commented. She stepped next to it, letting her boot provide a comparison. “It’s much smaller than mine.”

“You’re bigger than most men,” Yatsuhashi snorted.

Coco looked at him with wicked, brown eyes. “All the better to snuggle you with, my dear. Right Velvet?”

Yatsuhashi felt himself blush as Velvet made a small choking sound. Coco, he had found, could be a bit overwhelming when she found something funny. She had teased Velvet no less mercilessly than she had him when first the Faunus had woken.

*Perhaps an effort to snap Velvet out of her funk? I hope that’s all there is to it.*

“Still, you have a point, Yatsu. Velvet?”

Velvet set her foot on the other side of the print as Coco withdrew. Yatsuhashi nodded as he noted that Velvet’s boot left an imprint much larger. “A small woman.”

“Ruby, maybe?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged. “You’d know better than me, Velve.”

“I don’t see any other tracks,” Fox called. He’d circled the snow patch covering the rubble pile.

“They probably got buried in last night’s snow,” Coco mused. “At least we know someone’s been down here recently, and they were headed in the right direction. Let’s go.”
Winter Hunt - Chapter 4: Fox

Mountain Glenn Underground

The various teams formed in the academies throughout Remnant each had their own unique character. Some acted like a police department, able to combine various skills and talents to dig through evidence to solve a mystery. Others tended to work better as emergency responders, triaging a situation and working to save both life and limb through a combination of defensive moves and medical skills. Some even tended to behave almost like some sort of secret organization, sneaking in and out of areas to collect data and wreak havoc without ever being detected.

CFVY was basically an army on a microcosmic scale. Yatsuhashi was practically an armed fortification, a mass of muscle and steel able to dig in and hold against all comers, and with a murderous punch for anything that got too close. Coco was the source of heavy fire power. With Yatsuhashi acting as her armor, Coco could devastate whole swaths of Grimm or malicious humanity, swinging her massive rotary cannon like a long ranged scythe. Velvet was the special forces, best held in reserve until a particularly difficult nut came along needing cracking, then able to adapt and respond with the flexibility Coco and Yatsuhashi lacked.

As for Fox, well… Every good army needed its scouts. Without eyes, an army could only blunder along into every trap and ambush the enemy set up. And Fox, well, he suspected his eyes were very nearly the equal to Velvet’s, and he wasn’t even a Faunus. Just… well trained.

As they travelled along the railway tunnel, Fox roved ahead of the rest. He remained within easy shouting distance, but still used his speed and light, energetic form to poke into every corner and analyze every detail at an untiring pace that the others could only match by moving straight forward. Every skylight that had been opened with explosives got checked to see which way they were moving, every rubble pile was examined for clues, every misplaced weapon or bit of debris from the mobile fight that had occurred a few months back was checked for usefulness or indications of origin.

Fox stopped and let the others catch up. While at it, he spent the time looking over the wreckage of a Paladin in the tunnel. It had been trashed pretty thoroughly, just like the previous two he’d seen. The other two had been heavily parted out and now remained little more than metal skeletons. Apparently the damage to this one was bad enough for Atlas to not bother recovering it.

His finger traced a stain leaking out of the hatch to the pilot’s compartment. Rust colored. His eyes narrowed as he noted nothing of the beast was made of iron. He shifted a bit to glance inside the barely cracked hatch, then winced at the odor that wafted out.

“Is something up, Fox?”

He turned his eyes toward Coco, using a hand to shield his eyes from the flashlight she was using to illuminate the tunnel. While Ruby’s report had pointed out that the White Fang had turned all the lights on, the intervening months and destruction wrought by the train had left everything in a darkness that required hand held illumination to make passage possible. In the dark such details would easily be overlooked.

Like the various stains he’d noticed in the tunnel here and there, with no rusty beams available to have caused them.

The contents of the wreck, however…
He shifted his weight, placing himself between the light and the cracked hatch.

“It’s getting a bit late. I’m guessing we’ve gone nearly 20 miles.”

Coco quickly checked her own scroll, it’s screen lighting up her face to reveal that, in the darkness, she’d taken off her sunglasses. She sighed as she put the scroll away. “Yeah. Velvet, did Ruby ever tell you how far the train travelled?”

“Not really. But I got the impression that it took them about half an hour to reach Vale.”

“They were probably doing around 60 for most of that.” Coco frowned. “We could still be miles from their base.” She sighed. “So, have you seen anything important?”

Fox shrugged. “A few more tracks like the ones we saw earlier. Whoever it was is small, probably female, and not trying to hide from anyone who might be following her.”

“Ruby,” Velvet whispered, an expression of hope on her face.

“Or the White Fang.” Fox frowned. “They’re the ones doing the following, so they wouldn’t be concerned that their tracks would lead to their being discovered.”

Velvet’s face fell a bit, worry once again the foremost expression. Fox mentally kicked himself. “For what it’s worth, I don’t think whoever it is is moving any faster than we are. If it is Ruby, we’re keeping up.”

Velvet nodded gratefully, relieving Fox of a small amount of guilt and worry.

“Alright, Fox. Find us someplace to bed down for the night.”

Fox nodded acknowledgement of Coco’s instruction and stepped away from the grisly metallic coffin he’d been protecting the others from.

The door he found a short time later had probably been closed since Mountain Glenn had fallen. Dust and debris had gathered at its base, and its paint had mostly gone, replaced by flaking rust. A sign had once announced the room’s purpose, but now it was simply a black and red mass, illegible, keeping its secrets.

“Ready?”

Fox nodded in reply to Yatsuhashi’s question. He was poised alongside the door, weapons at the ready. There was no knowing what was beyond the threshold, and Yatsuhashi would be vulnerable until he could get both hands on his sword if something rushed out. Noticing Fox’ nod, the big man gripped the door’s handle and, muscles bunching, heaved backwards.

With a loud protest, the door gave way. It rolled outward, swinging on corroded hinges until one snapped, leaving the door halfway open. The corner immediately dropped to the concrete beneath, filling the tunnel with a scraping, rasping sound, the echoes bringing images of the dead come back to haunt the living.

Velvet winced and pulled her ears down against her head. Fox sympathized. The squeal of the rusted door being busted loose from a few decades of warping had been unpleasant for him, and his ears were nowhere near as sensitive as the extra set Velvet sported.

Coco gave a small snort. “Well, if it is the White Fang we’re following, let’s hope they’re a full day way. They might not have heard that.”
Yatsuhashi scratched the back of his head with an embarrassed smile. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Coco gave the big man a friendly pat on the rump, oblivious to the brief flash of something that crossed his face. Fox caught himself staring at Yatsuhashi’s reaction and forced himself to look away casually. Oblivious, Coco continued speaking. “It’s not your fault no one maintained the place, big guy. I’ll put in a word with the manager.” She turned to the side. “Velvet?”

The Faunus girl stepped forward, sniffing at the air coming through the doorway. “I wouldn’t call it fresh, but it’s not foul either.” She nodded. “It’ll do.”

Coco nodded. “Fox?”

At her order, Fox darted through the opening, weapons at the ready. Nothing had come dashing out when the door had opened, but that didn’t mean nothing was waiting in ambush inside. Not all Grimm threw themselves forward into combat mindlessly. And unlike Humans and Faunus, Grimm could go a very, very long time between meals. Not everything down here was dead.

Nothing moved within. Electrical boxes and pipes festooned one wall, the levers and knobs welded in place by decades of dirt and neglect. A dripping sound emerged from one corner, where an encrustation lined puddle rippled with each drop from a crack in the ceiling. No Grimm waited to launch an ambush, no White Fang launched an attack. There was, simply, nothing. The place was quiet as a tomb.

Fox winced at his mental turn of phrase when his lights swept the far edge of the room. “Don’t come in here,” he called softly, backing out.


“Don’t…”

The group fell silent as the girls joined Yatsuhashi in pushing past, the circle of their flashlight beams illuminating the perfectly formed skeletons lying on the floor.

“God…”

He had no idea which of them whispered the small oath the darkness swallowed.

It had taken an additional hour for them to find the next suitable, easily defended spot to stop for the night. The entire time the group had moved in a subdued silence. When they’d found another small control room of some sort, this one with the door still open, Coco and Velvet had moved in to begin setting up while Fox and Yatsuhashi had remained outside, keeping watch, all in utter silence.

Fox slid down the wall next to where Yatsuhashi was already seated. He put his hand on the big man’s armored shoulder. “How are you doing, Mountain?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged. “I’m puzzled by the bones. They can’t be White Fang, could they?”

Sighing, Fox nodded. “They weren’t White Fang.” He looked down between his feet, his hand dropping to rest on his knee. “They were... Well. This is not something we like to talk about much in Vale. We all know that Mountain Glenn failed. It’s hard to erase that from our minds. But we try not to think about the fact that for Vale it was far more than just a failure.”

Yatsuhashi turned to look at Fox with a subdued but curious expression. Fox gave a shrug of his own in reply.
“Everyone knows that when the defenses of Mountain Glenn failed, the people retreated underground and sealed off all the entrances to the city above. They were able to survive, and even thrive after a fashion, for several years.”

“We’ve heard the story in Mistral.”

“What you probably haven’t heard is what happened the day they tunneled into a pocket of Grimm.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “The Grimm overran the underground city, slaughtering everyone.”

“Not exactly.” Fox felt his face slip into a hardened mask. “The tunnel we’re in right now was far from the only tunnel leading back to Vale. There were a couple of dozen of them. Each was a gap in Vale’s own defenses. A darkened, cramped, noisy hole that could bring the Grimm straight into the heart of Vale. So when the reports came in that Grimm were attacking the caverns, the Council made a decision.

“Sending in what small army we had at the time, and our hunters and huntresses, was deemed foolish. In the chaos of everyone trying to flee, with parts of Mountain Glenn darkened by power outages caused by the Grimm, there would be no coordination. Cooperation would be impossible. Grimm could come from any direction, people were clawing over one another to get out, you couldn’t tell who was trying to help, and who just running blind. Worse, the defender’s senses would play tricks on them with the echoes, the lack of any visible landmarks. It’d be a slaughter.”

Fox felt his head hang down between his knees, felt the bitter, sourness of shame in his stomach. “So the Council didn’t try. They simply ordered all the tunnels be sealed. Immediately.”

Yatsuhashi’s eyes closed on the reflected light of their flashlights. “So the people of Mountain Glenn…”

“We abandoned them to their fate. Many of them were slaughtered outright by the Grimm. But some found places they could barricade themselves in, spots the Grimm couldn’t get inside. They waited there, in the dark, for a rescue that never came, as their food and water ran out. And they had scrolls connecting them to Vale the whole time. The network was ablaze with pleas for help that slowly dwindled over a period of weeks, until eventually there was only silence.”

The two sat, neither saying a word, as the darkness around them became more oppressive. Eventually Yatsuhashi’s hand found Fox’s shoulder.

“It wasn’t your fault,” the big man said. “You weren’t even born yet.”

“No. But it was Vale’s. We like to think of ourselves as the heroes of the world, more caring than Atlas, more civilized than Mistral… We’re the hope for the future. But when our greatest test came, we failed.” He sighed. “No, worse than that. We didn’t even try.”

Yatsuhashi grunted, then stood up. “Come on, let’s go inside. The girls probably have everything set up now. We can barricade the door. I think we all need some rest.” He offered his hand.

Fox nodded and accepted Yatsuhashi’s offered help standing.

Despite the warmth of their bodies, huddled together under blankets and encased in sleeping bags, the night was a cold one as each was alone with their thoughts.
Mountain Glenn Underground

“Good morning.” Yatsuhashi turned to see Velvet sitting up in her sleeping bag, from where she had been sandwiched between Coco and Fox. He gave her a smile as she got a sheepish look on her face. “It is morning, right?”

Yatsuhashi took a quick look at his scroll, and nodded. “It is. Kind of hard to tell down in these caves, though.”

Velvet gave a quick stretch that Yatsuhashi tried not to blatantly watch. They’d been teammates for a year and a half before beginning their pursuit of Ruby. It had been plenty of time to both notice and get used to Velvet’s appearance. Despite this, something had somehow reawakened his awareness that not only were two of his teammates girls, but that they were, in fact, Girls.

*Down, Yatsu,* he told himself. *One does not disrespect one’s teammates by ogling them.*

He wrenched his head away from admiring certain curves and poured water and coffee grounds into a pot, stirring them. “I’ll have some coffee ready in just a moment. It’ll be cold, I’m afraid, but with no guarantee a fire wouldn’t choke us all to death in here…” He shrugged.

“Cold will be fine. Thank you, Yatsu. At least the water’s not frozen.” Velvet slid out of her sleeping bag and slipped on her jacket and boots before padding over to settle down next to him. She gave him a pat on his shoulder. “Thanks for always looking out for me.”

Yatsu grunted and gave Velvet a smile. “It’s no big deal.”

“I still appreciate it.”

*How could I not?* He thought. *Yes, you probably could kick my butt if you used your semblance and weapon. But you’re still the smallest of us. You look like a hard hug would break you…*

He didn’t say anything and ensured his face didn’t betray his thoughts. Instead he simply gave a little nod, and focused on stirring as the two sat in a companionable silence. After a few moments he poured out a cup of the results and took a sip.

Velvet gave a little laugh beside him. “That bad?”

His eyebrow arched a bit in surprise. He twisted to look down at where she sat beside him. “I
“Maybe from people who don’t know you as well as I do,” Velvet smiled up at his downturned gaze. “Your stoic expression went from ‘I am doing a task’ to ‘I suffer my burdens silently’.”

He shrugged a little, then turned his head towards the offending cup of… something. “It’s like drinking gritty swamp water.”

“Sounds ghastly.” She reached over to her pack and pulled out a cup. “Gimme.”

Yatsuhashi poured until the cup was half full, then watched as Velvet took a sip. The Faunus woman’s face could only be described as ‘curling in on itself’ as she pulled the cup back and held it as far away as her arm could reach.

“Oh, my, god,” she choked. “It’s awful. Coffee should not crunch between your teeth.” She stared at the cup, then held it out in front of him. “Gimme some more, Yatsu.”

Shrugging, he filled her cup.

Velvet took another sip, her face only slightly less expressive than the first time, then sighed. “Sorry about yesterday.”

“Hmm?”

“Hearing about… this.” She gave a gesture that encompassed not only the room they were in, but everything beyond.

He waved the comment away. “Not your fault. What happened came before you were even born. You had nothing to do with it.”

“I know, but even if it wasn’t our decision it was the decision of our nation. It’s our legacy to live with, and to try to somehow make up for.”

Yatsuhashi leaned back, staring into his own cup before steeling up his nerve and finishing the cold sludge inside of it. He did his best to try not tasting any of it as it went down, with very little success. Setting the cup on the ground, upside down so it would drain, he returned his attention to Velvet. “Is that why you decided to become a huntress?”

“It’s part of it.” Velvet took on a contemplative look, as though she was examining her own thoughts. “I guess I wanted to make sure something like this never happened again, and show the world that, well…” She stumbled to a stop, seeming to seek words that weren’t coming.

He reached over and patted her on the shoulder, shaking his head a little. She didn’t need to say a thing. He understood what she was attempting to get out, and that was good enough. Neither of them needed to talk about the stigmas they had been born into to understand one another’s motives.

Velvet gave a grateful smile, then leaned in to give one of his arms a sidelong hug. “Thanks, Yatsu. You’re the best.”

Carefully pushing one of her ears out of his face, Yatsu chuckled. “Yup. I am.”

“Cad.” Velvet laughed and sat back up straight, giving his shoulder a playful swat.

Former White Fang Hidden Base

“This was definitely where they started from,” Fox stated.
Yatsuhashi grunted. Fox hadn’t needed to inform the team that they had found the station that the White Fang had launched their initial attack from. While anything important had been taken by either the White Fang or by investigators from Vale and Atlas, there was plenty of rubbish left behind to show that the station had been quite busy recently. Empty crates were still stacked in corners bearing various brand labels from Atlas companies, garbage heaps of half eaten food, discarded clothing, and other bits of refuse lay where it had been dropped. The roof overhead remained intact, revealing that the years of dust had been scraped and shoved about by shoes, boots, and wheels, rather than any natural activity.

“It looks like it was a pretty sizable operation,” Coco called. She was inspecting a stack of discarded electronics. “This is a lot of scrap for something that was fly by night. It’s not cheap stuff, either. Even broken this stuff has some resale value.”

“I’ll say,” Velvet agreed. She lifted what looked like the bones of a giant made of metal. “This looks like it’s a spare part for one of those machines we fought back at Beacon. A lot of people would kill to have one of these.”

“You’d think Atlas would have recovered it during the investigation,” Coco agreed, her voice sounding thoughtful.

Fox shrugged from where he was examining a stack of food crates, taking a few leftover cans out to stuff into his backpack. “I suppose that depends on how easy it was for them to get in and out of here. They couldn’t have used a train. Not with all that rubble piled up on the tracks. I bet they left a lot of things behind because it was just too hard to move them.”

“The White Fang got it all down here somehow.”

He contemplated Coco’s response for a moment. They had needed a place they’d be able to move objects as large as Paladins from above to below. It was possible that they had brought them in from even further down the tunnel, but if so, why stage here, rather than there? It made no sense to load things onto the train, then take them off, only to put them right back on.

He looked around for a moment, thinking about how he would have done it.

Ah.

Yatsu walked to a large opening, grabbed a railing and began climbing the flight of stairs leading up from it. About a story and a half up, they came to a landing and made a right turn. Glancing upward from there, Yatsu found himself surprised, and then realized he shouldn’t have been.

The stairs had been completely sealed off. This had probably originally been an entryway into the station from above ground. When the population had fled underground and sealed themselves safely away they had simply taken the expedient of blowing the entry, bringing tons of dirt and stone down to effectively cork the stairway completely. Fast, efficient, and clearly a sign of the desperation and haste of the situation.

He walked back down the stairway, then glanced at the wall directly to the left of the first steps. The doors to a freight elevator stood there, silent and unmoving since…

In the beam of his flashlight, he saw the glint of shiny metal. “Hey, Coco?”

He turned and watched as Coco’s silhouette sashayed over to where he stood, her flashlight illuminating the ground before her. “What do you have, big guy?”

“They would have sealed every means to get down here from the surface when they fled
“Underground, right?”

“Yep. They did it well enough to last for several years as a functioning society.”

Yatsuhashi gestured to the freight elevator doors. “The stairs were blocked by explosives. So if they had blocked an elevator shaft the same way they wouldn’t have welded the doors shut, right?”

Coco turned her flashlight up to shine on the seams between the two doors. The beam glinted off of shiny, fresh marks where a saw or blade of some sort had cut its way through the welds that once had held them shut.

“Nice catch, Yatsu.” She slapped his rump. He felt a strange flash of embarrassment at what should have been just another of Coco’s normal antics, but he thrust it aside, refusing to examine the odd emotion.

“Velvet, Fox!”

Their teammates quickly joined them in staring at the doors. Coco stepped forward, then nodded to Yatsuhashi. “Make sure your aura keeps you from cutting your fingers on the sharp edges.”

Stepping up next to her, Yatsu nodded. He wedged his fingers into the seam to begin pulling the left door aside. Coco took a mirrored stance, grunting as she pulled on the right side door.

With a groan the crack widened in spite of the doors trying to push themselves back shut. When the gap between them was about three feet wide, Yatsu slipped around and wedged his shoulders in place, keeping them open. “Go on.”

Coco nodded. “Fox.”

The dark skinned man quickly ducked and rolled through the gap between Yatsu’s feet, gaining entry to what lay beyond. After only a second, he stuck his head back out between Yatsu’s knees. “The car’s here. Come on in.”

With no further prompting, Coco slipped through the gap, her hip brushing against the insides of his thighs.

*Don’t think about it. It doesn’t mean anything. The gap is simply tight and she’s not a small person…*

Velvet followed quickly after Coco, her ears striking gently somewhat higher than Coco’s touch had landed.

*Oh, hell…*

Once Velvet’s feet had disappeared, Yatsu twisted, freeing himself to pop inside after them. He jumped free and the doors slid shut once again.

A crate was filling part of the space, only the lightest traces of dust collected on it. Its markings were that of the Atlas military.

Yatsuhashi dug his fingers under the lip and pulled, wrenching the top of the crate off with little effort.

“That’s a lot of guns,” Fox quipped, casually looking inside the box.

Coco nodded. “They must not have had time to move them when Team RWBY showed up, and no
one thought to come back for them.”

“I think I found something,” Velvet called, her ears visible behind the crate. The Faunus was on hands and knees in the back of the large elevator car.

Coco stepped over to her. “What is it?”

Velvet slipped to a knee, then stood, waving a paper. “It was taped to the back.”

The four gathered around the paper, shining lights on it. Columns and lines full of numbers stood out, black on white, without any signs of aging marring the sheet.

“What is it?”

Yatsu sighed and closed his eyes. “It’s a shipping manifest.”

He heard the edge in Coco’s voice when she spoke next. “You’re able to read it?”

“Yeah.” His shoulders slumped. “That’s my family letterhead at the top.”
Mountain Glenn

The sun was still relatively low in the sky when Coco followed Fox up and out of the shaft. The clouds that had been dumping snow the last few days were gone, replaced by a cold, cruel blue sky. Sunlight bounced off of the snow visible beyond the open doors Coco was staring out of, causing her to shield her eyes. She’d already put her sunglasses back on for the first time in two days, but the combination of that long being spent in the dark and sunlight reflecting from every direction off of the proliferation of ice crystals still left her eyes watering.

She shuddered to think of what it might be doing to Velvet.

“Coco.”

Moving out into the open air, Coco stepped next to Fox. He was kneeling down, studying the snow just outside the doorway leading into the elevator shaft. Velvet, blinking furiously against the light, and looking cuter than she should because of it, stepped up next to her, followed by Yatsuhashi.

“More tracks.”

Coco looked down to where he was pointing.

“Small again. Do you think it was the same person?”

“Most likely.”

Turning, she traced the tracks back to where they came from. “So she found a different way up. She crossed just in front of us headed….” Coco turned and followed the tracks with her eyes. “There.”

The group all began walking, following the tracks around the perimeter of what was a fairly large open area. Buildings surrounded it on all sides, with a few stumped off statues scattered here and there. Streets had lead off of the space at regular intervals between the buildings, but these spaces had been blocked off with tall, metal wall pieces that looked to be a very recent addition.

“You could probably land a dozen Bullheads out here,” Velvet mused from where she was walking behind Coco.

“That may be why the White Fang chose this particular station,” Yatsuhashi agreed. “Once they had the power working they could use the freight elevator to move things from Bullheads to the train, while being far enough from Vale to never be noticed. Metal plates to form a temporary perimeter
would keep the smaller grimm at bay, and anything larger could be avoided by re-sealing the elevator.”

Coco nodded. Many people took one look at Yatsuhashi and assumed he was just big, dumb muscle. Well, he certainly was well muscled. And big. For a brief moment she found herself wondering if all of him was so blessed.

Fer f**k’s sake, Coco. A leader does not mentally undress the people she is responsible for.

She forced her thoughts back onto the rails. “Then team RWBY came along and forced them to pull the trigger prematurely,” she pointed out. “I hate to think what might have happened if they had been fully prepared.” She felt herself shudder at the thought of the tunnel rupturing while everyone was already fighting for Beacon, rather than a moment when everyone was available to head to the breach.

As they drew near to a particularly tall but well preserved building, a bang from inside brought them all to a sliding halt. Coco felt her hand automatically go to her hand bag as she crouched into a fighting stance.

“Fox,” she whispered softly. “How fresh are these tracks?”

“I’m betting they’re fresher than I thought.” The redhead had the grace to look abashed. “I had assumed the storm had blown out yesterday. Maybe it didn’t quit until this morning.”

“Bloody weather,” Coco muttered.

“So,” Yatsuhashi whispered. “Are we betting that we’ve caught up to Ruby, or are we thinking the girl from Forever Fall is up ahead?”

“It’s definitely not Ruby,” Velvet replied, not bothering to whisper.

Coco directed her eyes toward the upper window that Velvet was glaring at. Framed inside of it, contemplating them with a private little smile on her face, was one of the smallest people Coco had ever seen. Shoulder length hair flowed down either side of her head, pink to one side, brown to the other. A white and pink bolero jacket, buttoned in the front, shielded her from the cold, and stuck out far enough forward for Coco to revise her initial assessment from “girl” to “very short woman”. A parasol was casually cocked on one shoulder, the girl’s free hand resting on the window sill.

“Huntress?” Yatsuhashi asked.

“No,” Velvet replied, her voice certain. “That’s the girl that knocked out Yang on the train.”

“So, White Fang,” Fox muttered. “Goody.”

The small woman leapt out of the window, doing a flip then landing casually on the snow covered ground below. She rose from where she had dropped to one knee, dusted the snow from it, then gave an exaggerated bow.

“Right,” Coco said. “Get her.”

Fox and Velvet both dart away at oblique angles, working to flank their diminutive opponent. Yatsuhashi stepped in front of Coco, drawing his sword and resting it on his shoulder in an almost mocking mirror of the girl’s own pose. “You I won’t mind hurting.”

Coco gave a little flick of the wrist and felt her cannon unpack itself from its compact form. Less than
a second later, she squeezed down on the trigger, and the barrels began to spin, spitting out dust laced punctuation to Yatsuhashi’s boast.

Their opponent had not bothered to move as the team had begun deploying. The girl had simply watched, still giving a small smirk, until the bullets came flying at her. She gave a simple little twist at the waist, moving her head aside just as their fiery path slipped through the space it had just been, then did a series of cartwheels and flips that kept her just ahead of Coco’s swinging attack until she disappeared inside an open doorway.

“How,” she gasped, then spun the barrel towards the fight with a jerk. She began to press the trigger, but hesitated, even as Yatsuhashi’s hand dropped to her arm. They had both reached the same conclusion immediately. Any shots towards the oddly haired girl would also endanger Fox.

“As Coco!”

Yatsuhashi stepped in front of her, then began walking towards Fox and his opponent. There was no hurry in his steps, but instead a swagger that Coco might have appreciated watching under other circumstances. His sword tapped on his shoulder a few times as he approached the fight, then came off with a rush as he came within reach.

The girl bent backwards, bending away from where she had just casually parried a blow from Fox. As her hand touched the ground behind her Yatsuhashi’s blade swept just above her arched chest, close enough Coco could see the collar of the bolero ruffle in the breeze. Her feet came up, leaving her inverted and balanced on one arm, and she spun, striking Yatsuhashi in the chin once with each foot.

The giant staggered back a step, shaking his head as though trying to dislodge an annoying fly. Before he could fully recover, however, a parry with the parasol threw one of Fox’s blows off balance. The rosewood hued man attempted to regain his balance, only to slip on the snowy surface and plow into Yatsuhashi’s legs, bringing both of them down in a heap.

As Coco heard the girl giggle, she triggered her gun. The bullets arced right above the pile that was her two tangled teammates, aimed dead on for their assailant.

With a wink, her target jumped backward and vanished.

“DAMMIT!” Coco shouted for the third time. “Where’d she go?”

The boys untangled themselves and immediately popped back into fighting poses, back to back. Beyond them Velvet popped up from behind a snowdrift with a shrug. Carefully, Coco began to rotate, looking over the entire open area for any sign of the girl.

“COCO!”
She whipped herself around at Yatsuhashi’s shout. The parasol thrust past her head, barely missing her ear, and she slewed her cannon’s barrels around as hard as she could. A blur of pink and white jumped over them as they swung past, then landed in front of Coco.

A blow from a spats covered shoe slammed into Coco’s hip, sending throbbing pain through it in spite of her aura’s absorbing most of its power. Coco let it stagger her aside as she triggered the gun’s transformation back into a handbag. She forced the stagger into a graceful retreat, avoiding a further pair of kicks, then hauled the bag around to block a third.

The girl brought her parasol back into play, thrusting it at Coco’s head again like some demented, lace encrusted sword, forcing Coco to dart to the side. With a sweep the parasol swung downward and opened, and she had to leap upward to keep her legs from being hooked and swept out from under her. She twisted in the air, letting her handbag add speed and momentum, then made a three point landing, the bag held behind her as she glowered at the diminutive pest over the top of her sunglasses.

“Nice outfit,” Coco growled. “I love the corset. Underbust?”

The girl straightened up into a casual stance and gave an expressive shrug, smiling.

“A pity I’m going to have to ruin it,” Coco said, then turned her crouch into a lunge. Her target danced aside, then swung her parasol into the fray. Coco blocked it with the handbag and turned the dance into a general brawl.

Or at least she tried to. Her opponent refused to meet her blow for blow, but insisted on dodging and twisting, only allowing enough contact with her parasol or legs to turn attacks aside rather than taking them on force for force. Coco could feel a trickle inside her bra, and cursed the fact the weather had caused her to trade in her turtleneck blouse for a heavy sweater and coat.

She felt a growing frustration inside. She was fighting for all her worth, and couldn’t land a blow. She was used to delivering heavy hits, usually from a distance, and here she was dancing cheek to cheek with a light, nimble foe. She couldn’t hit the girl, the kicks she was having to block were sapping her aura away in dribbles, and to top it all off she was starting to suffer from boob sweat in sub-freezing temperatures!

I’m really starting to hate this bitch.

She allowed a frustrated growl to escape her as she swung her handbag at the girl’s head yet again, and was once again thwarted by a small motion with the parasol. Angrily, she made a grab for the offending device. “I’m gonna take that umbrella and shove it right up your fancy little a-

A kick cut the obscenity short, glancing off her left breast and robbing her of the breath behind it. She staggered backwards, her left hand coming up on its own to rub at her chest.

OW! That really stings! What the hell kind of legs has she got?

“COCO!”

She slammed herself to the ground, further insulting her already bruised breast, in instant response to Yatsuhashi’s shout. Her vision starred up briefly from the combination of the blow and oxygen deprivation, but she could still see the bright flash that came from behind her reflected by the snow.

As the short girl standing over her instinctively blocked her eyes from Velvet’s camera flash, Yatsuhashi’s blade caught her in the small of the back. Having not expected it, she flew off her feet in a multicolored blur.
Coco rolled to her side and gulped down air as the girl slammed against a metal wall section several dozen yards away, then slid down the wall into a snowdrift at its feet. A groan emerged from the pile of limbs sticking out of the snow, and the girl began picking herself up slowly, no longer smiling.

“Nice work,” Coco rasped. She swung her hand toward Yatsuhashi’s rump, but found it too far from reach to give him a proper ‘good game’ pat. Giving that up, she turned her head and flashed Velvet a smile as the Faunus lowered her camera with a grin.

Coco picked herself up and turned to face the candy haired woman who was testing her back with a grimace. Coco glowered at her for a moment, plucked a bit of sweater away from her cleavage, then turned to Fox.

“Get her, boyo.”

Fox grinned. “With pleasure.”

Their attacker gave Coco a glower of her own, then straightened up with a grin. Her hand snaked out and slapped a large button on the temporary wall section behind her. The wall gave a loud, metallic groan, then began falling outward as it was released from its mounts in the buildings to either side.

The girl gave another mocking bow, then leaped into the air over the head of the first Beowulf charging in through the newly opened gap. She disappeared completely as it was joined by dozens like it, and even larger shadows began rushing up beyond them.

Coco’s felt her shoulders slump. “Well... shit.”
“Well, shit.”

Velvet fought down a smirk as she watched Coco begin mowing down Grimm attempting to force the breach in the wall. She knew everyone thought of her as being a bit of a passive innocent, but in truth she found Coco’s occasional vulgarities and bits of innuendo to be surprisingly endearing. And she knew that, while a nimble foe like the one that just escaped was difficult for Coco to handle, masses of the stupider Grimm stood no chance against the firepower the fashionista wielded. Coco’s little obscenity was entirely unnecessary, and completely adorable.

“Fox!” Coco shouted. “Is the shaft still open?”

As Fox began to run toward the opening they had entered through, a few of the Grimm managed to slip past Coco’s hail of bullets. They headed straight for Fox the moment they were free of the threat Coco represented, moving at a pace that would reach the dark skinned huntsman before he reached the open doors to the elevator.

*Nope! No one outsprints a hare!*

Velvet pushed off with leg muscles far more powerful than appearances would suggest. She sprinted part way across the open space, not letting the deep snow slow her one bit. With a leap she shot past the running Grimm, twisting in the air and landing firmly in their path.

The Beowulf didn’t even slow, but simply changed their focus to the new obstacle before them. Velvet felt a small smile form on her lips, and waited for just a moment so that the timing would be just right, then exploded into action. A spinning round kick sent one Beowulf flying, already starting to dissolve into dust and smoke from a broken neck, while another was smashed into the ground by the camera case she held in her off hand.

Several of the following Grimm slid to a halt on the ice and snow, giving one another looks that implied more intelligence than one would usually expect from Beowolves. Velvet couldn’t help but giggle before she began moving towards them.

“It’s clear!” Fox shouted from behind her.

“Velvet, go!”

Velvet gave a nod to Coco’s back, then turned away from her prey, bolting for the shaft. She heard the multiple Beowulf behind her dig their claws into the ice and begin running to catch up, but before she could even turn to look, one of them flew past her, perfectly bifurcated and fading into wisps on the wind.

Yatsuhashi growled. “I won’t let you touch her.”

A warmth flooded her stomach and raced up to her cheeks. Yatsuhashi had always watched out for her, ever since that day back in Forever Fall where CFVY had been formed. Still, something sounded vaguely different in his voice this time, striking her in an almost primeval fashion, and something inside of her fluttered in response.

*No time for that,* she chastised herself. *Figure it out later. For now…*
A powerful spring shot her through the doorway of the shaft, and she dropped the fifty or so feet down to the top of the elevator car. The moment she landed she threw herself down through the open hatchway in the roof leading inside and rolled to one of the walls.

Fox was already inside, pressed to the opposite wall. A loud bang announced Yatsuhashi’s descent, quickly followed by his own drop into the interior. Almost instantaneously afterwards Coco entered, skipping the roof entirely to land in Yatsuhashi’s arms like a newly married bride.

Velvet felt a brief flash of envy, but shoved it aside with a brief moment of worry. They were in the middle of a dashing escape, and her emotions were off on completely inexplicable tangents?

*Keep it together, Velvet...*

Coco sprang from Yatsuhashi’s arms and immediately grabbed one of the doors back into the train station. Just as quick, Yatsuhashi had wedged his fingers in the gap to pull at the other, and the doors yielded once more.

There was no hesitation in her at all. Before it really had the room for her, Velvet shot through the opening, with Fox close enough on her heels to be at risk of a kick to the jaw.

“Yatsu! Go! Lift it!”

Velvet turned to see Coco wedging herself high up between the doors, feet on one, hands on the other, as Yatsuhashi ducked low to slip out beneath her. Still ducked down, the giant of a man twisted and thrust his hands into the gap between floor and elevator, then began heaving upwards. The elevator car began to rise slowly, as muscles bulged in the necks of both of Velvet’s brawny teammates.

“Velvet!”

A grin broke out once more on her face as Coco called on her unique talents. Velvet sometimes felt like she contributed the least to the team, given the way they protected her so much of the time. But then came moments like this, reminding her that she was not just valued and appreciated for her own contributions, but sometimes was the only one who could do what the team needed.

She snatched up the Paladin servo arm she’d spotted earlier and spun. She didn’t need a hard light copy of Magnhild for this. She just needed to borrow Nora’s strength, something her semblance made child’s play. She’d simply apply what Nora brought to the table to her makeshift sledge hammer, and…

The metal arm rose above her head, and she brought it down in a powerful arc. Converting the smash into a swing she brought it up to strike just beside one of Yatsuhashi’s hands. With the sound of a bomb detonating, the elevator car suddenly smashed upwards, barely missing Coco as she and Yatsuhashi both sprang away to let the doors slam closed once again.

A roaring sound echoed through the station as the elevator car smashed into the top of the shaft with enough power to destroy the structure above, causing it to collapse and fill the shaft. A rumbling sound echoed throughout the station, announcing the thoroughness of the destruction.

“So I take it we won’t be exiting that way, then,” Fox muttered.

A stinging slap landed on Velvet’s butt, the tips of long, slender fingers cupping enough to touch the fold where leg met rounded upper works.

“Very nice work, Velve!”
“Meep!”

Velvet shot up onto the tips of her toes in surprise. It was hardly the first time Coco had ever given her such ‘encouragement’. The woman definitely put the “hands on” into “hands on leadership”. It had never felt quite so… intimate before, however, and Velvet felt herself turning beet red at both the touch and her reflexively squeaked response.

_Dear god, Velvet! What has gotten into you?_

“Well, team. We need to find another way out of here. Fox?”

Velvet turned to look towards the teammate Coco had just spoken to, only to catch him giving her a knowing look before he moved to begin searching the area. She quickly ducked her head and turned aside, trying to hide both blush and confusion from him, and knowing she’d failed.

**Mountain Glenn Outskirts**

The team surveyed the land around them with caution. The train tracks had continued underground, heading to the Southeast. Another station had been located only a few miles further along. None of the entrances had been unsealed in this smaller substation, but a roof collapse some time in the past had allowed them a means to escape the underground tunnels. Now they stood in the upper reaches of a multistory ruin, looking out towards what appeared to have once been farmland.

“So, now what?” Yatsuhashi mused. “We now know for certain that those tracks weren’t Ruby’s.”

“True,” Coco agreed. “But we do know something else as well.”

Velvet nodded, recalling the conversation back in Forever Fall. “We know she’s also looking for Ruby.”

“Right.” Coco nodded. “I bet that she’s thinking the same way we are. She knows that Ruby is off to thwart the White Fang yet again, and that Ruby is headed for Mistral. Just like us, she guessed that Ruby might return to their temporary base. So she sends a White Fang minion to check the train station in Forever Fall, comes here herself...”

Fox cocked his head thoughtfully. “You think that she was looking for signs of Ruby when we caught up to her?”

Velvet thought about that, then nodded. “It’s the most likely reason that she was lingering. She had at least half a day’s lead on us when she arrived, possibly even more since she knew where she was going and we didn’t. So unless she specifically was laying in wait for us...”

“I don’t see how she could have been,” Coco pointed out. “We didn’t start looking for Ruby until after she did, so she would have already been in the tunnels before us. Who could have told her?”

“Scroll message?” Fox asked.

“Has your scroll been able to connect to anything since we left Vale?”

“Naw,” Fox shrugged. “It’s just a glorified clock at this point. I went ahead and just stuffed it in my pack yesterday.”

“I imagine they’re going to be pretty darn unreliable outside of the kingdoms, with the CCT towers down.”
“Good point,” Yatsuhashi nodded. “But knowing she couldn’t have heard we were coming doesn’t change the fact we weren’t following Ruby. We’re still left with the question of what to do next.”

Velvet tapped a pouch on Yatsuhashi’s belt. “You still have that paper we found, right?”

The big man grimaced, and Velvet felt a slight twinge of guilt for reminding him about it. He opened the pouch and pulled it out. “My family is in the import/export business. They never deal in anything patently illegal, but…”

“But?” Coco prodded.

He sighed, and Velvet resisted the urge to spontaneously hug him. The idea was harder to fight off than it should have been.

“But, just because something isn’t actually illegal doesn’t necessarily mean it’s really legal, either.” Yatsuhashi scratched the back of his neck. “Shipping things like stolen Atlas equipment or SDC dust products wouldn’t happen between, say, Haven and Vale. But the small coastal settlements on the strait between Sanus and Anima have never exactly worried about minor details such as a bill of sale. As long as there’s a legitimate manifest the family shipped anything that wouldn’t actually get them in trouble at either end. Since a shipment like this would never touch either kingdom while they were in possession, no one ever needed to find out it was stolen goods.”

“So it’s a legal grey area,” Fox commented.

“What Mistral and Vale don’t know can’t hurt the family,” Yatsuhashi agreed, his expression sour.

Velvet reached over and patted his arm sympathetically. “You don’t think much of that, do you?”

“Dad distanced himself from all that. Or at least, he kept as far from that as he could. Even questionable organizations have legitimate interests to help cover their other activities. Dad handles that part of things.”

Coco broke in, a quick smile the only apology she offered. “So, if you were an illegal group like the White Fang, shipping stolen weapons between the kingdoms through unaffiliated ports, how likely are you to use more than one bunch of… discreet shippers?”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “You’d keep the people in the know as small as possible. If a group had proven trustworthy, or at least showed that they tended to stay bought, and had the ability to handle the entire shipment, why increase the chances of being discovered by branching out to untested elements?”

Velvet reached over and tugged the paper out of Yatsuhashi’s hand. She opened it and scanned the page. While much of it was clearly industry terms she couldn’t quite parse, one thing stood out. “So, do you know anyone in Farmland?”

“Sort of,” Yatsuhashi shook his head. “But I don’t think he’s going to be happy to see us.”

“Alright then.” Velvet watched Coco smile and pat Yatsuhashi’s arm. “I guess it’s time to go to Farmland. We might even get the jump on our new friend this way.”

Yeah, Velvet thought. Why does that not reassure me?

The expression on Fox’ face led her to suspect he had similar thoughts.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 8: Fox

Chapter Notes

(Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays)

Welcome back, everyone! It’s Tuesday and that means it’s time for the next chapter. I hope everyone is enjoying things. As always, please comment and let me know how you think I’m doing and to ask any questions you might have. I love feedback, as it helps me to improve the story.

Speaking of which, I’ve lost a few beta readers recently for reasons external to the story. If you’re interested in getting an advanced look at where things are going in exchange for giving me good, solid feedback on what you think needs improvement and what you think works really well, drop me a line.

-Bookah

Riverside

The river they had camped beside kept Fox company as he settled in to keep watch. Two days travel had brought them near to the feet of the mountains dividing East from West, and marking the “official” boundary between Vale and the rest of Sanus. They had been following the river since they had left Mountain Glenn several days earlier, and the territory had only gotten more wild. It had gotten colder, as well. Fox, Coco, and Velvet had been amused by Yatsuhashi’s reaction to learning that it could actually become too cold to snow.

“You wouldn’t expect that,” Coco commented in response to the placid man’s uncharacteristic look of surprise. “But by the time the air gets this far inland, the moisture’s all frozen out and fallen already. There’s hardly anything left to snow with.”

“Just foolish frost, really,” Velvet agreed, then found herself having to explain how seemingly dry air could fill with ice crystals that made it seem someone had set off a glitter bomb on a clear day.

They had settled into a small hollow between two low ridges, cutting down on the wind that kept trying to bite through their clothing. The specific spot they’d chosen was well sheltered, with a small cliff on one side and a large snowdrift on the other, forming two walls with a snow-free patch between them. Velvet and Coco had both disappeared under a pile of blankets and sleeping bags immediately after eating, while Yatsuhashi had stepped out of the camp briefly to answer one of those needs that never got mentioned in the legends and tales told around the fire. Fox had settled down on a log, putting his back to the fire and letting its cheerful coals warm his shoulders as he idly stared out into the darkness.

Yatsuhashi emerged from the darkness, settling to the ground near the fire. He folded his legs into his usual meditative pose, eyes closed, as he sank into his usual pre-bed rituals. Fox made note of the man’s actions, then returned his attention to things that went bump in the night.

He snorted at the thought. He’d grown rather used to things in the night. Coco and Velvet may have grown up in Vale proper, but he’d been very much on the outskirts. The kingdom’s defenses were
good, but they weren’t perfect. Grimm never made it to the actual city, but a few could sneak through to the outskirts and farmlands. And it wasn’t just Grimm that haunted decent folk in those parts. Sometimes humans could be worse monsters than any red eyed shadow.

A grunt from Yatsuhashi distracted Fox from his thoughts. The big man looked displeased with his level of contemplation of all things centered. He shook his head, then shuffled over to sit down next to Fox. The man maintained his usual contemplative expression, then grunted. “My nose hairs keep freezing.”

Fox chuckled. “Get used to it. It’ll only get worse when we’re in the mountains proper.”

“Uh.”

“You never got out of Mistral much, did you?”

“It’s one of the ways we maintained our distance from the family. We never traveled, while they never stayed in one place.”

“And then you traveled to an entirely different continent to complete your education as a huntsman?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged. “It seemed like a good idea at the time.” Fox watched as the large man’s eyes slipped over to the tangled bundle under the blankets across the fire. “It still does, to be fair.”

“Glad to hear it.”

Yatsuhashi’s eyes quickly snapped back to Fox, and he grinned. Then, however, his eyes strayed back to the sleeping arrangements, and his voice lowered. “Say, Fox…”

Fox waited for more, only for the silence to stretch out awkwardly long. Yatsuhashi’s expression was a very mild version of someone struggling to get an idea from brain to tongue, something Fox found surprising. Yatsuhashi always seemed so balanced and self assured. He felt his eyebrow start to arch, and forced it back down, counseling himself to be patient. “Yes, Yatsu?”

The pasted on smile failed completely, and Yatsuhashi scratched his head in a sign of clear discomfort. “Uh… You haven’t noticed anything about the girls, have you?”

“… What?”

Yatsuhashi waved his hands uselessly for a moment, then began speaking in a low, urgent voice. “Well, I mean, they seem different somehow. I don’t know. It’s just that somehow little things are kind of becoming big things, ever since we started this trip, and, well, it’s all kind of adding up to something, I’m not sure what. So I… Just… I dunno…”

“Hold up.” Fox held up his hand. “Take a few deep breaths there, mountain man.”

Yatsuhashi blinked at him a couple of times, then leaned back a bit, taking in a deep breath. He almost immediately began coughing in response.

Fox shook his head. “Through your nose. In air this cold, a breath that big will go straight to the lungs unheated. They don’t like that much.”

“ Noticed,” Yatsuhashi rasped.

“To answer your question, yes.” Fox glanced over toward the sleeping girls hidden in their mound, and thought briefly about how to word things. “Velvet is clearly antsy about the thought of the White
Fang, probably because of something in her childhood, and Coco is maddeningly frustrated by the fact the last two times she’s fought one on one the opponent has been too fast for her to feel like she could be effective. Those kinds of things can eat at you to the degree it actually impacts your health physically, as well as mentally.”

“No. Well, yeah. I mean, you’re right but that’s not what…” Yatsuhashi sighed, and Fox settled back, waiting to find out what was really bothering the man. Yatsuhashi pinched the bridge of his nose, then sighed. “What I mean is, do they seem more… girly to you?”

“Girly?” Fox felt surprise wash through him, as that was definitely not where he thought any of this was going. He rattled that thought around in his head for a moment, trying to parse it. “Uh, not really? We’ve been gone for several days now on a no frills vacation package. No showers, no night on the town little black dresses, no lacy underwear, or at least I assume as I haven’t exactly been peeking. I don’t even think Coco’s been applying makeup. Well, much makeup.”

“That’s not quite…” Yatsuhashi looked frustrated, blowing out a large breath. “I mean more…” his hands fluttered awkwardly in a vaguely hourglass shape. “More… softish.”

“Oh. Ooooooohhhhh. Ah…” Fox felt a small tinge of panic form in his belly. Of all the things he expected Yatsuhashi to be trying to get at, this was probably the last possibility he would have thought up. “No? But, I’m really the last person you should be asking that.”

A surprised look crossed Yatsuhashi’s face. Fox briefly regretted not having a calendar to mark the date on, as this evening was proving to be a singularly expressive one for the normally staid swordsman. Fox’ teammate coughed a moment, then hesitantly whispered, “You prefer men?”

“What? No! No… It’s not that. I don’t prefer men.” Fox sighed. What the hell. We’ve been friends for almost two years now. I suppose he deserves to know. “It’s that, well, I don’t prefer anyone. At all. I just… don’t… notice, I guess? I mean, I do know when someone is attractive, and can appreciate that. But I appreciate it in the same way one appreciates art. When it comes to that whole ‘boys and girls’ thing it just doesn’t do anything. At all.”

An awkward silence filled the space between the two men, and Fox began to cringe inside. Maybe mentioning that was a bad idea…

“At all?”

“Nope” Fox shrugged. “Truth be told, I worry about that sometimes. I mean, everyone else definitely notices butts and boobs and such. But me?” His shrug exaggerated itself. “Meh. But yeah. I’m just not interested in any of, well, that.”

Yatsuhashi cocked his head to one side a bit, his previous confusion replaced with a more contemplative look. “Hey, sorry Fox. I didn’t mean to pry. It’s fine and all. I suppose some folk are just like that, and that’s fine. It’s just who they are, I guess. I just thought that…” He paused, then gave Fox a sharp look. “Anyone at all?”

Fox shrugged. In for a penny… He gestured toward where his thighs were parted atop the log. “Not a twitch.”

Yatsuhashi glanced down, then quickly looked away, but not before a small smirk formed on his face. “TMI, Fox. TMI.” Then the big man chuckled a bit. “Okay, yeah, I guess that would mean you’re the wrong guy to ask.”

Fox grinned at the humor in his teammate’s voice. “Hey, I can’t be perfect at everything. This birds
and the bees stuff is weird.”

Yatsuhashi snorted.

Fox slapped Yatsuhashi’s shoulder. “Seriously, though. Listen, just because it’s not my thing, doesn’t mean I don’t get it.” He tapped his temple. “Intellectually, at least. So while I may have not developed the same awareness you have, I think I understand some of what’s going on in your head.”

Yatsuhashi nodded slowly, and gave a ‘go ahead’ gesture with one finger. Fox nodded back, and took a second to carefully think about things.

“Look, we’ve been teammates for, what? A year and a half? Going on two? We’ve attended the same classes, fought in the same fights, and even shared the same room with Coco and Velve for a significant portion of our young lives, right?”

“Yeah.”

“We’ve seen them in their PJs, watched them wearing towels to and from the shower, and even walked in on them in their lacies more than once. I even walked in on Coco once when she wasn’t wearing a stitch.”

Yatsuhashi nodded again, the firelight revealing his cheeks coloring up a bit.

“But do you recall ever getting to actually encounter them in any sort of physical sense? A hug, or a glomp, or even an aggressive reading over your shoulder lean?”

“Uh…”

“Right. Hardly ever.” Fox smiled. “But now, thanks to the cold, Coco has had you out and out spooning with both of them all night, every night. It’s no wonder you’ve noticed that they’re… soft.”

“Some bits more than others,” Yatsuhashi admitted, then suddenly looked bashful. “Not that I’ve been, you know…”

“Look, no one is accusing you of copping a feel.” Fox laughed a moment. “I’m sure Velvet would have killed you by now if she thought any of it was deliberate.”

“Not Coco?”

Fox raspberried. “The way she behaves? She’d probably find it funny.”

Yatsuhashi looked unconvincing, but didn’t argue. Fox took that as a win and kept going. “It’s inevitable that you’d be in frequent, and often lengthy contact with the softer bits without realizing quite what was pressed up against you in your sleep. Hell, I’ve noticed them myself, bumping up against them in my sleep. They just don’t do anything for me. But they do something for you, and after a year and a half of them being a distant, scarce noticed theory, they are now a very fleshy, very closely interacted with reality. So, somewhere inside that big bunch of meat on your shoulders,” he poked Yatsuhashi in the head, “cave man Yatsu is realizing that you are a boy, they are girls, and that boys and girls have compatible bits with which they are expected to Do Things.”

“So…”

“So don’t actually Do Things, but stop worrying your big, fat head about the fact you’ve realized they’re girls.”
Yatsuhashi chuckled. “Easier said than done.”

“Not Doing Things? Or not worrying?”

“Either or.”

Fox shook his head with a wry grin. “Aren’t you some sort of meditative mystic from the East or something?”

“Yeah. I even know the secret handshake. But I’m also not dead. Er… No offense to…” Yatsu gestured to Fox’ lap.

Fox chuckled. “None taken.”

Yatsuhashi nodded, then stood. He stretched, and turned towards the blankets, his face a mix of trepidation and determination as he stared at the shapes of what lay beneath. “Well… g’night.”

“Night.”

Fox heard Yatsuhashi begin walking away, then pause. “Fox?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks.”

Fox smiled. “Anytime.”
Winter Hunt - Chapter 9: Velvet

Chapter Notes

(Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays)

Welcome back, everyone! It's Friday and that means it's time for the next chapter. I hope everyone is enjoying things. As always, please comment and let me know how you think I'm doing and to ask any questions you might have. I love feedback, as it helps me to improve the story.

Speaking of which, I've lost a few beta readers recently for reasons external to the story. If you're interested in getting an advanced look at where things are going in exchange for giving me good, solid feedback on what you think needs improvement and what you think works really well, drop me a line.

-Bookah

...

“What a freak.”

Velvet tried to ignore the voice. There was no question who the boy was referring to with his comment. She’d been hearing such things for months now, often with the one doing the comment staring straight at her. Most people were simply avoiding her these days, but there was a core group who seemed to think that it was brave to make fun of a little girl.

“I know, right? She should just go to Menagerie with the rest of the animals. Join the zoo.”

Her fist clenched, but she forced it to relax as she turned the corner in the hallway. She gulped down several breaths, focusing on the feel of the air lifting her chest, then flowing out of her body, a rhythmic pattern of necessity. Ordinarily it was calming, but today it wasn’t having its usual effect.

A sudden thump knocked her backwards, causing her to stumble and fall on her backside painfully.

“Hey! Watch it, rabbit!”

Violet winced as she recognized the voice. “Olive? I’m sorry. I didn’t see you there.” She began picking herself up.

“Sure you didn’t.” The almond skinned girl she’d collided with popped her fists onto her skirt-clad hips and glared down at Velvet. “I thought you Faunus were supposed to have good eyes.”

Rising to her feet, Velvet didn’t respond to the taunt. There was nothing she could say that would bridge the gap Olive had forged between them. That fact, more than the words coming from Olive’s mouth, was what hurt the most. She hoisted her book bag back onto her shoulders and began moving down the hall again.

A foot snaked out and tangled with her legs, sending her falling to the floor once more. She landed hard, her hands stinging more than her butt, and her bookbag spilled its contents. The hall filled with
cruel laughter.

Cautiously, she rolled to one side, looking up at her tormenter. “Why?” she rasped, fighting tears. “Why did you do that?”

“Do what?” Olive’s smile was patently false, a deliberate mockery. “It’s not my fault you animals have trouble walking upright.”

“We used to be friends.”

Olive’s face took on an ugly sneer. “That was before I realized what you Faunus really were.”

“Come on, Olive,” A large man put his arm around Olive’s waist. “Don’t waste your time on her. Your friends are over here.”

A tear escaped Velvet’s eye as she began pulling her papers back into her bookbag.

The blow that struck her from behind was completely unexpected. Her vision turned to grey, with stars swimming in the darkness, and she could taste blood from where her jaw had snapped shut on her tongue.

She scrambled forward and pulled herself to her feet with the wall’s assistance. The grey began to retreat, and she stared at the boy that had been behind her, his fists balled, the knuckles of one hand bloody.

She reached behind her to feel the stickiness in her hair. Her hand came away, and she stared at the blood on her palm, then turned toward the boy. “Why?”

The face that confronted her was not cruel, or mocking, or even amused. Rage had distorted it into an ugly caricature of a human visage. His chest heaved with raged, angry breaths. “You all should just hurry up and die, you fucking animals.”

Velvet stared in shock. “I don’t understand.”

“That was my brother’s shop last night,” he snarled, spit flying from his lips. “It’s your fault. You did it. You people all did it, and you should just die!”

“But I didn’t do anything!”

“But you will. That’s just how your kind are! And I’m going to stop all of you!”

The boy hurled himself at Velvet, slinging his fist at her chin as he came.

Velvet jerked her head aside, the knuckles only glancing along her cheek as a result. She tried to back away, but her feet tangled with the book bag and she went over backwards, the boy following to smash down on top of her belly.

Breath whooshed out of her lungs, and her belly spasmed. A fist came down on her face, and she could feel her skin open up under the blow. Pain shot through her, overwhelming her senses.

Her vision went red.

Before quite realizing what was happening, she got her feet under her, and thrust backwards, hard. Her hips shot upwards, the boy rising with them with a shocked look on his face, and then Velvet’s foot connected with the back of his head. They went over like that, her flip taking him all the way past her head and onto the floor, face down, with her now the one on top.
With a scream of rage she began raining punches down on his back, sitting on his hips, her world narrowed down to a crimson tunnel focused on causing enough hurt to wash away months of her own suffering.

Arms suddenly came around her, jerking her away from the boy. She kicked and struggled to escape, only for a harsh voice to bark in her ear.

“Velvet Scarlatina, stop this at once!”

Mrs. Desiree drug her up to her feet, and the red faded from her vision. She felt the energy rush out of her, leaving her feeling deflated and weak in the teacher’s grasp.

“What happened here?” Mrs. Desiree demanded.

“He hit me,” Velvet rasped as the tears began to flow. “In the back of the head. Then he jumped on me, and kept hitting me more, and…

“That’s not true!” The boy had risen to his feet once more. He stood, wobbling, bowed over with his hand on his back, blood dribbling from his nose. “This animal jumped me for no reason! I was just defending myself.”

Mrs. Desiree’s arms tightened their grip on her. “Is that so?”

“No!” Velvet cried. “He’s lying!”

“No he’s not.” Velvet’s head whipped about to stare at Olive. The tanned girl’s lips were parted in a cruel snarl. “Velvet totally started it.”

“No…”

“That does it. We can’t tolerate this sort of thing,” Mrs. Desiree snarled. “You’re coming with me, Miss Scarlatina.”

Velvet started wiggling, attempting to free herself, but it was no use. Mrs. Desiree tightened her grip, and growled. “Oh no you don’t, young lady! I’ve got you now, and you are not getting away from what you’ve done. Stop struggling, I’ve…

“…got you. It’s alright, Velve. I’ve got you.”

Yatsuhashi’s arms gripped tightly around her chest as Velvet awoke. The cold mountain air shocked awareness into her, and she gasped. Spinning, she buried her face into Yatsuhashi’s face and burst into tears.

East Slope Camp, Mountains of Sanus

“So I got suspended. My parents were quietly told I should probably find a different school altogether. So we did. It wasn’t really that much better, there, but at least they left me alone. I guess they heard about what had happened.”

“That’s not right,” Yatsuhashi growled. His usually calm face was wrinkled with anger.

“It didn’t matter whether it was right or wrong,” Velvet replied. Her voice was calm, now, her cheeks dry. The team had quietly waited until she felt herself before asking about her nightmare, and had spent the intervening time making sure she was fed and coffeed. She held a steaming cup between both hands, and shrugged. “They were scared. Everyone was scared. So they did what they
“At your expense,” Yatsuhashi growled again. “Bastards.”

Velvet sighed. “It wasn’t really their fault. I mean, the boy was just worried about his brother. I found out later that he lost both legs in the attack on the shop. It was them that caused this. Caused all of this.”

Fox shifted awkwardly. “To be fair, we did kind of push the Faunus into this.”

“No,” Velvet felt a little heat color her voice. “Yes, Faunus have been dealing with prejudice a long time. We know it. You know it. But it was getting better in places like Vale. People like me could stand up, and speak up, and know we would be heard. Things weren’t changing overnight, but they were changing.”

Velvet looked at Fox, who turned his head away. ”Humanity has plenty of bastards, it’s true. But until the Whi…” She paused, then let a little of the rage she always kept in check leak out. She was going to say it, dammit! “Until the White Fang got us all branded as dangerous psychopaths we could stand up for ourselves, defend ourselves. They chose violence because they were impatient, not because it was the only way. And now? Because of them? Anything I do would just prove the bastards who hate Faunus right.”

“So that’s why you never defended yourself back at Beacon.” Coco grimaced.

“I wanted to. Oh, you have no idea how much I wanted to. Every time someone pulled my ears I just…”

Velvet bit the sentence off and made herself take a sip of her coffee. The slight scalding her tongue received helped abate some of the anger behind her words. She sighed.

“I wanted to, but I couldn’t let them be right about me.”

“Why didn’t you go to Goodwitch?” Fox had turned his face back towards her. “You know she wouldn’t tolerate that.”

“It would have just convinced them that I was weak, and easy prey for their own insecurities.” Velvet shrugged. “My only refuge was in being silent and hope they’d give up.”

“Velvet, honey, I am so sorry you had to deal with all that.” Coco came over and wrapped her arms around Velvet’s shoulders, pulling the side of Velvet’s head into her chest. “You know, you could have told us. We always wanted to bust a few heads…”

“That would have been worse than telling Goodwitch. Not only would it have looked weak, it would have gotten you in trouble.”

“Worth it,” Coco grumbled.

Despite herself, Velvet giggled a little, and leaned into the hug. “Anyway, so yeah. That’s me, the neurotic Faunus, wrapped up in a crazy bow.”

“Now stop that.” Coco let go of her hug and sat back down near the fire. “You’re not neurotic, or crazy. You’re the strongest person I know, and we’re proud to have you.”

Conflicting emotions ripped through Velvet, and she felt a little stinging in her eyes return. She didn’t
feel strong, or even particularly sane. To be honest, she felt like going out and ripping a few Grimm apart out of a need for some dark catharsis. But hearing Coco’s words warmed her in ways she hadn’t expected, and she had to fight back a few tears of gratitude at having found such a team as hers.

“Thanks, Coco.” She looked down at her cup, smiled, then brought it up for another sip. “I guess I’d better finish this. There’s not that much daylight up here. Let’s not waste it.”

Farndale

“Oh, god. I am going to stay in the shower for a week.”

Velvet couldn’t decide whether to giggle, or agree vehemently with Coco’s announcement. She couldn’t remember ever itching quite this much, before, and she was convinced that there were little crystals of ice embedded in her bones. The inn they had discovered shortly after finally reaching the wall dividing Farndale from Grimm territory could not have come too soon. She shrugged and dropped her pack, not caring about the loud thump it made on the floor.

“I’ll just be happy to sleep in a real bed.”

“Oh?”

Coco felt a sinking sensation in her stomach as she heard the tone of Coco’s voice She knew that sound, and knew that it meant…

“I thought you and Yatsu rather enjoyed snuggling up,” Coco purred. “Are you sure you won’t miss it tonight?”

“Coco!” Velvet felt her face heat up, and fought the urge to reach up and grab her ears and pull them down to hide her face. She spun away and grabbed a pillow out from under the bedsheets, whipping it at her teammate.

Coco danced away with a laugh, then began peeling her coat off. “Hey! I don’t blame you. If I wasn’t the team leader I’d be tempted to sample the goods myself.”

“Oh my god! COCO!” Velvet squealed. She wasn’t sure she could turn any redder than she already was, but it seemed like Coco was determined to test that. She felt embarrassment seeping out of her quite prominent ears at her teammate’s innuendo.

She also felt something else, and as she watched Coco fling aside her shirt and begin working at her bra she struggled to work out just what it was. She turned away, suddenly uncomfortable at the sight of so much of Coco’s skin, and her scandalized amusement at Coco’s suggestions died, replaced by a cold wave of realization.

Deep in her gut, she was jealous. Even though it was just a joke, part of her was jealous of the thought of Coco and Yatsu.

The scariest part?

She couldn’t even be sure who she was jealous of.

Disturbed, Velvet stared at the wall as she heard Coco’s bare feet pad into the shower, and the door close, leaving Velvet alone with her thoughts.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 10: Coco

Chapter Notes

(Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays)

Farndale

The hot water running down her left her feeling nearly orgasmic, if she was to tell the truth. While this wasn't the first time the job had kept Coco from being able to properly shower for a time, she had never gone quite so long without, nor under such unpleasant circumstances as being forced to wear multiple layers of insulation. She wouldn't ordinarily have thought that time alone with soap was better than sex, but at this point she might have been willing to at least weigh the possibility that there might be something to that.

She began lathering up, and tried very hard to put such thoughts out of her mind. While she wasn't exactly the most wanton of creatures, she wasn't exactly one to deny herself when her appetites were demanding either, and she'd been on a dry spell since the tournament. That had been a smorgasbord of international cuisine, with a particularly tasty dessert needing some consolation after encountering Team RWBY. Coco'd always had a bit of a weakness for chocolate…

But now it had been months and, frankly, she was beginning to wonder whether it would have been wiser to risk freezing to death at night than to have made the sleeping arrangements she had. Her pants had become particularly swampy at night, and it was only a testament to how much everyone else stank that no one had (apparently) noticed the smell.

God, sometimes being the team leader sucks so hard.

She sighed and turned the heat up as her body got used to not being surrounded by sub-freezing temperatures again. Steam began filling the room, giving her own skin a bit of a fuzzy lack of visual detail as she continued to work away, attempting to get rid of weeks of dirt and sweat.

This would be much more fun if someone else was helping. Maybe Velve would like to join me?

"Dammit, Coco!" The fashionista reached over and grabbed the knob, cranking it over hard. She gave an involuntary shriek as the water turned ice cold, dispelling both fog and libido in a harsh, painful moment of torture and self flagellation.

"Coco?"

She heard Velvet's muffled voice call from the other room and spun the dial around, restoring most of the heat as her teeth tried to chatter. "I'm fine, Velve. Just bumped the water temp by accident!"

"Oh! Okay."

Coco slapped herself mentally before deciding that she really, really needed a drink.

She was three shots down when Fox walked into the bar and sat on the stool beside her. "Aren't you a bit young to drink?"
Fiddling with an empty shot glass, Coco turned a baleful eye on him, attempting (and knowing she was only barely succeeding) to amp up the death quotient in such a glare. "We're not in Vale anymore, you know."

"And they don't have a legal age requirement here?"

"Not everywhere has an age requirement, you know. Even Vale lets Huntsmen and Huntresses off the hook." Coco lifted a finger to catch the barkeep's attention, then held up the shot glass when he glanced her way. He brought over a full replacement, then scooped up the lien she'd placed on the counter as he approached. Coco lifted the glass, eyeing it as though attempting to divine the future through its lense, then pointedly downed the shot, smacking her lips in appreciation of the smokey flavor. "Also, he never asked."

"So…" Fox drawled. "Is there anything in particular that has inspired this particular bit of binging?"

"I'm a creature of appetites, Fox." She glanced over to him out of the corner of her eye and slapped the shot glass down onto the bar top. "I am indulging one of them." Another fresh glass quickly replaced the one just emptied.

"Please tell me you already indulged another one first."

She nearly choked as the whisky tried to go down the wrong pipe. Forcibly keeping her lips together, and feeling only a small trickle of the booze snake down from the corner of her mouth, she forced the drink down painfully before she permitted the coughing.

"What?" she wheezed, the word mostly understandable as it escaped between lung spasms.

Fox gave her a searching look, then twisted on the stool to face her fully, letting one elbow rest on the bar. "I was referring to food, since I happen to know what drinking on an empty stomach rates on the 'bad idea scale', but that little act of yours leads me to think you have other appetites in mind."

"Dammit, Fox…" She sighed, then impulsively spun away, putting her shoulders towards Fox and flopped backward, her head banging against his chest.

Fox made a small strangling sound in his throat, and she watched both of his hands flail around to either side of her head. "Coco…"

"Oh, relax, Fox. It's not like I think this will get me anywhere. You're the only person I could do this to and know nothing will happen."

She watched Fox' mouth gobble about as he sought words, a sight made more interesting by her position a little below his chin. She giggled, and reached up to pat the side of his face. "Relax, Fox. Your secret is safe with me. I won't tell a soul."

"How did you…"

"Please." She felt a laugh bubbling up and choked it back, knowing that she was already distressing him enough. "You've walked in on me naked and not so much as blinked. I swear, I could oil up my tits and rub them on your face and the most reaction I would get would be a request for a wet wipe."

"I turned around and walked back out."

"With nary a blush, nor a tent."

Fox sighed. "I take it you have not, in fact, eaten before starting this."
"It's on its way. I ordered five minutes ago. I recommend the veal."

Fox's hands dug in beneath her shoulders and he lifted her up into a sitting position again. "Alright, Coco. What's gotten into you?"

She sighed, knowing even in her addleheaded state he was not going to be distracted. "Nothing."

"Coco…"

"Nothing!" she barked, then slumped on the stool. "That's the problem. Nothing has gotten into me, and a girl has needs…"

Fox eyed her a moment, then glanced to the counter top. He tapped one of the empty shot glasses with his finger. "Just how many of these have you had?"

"Not enough." She sighed as Fox gave her a stern look. "Oh, don’t worry Fox. I know my limits. I'll be fine in the morning."

"That's not what I'm worried about."

The pair were interrupted by the barkeep setting a plate in front of Coco with less grace and tact and more stolid determination. He shot Coco a look, then glanced over to Fox. "Anything?"

Fox looked down at the sauce covered meat and vegetables before Coco. "Got any more of that?"

The barkeep lumbered off into the back.

Coco picked up her fork and poked at the meat for a second, then cut a bit loose and scooped it into her mouth. The gravy had a slightly smoky flavor that complimented the whisky nicely.

"Iss noh bad."

Fox rolled his eyes. "Alright, Coco. Spill."

"Hmm?"

"Which one is it that has you nobly drinking yourself into a stupor? Yatsu or Velve?"

Swallowing, Coco imperiously waved her fork in the air. "A leader does not boink her troops."

"I didn't say you had. I just asked which one you were quite self sacrificially not… boinking."

Coco sighed and stirred at the gravy on the plate. She stared at the patterns a few moments, then shrugged.

"Both of ’em."

A silence stretched out between them for several seconds. Coco stared, then stuffed her offending, overly talkative mouth with a wad of gravy soaked vegetables.

\textit{Oh, good job. Just drunkenly blurt things out, why don't you?}

Fox broke the silence with a sigh. "Both of them?"

Coco nodded, chewing to keep her traitor mouth too busy to do more damage.

She saw Fox shake his head slightly. "Uh huh. And if you, uh, \textit{boink} one of them…"
'S hardly fair to the other, is it?"

"And if you were to boink both?"

Coco nearly knocked the plate off the bar with the spastic jerk Fox' comment produced. "Fox! What are you…" She paused, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. "What, are you kidding? Nobody does that. It's the best way to totally fuck up the team."

"Pun intended?"

Coco sputtered a moment, a brief spike of outrage emerging, only to be almost immediately replaced by a bubble of mirth that erupted from her as giggles. "Oh god, Fox. Is this really the time?"

Fox grinned as a plate was banged down next to his elbow. He turned and slid it over, picking up a fork to start cutting at the veal. "Made you laugh, didn't it?"

"Yeah, that's true." She grinned and scooped up another bite from her own plate. The two both began eating in earnest, a companionable silence between them.

After a few moments, her hunger had abated enough for her pace to slow a bit. "Never work, anyway. There's no way I'd two time either of them. For one, either one could break me in half in my sleep."

Fox snickered. "Yeah, that would be a problem." He took a bite and chewed. "So, whaddaya gonna tell 'em?"

"Tell them?" Coco snorted. "Not a damn thing. They really don't need to deal with my shit."

"Well, any more than they usually have to."

Coco laughed. "The nice hustle slap will never die."

Fox hoisted a fork full of food. "Amen."

Coco's Room

Coco nearly tripped over her sweater as she exited the bathroom. In desperation she grabbed the doorframe, barely catching herself, and stared down at her feet in annoyance.

What's that doing there?

She kicked the sweater free, then took a fast assessment of the situation. Sweater: kicked over into the corner. Cincher: dangling off the end of her bed. Pants: hanging off the light shade. Socks: one by the room door, the other next to the sink. Boots: corner by the door. Bra…

Not finding the missing garment in her visual inspection, she did a quick pat down. Her boobs were bare and damp from her second shower of the evening. The moisture jogged her memory, and she leaned backward, looking back into the bathroom.

Bra, hanging on the towel rack, next to my panties.

Check, check, and check.

She padded over to a plush chair, piled in clothing that had done a run through the inn's washing facilities on the "Auto-soak/Extra Cleaning" setting. She pulled out a pair of black silk panties (the only thing that had been hand washed) and slipped them on. A casual, loose t-shirt quickly followed.
Padding over to the sink to pour a glass of water to drink, she contemplated the other bed in the room. Velvet had, evidently, eaten there, then gone straight to bed, if the dirty plate on the nightstand was any indication. She was piled under the sheets, rabbit ears sticking out from under a pillow, her breathing soft and gentle.

Coco downed several cups of water, the only sure preventative for a hangover. She turned and headed for her own bed, tugging the shirt down and reaching back to pull her underwear out of her butt, then crawled under the sheets, sinking into the soft mattress with a delighted sigh.

*No hard ground for me tonight. Thank god.*

"Coco?"

She rolled over on her side, facing Velvet's bed. "Yeah?"

Velvet gave a nervous laugh. "Uh, this may sound silly, but…"

"But you can't sleep?"

Coco heard the sheets rustle as Velvet rolled over. "No."

"The bed's not comfortable?"

"No! I mean, yes it is. It's not that, it's just… Well I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I have no idea. I'm just laying here, comfy, warm, relaxed… and I can't sleep."

Coco sighed. *Dammit, Velvet…*

"Come on." She patted the mattress she rested on. "Get over here."

"Coco?"

"Hurry up."

Coco could see Velvet sit up and slip out from under the sheets by the dim light filtering into the room. The Faunus looked hesitant as she squirmed at the edge of her own bed. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, Velvet. I am sure. Now get over here and snuggle up."

She sighed quietly as Velvet slid under the sheets and wiggled up beside her, trying to ignore how different it felt when coats, sweaters, and sleeping bags was replaced by thin t-shirts and bare skin.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 11: Fox

Farndale

Fox nodded at the maid as he slipped out of the room to head for breakfast. The girl curtsied, then entered the room across the hall, pulling her cart with her as she made her rounds cleaning and changing sheets.

Pretty enough, he thought. Maybe if I asked her to ‘turn down Coco’s sheets’ Coco will stay sober tonight.

Mentally cussing himself out for even thinking of suggesting that to an innocent bystander, Fox turned and padded down the hallway, heading for the small restaurant.

The other members of Team CFVY were all seated at a table, sipping coffee from steaming mugs and digging into plates of food. Yatsuhashi had apparently opted for a selection of fruits, cheeses, and breads. Velvet was enjoying a standard batch of bacon and eggs. Coco, however…

“I simply cannot understand how you stay so fit when you eat like that,” he muttered, gesturing at the mess that was Coco’s breakfast.

“And just what is wrong with biscuits and sausage gravy, hash, and a ham wedge?” Coco looked up at him, a challenge in her brown, slightly bloodshot eyes.

“You forgot to mention the stack of pancakes, nearly raw eggs, and bowl of beans.” Fox shook his head. “Why beans?”

“Protein.”

“Your entire breakfast is nothing but protein covered in grease.”

Coco grinned. “You eat your way, I’ll eat mine.”

Shaking his head, Fox plopped down in the remaining chair and picked up a menu. A short time later he was happily stirring a bowl full of oatmeal, cinnamon, and butter.

“So, what’s the plan?”

Coco quickly swallowed a mouthful of bad idea and grease. “I figure you and Yatsu can go check this possible source of information he has. Meanwhile Velvet and I can scrape up supplies for the next bit of winter stroll we’ll be taking.”

“Yay,” Velvet responded, her voice anything but excited. “I love winter hikes.” She made a face, then scooped up some egg and deposited it in her mouth.

“Don’t we all?” Fox took a bite of his oatmeal, decided that the mix was just about perfect, and
swallowed it, enjoying the warmth it brought to his stomach.

“While we’re at it, we’ll ask about Ruby as well.”

Fox nodded, and looked back over to Yatsuhashi. “So, just who is this source, big guy?”

Yatsuhashi finished licking apple drippings off of his fingers, then sat back in his chair. “A cousin of mine. A distant one. We’ve hardly ever interacted. He came over to the house when I was a kid once. My father wasn’t too thrilled to see him, but I loved the toy Beowulf he gave me. It walked on its own. Last I knew, he was basically running the Vale end of things from here. It’s pretty much the closest unaffiliated town to Vale, with several ways to get things over there through the mountains.”

“What’s his name?”

“Hidehiko Daichi.”

“Is he attractive?”

Fox watched Velvet roll her eyes at Coco’s question, and mentally slapped a hand to his face. Really, Coco? Really?

“Uh, no.” Yatsuhashi gave Coco a look that was almost expressionless. “He was in his fifties when I saw him as a kid. I doubt he’s gotten any younger.” He turned back to Fox. “The thing is, he may be a bit tricky to talk to. He knows my parents don’t think much of the business, and I don’t doubt he knows why I was in Vale. I doubt he’ll want to share trade secrets with the black sheep of the family.”

“White sheep,” Coco muttered, causing Velvet to giggle.

Fox cracked his knuckles. “Threats?”

“Let’s at least try talking first,” Yatsuhashi replied. “But if it comes to it, we could always threaten to give the manifest to Atlas. I really doubt that anyone involved in the business would really want Atlas to link them to what happened at the Festival.”

Fox nodded. “When would you like to go?”

Yatsuhashi pointed to Fox’ bowl. “When you’re done. You’re too thin to go without food.” The large man looked over at Coco’s plate. “In fact, you could stand to take some of hers.”

“I’ll pass, thanks.” Fox set to with a will, rapidly spooning oats and spices into his belly.

The door to the room that had been booked for the boys was hanging open when they got upstairs. Fox’ eyes narrowed, and he held his hand out to stop Yatsuhashi. The big man nodded in reply, and slowly drew his sword.

Fox darted inside, weapons readied, his eyes quickly searching for threats. A cleaning cart rested just inside, blocking the door open, but no one was inside. He straightened up and nodded Yatsuhashi inside.

“I guess the cleaning lady had to go get something.”

“Cleaning lady?” Yatsuhashi’s eyes narrowed, and he gave the cart a dark look. “Isn’t it a little early to be cleaning the rooms?”

Fox blinked, a sinking feeling settling into his guts. “I saw her cleaning the room across the hall,
Together, Fox and Yatsuhashi immediately began searching the room for signs of trouble. It didn’t take long to find them.

“The manifest is gone.”

Fox turned to look at Yatsuhashi. “You’re sure?” He immediately waved the question away. “Never mind. Of course it’s gone. It’s the only thing important in here.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “She must have grabbed it right after you left the room. She’d be long gone by now.” He turned to Fox. “What did she look like? She wasn’t the same girl we fought, was she?”

“No,” Fox shook his head. “I’m pretty sure I’d have recognized the weird hair and eyes. No, this girl had black hair. Her eyes were green, I think.”

“You’re not sure?”

Fox rolled his eyes. “You know I don’t pay attention to that sort of thing. We talked about that, remember?” Then he turned thoughtful, remembering the way he’d briefly contemplated letting the girl be a chew toy for Coco’s frustrated libido. “She definitely had green eyes.”

Yatsuhashi snorted. “Great. So that means there are at least two of them. The girl we fought, and this one. You think they’re both White Fang?”

“Who else?” Fox replied. “At first they were probably trying to find Ruby. But once they realized we were also on the trail, and that we were digging up one of their supply routes…”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “Steal the evidence and muddle the trail.” His eyes narrowed. “Maybe even cut it off completely.”

Fox gave Yatsuhashi a sharp look, then nodded briskly as he rolled that thought over. “We’d better hurry. Should we grab the girls or head straight there?”

“They’ve already headed out to get supplies. Let’s go and hope we’re not too late.” Yatsuhashi struck off down the hall at a rapid pace, Fox trailing behind.

The sound of a large object smashing into bits greeted them as they hurtled their way into the building Yatsuhashi had led them to. They didn’t even exchange looks at the sound, but simply armed themselves and darted inside. Yatsu put his shoulder to the door, smashing it open violently.

Fox immediately took advantage of the opening, shooting past Yatsuhashi and into the front room. A secretary was cowering under the desk. Her eyes locked onto Fox, and she shot a finger towards a hallway. “She went that way! The third door!”

He dashed down the hallway, the sound of Yatsuhashi thundering through the hall behind him filling his ears. Only a short ways down, a door hung loose, and the sound of breaking glass came through it as Fox pulled himself up short.

Looking over his shoulder he quickly pointed left. Yatsuhashi nodded, and the two swept in through the open door, Yatsuhashi to the left and Fox taking the right side of the room.
The pink and brown haired girl from a few weeks before was halfway through a broken window and out into the alley when they entered. She paused, looking back over her shoulder, then gave Fox a wink and jumped the rest of the way.

He didn’t hesitate. In a flash he was after her, passing through the window with care not to cut himself on the broken glass. Jerking his head to the side, he caught a glimpse of the woman dashing around the corner at the end of the alley. He immediately gave chase.

As he hurled himself around the corner, something convinced him to flinch. The slight hesitation probably saved his life. A blade stabbed into the brick of the building where his neck should have been, and he quickly bent his knees to slide beneath it, seeing his reflection in the blade’s surface as he passed.

The woman kicked him in the head as he started to straighten up, sending him spinning. He watched out of the corner of his eye as she pulled the blade free from the wall and slid it back into its concealed sheath in the parasol. Even as passersby screamed and shouted at the deadly fight that had just erupted in their midst, she smirked and took off running down the street.

Fox shook his head, ears ringing in spite of his aura’s protection from the worst of the kick. Glowering, he sped after her, dashing through the mid-morning pedestrians and vehicles, determined to not let her go.

She was fast, he had to admit. Surprisingly fast for her small size. But there was only so much speed she could put on in comparison to someone a third again her height. He smiled as he realized he was gaining on her.

A sudden crash announced her knocking a street vendor’s steaming cart onto its side. It was only a minor inconvenience, one that would slow him less jumping over it than it had slowed her while pulling it over. A squealing of tires, however, announced a vehicle also responding, and he had to leap aside as the truck smashed over the sidewalk and into a wall in front of him. He quickly went around the truck, looking around for the girl’s unique color scheme.

She was hurrying up an outside staircase a block ahead. She reached the top, five stories up, and disappeared over the edge of a roof.

Fox didn’t bother with the stairs. He simply ran to the base of the stairway, then jumped, grabbing the bars of the rails surrounding the landing above. A quick jerk of his arms hurtled him upwards to catch the next set, an action he repeated until he landed on the roof.

He couldn’t see her, nor could he hear the sound of feet. He crouched, slowly turning, straining every sense he had to determine where she had gone.

He heard the click, click, click of high heeled boots echoing off the sides of the surrounding buildings. He focused on isolating the sounds, then turned to eye a small shed atop the next building over as the girl sashayed her way into view from behind it with a smile.

Fox straightened up and twisted his neck, making the vertebrae crackle. He echoed her walk with one that had less hip, but compensated for this with casual swagger. Reaching the edge of the roof, he casually hopped between the buildings, then leaned back against the low lip of the roof he now shared with the girl.

“Awful short for a White Fang stormtrooper,” he commented.

The small woman strolled over to him, weaving her way between frozen puddles and bare patches
on the roof, her smile mocking. From an arm’s length away she peered up at him, not a word escaping her lips, and she popped a hip out, letting her hand rest on it as her parasol opened and came to rest on her shoulder.

They stared at one another like that for a moment, and then she casually reached up above her head to tug at his collar, as though attempting to straighten an invisible tie.

Fox snorted. “Let’s do this.”

She flipped away from him then, head going back over her heels, then heels over head multiple times as he followed, his punches and grapples never quite connecting. The flipping stopped and a punch was blocked with the parasol, while Fox glowered down into brown and pink eyes a foot below his own.

Then it was her turn to attack, stabbing at him with a series of jabs from the parasol that he ducked and dodged as he fell back from the assault. He almost felt it as she shifted her approach, and his arm came down to block the kick she’d thrown at him, then used the momentum to spin away and open the distance.

She paused, watching him, and gave a little nod.

“Not bad yourself.”

They charged each other again, Fox throwing a series of windmill kicks and dropping punches that she matched with jabs and roundhouse kicks of her own. Each blow was avoided or blocked as they went back and forth, neither seeming to be able to land a strike with any sort of conviction.

Suddenly Fox felt a foot slip. A series of kicks had steered him sideways a bit, and he suddenly discovered she had maneuvered him onto one of the patches of ice that dotted the roof. His ankle skittered on the slippery surface for just a moment before he regained proper purchase, but by then it was too late.

With a sudden twist to the side, the candy haired woman had Fox in an armlock. He felt her apply pressure, felt his elbow beginning to bend beyond its limits, and his aura began to flag. An unnerving giggle fell upon his ear from the girl at his side.

With a hiss, Fox tensed, then kicked off of the ground, bearing them both upwards. Airborne, the girl lost much of her leverage, and Fox took the opportunity to twist around his shoulders, attempting to put her beneath him as they began crashing towards the ground.

The girl abandoned ship, letting go of his arm and thrusting away from him, but not before he was able to land a kick on one cheek. He landed in a crouch, smirking.

“Points to me.”

She frowned, daubing at a split lip with the back of a black glove, then shrugged. He saw her make a small twitch with her hand, and the tip of the parasol sprouted over a foot of pointed steel. Pink and brown eyes locked with his, and she smirked, a smear of blood making the expression all the more creepy.

Something about her confidence unnerved him, for a moment, and Fox slid into a braced stance, certain she was about to get serious.

With a sudden rush she came at him, parasol in the lead, with the extra length and sharpened edge making each jab and thrust far more serious and tricky to counter than before. He felt himself being
driven back, having to use his wrist mounted blades to take strikes he previously would have deflected with his hands. His aura continued to drain and, for the first time in a long time, he began to feel a bit winded.

Desperate to change things up and regain the offensive, he swung his leg around behind him in preparation for a series of spinning kicks that he hoped would change the momentum of the situation. A sudden shock ran through him as his heel struck a vertical surface he had not been expecting, and his balance flew away from him. He wobbled precariously on one leg as the other flailed for a surface to brace against.

When did the roof edge get that close?

Smirking, his opponent thrust the pointed tip of the parasol at him. Desperately, he clapped his hands together, catching the blade between them and he pushed the weapon off target, though it made his poor balance worsen as his foot had not yet properly landed still.

He hung there a moment, half supported by his grasp on the parasol, and she cocked her head at him with a wink. With a sudden twist she wrenched the blade from his hand and, with a burst of power, smashed the heel of her boot into the center of his chest. He toppled back and the roof’s ledge caught him in the back of the thighs.

With a cry he plummeted over the edge, his stomach rising into his throat before the world smashed into his back, and everything went dark.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 12: Yatsuhashi

Chapter Summary

(For those of you who like lemons, this is where you get to start tasting the creamy filling.)

Chapter Notes

(Winter Hunt updates every Tuesday and Friday)

Farmdale

Yatsuhashi grumbled as Fox darted out the window of the office. Fox may have been freaky like a snake, but there was no way Yatsuhashi was going to fit his girth through that tiny hole. He spun around and raced back out of the office, hurtling himself down the hallway and out into the street.

A quick turn threw him down the sidewalk and over to where the alleyway started. He glared down into it, only to see neither girl nor Fox. Looks left and right revealed neither on the street, either. He rushed down the alley to its opposite end, looking around when he emerged the next street over, only to see no one familiar there, either.

Yatsuhashi pulled out his scroll with a frown. A couple of quick button pushes brought up Fox’ scroll, but the man didn’t respond. With a grunt Yatsuhashi put his scroll away and walked back the way he came. He couldn’t find Fox, but there was something he could still do.

Back in the office, the first thing he noticed was the smell. It was a strong mix of rust and sewer. He wrinkled his nose in distaste, and stepped carefully inside, surveying everything slowly to capture the scene. The desk was covered in a disarray of papers. Several cabinets hung open, the folders within roughly placed so that corners stuck up in the way of cleanly closing the drawers. The carpet squished.

Yatsuhashi looked down at his feet to reveal he was walking in a puddle of blood. An arm stuck out from beneath the desk, a vein opened by a cruel gash in the upper reaches. Nothing flowed anymore, a sure sign that the heart that would have been pumping it out had stopped.

With a sigh, he knelt down for a closer look. The corpse must have been in his late 50s or early 60s, mouth slack and eyes dull. Several additional cuts and stab wounds revealed where Hidehiko Daichi had attempted to defend himself, all bloody messes on slightly jaundiced skin. By the volume of the blood Yatsuhashi knelt in, the man had not died instantly, but his death likely had not taken long. The girl had likely had time between murdering the man and departing through the window.

“Hello, Hidehiko.”

...
Eleven year old Yatsuhashi stared out the window of his home, towards the opposite side of the canyon. Like so many of the homes in the city of Mistral, the Daichi house clung to the sides of steep mountain slopes, surrounded by trees and waterfalls, and connected by hanging bridges and artistic arches. The houses across the way were built in the same way, clinging to the canyon walls with a tenacity similar to that of the inhabitants of Mistral.

One such inhabitant was visible in the house Yatsuhashi was staring out at. Lanying Li was in her bedroom again, changing out of a school outfit into ordinary clothes. Some might not have really noticed much across the two hundred foot gap. Some didn’t have the eyes of a young Daichi who was only just discovering how fascinating the small lumps on Lanying’s no longer quite flat chest could be when she’d forgotten to pull the blinds.

He felt a stirring beneath his belt, something that he’d awoken to more than once. He tore his eyes away from his half-clad classmate and glanced down at his now ill-fitting pants. His hand slipped down to the outthrust garment, and he began trying to wiggle things into a more comfortable position as he looked back out the window. Lanying had finished removing her skirt and was beginning to ease out of her last remaining underthings.

“Stop!”

The raised voice of his father suddenly halted his newly adolescent thoughts about Lanying. He felt a burst of shock rush through him, as it suddenly occurred to him that it was not just questionable, but in fact very disrespectful to be watching the girl in such a private moment. What would the girl feel, knowing she’d been so treated? He felt a wash of shame chill his previous feverish thoughts and he jerked his hand free of his pants to stare at his bedroom door.

“Please stop asking. He’s only a boy.”

“He’s barely a boy anymore. We’re all aware of how big he is. He’s practically a man.”

Yatsuhashi didn’t recognize the second speaker’s voice, drifting up to his bedroom from the common room below. It was a man’s voice, with the slight wispsiness of age.

“Please, both of you.” His mother, this time, a small woman who had somehow produced a boy who was already over five feet tall by the time he’d reached ten. “There is no need to raise your voices. He’s right upstairs, you know.”

“I do apologize, Akane.”

The voices from below quieted.

Curious, Yatsuhashi slipped out of his room and crept down the stairs.

His father was speaking when he was able to hear once again. “Large or no, he’s still just a child.”

The stranger immediately responded. “I know his age. But many children his age have begun learning the trade that will set the course of their life. Some of his peers will already have started at an academy for huntsmen. I am not asking you to let me send him into anything so dangerous as that. I am just suggesting that he is large enough, and bright enough, to begin learning a life at sea, like the rest of the family.”

“I haven’t,” his father snapped.

“The family has respected your decision not to go to sea, Kin, and thanks you for the role you have served in our prosperity. You’ve served ably. But you decided that yourself. Doesn’t he deserve to
“Have the same right?”

“Not at eleven.”

“How old were you?”

“Hidehiko…”

“Hush.” His mother’s voice broke into the argument, firm and authoritative. Even Yatsuhashi’s father quieted when she spoke in such a tone.

His mother’s warm brown eyes peeked around the corner of the stairway. “Hello, my sweet little Yatsu.”

He shrank back a little, sure that he should not have been eavesdropping on the conversation.

“Oh, it’s alright, little man.” His mother smiled, a warm and loving thing. “Come on down and say hello to our guest.”

She held her hand out to him, and he took it before easing around the corner. The man seated beside his father rose, older and greyer, but with a similar face. He leaned down. “Hello, Yatsuhashi. I’m Hidehiko Daichi, your cousin.”

Yatsuhashi glanced over to his mother, who nodded back to him. He turned towards the man. “Hello.”

“I have something for you.” The old man turned and opened a pack sitting by the chair, then pulled out a stuffed Grimm toy. “Perhaps you are a bit old for it, but I hope you like it. They made it in Vale.”

Yatsuhashi stepped forward and took the offered creature, then turned back to look at his mother once more. She nodded again, smiling, and he turned back to the man. “Thank you very much.”

The man smiled.

Farmdale

Yatsuhashi’s link to the next part of the trail was dead. He rose slowly, pondering this. Yes, the man was dead, but was the man the sole means to learn what that next step was?

His eyes shifted to the disorder of the shelves sticking out of their cabinets and he squelched his way over to the first. Fingers began walking along, searching the folder labels to get a general survey of the contents.

Suddenly, his fingers froze.

Ah hah.

He turned away and found the secretary in the door. Her skin was pale as a sheet, her jaw hanging open. She was frozen in place.

Gently, he pushed her aside. “My condolences,” he muttered, then headed down the hall towards the fresh air outside.

His examination of the alley outside the office was just as thorough. Like any alley, it was a dirty, murky place. While the people of Farmdale were clearly attempting to keep things as clean and tidy
as they could, it wasn’t nearly the town that Vale was. Small bits of trash had accumulated where walls met pavement. Puddles has the sickly sheen of ice that had pollutants mixed within. Trash bins formed groupings near side doors while steaming pipes crawled up the sides of buildings like some sort of mechanistic vines.

Lying near the opposite end of the alley he found a folder, papers scattered about, a bigger mess than the rest of the alley contained. Clearly the folder had been rifled through with extreme haste, the girl only interested in a few key papers and not eager to be burdened by the whole thing. He picked up the folder and examined it a moment, then let it drop with a nod.

Screams echoed down the road from a few blocks away. Spinning, the big man began to run, moving faster than most people would assume small mountains capable of. Within only a minute he came to a crowd gathered around a body in the street. He forced them apart, and stared.

“Fox…”

Farmdale Inn

Yatsuhashi watched as Coco paced the room. The leader of Team CFVY was clearly agitated, her legs turning nervous energy into kinetic motion.

“He’s going to be fine, Coco.” Velvet sounded like she was attempting to reassure herself just as much as her leader. The Faunus woman reached over and adjusted the sheets covering Fox on the bed. “His aura took the brunt of it. He just needs time for his body to rest a bit.”

“He’ll be fine,” Coco agreed, her voice strained. “But the potential…” She rounded on Yatsuhashi with a glare. “Dammit, Yatsu! You should have been there!”

Carefully controlling his motions, Yatsuhashi shrugged. “I tried. I didn’t know where they went.”

Coco glared at him a moment, but then she crumpled. Her legs gave out beneath her and she collapsed onto a chair, her face in her hands. “I know. I know. I’m sorry. It’s just, when I think about what could have happened…” Her entire body twitched. “FUCK!”

He reached over and rested a hand on her shoulder. He could feel her body trembling with strictly repressed sobs. “It’s not your fault.”

Coco pushed his hand aside. “But it is my responsibility.”

“No.”

Coco shook her head, her face still buried in her hands.

“No,” Yatsuhashi repeated. “We all made this choice. We made it when we decided to become hunters and huntresses. We decided again when we chose to come here. Yes, you are our leader, but we are all responsible.” He turned to look at Fox. “We’re responsible for ourselves. And we are responsible for each other. Don’t think you’re responsible to decide if we take risks. You only have to worry about pointing us in the right direction when we do.”

A sob did escape Coco then, and Yatsuhashi slid over to put his arm around her. A few moments passed as she shuddered with the effort to repress her emotions, something he wasn’t sure was really healthy. He wasn’t going to criticize, though. He was hardly one to wear his emotions on his sleeves, after all.

“He moved!”
Yatsu turned his head toward the bed after Velvet’s exclamation. Beside him, Coco looked up as well, face wet and eyes bloodshot.

Velvet stood from her chair and bent over the dark man in the bed. “Fox?”

A low groan sounded from the bed. “Ow.”

“Don’t try to move. None of your injuries are serious, but you took quite a beating.” Velvet rested a hand on Fox’s shoulder.

“Don’t want to move,” the man groaned.

“How do you feel?”

“Tenderized.”

Velvet began poking and prodding at Fox, eliciting a series of grunts and groans from the man as he lay in the bed. “There’s a lot of bruising, and definitely some serious knots. Swelling too. Nothing’s broken though.” The Faunus girl turned towards Yatsuhashi and Coco. “Could one of you get some ice? It might help with some of the swelling.”

Yatsuhashi rose and turned to exit the room, grabbing a bucket from the dresser as he went. The inn had an ice machine just down the corridor.

Just as he was returning the scoop to the ice machine, he felt a hand on his back. Straightening up from the ice machine’s door (built for people not quite so tall as such as he), he turned to see Coco standing beside him. Her fingers tangled in the back of his shirt as she stared down at her shoes.

“Coco?”

With a rapid motion, she was against him, her arms curled against his chest, her cheek resting on his shoulder. He set the ice bucket aside and wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight.

“Are you alright?”

“No,” she whimpered. “No I’m not. I’m scared. I almost lost him, and I’m not certain where to go next, or even if we should. I don’t want to risk hurting him again, or losing Velvet, or you, or…”

He squeezed her tightly, resting his chin on her head as one hand rubbed a shoulder. “It’s okay to be scared. We’re all scared. I am too. It’s alright.”

“Yatsu, I…” Her head shifted under his chin. He tilted his head down so he could look down at her upraised face.

Suddenly she slid up against him, her shoulders slipping through his arms as she went up on tiptoes. He felt her lips press to his, insistent, demanding. Fingers dug into his shirt, then slipped down his body to fumble at the thick belt around his waist. “Oh god I need you so bad.”

He stiffened in shock. He had become somewhat familiar with the tall girl’s body over the past few weeks as they shared body heat to stave off the bitter cold. Far from getting used to it, it had only become more noticeable as the days had passed, and he had caught his mind wandering into inappropriate curiosities about her body more than once, only to snap himself away from it out of respect.

And now she was here, pressed up against him, her lips whispering against his, her fingers searching,
her needs whetting that curiosity and offering a chance to indulge it…

“Coco, I…”

He felt her freeze then, her eyes snapping wide, an expression of horror crossing her face. “Oh god… What was I about to… I didn’t mean…”

She ripped away from him then, whirling away and running down the hall, panic clear with every step.

“Coco!” He reached out after her, but as she disappeared around the hallway corner his feet refused to follow, leaving him standing there, aroused and ashamed.
Coco was still shaking when the infirmary released her with a clean bill of health. She was completely unable to reconcile what had happened during the doubles round in her head. One minute Yatsuhashi had been there, the next…

"With that final blow Yatsuhashi is eliminated!"

"What?!"

Coco shook her head, trying to drive out the uncertain memories from the last moments of the match. She was the hammer, he the anvil. They should have emerged victorious, but instead…

*How can I lead if I can’t even trust my senses? He couldn’t have been there, but I swear…*

She hadn’t even waited for Yatsuhashi before she left the clinic. Her hands were still shaking, her confidence shot… she’d needed a drink to steady her nerves. Maybe then she’d be able to figure out what had happened.

"Aren’t you the one Blondie K’Oed?"

Coco’s naval gazing was interrupted by a comment from further down the bar. She looked two spots over to where the man behind the bar had just leaned toward a smouldering woman sitting on the stool opposite. The woman wore a mustard yellow top that left a single nut-brown shoulder uncovered, held closed with a red sash about the woman’s waist. Coco found herself appreciating her taste, admiring the complementary nature of the outfit’s colors and the woman’s richly hued skin.

Olive green eyes scowled at the barman from under platinum blond hair worn in an almost messy, mostly carefree cut. “Rubbing it in?”

“Nope.” The man bent down behind the bar, coming back up with a large, unopened bottle. “I have 5,000 Lien riding on her winning. This is on the house.” He popped the top and set it before her.

She stared at the bottle, then shot the barkeep a look. “You know something I didn’t?’’

He turned to glare at two boa-clad twins at the end of the bar. “Something like that."

Matching “Whatever”’s echoed from that way, followed by paired middle fingers as the two girls stomped off. The man snorted, then turned back around, attending to something on his scroll.

“Don’t mind Junior,” Coco commented. “He’s gruff, but he runs a decent bar.”

The woman turned her regard in Coco’s direction, contemplating her a moment, then hopped over to the empty stool between them, sliding the bottle over to fill both their glasses before offering her
“Arslan.”

“Coco.” She grasped the outstretched hand, giving it a firm shake. “I saw your match. My teammate is pretty fond of RWBY.”

“Yeah,” Arslan replied, her face a bit grim. “I can see why. They’re pretty good.”

“You were pretty good too,” Coco grinned. “You just had the disadvantage of being four on two.”

Arslan snorted, a slight smirk cracking her mask. “Ah, Bolin and Nadir. They actually are decent fighters. They just get a little fixated on things and lose track of their surroundings.”

Coco twisted on her stool, leaning back to rest an elbow on the bar as she lifted her freshly filled shot glass. “Well, you were definitely good. You held your own against Yang for quite some time, and she’s the team bruiser.”

Arslan grinned. “Yet here I am drinking away my loss.” She lifted her own glass and held it up toward Coco. “To drinking away our memories.”

“Until we can’t remember why we’re drinking.” Coco grinned, and downed her drink.

The bottle had been long gone, and another bottle (paid for, this time) deeply wounded before the two had staggered out into the street. Coco had her arm draped over the average sized woman’s shoulder, her hand dangling limp wristed. Arslan had slid right in, wrapping an arm of her own around Coco’s waist. Coco couldn’t be certain whether they were both walking the same way, or simply unable to let go of each other without risking falling down.

Either way, she couldn’t care less. She was well lubricated, high on life, and not completely certain why she had gone to Junior’s bar in the first place. She was just damn glad she had.

“And then!” she pontificated as they carefully negotiated the curb near one of Vale’s larger parks. “THEN! This crazy first year girl starts cackling and yelling ‘I’m queen of the castle, I’m queen of the castle!’”

Arslan gave a cackle of her own. “And you’re sure this wasn’t in Mantle? I always thought you people here in Vale had sticks up your asses!”

“Wanna check?” Coco grinned and slapped her butt with her free hand. The woman under her shoulder cackled once again. “Well, we all lit out of there. No WAY were we sticking around for that one. I heard Glynda was PISSED.”

“Glynda?”

“Glynda Goodwitch. She’s one of the instructors and kind of acts as Ozpin’s second.”

“And she’s a hardass?”

“She carries a riding crop.”

“Kinky.” Arslan gave a sexy growl.

Coco snorted. “I knew I liked you for a reason.”

“It wasn’t the free booze?” Arslan batted her eyelashes, an expression completely in conflict with the smokey looks Coco had been enjoying all evening.
“That didn’t hurt.”

The soft grass of the darkened park lurched beneath her feet, and Coco suddenly grabbed hold of whatever came to hand in an effort to stay upright. She wobbled a few times before steadying, then giggled.

“Like what you feel?”

Blinking, Coco turned to see what Arslan was referring to. The student from Haven had a rose colored blush to her dusky cheeks that was visible even in the unlit reaches of the park, but was showing an unapologetic flash of white teeth as she smiled. A little further past that sight, Coco caught her hand, no longer laying limp, but firmly clenched onto…

Before she could stop herself, she gave a little squeeze.

Arslan gave her a wry look.

*Hell with it*. Coco grinned. “Yes, I rather do.”

Arslan gave her a flat look for a moment, then burst out laughing. “Fine, fine. But I demand an equal exchange!”

Coco snorted and jumped clear of Arslan, arms held wide. “They’re right here, hot stuff. Come and get ‘em!” She twisted to her side and gave a ‘come get some’ wiggle of her hand.

Grinning, Arslan slid her feet wide, one before the other, and slowly spun her arms until she settled in a low posture, one hand palm down at the level of her waist, the other held out toward Coco, the back of her hand towards the fashionista. With a wink, she shot forward, arms spiralling like windmills as she approached step after step.

Laughing, Coco retreated. “No fair! I can’t even do that sober.” She suddenly reversed her retreat, jumping forward in a stagger step and firing a high heeled kick at Arslan’s middle.

An umber shaded arm spun out of the whirling mass to deflect the kick with gentle ease. A white wrap flung out, catching Coco’s ankle and trapping it high in the air as Arslan stepped past the outstretched leg.

Arslan’s hand whipped in and groped Coco’s breast. “One,” the Mistral girl commented.

A flush of heat ran through Coco, and she grinned as she jerked her leg back. The bandage like ribbon attached to Arslan’s wrist came with it, and Arslan tumbled forward, aided, no doubt, by the booze in her system. She gave a twitch of her wrist, freeing the entrapping cloth from Coco’s ankle, but not before Coco was able to reach in and cop a feel of round bosom herself.

“One,” she quipped with a wink.


Smirking, Coco whipped aside. She brought her handbag into play, spinning it around her to whip it towards Arslan’s head. Platinum blond hair suddenly dropped as Arslan squatted down beneath the swing to sit on one heel, her other foot sliding outward. As the bag shot past overhead she shifted her body in a low slide until she poised above her other heel. A quick upward pop and, again, she was inside Coco’s attack.
A hand popped up, slapping softly against Coco’s exposed midriff, then shot up under her shirt to firmly fondle her through her bra. As fast as it was there, the contact was gone and Arslan was leaping away.

“And two for me.”

A shiver ran through Coco as she felt her nipple harden against the inside of her lingerie. She growled, though she could put no displeasure in the sound. She dashed forward, tossing a series of kicks with her hands held down by her hips, keeping the hand bag in place.

With a sudden switch she dropped the kicks that Arslan was easily dodging and threw a punch right towards the middle of her opponent’s chest. Unexpectedly, Arslan sidestepped to the outside, thus avoiding the follow-up hand grab meant to intersect an inside dodge at boob level. Arslan’s knee snaked behind Coco’s leg and the student from Beacon suddenly felt herself go backwards. Arslan grabbed Coco’s elbow with one hand, and darted the other inside Coco’s shirt once again, this time displacing the cup of the bra completely.

“Make that three,” Arslan purred, and Coco grinned at the skin on skin contact arousing her other nipple. She balanced there, precariously bent over Arslan’s knee, enjoying the feeling.

Then she kicked both her feet off the ground completely.

Surprised, Arslan continued to grip Coco’s breast, only letting go of the captured elbow with her other hand. Plummeting backwards, Coco shot both now free arms around Arslan’s back. Crashing to the ground, she pulled Arslan down with her, tightening her gut against the double impact of grass and girl, preserving her breath.

As Arslan landed on top of her, the lower hem of her shirt flipped up over her back. Coco wasted no time. Her hands struck, sliding beneath the now exposed waistband of Arslan’s pants. She felt silk slide over her knuckles, and soft skin under her fingers. She arched her fingers into claws, gripping firmly.

“Three AND four,” she announced triumphantly.

Arslan froze on top of Coco, a slight rose tint returning to the dark hue of her cheeks.

Smiling, Coco lifted her head, and pressed her lips to Arslan’s.

“And five makes match.”

Arslan laughed, and leaned down to return the kiss. Coco grinned into it as she felt fingers beginning to undo her belt.

**Farmdale**

Coco’s feet pounded on the pavement unguided, taking her whichever way they happened to point. She hurtled past people, never noting their faces, never analyzing their purposes. She simply ran, not towards anything, but fleeing from…

From what? From memories? From responsibility for her choices? From a future she had jeopardized?

Lungs bursting, Coco staggered into a walk. Her legs were rubber, her head throbbing with a need for oxygen. She sucked down air with gasping desperation. A wobble left her suddenly leaning against a random wall of brick, her vision tunneled down to a few square feet of concrete just ahead
What the hell, Coco? Her thoughts began beating at her as strongly as the pulse pounding in her temples. Fox gets thrown off a roof, and the first thing you do is push yourself on Yatsu? What were you thinking?

She wasn’t thinking, she realized. That was the problem. From the moment Yatsuhashi had stumbled into the inn, Fox slung over his shoulders in a fireman’s carry, she had stopped thinking, and begun mindlessly reacting.

Her breath a little easier, she pushed herself off the wall and began walking.

_It wasn’t thinking the day after the doubles fight, either. _She scowled. **I just followed my gut, and my gut wanted food, drink, and sex.**

Coco sighed. She had lost a fight, then lost her head. Now she nearly lost a teammate, and nearly repeated that response. **No, HAD** repeated it. It had been Yatsuhashi that had kept his head there, not Coco, and now the damage was done.

*A one time fling with a stranger is one thing. But this...*

She had no idea how she would be able to face the team again.

But she’d have to. That was plain enough. They were a long ways from home, with White Fang who were willing to play for keeps trying to erase what they knew. If ever the team needed to remain tight, this was the time.

*So, how are you going to fix this one, hero? _She asked herself.*

Silence was the only answer her brain gave her.

*Right...*

“Yeah, I remember you.”

Coco froze as the coarse voice echoed out of the alleyway just ahead of her. She looked around, torn from her inner torment by the guarded clip to the voice, the sound of it ringing alarm bells.

“You’re the bint that Torchwick fellow kept.”

The sound of a slap echoed through the alley, and Coco slid toward the alley’s opening. Whatever it was that first got her notice, the name ‘Torchwick’ anchored her attention firmly on what was going on in there. Anyone in Vale who had been paying attention to the news leading up to the Battle of Beacon knew about the man who had led the tunnel attack.

Which meant the speakers were...

She peeked around the edge of the alley in time to see a large deer Faunus glaring from behind his Grimm mask at a smaller, similarly garbed female. The ice cream colored girl stood beside them, her face seeming amused by the whole thing.

“Some of us don’t like that word, Gil.” The other White Fang member snapped, her voice clear and commanding. “Or the rest of that sentiment. So keep. Your trap. Shut.”

The big man’s glare only grew behind his mask, but he said nothing. Coco found herself grateful that his attention was entirely on the two women and not on anything else going on in the alley. His was
the only face pointed towards her end of the alley. So long as he stayed distracted…

The Faunus girl turned to the other woman. “Neo, wasn’t it?”

The brown and pink haired girl nodded, casually leaning on her parasol.

“What happened to Torchwick?”

The tiny girl’s calm demeanor vanished in an instance. Coco could nearly hear the girl’s violent shaking as she lashed out at a dumpster, the blade that had suddenly appeared at the tip of the parasol cutting a gash in its side and throwing sparks. Neo’s hand threw the parasol, embedding it into the doorway the two White Fang had been guarding and then she drew out a scroll, punching a couple buttons before flipping it to face the two guards.

“Ah. Her.” The Faunus female nodded. “Believe me, we would love to have a few words with her ourselves, as well as any other members of her party.”

“Especially that bitch, Bla”

The Faunus woman backhanded her companion again. “Traitor or not, I’ll thank you not to use that term, either.”

Gil slumped into a dark sulk, clearly wanting to do something, but just as clearly unwilling to make the attempt.

“Alright,” The Faunus girl nodded to Neo. “It sounds like we still have common cause, human. Come on in, I’ll take you to the boss.” She turned and opened the door to the warehouse. “Lucky you came when you did. We’re leaving in two days.”

Coco turned and began running back the way she came, her former thoughts buried under new information.
Yatsuhashi took a while to get back with the ice. Velvet turned as he entered, noticing an awkwardness to his walk, his brows furrowed in deep thought. She watched him as he shuffled over to the bed, holding out the bucket of ice.

She took the bucket from him and sank a hand into it, dropping a few cubes into a towel to set on Fox’ exposed ribs. “Hold this,” she told fox, then turned back to watch Yatsuhashi. “Thanks, Yatsu.”

The big man grunted and plopped down on his bed, staring at the far wall.

Velvet shared a concerned glance with Fox.

“Something going on there big guy?” Fox asked, holding the towel to his ribs.

Yatsuhashi grunted again, then turned to look at them. “Sorry, what?”

Velvet found her eyes narrowing a bit. “Is something wrong, Yatsu?”

“Oh. No,” he shook his head. “Just tired I guess.” He flopped back onto the bed to stare at the ceiling.

Velvet watched him breath for a moment, and then her eyes shifted to the door.

Coco went out the door just after he did. Just why did she leave? I don’t remember her saying anything.

She frowned, and then the frown turned into a worried scowl.

“Yatsu… What did Coco say to you? She wasn’t scolding you again, was she?”

On the bed, Yatsu’s eyes widened. “Uh, no, no she…”

“Yatsu. What did she do?”

A redness crept up his neck and onto his face, which he turned to the wall. “Nothing important.”

Velvet stood up abruptly. She turned and looked down at Fox, patting him on the shoulder. “You’re healing fine. Once your Aura has fully recovered you should be right as rain.”

“Velve…” Fox held out his hand toward her.

She turned and walked out of the room, making it down the hall to her own room before the tears began to flow.
Laying in bed, she could smell Coco when the girl came back to Team CFVY’s dorm room. She could always smell Coco when she was near. It was a mixture of subtle perfume, clean laundry, and the lightest hint of something that was uniquely Coco. It was a smell Velvet had quickly grown fond of.

Coco’s usual aroma was present, though muted by an eventful day. Her perfume had mostly faded away, to be replaced by a story of the day’s events. She could detect the familiar smell of Coco’s sweat, probably built up during the fight and not yet washed away. Alcohol overlay this, a strong odor, making plain Coco’s overindulgence. But on top of those, sharp, pungent…

Unmistakable.

She could smell the distinct scent of a woman. Girls didn’t make that scent. It was a ‘gift’ that came with puberty. Breasts bulged, hair grew, and certain new emotions caused the creation of certain new and exciting fluids. Fluids that came with a particular odor.

Coco had been aroused. Quite a bit, based on the strength of the scent.

Velvet felt her belly grow warm, low down inside, followed quickly by a tingling, pulsing a little lower, a surface level demand reacting to a deep down desire.

Velvet quietly cursed her Faunus sense of smell as it triggered an all too familiar, but unwelcome response through sheer instinct. She opened her mouth quietly, trying not to breath through her nose, willing the reaction of her body away.

She heard the click of the bathroom door as Coco closed it, leaving behind only the strong scent and the needs it awoke, still strong in spite of her denial. She lay there, awash in the smell, fighting the urges it created, willing them away, wishing for the dampness she felt to dry and the ‘itch’ to cease. She lay there.

Fighting.

Weakening.

And then succumbing.

As the sound of the shower splashed through the closed door, Velvet’s fingers slipped down the soft, peach fuzz covered skin of her stomach until they reached the elastic of her waistband. Only a slight hesitation occurred, one last small struggle for victory over herself, and then her hand crept down inside of her shorts and began addressing the tingling, moistened thing that Coco’s arrival had awakened. So addressed, the little button grew, as though pushing itself into her small pinches, pushes, and pullings.

Her mouth clenched shut against the vocalizations of her growing pleasure, the tingling replaced by the heat and need in her belly. She could feel her breath escaping her in small shuddering patterns as she tried to keep the sounds from awakening her roommates, the concern of their notice only sharpening the feelings her fingers were creating. Soon, even this was not enough, and her fingers sought a deeper home, her palm claiming their former duty, and she began a rhythmic, powerful motion below…

Velvet felt her nostrils flare, the first sign of something else. Mixed in with the scent of Coco, and the growing smell of her own desire, was another smell. It was almost perfectly, but subtly not quite, the same.
It was the smell of another girl mingled with Coco’s.

Not perfume. Not sweat. Not even shampoo.

It was the smell of sex.

Shocked, Velvet stopped.

*No. No no. No no no. I won’t believe it. I won’t. I…*

Her mind wouldn’t let it go. She could smell the proof of it. She could see it in her mind. She could picture fingers, a stranger’s, pushing into that moistened source of Coco’s own scent, picture a growing arousal as legs tangled, as sexes kissed, as pools of dampness mingled into a new, complex perfume.

Unknowing, her fingers and hips began moving of their own accord, soft wet noises negating her care not to gasp or moan. She twisted, twitched, slowly writhed, caught between the needs of her own ardor and the fear of being found out.

A small, distant part of herself was horrified to realize that the images only made her hunger stronger, made her thighs grow damp with transplanted moisture, that the risk of being discovered made her own fingers feel even more powerful, made her body clench, made everything crash down in overpowering waves of…

She kept her eyes averted, pretending to be asleep when Coco left the bathroom a quarter of an hour later. She couldn’t bear the thought of looking at the object of her lust while she still trembled, her shaking as much a result of shame as of pleasure.

**Farndale**

The tears had not lasted long. Velvet had thrown herself on the bed almost violently, pressing her face into the pillows to absorb the moisture escaping her eyes against her will. She was not a cryer. Hadn’t been since the day she learned how unjust the world could be.

The worst of it was that she didn’t even know why she was crying.

No, that wasn’t true. She knew the reason. What she didn’t understand was why she was reacting as she was. She should have been angry. Should have been jealous. She should have wanted to pummel Coco or Yatsuhashi. Her tears should have been tears of rage.

Instead she just felt… little. Diminished. Unfulfilled. Like something was missing, and it was only in thinking someone else had whatever that missing thing was that she realized how badly the lack hurt. Everything just felt… Empty.

And now she lay on the bed, her eyes staring but seeing nothing, as her cheeks itched from the dried salt streaked down them.

A knock on the door announced a visitor. She quickly realized she had failed to close the door completely as it slowly swung open. She refused to roll over to look and see who it was, but lay in her bed, listening to the sound of footprints softly cross the carpet.

“You okay, Velvet?” Yatsuhashi’s voice sounded hesitant.

She didn’t answer. She knew it was petty. She didn’t even feel like she was angry with Yatsuhashi. But the fact remained, she ignored his question and continued staring at the wall, sniffing away a
The bed sank as Yatsuhashi sat down by her feet, the springs sighing in echo to his own unvoiced expression. She could feel him sitting there in silence for a moment, then felt him twist just a bit, his hand coming to rest near the back of her thighs.

“For what it’s worth, nothing really happened. Coco was scared and wasn’t really thinking straight. She blurted out something kind of dumb, realized how it sounded, and then ran off.” He shifted on the bed a bit. “She’s probably feeling really embarrassed over nothing.”

Velvet thought about that for a moment, then drew her knees up to her chest. “What did she say?”

He laughed nervously. “Something I probably misinterpreted.”

She frowned, and her voice grew stern. “Yatsu…”

“Okay.” She could almost hear his hands go up in surrender. “She hugged me and said she needed me. She probably meant that she just needed someone to hold her a bit, to reassure her that everything was alright. Fox was fine. I was fine. You were fine. Everything was a big happy batch of fine, and she could quit beating herself up over might-have-beens. But Coco being Coco, my brain went somewhere else first, figuring it for another of her over the top antics and interpreting it very differently.” She felt the big man squirm a bit. “So yeah. I guess it was me being dumb, not Coco.”

“Yatsu…” She sniffed, her nose threatening to start running again. “Thank you for trying.”

“Trying?”

“To lie and make me feel better.” She surprised herself by truly meaning it. Yatsuhashi tended to being quiet and evasive, rather than being one to lie, even if it was a little fib to smooth things over. That he would go so far to make her feel a bit better was surprisingly heartening to her, though it didn’t go so far as to take her current numbness away completely.

She heard the big man sigh again, acknowledging his defeat. “You really like her, huh?”

Her ears rubbed the pillow as she nodded. “Yeah. Stupid, huh?”

“Uh, what?”

She sighed, and rolled over so she was facing him over her knees. She quickly attempted to scrub some of the salt away, knowing it would accomplish nothing to improve the puffiness and redness around her eyes. “She likes girls. I’ve known that for a while. She likes boys too. And that’s okay. I just always hoped that, since she liked girls, she might…” She stopped and shook her head. “You know, never mind. It’s not important.”

Yatsuhashi twisted around, letting one knee stay on the bed while the other leg slipped off the side of the bed. “It is important.” He sighed and leaned forward, resting a large hand on her much smaller knee. “I’d like to hear more, if that’s okay.”

She hadn’t thought she wanted to. But then the words began coming out, unbidden. “She was my first friend here, you know. I mean, even before the team formed, she came over to talk to me. I was sitting there, in my shorts and PJ shirt, over in a corner by myself, and she came over. “I was sure no one would. I mean, there I was, one of those scary Faunus. It’s not like I could even hide it from people in regular clothes, let alone in pajamas. So everyone was going to stay away, and
I’d spend the night by myself. But then, there she was.”

Velvet felt her lips curl up in a small, hesitant smile, much like the one she’d worn during the events she was relating. “She just came right up to me, held out her hand, and said, ‘Hi. I’m Coco. I dig those shorts. Very cute.’ I almost died on the spot.”

“Of embarrassment?”

Velvet’s smile spread. “They were pretty short shorts. I don’t think I’d realized quite how much I’d outgrown them until I knew someone had actually been looking. But Coco didn’t say anything about it. She just spread out her sleeping bag next to mine and talked with me well into the night. She was just… cool. About everything.”

Yatsuhashi nodded, a small smile of his own flashing as he watched her.

“So once I figured out that she liked girls, I just kinda… Well…” She shrugged.

“Fell for her?”

Her smile slipped away. “Yeah. Pretty hard. Dumb, huh?”

Yatsuhashi looked away, his eyes studying something on the floor that she couldn’t see.

“No. No it’s not dumb.”

They lapsed into silence for a bit, there. It wasn’t quite a companionable thing, as both clearly were lost in related, but still separate worries. But neither seemed to be uncomfortable with it, either, until...

“Look, Velvet…” Yatsuhashi was facing her again, and his hand was gripping her knee tightly. He wet his lips a moment, as though composing his thoughts. She found herself staring, something intense in his gaze capturing her in an almost hypnotic fashion.

“So, we’ve known each other for a while. Fought against Grimm together, studied together, ate together. We’ve shared the same room, been through thick and thin together. We’ve even been, well… sharing body heat lately.” His face, previously serious, took on an awkward look, and suddenly his other hand was scratching the back of his neck. “I guess what I’m trying to say is that, well… You mean a lot to me. You really do. And, well… Velve, I really think I… That I...”

The big man trailed off, and Velvet cocked her head, watching him carefully. She felt a small flutter in the pit of her stomach as a butterfly shifted about inside. A tiny portion of her brain tried to get her attention and warn her that something very important was happening, tried to get through to her just what this might mean.

Yatsuhashi’s shoulders slumped, and his hand slipped off her knee onto the bed. He sighed. “I just… Look. I really think I know what you’re going through. Don’t…” He stood up and turned toward the door. “Don’t give up, okay? On Coco.”

Silently the man walked through the door, closing it behind him. Velvet lay there, staring, her attention caught by the fading warmth on her knee and feeling, somehow, disappointed.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 15: Yatsuhashi

Chapter Notes

Winter Hunt updates on Tuesdays and Fridays

Farndale

“Coco!” Yatsuhashi reached out after her, but as she disappeared around the hallway corner his feet refused to follow, leaving him standing there, aroused and ashamed. He stared, his mind a confused mess, his emotions overwhelming the disciple he tried to keep firmly in control over it.

What had just happened?

He tried to force calm to replace other feelings, but found it difficult. His body and mind were both fighting him, forcing his thoughts down paths he’d long resisted, turning him into something that eschewed discipline and became more animalistic.

With a growl he seized the bucket of ice and pressed it to his groin. The cold was a shock to the system. In fact, it was outright painful. But it served to break a cycle he was otherwise helpless to and jumpstart his brain.

Alright, Yatsu. Step by step. What happened?

Coco had kissed him. Not a peck on the cheek, or a quick, teasing brush against his lips. It had been a full on heated, wet, connection between two people. A lover’s kiss.

He shifted uncomfortably. Surely he was misunderstanding it. Coco was a tease. An outrageous flirt. It wasn’t something serious, it was just how she bonded with people.

Bullshit.

It had not been a thought he’d expected. But even as his conscious self was insisting it was just a joke, his deeper mind knew better. Coco’s kiss was no act, no game, no amusing little interaction to bond the team together. She was hurting. Wounded. Vulnerable. She had needed comforting. She was in no condition to play little games.

And she had KISSED him. She had pressed herself up against him hard enough for him to gain a full appreciation of what was in his arms, kissed him, and her hands had…

He ground the bucket against his groin again.

Eyes pressed closed, he sighed.

Coco… came on to me. She. came. on. to. Me.

He growled.

No way. Yes, she threw herself at him, but she didn’t really mean it. She was needy and hurting, and not in a stable frame of mind. If she’d been fully in control of herself she’d never have done anything
like that.

And by Oum, he was NOT going to let it affect how he thought of her.

No matter how good she had felt in his arms.

Clutching the bucket of ice he forced his legs into motion, heading back to his hotel room.

Don’t think about it, don’t think about it…

“Thanks, Yatsu.”

“Uh huh.”

He dropped to the foot of his bed, mind working furiously.

Knowing Coco she’s probably really embarrassed. She’s probably trying to drink me… drink this moment into oblivion.

He sighed. Coco’s love of liquor had never gone unnoticed. It was something that worried him, in fact. But she had never gone off and gotten drunk in the middle of a mission.

She’s more responsible than that. It’ll be fine…

His thoughts were derailed by Fox asking a question, though he didn’t catch it. He jerked his mind back into the present and turned to glance over to Fox’ bed.

Velvet was looking towards him as well. “Is something wrong, Yatsu?”

“Oh. No,” he shook his head. “Just tired I guess.” He flopped back onto the bed to stare at the ceiling.

And pigs fly. What a mess.

He found himself actually hoping she would drink the memory away. Better that than… what? Than everything she did around him being somehow twisted by her own shock?

“Yatsu… What did Coco say to you? She wasn’t scolding you again, was she?”

Scolding? Yatsuhashi was surprised by that, and then he realized…

Velvet can sense something happened. Velvet, the girl he’d always protected, the sweet and kind one he trusted with his life. The girl whose soft curves had become only too familiar of late, and who he had to get out of his mind whenever he wasn’t keeping it idle.

Oh, geeze…

Velvet had always admired Coco. If she knew...

Desperately he tried to think of some way to deflect the question. “Uh, no, no she…”

Velvet was having none of it. She locked eyes with him, a dominance fight she probably wasn’t even aware of, and which he knew he couldn’t win. “Yatsu. What did she do?”

He jerked his face away, feeling the burn of shame in his cheeks. “Nothing important.”

He head Fox’s bed creak from a sudden change in the weight it was holding. “You’re healing fine.
Once your Aura has fully recovered you should be right as rain.”

“Velve…”

Yatsuhashi winced as the door clicked closed, far too gently for the disaster it represented.

He heard Fox sigh. “Well, that’s that then.”

“Huh?” Yatsuhashi turned to eye Fox.

“The Coco bomb finally detonated. Now we get to see where all the shrapnel has landed.”

“You were expecting this.”

“I was hoping it wouldn’t happen, but…” Fox shrugged.

Yatsuhashi sighed and scratched the back of his head. “And you couldn’t stop it?”

“Stop Coco from being Coco?” Fox laughed ruefully. “No more than I can stop you from being you.”

Yatsuhashi gave Fox a sharp look. “Meaning?”

“How do you view Velvet?”

“Me?” Yatsuhashi shrugged. “She’s just… Velvet. You know? She’s strong and capable but also kind and sweet.”

“Cute?”

Yatsuhashi shifted uncomfortably. “I suppose, yeah.”

“Perhaps even sexy?”

“Uh…” He stared down at the hands resting uselessly in his lap.

“And Coco?”

“She’s… well…”

“Right.” Fox sat up, wincing a bit as he moved. “Until this trip Velvet has been the cute kid sister and Coco the unblemished virgin warrior.”

“No, I know Coco has… well…”

“Up here, yeah.” Fox tapped his head. “But the rest of you? Not so much. She has her ‘little indiscretions’, but they’re always out there, away from the team, and she’s as innocent as a lamb when it comes to the rest of us. She jokes a lot, sure. But actually act on it? She’d never touch us that way. Not me. Not you. And especially not innocent little sister Velvet, right?”

Yatsuhashi thought about that for a moment, rolled over the events of the past few weeks in his head. He thought about Coco’s behavior, his own new awareness of her body, what had just happened.

And Velvet…

“Oh, geeze.” He sighed. “How long has she been crushing over Coco?”
“Velvet?” Fox pinched the bridge of his nose. “Pretty much from the beginning, I’d say. And I doubt you’re the only one who has noticed how soft Coco has become, so to speak.”

“Great.” Yatsuhashi heaved himself up from the bed and ambled over to the door. “I’m going to go check on her.”

Fox shook his head a little, then shrugged. “Good luck…”

It took a little bit of work to gain the courage to knock. Facing Grimm was always easier, because you knew it was simply a case of winning or dying. This, however, was far harder, and the results far less certain.

The door swung a few inches as he rapped on it with his knuckles. Hearing nothing from within he paused, then made himself push on through into the room beyond.

Velvet was a lump on one of the two beds, her back to him. Her face was pressed to a pillow, and he could see small shudders as she drew breath, like she was just recovering from a patch of weeping.

He was reluctant to disturb her, but there was no chance she didn’t know he was there. He straightened his shoulders, an act of will, and stepped further into the room. “You okay, Velvet?”

She didn’t reply, merely shrunk the tiniest bits deeper into her curled up position above the sheets, a small sniff coming from the pillow. He looked at her, vulnerable and small atop the bed, and felt something in his chest tighten painfully.

Velvet…

He tiptoed over to the bed, and sank down onto the corner, his own back to hers. He slumped there, shoulders dropping low. He’d hurt her, and he wasn’t even certain how it had happened. He just wanted to take her in his arms, hold her, protect her, and magically make everything be alright.

But he couldn’t. All he could do was…

Turning slightly, he rested a hand on Velvet’s knee, the only gesture of comfort he felt he had a right to give. “For what it’s worth, nothing really happened. Coco was scared and wasn’t really thinking straight. She blurted out something kind of dumb, realized how it sounded, and then ran off.” He shifted on the bed a bit. “She’s probably feeling really embarrassed over nothing.”

He could feel his face heating up at the little lie, willed himself to believe it just as strongly as he hoped that Velvet would.

Velvet’s knee pulled out from under his hand as she pulled her legs in, hugging them to herself. “What did she say?”

He laughed nervously, fighting to come up with something plausible. Failing that, he simply blurted out an evasion. “Something I probably misinterpreted.”

“Yatsu…”

You’re just hurting her more. Man up and tell her the truth.

“Okay. She hugged me and said she needed me. She probably meant that she just needed someone to hold her a bit, to reassure her that everything was alright. Fox was fine. I was fine. You were fine. Everything was a big happy batch of fine, and she could quit beating herself up over might-have-beens. But Coco being Coco, my brain went somewhere else first, figuring it for another of her over
the top antics and interpreting it very differently."

*There you go. Make yourself the villain so she’ll be fine with Coco. You can give her that much, right? For her sake?* He felt something twist inside even as he thought it, and the pain in his chest only grew.

“So yeah. I guess it was me being dumb, not Coco.”

“Yatsu…” He heard her sniffle again. “Thank you for trying.”

“Trying?”

“To lie and make me feel better.”

He felt the stab go straight to his core. His willingness to make himself the bad guy in order to protect her feelings for Coco had failed. Worse, he’s shown himself a liar. Somehow knowing that he’d damaged her trust in him was a harsher thing than knowing that he’d crushed her dreams about Coco.

*Coco…*

“You really like her, huh?’

She nodded into the pillow. “Yeah. Stupid, huh?”

“Uh, what?”

He watched as she rolled over, still hugging her knees to her chest. She scrubbed away at her puffy cheeks, red with her tears, then looked at him.

Her eyes bore a hole right through him. His heart hurt at her expression, at the clear evidence of her tears. Pinned by her gaze he felt wounded, guilty, and the urge to do anything to make things better for her. He felt the need to take her in his arms and...

“She likes girls.”

Velvet’s voice snapped away his inward focus. He returned his attention to the wounded Faunus before him as her voice, broken, spilled out her suffering.

“I’ve known that for a while. She likes boys too. And that’s okay. I just always hoped that, since she liked girls, she might…” Velvet paused, and closed her eyes, shaking her head. “You know, never mind. It’s not important.”

Yatsuhashi twisted around, one leg slipping off the bed as he shifted so he could face her fully. His hand came out and rested on her knee without his telling it to. “It is important.” He sighed, angry with himself for his presumption. He mentally chastised himself. *Focus on her, on her needs.* “I’d like to hear more, if that’s okay.”

Velvet nodded, hesitantly, but the words began to spill out. “She was my first friend here, you know. I mean, even before the team formed, she came over to talk to me. I was sitting there, in my shorts and PJ shirt, over in a corner by myself, and she came over.

“I was sure no one would. I mean, there I was, one of those scary Faunus. It’s not like I could even hide it from people in regular clothes, let alone in pajamas. So everyone was going to stay away, and I’d spend the night by myself. But then, there she was.”
Yatsuhashi felt a small stab as a hesitant smile formed on Velvet’s lips. “She just came right up to me, held out her hand, and said, ‘Hi. I’m Coco. I dig those shorts. Very cute.’ I almost died on the spot.”

“Of embarrassment?”

Velvet’s smile spread. “They were pretty short shorts. I don’t think I’d realized quite how much I’d grown until I knew someone had actually been looking. But Coco didn’t say anything about it. She just spread out her sleeping bag next to mine and talked with me well into the night. She was just… cool. About everything.”

Yatsuhashi felt his own smile form, first from the unbidden image of Velvet in those shorts, and then at Coco’s being the Coco he remembered. Not the one he was just learning about.

“So once I figured out that she liked girls, I just kinda… Well…”

Yatsuhashi nodded, his smile slipping. “Fell for her?”

Velvet’s face also dropped its smile. “Yeah. Pretty hard. Dumb, huh?”

Yatsuhashi looked away, his eyes picturing Coco. Laughing Coco, making another crude comment. Playful Coco, giving his backside a swat as she praised him. Caring Coco, making certain the team was watching one another’s backs.

“No. No it’s not dumb.”

No dumber than him falling for her and never realizing it until it had all gone wrong. Or him falling for…

Velvet.

He realized it then. What Fox had been getting at. Fox had figured it out before he had.

It wasn’t the “softness” he’d asked about that he’d become aware of over the past few weeks. It wasn’t a reminder that two of his teammates were girls that he’d been tripping over. In the past year and a half they had been teammates and partners, become friends and comrades. He trusted them with his back, his life, and many of his insecurities and weaknesses. And somehow, over the past few weeks, friendship had become...

“Look, Velvet…” He turned back to the girl, no longer knowing just how to describe their relationship. Velvet turned back to facing him from wherever her own thoughts had gone, and something in her eyes stared back, unrecognizable.

“So, we’ve known each other for a while. Fought against Grimm together, studied together, ate together. We’ve shared the same room, been through thick and thin together. We’ve even been, well… sharing body heat lately.” The briefest of flashes of memory went through him, of just how good she felt in his arms, and he felt his face heat up. “I guess what I’m trying to say is that, well… You mean a lot to me. You really do. And, well… Velve, I really think I… That I…”

That I love you. That I’m in love with you.

He couldn’t say it. Not now. Not when she was hurting about Coco. Not when he was not sure what his own feelings were for Coco. Not when… Not when doing so could only make things worse. Make Velvet’s own pain deepen.
Yatsuhashi’s shoulders slumped, and his hand slipped off her knee onto the bed. He sighed. “I just… Look. I really think I know what you’re going through. Don’t…” He stood up and turned toward the door. “Don’t give up, okay? On Coco.”

Broken, Yatsuhashi stepped into the hall and closed the door behind himself.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 16: Fox

Chapter Notes

Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays.

Farndale

Fox shook his head as the door closed behind Velvet. “Well, that’s that then.”

“Huh?” Yatsuhashi turned, a thoughtful eye directed towards where Fox lay propped up against the headboard of the bed.

“The Coco bomb finally detonated. Now we get to see where all the shrapnel has landed.”

“You were expecting this.”

Something like this, he thought. He hadn’t been sure who would be the one to step on the landmine, but given that all three of his teammates were utterly idiotic towards one another, and even more idiotic about their insistence on bottling it all up, it was inevitable that someone was going to trip that trap.

_Sometimes it sucks being the one everyone else talks to…_

“I was hoping it wouldn’t happen, but…” Fox shrugged.

Yatsuhashi sighed and scratched the back of his head. “And you couldn’t stop it?”

“Stop Coco from being Coco?” Fox laughed ruefully. “No more than I can stop you from being you.”

Yatsuhashi’s eyes narrowed as he stared at Fox. “Meaning?”

_Meaning you have this amazing ability to put women on a pedestal, even after a year and a half of living with them. Meaning you have some serious hangups about being anything less than a celibate knight, treating anything with tits with utmost chivalry. Meaning you need to wake up and smell your own libido._

Of course, he couldn’t just say that. This was something Yatsuhashi had to realize for himself. All Fox could do was lead him by the nose until something clicked.

Rolling his eyes mentally, Fox pondered just how to get started at the very unwanted role of sexual advisor to the inept.

“How do you view Velvet?”

“Velvet?” Yatsuhashi shrugged, his face having snapped back into its usual inscrutable wall of meat. “She’s just… Velvet. You know? She’s strong and capable but also kind and sweet.”

_How noble of you. Come on, dude. Grow a dick._
He turned the screws a little. “Cute?”

Yatsuhashi shifted uncomfortably, his face attempting to remain completely passive and failing to fool Fox one bit. “I suppose, yeah.”

He couldn’t help but smile as he planted the barb. “Perhaps even sexy?”

“Uh…” Yatsuhashi turned his face away from Fox, staring down at his hands. Fox’s smile became a grin as he watched the strike land.

And now you’re remembering the tits and ass you were trying steadfastly to not describe to me the other day, aren’t you? Time to twist the knife.

“And Coco?”

“She’s… well…”

“Right.” Fox sat up, wincing as still knitting muscles objected painfully. “Until this trip Velvet has been the cute kid sister and Coco the unblemished virgin warrior.”

“No, I know Coco has… well…”

Stop. Flinching, Yatsu. It’s okay to say the words “active sex life”.

“Up here, yeah.” Fox tapped his head. “But the rest of you? Not so much. She has her ‘little indiscretions’, but they’re always out there, away from the team, and she’s as innocent as a lamb when it comes to the rest of us. She jokes a lot, sure. But actually act on it? She’d never touch us that way. Not me. Not you. And especially not innocent little sister Velvet, right?”

Innocent my ass. Velvet isn’t quite as discreet as she thinks. Come on, Yatsu. Let the idea of Coco being interested in Velvet lead you to think about Velvet’s own potential interests...

“Oh, geeze.” He sighed. “How long has she been crushing over Coco?”

It’s a miracle! Fox felt himself relax as Yatsuhashi finally admitted that Velvet might actually have romantic, perhaps even sexual interests. He pinched his nose against a potential stress headache.

“Velvet? Pretty much from the beginning, I’d say. And I doubt you’re the only one who has noticed how soft Coco has become, so to speak.”

In fact, I have no doubts whatsoever. Velvet has admitted as much to me. At least she’s not wearing blinders to her own hungers.

Come to think of it, maybe she could stand to have a few blinders. Dammit, Coco...

Fox could see the sharp look in Yatsuhashi’s eyes as the gears finally began to turn in the parts of his brain that governed people’s sex lives. The big man heaved himself up from the bed.

“Great. I’m going to go check on her.”

Oh, good idea. Completely confuse her when she’s at her worst.

Fox shook his head a little, then shrugged. What could he do? Boys will be boys. “Good luck…”

He lay there, staring at the wall as Yatsuhashi left. He couldn’t help but wonder what he thought he was doing.
Coco had basically succumbed to her desires in a moment of weakness. Rather than helping to try and make that ‘go away’ so everyone could pretend nothing had happened and attempt to act like they were still a perfectly functional, well tuned fighting machine, here he was actually pushing Yatsuhashi to stop repressing himself.

Oh yes, the big guy was clearly repressed. Fox really had no idea why. Maybe the man’s mother had been a serious hardass. Maybe his father had been a celibate monk and Yatsuhashi raised in a monastery. Maybe Yatsuhashi had actually been born yesterday and never stumbled across a lingerie ad. Whatever the cause, Yatsuhashi clearly had clamped down on his own sexuality so hard that women, all women, were absolutely untouchable saints in his eyes.

“The man makes me seem like an absolute sex fiend.” Fox made quick devil horns with his fingers, pressing them to his head. “Bring me yer wimen!” He snorted.

The door swung open and Coco burst inside. “The White Fang are here.”

Fox stared for a moment, taking in Coco’s uncharacteristically disorganized appearance. It wasn’t so much a physical thing as an air of completely undisciplined thought, a jarring difference from her usual self-assurance.

“We knew that already?”

“No, I mean I’ve found their hideout. It’s just around the block. Apparently I made a nice big circle and…”

Fox pinched the bridge of his nose again. “Slow down, Coco.”

He watched as she drew in a deep breath. She gripped the door frame, eyes closed, and he could see her forcing some degree of calm to settle over herself. When she opened her eyes he could see she was still rattled, but that something vaguely resembling her usual cool had gained a small foothold.

“There’s a warehouse a block from here, on an alley. The girl, Neo, was there, meeting with a couple of White Fang. Where’s Yatsu and Velve?”

“Next door.” Fox slipped out of the bed and padded over to the door. He pushed past Coco and turned down the hallway towards the room she shared with Velvet.

He could hear voices from the open door of the next room.

“She likes girls.”

Velvet’s voice.

“I’ve known that for a while. She likes boys too. And that’s okay. I just always hoped that, since she liked girls, she might…” Velvet’s voice stumbled to a halt, and then began again with a defeated tone to it. “You know, never mind. It’s not important.”

Coco shot Fox a look, then began moving to step through the door. Fox reached out and took her arm, stopping her. He shook his head and tapped his ear.

“Fox…”

“Shh.”

“It is important.”
Yatsuhashi, this time.

“I’d like to hear more, if that’s okay.”

Coco gave Fox another look, this time more Coco-ish. A touch of control, a touch of peevishness, and a touch of class.

“Trust me,” he whispered.

*I really hope you know what you’re doing…*

“She was my first friend here, you know. I mean, even before the team formed, she came over to talk to me. I was sitting there, in my shorts and PJ shirt, over in a corner by myself, and she came over.

“I was sure no one would. I mean, there I was, one of those scary Faunus. It’s not like I could even hide it from people in regular clothes, let alone in pajamas. So everyone was going to stay away, and I’d spend the night by myself. But then, there she was.”

Fox glanced over at Coco out of the corner of his eyes. The fashionista was looking downward, a slight flush on her face.

Despite himself, Fox smiled a bit.

“She just came right up to me, held out her hand, and said, ‘Hi. I’m Coco. I dig those shorts. Very cute.’ I almost died on the spot.”

“Of embarrassment?”

“They were pretty short shorts. I don’t think I’d realized quite how much I’d grown until I knew someone had actually been looking.”

His covert examination watched a small smile form on Coco’s face.

*Bet she’s saved that memory for a while.*

“But Coco didn’t say anything about it. She just spread out her sleeping bag next to mine and talked with me well into the night. She was just… cool. About everything. So once I figured out that she liked girls, I just kinda… Well…”

“Fell for her?”

“Yeah.”

The smile faded from Coco’s lips, to be replaced by an expression of thoughtfulness tinged with some sort of pain.

*Yeah, Coco. You never realized it, did you? We all love you, but those two love you in a way I will never understand.*

Fox felt the tiniest bit of jealousy of his teammates, but it was only a little thing. He’d long since resigned himself to never experiencing such a thing.

“Pretty hard. Dumb, huh?”

Coco’s head jerked in a no.
“No. No it’s not dumb.”

Coco’s hand reached out, her fingers pinching Fox’ arm like a vice. She dragged him away from the doorway, back down the hall and into his room.

“I had no idea.” Coco’s voice was pained as she whispered quietly. Fox looked at her, and was taken briefly aback by the sight of her watery eyes. He froze for a second, then stepped into her, gently loosening her grip on his arm so that he could fold her in a hug.

“Sometimes,” he gently said, “you’re too busy being cocksure to realize the effect you have on people.”

Coco’s fingers gripped the shoulders of Fox’ vest. “Even you?”

He laughed. “In my own way, I suppose. Just don’t expect me to get frisky.”

She laughed back. “Can I still get you with a good game slap?”

“My buns are quivering in eagerness.”

She snorted then. “Idiot.” She pulled away, straightening her shoulders. “Get the others. We need to act fast.”

“You got it, Coco.”

After rousting the others out, (Velvet from her bed, Yatsuhashi from the hallway), he listened as Coco recounted the one sided conversation she’d eavesdropped on.

“So let me summarize,” he said when she finished. “Neo, who has done a pretty good job of kicking our backsides up between our ears at every turn, has joined up with at least two White Fang, who don’t seem to like one another much, and who are planning to skip town in two days.”

“Pretty much,” Coco replied, seemingly mostly back to normal.

“We may not have two days,” Yatsuhashi pointed out, and Fox found himself agreeing.

“She knows we’re in town,” he commented, stretching to emphasize the point. “She may encourage them to accelerate their schedule.”

“Or come after us as a preemptive move,” Velvet added.

Fox leaned back and watched as Coco worked things out, and smiled. Her thoughtful pose was all business. The crisis of mere moments ago was certainly not averted, but it was, at least, delayed for the time being.

_Never thought I’d be thankful for the White Fang_ , he thought.

“Fox.” He brought his attention back to Coco. “How are you feeling?”

He flexed, then grinned. He still hurt, but not as bad as even half an hour ago. “Just about perfect.”

Coco nodded. She gave Fox a sharp look. “Okay. I need you to…” She paused, and something flickered behind her eyes. She quickly shook her head. “I’d like you to stake things out. See if you can figure out what they are up to, and what we’re up against. If you can. Don’t…” She clenched her fists. “Don’t take any unnecessary risks, okay?”
He walked over and put his hand on her shoulder. “You got it, boss.

She smiled, and he released her shoulder to pick up his weapons before walking out the door.
**Winter Hunt - Chapter 17: Yatsuhashi**

Chapter Notes

Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays.

BubbleSorted:

“It will be interesting to see how the blossoming feeling inside the team will affect the mission. It seems that Fox getting hurt before has taken a toll on Coco as well.

Could be that the well-oiled machine is running dry soon …”

Yep. This freight train of events (Losing Beacon, Dealing with Mountain Glenn, Not being able to do much to Neo, then Neo almost killing Fox) has definitely messed with Coco, and I'm glad you picked that up. We'll be seeing more of what is going on in Coco's head, and how it is effecting everyone, in further chapters.

Listen up, strap in, notify your next of kin, you're about to take a ride...

**Farndale**

There was a distinct air of awkwardness in the room after Fox left. Yatsuhashi felt a certain thickness to the air as everyone found reasons to be looking at anything but the other two in the room, and had nothing quite appropriate to say. Coco and Velvet had managed to stock up on quite a few supplies while he had been dealing with the dead Hidehiko and Fox had been sparring unsuccessfully with… "Her name was Neo?"

The girls both turned to look at him. Coco nodded. “That’s what the White Fang called her.”

“Yeah,” Velvet agreed. “I remember the name from when Yang was talking about her. RWBY encountered her at least twice that I know of.”

“Okay.” He leaned back against the headboard of his bed and put his hands behind his head. He closed his eyes and began picturing Neo. “What do we know about her?”

“She’s fast.” Coco’s voice held significant annoyance. “And she has excellent reflexes.”

“Right,” Yatsuhashi agreed. “When fighting her, she used her speed and reflexes to keep avoiding or redirecting our attacks until she could get in close, then worked on wearing us down with little blows.”

“A death of a thousand cuts.” Coco nodded.

“We know she beat Fox and Yang both,” Velvet commented. Yatsuhashi opened one eye and watched as she leaned forward propping her chin on her fist where she sat on the foot of Fox’s bed. “So she took on two hand-to-hand experts who do have some ranged capabilities, both of which outsize her quite a bit, and still won.”

“She’s tough, capable, and able to beat bruisers despite her small size.” He nodded again. “Did Yang
ever tell you how she did it?”

“No,” Velvet shook her head, and Yatsuhashi closed his eyes again. He contemplated that a moment, then opened his eyes to look back to Velvet.

“What’s Yang’s semblance?”

Velvet took on a thoughtful look, as though trying to remember something, but it was Coco who answered.

“She takes the power from hits she receives and uses it to power her own attacks.” She smiled as his face became ever so slightly surprised. “I studied up on what we knew, in case we ended up in a match against RWBY. I couldn’t do that with many of the teams outside of Vale, but I have a good idea about most of the teams from Beacon.”

Yatsuhashi felt himself grinning. Coco may not have been the academic monster Velvet was, but she was no slouch, either. When it came to things she thought mattered, she could apply herself quite studiously.

“Okay,” he nodded. “So Yang could well have been charging up in little bits, one strike at a time. But to do it, she’d have to take hits. And to use that power, she’d have to land a hit.”

Velvet nodded. “But Neo’s style avoids taking the hits in the first place.”

“Exactly.” He closed his eyes once more. “What else do we know?”

“She definitely has a grudge against Ruby,” Coco commented. “I didn’t see the photo she showed the White Fang, but we know she has a photo of Ruby. She went a little crazy in that alley when they asked about Torchwick.”

“Torchwick masterminded a lot of what happened during the train incident and the Battle of Beacon both.” Velvet sounded a bit excited. “But no one is sure what happened to him.”

Yatsuhashi felt himself wince a bit as a thought occurred to him. “He’s dead,” he muttered.

He heard the creak of Fox’s bed as Velvet turned to fully face him, and felt the foot of his own bed sink as Coco settled onto it, similarly orientated. “Go on,” Coco asked, her voice grim.

“You said that she went a bit crazy when they asked about Torchwick, right? You also said the White Fang didn’t like the fact she was human, but felt they had similar enough intentions towards Ruby to let her into the warehouse after seeing the photo.”

“Right,” Coco’s voice was slow, encouraging him to get to the point.

“So there were only two humans involved in the train attack. Torchwick and Neo. Then in the attack on the Vytal Festival it was all robots and White Fang…”

“Except for Torchwick?” Velvet asked.

“And Neo,” Coco speculated.

“We know they were already hip deep in the previous White Fang attack. And that Torchwick was being held by Atlas.”

“Probably on Ironwood’s flagship.” He could hear the frown in Coco’s voice. “Neo probably broke him out.”
“And they took over the ship, which is how the robots were all being controlled by the White Fang, not Atlas.” He opened his eyes and sat up. He turned to Velvet. “We know that, towards the end of the battle Ruby went and fought that dragon at the top of the tower, where Pyrrha died. But before that…”

“Before that Ruby brought down the Atlas flagship.” Velvet’s eyes were wide.

Coco sighed. “If Torchwick had escaped the ship, Neo would be looking for him, not trailing Ruby.”

Yatsuhashi nodded reluctantly. “She’s out for revenge.”

The room fell silent once again as they each contemplated the inescapable logic.

As huntsmen and huntswomen in training, they knew all of the potential ugliness they potentially faced. While the Grimm were their main focus, hunting those creatures of darkness wasn’t the only task they took on. It wasn’t something that most students would have had to confront face to face until after they had graduated, but eventually most of them would find themselves fighting Humans or Faunus. Someone would die.

And the victor would have the blood on her hands.

“Ruby…” Velvet whispered softly.

He leaned across the gap between the beds and rested a hand on Velvet’s shoulder. She smiled wistfully towards him, and reached up to pat the hand he was comforting her with.

“I’m fine. It’s just… gotta be hard. She’s only 16.”

“We’re only 18.”

Coco sighed. “We only fought Grimm and Paladins. And we caught the Faunus in the Paladin.”

“Time enough to face that hardship later,” Yatsuhashi said. He sat back, letting his hand slide out from under Velvet’s. “For now, we have an idea of not just what Neo is capable of, we also know why, and how strongly motivated she is.”

Coco nodded gratefully. “And we also know that it’s enough for the White Fang to still be willing to at least talk to her.”

“Yeah. And that means we can start to anticipate her. We may not be able to stop her completely, but we now have the start to being able to slow and deflect her.”

“I’m pretty sure I know where to start.” Coco grinned and hopped off the bed. “And once Fox is back,” her eyes took on what almost looked like a prayerful look upward for a second, “we know what we need to do to get that start.”

Velvet nodded, and growled. “We’re going to take down this batch of White Fang.”

Coco grinned ferociously, and reached out towards Yatsuhashi with her hand. She stopped, though, the grin wavering into something strained and her arm dropped as she turned away and stared instead at the door. “Nice thinking, Yatsu,” she rasped.

Yatsuhashi frowned a moment, then his eyes slipped over to Velvet. The Faunus woman was also frowning, looking at Coco with a slightly uncertain set to her eyes.

He wiggled his hand, catching the girl’s expression. With a slight smirk, he mimed a hand motion,
then gestured.

Velvet’s eyes went a bit wide, and then a slow, sly smile showed her agreement.

Quietly they rose behind Coco and, simultaneously…

**SMACK!**

Coco nearly launched herself to the roof as two hands, one large and one small, struck her butt cheeks hard enough to leave Yatsuhashi’s hand stinging a bit. She actually gave a small shout of surprise, spinning and reaching behind herself to grab a cheek and squeeze.

Yatsuhashi grinned. “Good one, catching on to where they were.”

Coco stared, then laughed, rubbing her backside. “Alright, alright…” She glanced over to Velvet. “We all good?”

“We’re good,” Velvet agreed, smiling.

*For the moment, at least*, Yatsuhashi thought. But sometimes one has to accept just living for the moment.

Fox was back only two hours later. He entered the room as the three each idled in their own way. Coco had been spending her time thoroughly maintaining her oversized cannon on Yatsuhashi’s bed. Velvet had been reading something on her scroll. For his own part, Yatsuhashi had settled into the corner, sitting on the floor and working to center himself. While it hadn’t been as easy as it should have been, it was easier than it could have been, given everything that had happened.

Fox slid into the room quietly, the door snicking shut as he locked it.

“We’re in luck.” He settled onto his bed beside Velvet as Yatsuhashi unwrapped his legs from his meditative pose. “It’s only the two of them, and they can’t bump up the schedule.”

Coco finished sliding a part in place as she worked to reassemble the gun. “Oh?”

“They’re waiting for a shuttle to come in and pick up the last of what they have in the warehouse. Apparently they are closing up shop here, feeling that they need to be as far from Vale as they can get for a while. The shuttle won’t be here for two days, and there’s no way to speed that up.”

Yatsuhashi arched an eyebrow. “They told you this?”

Fox chuckled. “Indirectly. The big guy and the Faunus girl were arguing about it. He wanted to take us on directly. The girl wanted to lay low and not blow the op by creating a big, visible fracas.”

“And Neo?”

“She didn’t say anything. She just sat there, looking very composed and dainty. I get the feeling she could care less about us and is simply waiting for a ride.”

“Makes sense.” Coco tightened down an attachment. “Her goal is Ruby. We’re not even an inconvenience.”

“Yet,” Yatsuhashi rumbled, thinking. “So that gives us some time to prepare. So here’s the question. Do any of us disagree with her at this point?”

Velvet shook her head. “Not really. Fox is the only one I would have expected to have a shot at it.”
“For what it’s worth, I did manage to split her lip. She was still daubing at it with a kerchief.” Fox smiled.

Velvet grinned at Fox.

“Alright,” Yatsuhashi nodded, and glanced over to Coco.

Coco nodded. “Are you thinking what I am?”

“We wait for the transport. Not only do we keep Neo from taking a shortcut, but we destroy some of the White Fang’s assets and take out two of their people.”

“And Neo?” Fox asked.

“Avoid her at all costs,” Coco responded. “Until we know we can stop her for good, no more risks. We try to do everything we can to inconvenience her, but we don’t go straight up against her. We’ll need to lure her away somehow.”

Fox grinned, and Yatsuhashi felt a little chill at the expression. “Leave that to me.”

Yatsuhashi narrowed his eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Hey, I don’t plan to fight her again.” Fox held out his hands defensively in front of him. “I just want to invite her to dance.”

Yatsuhashi eyed Fox doubtfully, but then turned as Coco started laughing. “What?”

“I just never thought I’d see the day Fox would ask anyone to dance.”

From the other bed he heard Velvet snicker.


“Sorry!” Velvet laughed. “But you really don’t seem the type to dance with a girl. Boy either.”

Fox flopped back on the bed.

Yatsuhashi found himself chuckling. “Don’t worry, Fox. I can see you dancing with a girl.” Fox rolled his head to give him a baleful look. “But don’t be surprised if she has to stand on your shoes and wrap her arms around your thighs. She’s a bit short for you.”

Fox groaned. “Impossible. The lot of you.”

Yatsuhashi grinned.
Coco pulled her towel over the curtain rod, leaving it to dry in the damp bathroom. She slipped on a comfortable pair of undies and a simple sports bra, then dropped a long shirt over her head and pulled it down to cover herself to the thighs. Showers were truly wonderful things. They helped cleanse the body and clear the head.

*Oum knows I could use that.* She sighed. *How does Yatsu manage to keep so balanced?*

She opened the door, watching the steam in the air stir and spin in the eddies created by its motion, then stepped out into the hotel room she shared with Velvet. A few quick, long legged strides took her over to the bed she had chosen for herself and she flopped back onto it gracelessly. Her arm dropped over her eyes, and she let out a small whoof of air as she felt the mattress sink beneath her.

“Are you alright?”

Coco slipped her arm off her face and rolled her head to look over at Velvet lying on her own bed. The Faunus girl was belly down reading a book, her feet kicked up over her butt, but at Coco’s dramatic flop she had laid the book down and was now looking at Coco. Coco returned the gaze, frowning slightly. “I should be asking you.”

“I’m fine.” Velvet gave a small handwave dismissing Coco’s redirection.

Sighing, Coco sat up, shaking her head. “I did something really stupid today, and it’s hurt everyone. Especially you.”

“Coco, no, it’s…”

“No, it’s not fine,” Coco interrupted. “I screwed up. I screwed up, I keep screwing up, and I…” She paused, and took a breath. “Here. Let me show you something.” Her hands reached down for the hem of her shirt and she pulled it up over her head to flick it on the bed.

She heard a small squeak of surprise from Velvet, and turned to watch the girl. Velvet’s eyes widened, though the girls had seen one another in their lingerie before. Velvet’s skin began to flush red as Coco began pulling the sports bra off as well, exposing her modest chest.

“Coco!” Velvet gasped. “What are you doing?”

“Shh. It’s alright.” The bra dropped to the bed. “Look, I know this is a bit awkward since, well…” She watched Velvet’s reddened face lock up as the Faunus realized that Coco knew. Having mercy, Coco covered one of her now bare breasts, and gestured to the one still exposed. “Velvet. Look. Please.”

Velvet’s eyes flickered over to glance at the exposed flesh, then darted away just as quickly. A
heartbeat later Velvet’s eyes went wide and turned to stare at Coco’s chest fully. “Coco, your… Is that a…”

“Yes. It’s a tattoo.” Coco looked down at her breast, at the yellow on black crosshares tattoo that crossed her nipple and circled her areola.

“How…”

“The usual way tattoos are done,” Coco shrugged. “And yes, before you ask, it did hurt quite a lot. I don’t need to tell you how sensitive these things are.”

Velvet stared, the red flush gone and replaced by open mouthed shock. Coco lowered her protective hand, revealing the unmarked breast, and waited for Velvet to react. It didn’t take long before Velvet, a trained fighter, recovered from her shock and her eyes flicked upward to Coco’s face.

“Why?”

“And there’s the thousand lien question.” Coco shrugged. She thought a moment, and took a deep breath. “So, let me tell you a story.

“So there I was, minding my own business as a 13 year old girl. Just stick limbs and long brown pigtails.”

“Pigtails?” Velvet’s eyebrows rose.

“Pigtails,” Coco confirmed “Then the titty fairy picked up the puberty stick and hit me so hard in the small of the back I had boobs explode out of my chest and hair pop up all kinds of places I’d never even thought about before.”

Despite the seriousness of the topic Velvet gave a giggle, and Coco found herself smiling.

“Well, those weren’t the only thing that grew. I didn’t just gain boobs. I gained inches. It was like I’d become an elevator. I just went up, and up, and up. I was 5”8 before my 14th birthday. And I just kept going until I made six foot nothing. I think trying to keep looking me in the eye gave mom whiplash, I grew so fast.”

She returned the smile Velvet gave her and kept going.

“So when it was time to leave primary school there was no question where I was going. When you’re that tall, and strong, too! Everyone knows you’re going to be a huntress. So I put on my uniform and marched my newly rounded butt to Lighthouse Academy. My parents were thrilled!”

Coco didn’t need to explain why to Velvet. Human or Faunus, it was just one of the basics everybody knew. When Humans and Faunus alike were always on the brink of extinction those students who had the strength and the aptitude to become Huntsmen and Huntresses quickly became one of the most prized commodities for any kingdom. Their schooling was paid for, their expenses covered, and their lives bettered. They even earned a small stipend. They became the star athletes celebrated in the news, the idols on cereal boxes, and the small town heroes their parents could beam about.

It was any parent’s dream. And all it required was enrolling your near-adolescent child in a school dedicated to forging killers.

“I was a natural, of course. Once my aura was awakened, and my semblance discovered? I was one of the toughest students in school. Everyone knew that someone as good as I was would find her
way to Beacon. I may not have had the best grades, but in combat training no one could touch me. I was destined for the best!”

“So I was absolutely certain that, when I asked Dusty Lei to the Lighthouse school dance our last year there he would say yes.”

Velvet sighed. “He said no.”

“I couldn’t believe it! No one would say no to someone as good and beautiful as me, right? It turns out that some guys are intimidated by girls bigger than they are.”

Velvet shook her head a bit. “So what did you do?”

Coco jabbed a finger into the tattoo on her breast. “This. I stole some of my dad’s whiskey, got wasted, hit some clubs, danced like a fool, got further wasted, and finally staggered into the tattoo parlor of a guy who was only too happy to spend an hour playing with my boob, and then a while longer playing with other things as well.” Coco smiled. “To be honest, I liked it. All of it. I felt like I totally had him where I wanted him the whole time. Like I had complete control. And the next morning I woke up in a strange bedroom with a hangover, a smile on my face, and the certain knowledge that there was no greater a confidence booster than a night doing whatever the hell I wanted.”

“He took advantage,” Velvet growled

“If anything it was me who took advantage,” Coco disagreed. “It may not seem that way, but I didn’t do anything I hadn’t already wanted to do even before being shot down by Dusty. Well, I didn’t plan the tattoo. But I didn’t wind up paying for that. I conned him out of a 400 lien tattoo.” She looked down at her breast. “I rather like it, though. This tattoo restored my confidence in myself. I’d gone out and taken on the world on my own terms, and won. It made me so full of myself. I was kind of a dick to Dusty for the next week, dropping hints of what could have been. Now, every time I look at it I feel confident.”

Velvet looked confused. “I don’t understand. What does that have to do with today?”

“I almost lost Fox. I failed as a leader. It scared me. My confidence was shot. I didn’t know what to do. I just knew I wanted the fear and the anger and the sense of failure to go away. I wanted to feel strong, and sexy, and bold. I wanted my confidence back. So I did what I always do. And I didn’t even realize that’s what I was doing until Yatsuhashi stopped me.”

“I told myself I would never mess around with anyone on the team. I was going to forge us into a finely honed tool, and playing around with anyone would leave the rest out of something. And in one moment of weakness I threw all that right out the window. Team cohesion and self discipline and self confidence all in one fell swoop.”

Coco flopped back on the bed. “Oum, I want a drink so bad right now.”

She heard Velvet slide off her own bed then watched as she sat down beside her on Coco’s own. The Faunus girl looked down at her with warm brown eyes. “Well, I can’t say I fully understand, but at least you had better taste in men this time.”

Coco surprised herself with a laugh. “I suppose there is that.”

Velvet flopped down beside her, staring up at the ceiling. Coco matched suit, staring up as well. “I’m sorry, Velve. Here you have a crush on me, and I go and do that.”
She felt the girl shrug. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Easier said than done.”

Velvet chuckled. “Yeah. I suppose it would be.” A moment of quiet passed between them, and Coco felt Velvet’s head move. “You really like him?”

Coco winced. “Velvet…”

“I’m serious, Coco. I want to know. Do you like him?”

Coco turned her head to look at the girl laying beside her. Velvet had turned her head first, and Coco found herself staring into coffee colored eyes from a foot away. She sighed.

*I can’t lie to eyes like that.*

“I don’t know. I’m big. I’m strong. I’m tough. I take no prisoners.” She turned her eyes back to the ceiling. “But sometimes I don’t want to be any of those. I want to be weak, and small, and vulnerable. I want to be picked up and held and made to feel like it’s okay to be weak. And Yatsu is just about the only man big enough for me to feel weak around.” She sighed. “I think I could be weak around him. Sometimes.”

“Then do it. Tell him how you feel and just… do it.”

Coco’s head whipped around to stare at Velvet.

*Did she just…*

Velvet’s eyes were still looking at her. They were warm, sincere. Even a bit worried, but in a way Coco knew wasn’t turned inward.

“But… that wouldn’t be fair to you.”

This time it was Velvet’s turn to turn her eyes aside. “Seriously Coco?” She shook her head, making her ears roll around on the blanket covered pillow by the headboard. “I’ve had a crush on you for almost two years. During that time you’ve hardly been celibate. I’ve noticed every time you came back smelling of someone else.” She tapped her nose. “Every time. And I’ve been fine. Nothing will change if you happen to smell like Yatsu instead of strangers.” Velvet’s head turned back to Coco. “In fact, I think I’d feel better about it knowing it was him.”

*Oum… She’s serious!*

“Velve…” Her right hand reached over and found Velvets. She clasped hers over the Faunus girl’s, and gave it a squeeze. “Thank you for saying that. But, seriously. I can’t do that. Not to you, and not to Yatsu.”

Velvet gave her hand a squeeze back. “Just think about it, alright Coco?” She let go, and Coco watched her walk back over to her own bed. The smaller woman settled back down on the bed, picking her book back up.

*Velvet, you self-sacrificial ninny…*

Coco sighed and rolled over, facing the wall. She knew she wouldn’t be able to do what Velvet had suggested. A casual fling with Yatsu was simply out of the question.

*You know that’s not what she was suggesting.*
Of course she knew. That sort of thing wasn’t exactly unknown. A small but statistically important percentage of partners and teammates did wind up as long term couples, most of which did not wait for graduation to establish the romantic, and even sexual aspects of their relationship. As long as certain precautions were taken. No pregnancy, no foul, as far as the school was concerned. It kind of came with the territory of being trained to live each day as your last.

But that simple fact didn’t change a few fundamental things. It didn’t change the fact that even if he had fallen for her, Yatsu had turned her down. And was right to do so. Velvet talked a good game, but knowing that her love was in a committed relationship with her best friend couldn’t help but hurt.

_Besides_, Coco admitted to herself. _I think I may have fallen in love with you, too, Velve. And that means no matter who I chose it’d feel like I was cheating on the other._

She sighed and crawled under the sheets. Exhausted from her day she was asleep before Velvet turned out the lights.
Farndale

Velvet relaxed, letting her hair spread out around her in the warm water of the pool. She’d settled on steps leading into the shallow end, immersing herself up to her chest, letting the sensation of lightness and warmth lull her into a bit of peaceful relaxation. She’d need to wash the chlorine out of her long brown hair later, but the soak was totally worth it.


The door to the inn’s pool open, and Velvet turned to watch Yatsuhashi swagger in. His trunks came halfway down his thick thighs, leaving his muscular abs available for thorough examination. Huntsmen tended to be muscular specimens to begin with, and Yatsuhashi worked out. She could have used his stomach as a washboard.

Velvet had to resist the urge to lick her lips.

*Now I understand why they say guys are very visual. I could stare at that all day.*

It was the realization that Yatsuhashi had paused and was returning the examining look that snapped her out of her reverie. She thanked the heat of the water for giving her an excuse for blushing as she shifted ever so slightly, all too aware of how little her one piece disguised her curves, or much else for that matter. Coco had helped her shop for it, so it was less conservative than she usually utilized. Self conscious, Velvet wiggled her bum, sliding deeper into the water until it rose to a spot just below her chin.

After a moment Yatsuhashi shrugged and walked over to where she soaked. Bypassing the stairs he slipped gracefully into the water on the other side of her, sitting directly on the bottom of the pool and still only winding up shoulders deep.

“I don’t normally see you at the pool,” he commented, stretching out and relaxing.

“This one’s heated. I thought it would make a nice change to be hot and soaked instead of cold and soaked.” She gestured to the windows along one wall, looking out onto the snow covered trees and grass of a courtyard. “Normally pools aren’t my thing, I admit.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “Why’s that?”

“Ever get water in your ear?”

“Yeah.”

“Enjoy it?”

“No.”
“Try having four of them, two of which are enormous.”

Yatsuhashi chuckled. “Good point. That does raise something I’m curious about though.”

Velvet glanced over at him out of the corner of her eye. “What’s that?”

“Just how much better can you hear than us mere humans?”

She thought about that for a moment. “Well, it’s really hard to know. I’ve never had ‘mere human’,” she held up her fingers to form air quotes, “senses to compare with. And of course it varies between Faunus as well, so I really can only speak for myself.” She cocked her head back a bit. “I know I can hear much quieter tones than most humans. I can hear someone walking by out in the hallway right now for example.”

Yatsuhashi turned his head to contemplate the door he’d come through. In half a second someone walked past, a brief glimpse allowed by the small window in the door. “I never even heard him.”

Velvet shrugged. “Par for the course for me. I can also hear higher tones than humans as well. Don’t get me started on dog whistles,” she stuck out her tongue, her face wrinkling in mock disgust as Yatsuhashi laughed. “And I can localize the direction sounds were coming from better. I don’t know if that’s because I have four ears, or if it’s because the upper ears can rotate to ‘dial it in’. ” She wiggled her ears around in illustration. “But how much better I am at all that than you are?” She shrugged again. “I have no idea.”

Yatsuhashi nodded in reply. “And better vision.”

“Well, better night vision. I wouldn’t say my distance vision is really any better. Some Faunus, yes. But some don’t have hearing a good as mine. Really, our senses vary as much as our types. My sense of smell is pretty good, too.” She wiggled her nose.

Yatsuhashi nodded. “That’s part of why I shower every day,” he quipped.

“We Faunus thank you for your consideration,” she laughed.

He grinned, then his face turned serious. “We didn’t really fight any of the White Fang during the Fall of Beacon. Just machines and Grimm. I can’t help but wonder how difficult tomorrow will be.”

Velvet scooted sideways so she could pat Yatsuhashi’s shoulder. “It won’t be too bad. Most of the… White Fang aren’t trained to the level we are. They’re just people who decided to turn to violence, and most of that is aimed at average folk, not trained fighters. They won’t be particularly good fighters. We’ll be fine.”

Yatsuhashi patted the hand Velvet had on his shoulder. “Have you ever sympathized with them? The White Fang?”

Velvet sighed and closed her eyes, letting her hand fall back into the water to settle on her thigh. Her thoughts on the White Fang weren’t something she liked to share, but when it came to Yatsuhashi…

“I don’t think there’s a Faunus alive who hasn’t sympathized at least somewhat,” she admitted. “We’ve all dealt with some pretty lousy treatment. I think we’ve all wanted to lash out in response.” She opened her eyes and looked at Yatsuhashi. “But there’s a big difference between wanting to, and blindly doing it. Attacking innocents? Destroying ordinary people’s lives? It’s one thing to attack a dust shipment created by almost slave-like labor practices, and another to blow up a restaurant. That’s just… evil.”
She turned away and idly swept water around in front of her with her hands. “You know, they weren’t originally like this. When my parents were our age the White Fang were peaceful. They organized large protests and boycotts, but they never hurt anyone. Then Sienna Khan took over and they got violent. Now they’re making it seem like oppressing us is actually necessary to protect the innocent. They’re making things worse, not better.” She sighed. “It’s like they want to start a war.”

She saw Yatsuhashi frown. “They couldn’t hope to win something like that.”

“Weren’t you just worried about Faunus having better senses? What if a group of them thought that was enough? We won the last war, after all.”

“That’s a dangerous line of thought,” Yatsuhashi rumbled. “What if they really thought they could win? Even dominate? What if they thought they actually deserved to be in control of us ‘inferior’ humans?” He sank down in the water a bit deeper, lost in thought.

“Don’t worry, Yatsu,” she reassured him. “I don’t think you’re inferior.”

He opened his eye, then laughed. “That’s good to know.”

“Do you mind if I ask a question now?”

“Go ahead.”

Velvet smiled, then cocked her head. “Why’d you say no? To Coco.”

“Uhm…” He looked down in the water. “The truth is, I didn’t. I didn’t say anything. I just froze.”

Surprised, Velvet scooted closer, twisting to face Yatsu directly. “Really?”

He nodded. “Really. I had no idea what to do.”

“What, don’t you like her?”

“Well, of course I like her. I like both of you. I just don’t feel… It just feels wrong to…” His eyes were downcast.

Velvet felt a small, sad smile cross her face as she understood what he was struggling to say. “To see us as women?”

“I don’t want to treat you shamefully.”

Despite herself, she laughed a little. “Oh, Yatsu. Has it ever occurred that we actually want to be thought of as women? There is nothing shameful in it.”

His eye shifted to her. “You too?”

“Well, yes…” She squirmed, and quickly redirected before Yatsuhashi could dwell on that. “But we aren’t talking about me.” she smiled, even as something tugged within her insisting that was a lie. “We’re talking about Coco.”

Yatsuhashi looked a bit more directly for moment, then turned aside again. “I just don’t want to treat her like some sexual object.”

“Guess what?” Velvet’s voice was a stage whisper. “She is a sexual object. She’s just not only a sexual object. As long as you remember that, you’ll be okay.”
“Uh…” Red crept into Yatsuhashi’s face. “Velve, why are you telling me this?”

“Honestly?” Velvet sighed, and leaned back away from Yatsuhashi. “Because you both need to get laid. Badly.”

Yatsuhashi sputtered, and Velvet couldn’t help but laugh.

“Jeeze, Velve!” Yatsuhashi gasped out, once he’d regained enough composure to manage it. “You’re going to give me a stroke!”

Velvet grinned and shook her head. “I doubt that. I am serious, though. She really could use a good, relaxing bit of sex. And honestly, you could use some too.”

Yatsuhashi locked her with a stern look, though she couldn’t be certain what was going on behind his eyes. “And you’re not up for the job?”

Velvet shot to her feet, water splashing. A range of emotions shot through her too swiftly and heavily mingled for her to be able to sort through. The only thing she could worm free was an overwhelming sense of frustration.

She could feel Yatsuhashi’s eyes staring at her wet, barely concealed body and she flushed in sudden embarrassment, crossing her arms in front of her. A fluttering sensation had settled low down within her, a little south of her belly button, and she realized that her body certainly had an answer to that. Embarrassed, she turned sideways, covering herself.

She watched as Yatsuhashi’s eyes widened a little, and he turned away. “Ah, sorry. Velve. I shouldn’t have…”

“No,” she shook her head. After what she had just been saying this was hardly the time for her to discourage him from looking, even if…

Even if what, Velvet?

“It’s okay.” She forced her arms back to her side and slipped back down into the water up to her exposed belly button. “I just wasn’t expecting it, is all. It’s fine.”

“I didn’t mean to imply…”

“Yatsu, it’s fine.” She reached over and gave his shoulder a light punch under the water. “Yes, I am interested in Coco. And yes, I can get… interested.” And yes, I actually kind of liked it when you looked at me like that just now, even if it was embarrassing. Not that she could say that. “But she turned to you. She needs you. She trusts you. And I’d rather she was with you than some random stranger.” She sighed, then leaned over and rested her head on top of Yatsu’s. “I trust you to be good to her.”

Yatsuhashi sighed. “And what about you?”

I want you to be good to me too. She forced the thought down and smiled, even though he wouldn’t be able to see it. “What about me? I won’t stop loving her whether you’re with her or not. At least I’ll know someone who loves her as much as I do is taking care of her instead of her settling for strangers who will be gone the next day.” She slipped deeper in the water, shifting her head to his shoulder. “You do like her, right? Enough to want to be what she needs?”

“I…”
“Just think about it. Alright?” She sat up, quickly pressing a kiss to his temple. “I’m going to go wash the chlorine out of my hair.” She slipped out of the water and grabbed a towel. She didn’t dare look back as she dried herself off, not wanting to know if he was watching the skin tight bottom of her suit or not.

Hair forgotten, she slunk into the shower, sinking two fingers deep inside of herself as the hot water caressed her, her mind full of thoughts of Yatsuhashi and Coco, together. The images and sounds she imagined tantalized, leaving her with an inexplicable hunger her fingers sought unsuccessfully to fill even as a sense of shame left an acid taste in her mouth. The sound of the splashing water kept her soft moans from being heard out in the pool she had just left behind, and the water running down her face concealed her frustrated tears.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 20: Fox

Chapter Notes

Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays

BubbleSorted wrote:

"I am rather curious about how much easier life would be if people would just friggin say what they want instead of trying to hide their needs behind some twisted perception of manners and chivalry.

Especially in relationships it frustrates me to no end."

Bookah replies:

How true that is. You should enjoy this chapter then.

Farndale

Lunch was very quiet. Velvet, hair still a little damp, was cheerfully eating a burger like she had no concern in the world. Coco was very deeply immersed in staring at a steak that she was barely eating. And Yatsuhashi seemed absolutely determined to put forkfuls of salad into his mouth without looking at anyone, particularly the two girls at the table.

Fox sighed and fished another chunk of sausage out of his soup. He chewed on it thoughtfully, eyeing his companions with frank exasperation. Yesterday afternoon’s discussion of the White Fang attack should have gotten things mostly back to normal, but instead… He’d have facepalmed some time ago, if it wouldn’t have made it hard to eat.

Seriously. Coco was Coco. Nothing has changed. Can you people all get over yourselves please?

He watched as Velvet leaned back, the last of her burger having disappeared into her mouth with a satisfied lip smack. “Delicious!” the Faunus said, patting her belly before muffling a burp.

She turned her eyes on Fox, then glanced at his nearly empty bowl. With a smile she stood. “Come on, Fox. Let’s go shopping. I want your opinion on some gear.”

The urge to facepalm grew even stronger. Velvet couldn’t convincingly lie to save her life. “Velve…”

She stepped next to him and grabbed his arm, lifting him bodily out of his chair. The girl was stronger than she looked, as was common for Huntresses. “Come on!” she laughed.

Sighing, he gave up the fight before it was well started. He turned to follow, glancing over his shoulder at Coco and Yatsuhashi.

“Have fun you two!” Velvet called.

Two pairs of eyes widened, and Coco and Yatsuhashi both turned a brilliant red, no longer even
pretending to care about their plates. Fox lost the struggle to not facepalm, burying his face in his hand with a sigh as he followed Velvet out of the inn’s doors.

“Please tell me you did not do what I just watched you do,” he sighed.

“I categorically deny everything,” Velvet replied, waving a hand imperiously.

“Not helping.”

The pair paused as Velvet looked both directions, clearly trying to decide which way to go. Fox grunted and grabbed her arm, pulling her to the left. “Come on. This way.”

Velvet nodded and followed.

“So, let me guess.” He strolled down the sidewalk, eyeing the various buildings around them. “Knowing that Coco’s hedonism is a coping mechanism, and realizing that she trusts and even desires Yatsuhashi, you told them both to go ahead.”

He heard Velvet’s footsteps, two feet back and three over, so he knew she was still there. Her silence otherwise spoke volumes.

“And when you did that, they both said they couldn’t, and may have mentioned they didn’t want to hurt you, since you have a crush on Coco.”

A sigh, this time.

“And you said you’d be fine. Then tried to push the issue by telling them to do it. Just now. When both of them could see and realize you’ve spoken to both of them.”

“... Yes?”

“How is it your answer is a question, and my questions statements?” Fox sighed and stopped, turning to face Velvet. “Velve, I love you. You know that, right?”

“Um…” Velvet had stopped, and was standing there, looking slightly up at Fox. “Yes? Ish?”

“Ish?” He shook his head. “Never mind. That’s not important. Wait…” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “It is important.” He turned back around and began walking again. “Bunbun, do you have any clue how they feel about you?”

Again, Velvet was quiet.

“Yeah. Let me guess.” Fox glowered up at the icy blue heavens, and shifted his voice into an imitation of Velvet’s. “Yatsu treats me like a kid sister needing protection, and Coco treats me as the team’s secret weapon. And that’s okay! Because it means I mean something to the team! Am I right?”

“Um…”

“And it has never occurred that maybe they have any other feelings about you? That maybe, perhaps and perchance, they are struggling with the same feelings for you that you feel for them?”

Velvet’s footsteps stopped.

“Yeah. Thought so.” He grabbed Velvet and dragged her into a cafe.
“We just ate,” Velvet mumbled.

Fox ignored her, pushing her down into a booth before sliding into it across from her. He ordered two black coffees from the waitress, then stared at Velvet.

“Fox,” Velvet muttered. “They do not feel about me the same way I feel about them.”

“Bullshit.” Fox waved a finger at her. “You just haven’t realized it because they are just as noble as you. In their own ways. But they do. I spent a snowy night listening to Yatsu stumble his way through realizing that you and Coco both have girly bits with which boys do things and his boyness is keen to do just that, and just a couple nights ago Coco spent a while getting drunk over the fact that she thinks it would be wrong to ‘boink’ either one of you but she really wants to.”

He leaned across the table and pushed Velvet’s jaw back shut. Velvet blinked in surprise, then shook herself.

“‘Boink’ me?”

“Her words, not mine.”

“She wants to boink me?”

“Both of you.”

“But, Yatsuhashi…” She trailed off.

“Tried to tell you himself, I suspect. When he came and checked on you yesterday right after the Coco Bomb detonated all over him. I bet at some time he may have tried saying something about not wanting to hurt you by choosing Coco over you. He actually feels like this is somehow his fault.”

He watched as Velvet shook her head again as the waitress came by and set two cups in front of them, a small bowl holding packets of cream and sugar appearing as well. As she left he added a cream and two sugars.

“He didn’t say anything… I mean, he started to say something like… He…” Velvet dropped her face to the table. “Crap.”

“Yup.” Fox kicked back and sipped his coffee, eyebrows arching in approval at the blend. “Congratulations, Velvet. You are the hypotenuse of a kinky little love triangle.”

Velvet lifted her head just high enough to be able to thump it back down on the tabletop with a clatter of silverware and china.

“You know,” Fox mused, “you’re the only one who hasn’t frankly admitted to me that you’re attracted to everyone else on the team. Of course, you haven’t had to.”

“Wha?” Velvet lifted her head to look at Fox.

“Hey, don’t let the all white eyes fool you, I’m not blind. Believe me, I can see how you look at both of them just fine. In fact, I think the only reason they haven’t realized you’re crushing on Yatsuhashi too because of their preoccupation with trying not to impose their crushes on you. Or each other.”

“Oh god…” Velvet whimpered, coloring up.

Fox reached over the table and rubbed her head, right between the ears that were flopped onto the table. “There there, dumb bunny.”
“I’m not a bunny,” she muttered, though there was no strength to it.

“Nope. You’re a hare. And you aren’t dumb, either. But you have just put your foot in it big time.”

“How so? They want each other, they get each other, no more… what did you call it? Coco bombs? It’s all good.”

“Yeah. If we ignore your very legitimate interests.”

Velvet lifted her head and shot Fox a dirty look. “Look, I can survive being the third wheel. I’ve lived almost two years not getting any from my crush, I can live a while longer. I’m only 19. Someone will come along.”

“There is another option,” Fox suggested.

Velvet stared at him for a moment, then violently shook her head. “No. Just no. That sort of thing just doesn’t work. Please don’t suggest it again.”

Fox sighed. Martyrs. Martyrs all of them.

“Velvet?”

“Yes?”

“Your coffee’s getting cold.”

**Farmland**

Fox glanced over to Velvet briefly, ensuring she was comfortable. The little hide he had found enabling him to keep an eye on the White Fang hideout had been pleasant enough for one, but with two of them squeezed in it felt a little cramped. The Faunus girl seemed warm enough, and wasn’t pressed up against anything in a fashion that looked painful, but her tension was palpable.

There was little need for him to guess why. The moment the pair had ensconced themselves in the rafters of the warehouse, one of the White Fang members had entered and taken a seat, reading a scroll. Velvet’s anger had seeped out of every pore, focused on the woman below. He scooched over a smidgen, leaning close to her ear.

“Careful with that one. She’s much stronger than she looks.”

Velvet’s attention shifted at the sound of that very faint whisper. Her eyebrows arched in a question.

“She may look small, and perfectly human, but she can swing from these rafters like nobody’s business, and her slap packs a powerful wallop, as Gil keeps being reminded from time to time. I suspect she’s got as much hitting strength as Yatsu, or Yang. I think she’s a Chimpanzee. Name’s Tawnee.”

Velvet nodded, her eyes going back to the indicated woman with an evaluating look to them. The anger was still there, but she looked more analytical, less caught up in the moment. Fox nodded to himself ever so slightly and returned to his stakeout.

A short time later they both tensed as Neo also entered. The tiny girl looked immaculate, her white outfit cleaner than the last time he had seen her, her hair perfectly combed. It was clear that she had taken full advantage of the facilities the White Fang had put in place to ensure she was completely recovered from her trip across the frozen mountains separating Farmdale from Vale.

*That’ll just make her all the more dangerous*, Fox thought. He slowly smiled. *Of course, I’ve done
the same thing myself. Ready for round two, Neo?

He watched as she walked over to a crate and slipped onto it with an effortless grace, one leg casually tossed over the other. The woman was clearly sure of herself, and had little reason not to be. After all, unless Ruby had somehow magicked herself across the continent, the ride Neo was about to catch would get her well and truly ahead of the young Huntress, prepared to lay in wait to spring an ambush.

*Not if I have anything to say about it.*

After a short time the third member of the warehouse’s current residents entered. “Gil,” it turned out, had been short for “Gilding,” a name that simply did not roll off the tongue. Tawnee had insisted on using the full name for half of yesterday after a particularly gratuitous use of the word “cunt” had gotten her especially angry. Fox had quickly come to the conclusion that the big deer Faunus was all muscle and temper, and completely lacking for brains. It was likely he had been left with Tawnee simply to do heavy lifting.

Which was completely redundant, given he’d watched Tawnee casually push crates twice her size across the floor without so much as a grunt. Gil would be an easy fight for the rest of Team CFVY, but Tawnee really was as dangerous as he’d warned Velvet she could be.

Tawnee suddenly twitched and sat up as he watched. She punched a couple of buttons on her scroll, reading intently for several seconds, before abruptly standing up. “Neo. Gil. Change in plans. The shuttle will be here in an hour. Get ready to load up and move out.”

Fox twisted and turned his eyes to Velvet. “Go,” he whispered. “Get Coco and Yatsu. Quickly.”

Velvet nodded back to him and started to slide out of the hiding spot. She paused, and gave Fox a look. “What are you going to do?”

Fox grinned. “Get Neo’s attention. This is gonna be fun.”

Velvet shook her head ruefully, then slid out and away.

Fox turned his attention back to the floor, where the three were starting to move, and his grin became a smirk.

*Here we go.*

He shifted his weight and pitched over the edge of the small platform, weapons ready. He landed in front of Neo while the two White Fang grew wide eyed in surprise. Rising from the crouch that he had used to ease the shock of landing, he focused on the small girl before him.

“Hello, Neo.”

She stared at him a moment, and then her head cocked to the side with a grin. He matched her look, then stretched out one hand in a come get me gesture. Her grin expanded, showing teeth and, with a laugh, Fox turned and ran.
“I’m going to kill that rabbit,” Coco groaned.

“Hare,” Yatsuhashi idly corrected.

“Whatever.” She forced herself to turn in the chair, her food completely forgotten as she faced Yatsuhashi, determined to deal with the awkwardness Velvet had left in her wake. “So. She talked to you too.”

The big man sitting next to her nodded, attempting to look inscrutable. He was failing miserably. “She suggested that we… well…”

“Have sex?”

She had to bite back a laugh at the expression that crossed Yatsuhashi’s face as she straight up named the elephant in the room without any hints at dissembling. His efforts to appear unphased collapsed completely as his expression became one of utter embarrassment. “Uh… Yeah.”

She leaned back in her chair, shaking her head. “Me too. I swear, that girl… Oum!” She turned her eyes to the heavens.

Alright, Coco. Now what?

She was thinking hard. Velvet, she realized, had dropped them into what was essentially a no win situation.

Yatsuhashi was clearly thinking along the same lines. His face, still red, grew thoughtful, and he turned to not quite look at her. “Obviously, we can’t. It wouldn’t be fair to Velvet. Since she’s in love with you.” He finally turned his eyes onto Coco. “You did know that, right?”

“I figured it out recently.”

He nodded.

She sighed. “But, of course, if we don’t do it she’ll be pretty irritated after she basically told us to and even drug Fox off so we had the chance.”

Yatsuhashi nodded again. “We could say we did and don’t?”

Coco shook her head. “Worst of both worlds. We’re both well aware that she’d know.” She tapped her nose.

She could see Yatsuhashi’s reluctant nod. “I never quite thought about that. But I guess she would
know if we... when we...” He shook his head and looked away.

“Yeah.” Coco nodded, then froze. She would know. She would have known every time that Coco had...

Well, crap...

Yatsuhashi turned his head, giving Coco an evaluating look. “Coco?”

She shook herself. “She knew. Every time I came back after... And she’s loved me from the start.”

Yatsuhashi’s eyes was thoughtful a moment, and then he frowned. “Ouch.”

“Well... I feel like an ass.” Coco dropped her head to the table.

A hand settled on her shoulder and began softly rubbing it. She rolled her head so that she was facing away from Yatsuhashi, and contemplated the far wall. She sighed. “That feels good, by the way.”

“Is that a problem?” Despite the question, Yatsuhashi’s hand continued its ministrations.

“Kind of.” She wiggled a bit, sliding around a touch to give easier access to her back. “It weakens my resolve.” She closed her eyes. “I could get lost in you. And...”

Yatsuhashi didn’t say anything. He simply kept running his hand over her shoulders. She felt herself relaxing at the touch. She could tell by the way his hand was touching her that he was just as happy with the arrangement. He was gentle, kind. And he was in love with her. She’d heard him say so himself. “Why did you say no?”

The hand paused, and she heard Yatsuhashi sigh. “To be fair, I didn’t. I just... didn’t know what to do.”

Coco rolled her head so that she could still lay her head on the table, but now watch Yatsuhashi. She felt his hand begin rubbing her back gently again. “What would you have done if I hadn’t left?”

Yatsuhashi shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Reluctantly, Coco sat back up, letting his hand slide off her back. “I know.” She crossed her arms over her chest, not defensively, but because she needed to create a small distance.

“I’m going to tell you the truth, Yatsu. I do want you. I don’t know when it happened. But you feel like someone I could be with and...” she struggled a moment, seeking the words. “And feel safe with.”

“Coco, you know I would never hurt you.”

“That’s not what I mean.” She shook her head, then locked her eyes on Yatsuhashi’s face, looking at him over her sunglasses. “You know I’ve been around.”

He nodded, his eyes showing no judgement, but no approval either. “I know.”

She sighed. “It’s an adventure. Fun. I go out looking for conquests.” She watched Yatsuhashi’s face. “And yes, I know what that sounds like. But it’s true. I...” She sighed. “Whenever I am feeling down I go conquer something. Someone. And it feels good. I don’t mean just physically. Mentally, too.” She sighs. “It boosts my confidence like nothing else, knowing I can do that.” She closed her eyes, giving up trying to figure out what Yatsuhashi was thinking. “But it also feels dangerous.
Risky. Like I’m doing something wrong and getting away with it. Like I’m winning a fight, but no one is losing. And that’s part of why it’s exciting.”

She felt a hand on her shoulder, and she opened her eyes again to look at Yatsuhashi. “But?”

“But you have never felt dangerous to me.” She dropped her arms down, letting her hands fall in her lap. She stared down at them, watching them lay there with nothing to do. “After I took off I realized that. I realized that you couldn’t be a conquest.” She fidgeted, then sighed. “That’s why it was you, yesterday. Somewhere down inside I realized I didn’t want a conquest. I wanted to lose myself in someone that would make me feel that the world is safe. That nothing could ever be dangerous again. That I would be protected, and cared for, and just held tight whenever the world was scary again. And when you were touching me just now…”

She saw Yatsuhashi nod out of the corner of her eye. “It felt safe?”

She turned her head aside so she could not see his face. “Yatsu. I don’t want to hurt Velve. And I don’t want to hurt you.” Her eyes began to sting. “I’ve never apologized for who I am, and for wanting to live to the utmost. I have thrown myself into every moment, and loved it. And I don’t want you to ever be a conquest I went after because I felt low. But yesterday…”

Tears began running down her face. Her hand came up from her lap to wipe them away aggressively. She felt furious with herself. She was not a cryer. She had never been a cryer. But here she was, and she didn’t know what to do with herself.

“Goddamnit.”

Yatsuhashi’s arm went around her shoulders, and she felt herself pulled from her chair and into his embrace. She resisted, just for a moment, and then let herself fall against his chest, still rubbing her eyes angrily.

“I see what she meant,” the giant rumbled.

Coco sniffled. “What?”

“Velvet.” She felt his sigh raise her up as she rode his rising chest, then lower her back down. “She said that she’d be okay with it. Because she said I’d take care of you and she thought you needed that. That it would be okay if it was someone she knew loved you as much as she did.”

Coco sniffled again, new tears flowing, but without the anger that had prompted the first. “And do you?”

His arms tightened around her. “Yeah. I guess I do.”

She wiped more tears away. “I guess I love you back.” She wriggled and snuggled in against him, still sniffling.

It felt good to be just held. Oh, she’d had her share of cuddling and snuggling after sex. But this time there had been none of that. No heavy flirtation, no dancing around the subject leading to subtle touches, then less subtle ones. No sweaty clutching, no messy climaxes. Just…

Just a moment of being honest.

She twisted in his lap so she could wrap her arms around his neck. Her cheeks were wet, her nose threatening to drip, and she was sure her makeup was a fright. But in that moment she just wanted one little thing. One little sign to assure her that this could work.
She pressed her lips against his, softly. There was no hunger in it. Just a simple, gentle touch to let her know that this was real. She felt his lips purse, returning the kiss. It was a little thing, inexperienced and clumsy. But it was real, and it felt completely, totally genuine.

Smiling, she twisted back around and settled back against him. His arms wrapped around her, and she slid her hands down them holding them against her, feeling safe and warm even as a few residual sniffles caught her.

“So I guess we’re a thing then?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she sighed. “I guess so.”

His chin settled atop her beret, a thing she realized she could grow accustomed to. It did feel nice to be there. It felt right. It felt…

She snickered a little. “It’s a good thing you’re so tall. I don’t think anyone else could do that.” She reached up and patted his cheek, and felt herself bob against his chest a bit as he laughed.

“Well…” She said. “Feels nice, though,” he said.

“I certainly wasn’t complaining.” She smiled, then sighed. “We still haven’t figured out what to do next.”

Yatsuhashi grunted behind her. “Velvet.”

“Yeah.” She dropped her hand back down to hold onto the arms wrapped around her waist.

“Coco. Do you trust her?”

She felt her eyes open in surprise as Yatsuhashi asked the question. “Well of course I trust her.”

“No…” He shook his head, twisting her beret on her head. “Coco. Do you trust her.”

She opened her mouth, but then closed it, thinking about the question. Did she trust Velvet? She trusted her with her life. With her secrets. With her weaknesses. But that wasn’t what Yatsuhashi was asking, was it?

Did she trust Velvet with Velvet? With knowing herself, and what she’d be okay with? With not lying about being alright if they...

“She said she’d be okay with it…”

“Mnhm. Do you trust her?”

She thought a moment longer, then patted Yatsuhashi’s wrist. “Come on Big Guy.” She rose, sliding out of his arms. “Let’s not disappoint the rabbit.”

“Hare.”

She sniffed and laughed, helping pull him up from his chair and over to the elevator.

They were not strangers to one another’s bodies. Not exactly. They’d lived together for almost two years now. They’d seen each other in all sorts of outfits, during combat practice, getting ready for bed, and while preparing for showers. They’d gotten used to one another.

Still, as they reached the hotel room that Yatsuhashi and Fox shared, Coco felt her hands trembling
slightly with anticipation. There were secrets of the flesh she had never explored on Yatsuhashi, and she suspected he never had explored them much himself. As the door closed behind them she turned and stepped up against him. Her hands came around his neck and she went up on tiptoes to kiss his chin.

He took the hint, and his arms came around her waist. Bending down, his lips met hers in a simple but honest kiss. She savored it, enjoying the feeling of being bent back ever so slightly and given such a simple, almost innocent thing. She had never been treated innocently before, and it was a pleasant, surprising thing.

She broke the kiss and led him over to the bed. She rested a hand on his chest, smiling to him, as she tossed her beret onto the bedside table. She licked her lips and tried to keep her face as kind as she could. “Yatsu, have you ever been with a girl before?”

She watched his skin color, but to his credit he didn’t look away. “I’ve never even… well…” He made a vague gesture with his hand.

Coco didn’t make him finish the statement. Instead she simply set her sunglasses with the beret and gave him a gentle smile. “That’s fine. Really.” She slid both hands onto his shoulders. “The important thing to know is to just relax and enjoy the moment.” She popped up again to capture another kiss.

They remained like that for several moments, simply getting used to the feel of being pressed together like that. It felt good, in her opinion. She’d seldom found someone larger than her in previous explorations, and none that were close to being his size. She found herself idly wondering if that feeling of being delicate and coddled she was experiencing was what most women enjoyed when in the arms of their lovers.

After a little she broke the kiss and stepped back. Her hands slipped to her cincher and undid the buckle, letting it fall away. With an almost shrug-like motion she lifted the sweater it had been enclosing up and off her shoulders to land beside it on the floor, her scarf coming with it and leaving her chest covered by a short camisole and bra.

She looked up at Yatsuhashi’s face, and was surprised to see his eyes averted, his skin aflame.

“Yatsu,” she said gently. She took a step closer and captured his face between her hands, turning it so he was looking towards her. “It’s okay to look.”

She could see him biting the inside of his lip. He seemed to be at war with something inside of himself. She watched the struggle in his eyes, unsure what was causing it. “It makes you feel uncomfortable?”

He sighed. “It feels… disrespectful.”

She nodded. “You’re a gentleman.” She gripped the bottom of the camisole. “Yatsu. Do you think I am pretty?”

He nodded. “Yes.”

“I want you to think I’m sexy.”

She watched him swallow.

“Look at me, Yatsuhashi Daichi.” She pulled the camisole over her head.
He was obscured by the cloth a moment, but she could tell his eyes kept flicking back and forth, wanting to watch, but still fighting to be ‘respectful’. She dropped the silk cloth on the floor by her feet and let her hands come to his chest. “Your turn.”

“Ah… Huh?” He sounded a little confused, but his eyes came down to her, widening as it became clear he could see the valley formed between her bra-covered breasts. She wrapped her hands around him, finding the buckle for the leather pauldron that protected his shoulder. It was short work to release it, letting it slip from him, quickly joined by the rest of the armor protecting his arm.

He turned his head to look at the armor as it lay on the floor. Coco’s hand came up and caught his chin, turning his face back to where it had been. “Nope, Boyo. Eyes down here.” She let go of his chin and tapped the skin of her right breast.

As he complied, his skin remaining as red as ever, she returned to her task. Reaching around his barrel chest again she found the buckles for his large belt. Though it was more work than the pauldron, this too fell aside, and she felt the brush of cloth against her stomach as his shirt fell open.

She’s seen his torso before. Perhaps girls were required to have at least something guarding themselves from prying eyes, but men suffered no such restrictions. She’d seen his very well muscled chest and stomach plenty, but never with a haze of desire enhancing her attention.

Some hunters and huntresses chose to rely on their auras to provide them with strength. Not so Yatsuhashi. He was a regular visitor to the gym back at Beacon. She reached out a hand and placed it on defined abs, feeling the soft skin and the muscle below. She slowly slipped the hand upwards, listening to the slight hitch in Yatsuhashi’s breathing with pleasure, then looked back up into his eyes.

He looked back, something in his eyes that she recognized, and she smiled at the way she had captured his attention. She stepped back again, and reached behind her. With practiced ease she unhooked her bra and pulled it away before he could react.

Yatsuhashi blinked and started to look away, but then stopped and stared. His eyes focused on her left nipple, and the tattoo.

“Yes, it is tattooed.” She took the breast in one hand, twisting it a bit to show him more clearly. “What do you think?”

“I…” He swallowed again, then, hesitantly, spoke. “I think it’s… sexy.”

It felt good to hear.

With a smile she dropped her breast, then stepped into him. She wrapped her arms around him and held him, pressing her chest against his stomach and enjoying the satin feel of bare skin against her breasts. She pressed a cheek to his chest, savoring the warmth and the sound of his heartbeat, elevated slightly. She turned her head to place a kiss on his chest just below his collarbone, then lifted her head encouraging another kiss.

A quick study, he lowered his face, his lips finding hers. She twisted a little, giving better access for his inexpert application, and her hands slipped under the now open shirt to softly stroke the skin of his back. His hands returned the favor, fingers gently tracing the flow of muscles in her back and exploring the curves of ribs, bones, and the valley of her spine.

She shivered against him. She was no stranger to foreplay. Despite her hunt for conquests she had never been one to skip straight to the main event. Each of her previous encounters had involved
flirtation, touching, anticipation, and all the little moves that flamed lust. Yatsu was far from the first to ever map out the naked skin of her back with fingertips. But somehow, with him, it felt new. Something about knowing it was his touch, his discovery, made that barely intimate sensation feel raw, and exciting, and virginal.

She brought her hands up, pulling the cloth of his shirt free of his shoulders. It slipped down his arms to be trapped by his elbows, forcing him to choose to release her and let the cloth go free, or trap both skin and woman against him. She felt him shrug a little, and then choose, and found herself pleased that he chose to keep her there, skin to skin, and damn the inconvenient garment as inconsequential.

Opening her lips, she slipped her tongue out of imprisoning teeth to tease at his lips. She felt his chest catch as he stopped breathing a moment, surprised and inexperienced. Then his lips, too, parted, and hers was the first penetration as her tongue began exploring the inside of his mouth, the kiss becoming less gentle and more demanding.

She wanted him. She had already admitted it, not just to herself, but to him as well. And now, with that first little dam breached, she felt the floodwaters of need flow. Even as their kisses became more impassioned, and Yatsuhashi’s inexpert touching of her back became stronger, a tickle becoming a squeezing of each well honed muscle of her warrior body, she slipped her hands around his hips. Opening a small space between their bellies, but still pressing her heated breasts to his skin, she found the clasp of his trousers and began undoing them.

He released her then, his body becoming stiff as he realized her intentions, and she was sure some small doubt had just intruded. As the shirt fell free of arms that no longer tightly held her his lips left hers.

“Coco. I don’t know what to do.”

“Shh,” she reassured him. “Just relax and let things happen. Tonight, just let me lead.”

The last clasp came undone then, and she felt a cloth covered bulge fall forward through the gap, brushing her knuckles. She smiled, her eyes finding his. “See? You may not know what to do, but your body does.”

She slipped down to her knees then, pulling his trousers down as she went. She kept her eyes on his as she descended, nipples tracing twin trails down his skin, and watched as his chest heaved as with anticipation. She kissed his stomach, then brought her hands up to hook them into the waistband of his boxers.

A deft movement freed him from his cotton prison, and she broke eye contact to look. The skin was darker than the rest of him, with a red hue to it that strengthened until a helmeted tip peeked purple from its foreskin scarf. She smiled at the slight curve to it, similar in truth to the sword he usually bore on his back. In size it seemed modest, though her fingers, still wrapped in the boxers, were small beside it, showing that its modesty was only proportionate to the giant’s own scale.

Impetuously she gave it a quick kiss, biting back a small giggle at the little sound of surprise Yatsuhashi made. She finished working his boxers down, then slipped back as he stepped free of the garments tangled around his ankles, kicking his shoes free in the process.

The moment both of his feet were planted once again she struck. Her hand captured his shaft with the certainty of a huntress, pressing neither too hard nor being too gentle with her prey. She felt it twitch, as though making a feeble attempt to escape, and heard the indrawn breath of Yatsuhashi’s surprise at the feelings she doubtless was awakening within him. Her eyes trailed back upward to the
wondering, almost fearful expression on his face, and she felt something flutter powerfully in her chest.

*It’s true. He really hasn’t done this, not even to himself.*

He’d told her, yet it still was a shock to her. Her ears had heard, but her heart had not. And now, with his virginity literally held in her hand, she realized just how significant this moment was. Something, somewhere, had left Yatsuhashi with such a view of women and the world he had refrained from even imagining them in a sexual way, left him almost determined to be the chaste warrior monk in order to protect the virtue of all women. Yet here he was, not merely offering to let her sate her needs with his body, but gifting her with his purity in spite of all those years, and all that self discipline. Trusting her to destroy both.

She’d never thought much about virginity before then. To her the word had been synonymous with inexperience, clumsiness, and a little bit of uptight sanctimoniousness. But here? Now?

She’d likely never change her overall attitude about it. For most that really was all that virginity was. But with Yatsu, with having lived with him for a year and a half and seen how he treated not just her, and Velvet, but every woman he met, she knew that in this case she was being given a precious gift indeed.

“Thank you,” she softly whispered, unsure he even heard the words, and she bent forward to place her lips around the tip and suck.

He moaned then. There was no other word for it. No matter what it was that he was feeling, a sensation she knew she would never really be able to have a comparison for, it was one he was completely unprepared for. His body shuddered, and she felt his hands suddenly grasp her head, shaking and clearly unsure whether to pull her away, or urge her on.

Carefully, listening to his breathing, she slipped more of him into her mouth. She didn’t suck much, not wanting to stimulate him too greatly too quickly. As powerful as she knew that would make her feel, she knew this was a moment to be savored, for both of them, and she wouldn’t embarrass him by finishing him too quickly.

She closed her eyes and let things sink in until she felt him tapping the inside of her cheek. She held there, simply holding him with her lips, and gave a little flick of her tongue against the bottom of the shaft.

He groaned again, and the sound of it struck through her like a shock. She could feel her own body replying, something in her belly echoing the need that she heard in that throaty growl. Even as she continued to slowly, carefully tease the thing in her mouth her free hand came up from the ground to undo her belt buckle, and then wrest the buttons of her own pants free so that she could slip her hand inside to begin teasing the very damp thing tingling between her nether lips.

She worked him then, paying close attention to every shiver he made, every twitch that she felt within her mouth, and every little moan and sharp breath he took. She paid attention to what she was doing to him, wanting to know how it was slowly destroying him, gradually wrecking the walls he had built against viewing her as the sexual creature that she was, that she enjoyed being, and knowing that, unlike others she’d had in the past, this time she wanted to do this just as much for him as she did for her.

His breathing began to grow ragged, and she could see his muscles beginning to knot and bunch in his neck and shoulders, and she stopped. Perhaps she had been at it for only a few minutes, perhaps it had been hours. She did not know. She only knew that, for that time, she had known nothing but
him as she played him and tortured him lovingly, wringing pleasure from his flesh, and thrilling at his each move. But now she knew that any more, and it would end as he tumbled over the edge.

That knowledge was enough for her. The finger teasing at her jewel below provided all the stimulation that thought needed and, as she held him in her mouth, unmoving, she felt small, powerful contractions take her below, squeezing and clenching as her world filled with an overwhelming pleasure. She bit back a moan, not knowing if the sensation of it would be enough to cause what she was trying to prevent, and rode out the small orgasm, only daring to move when the last quivering shake stopped between her thighs.

She released him from her mouth, then, and watched his body twitch as cold air suddenly assaulted the very sensitive thing she had been keeping so warm and wet. He groaned and looked down, wide eyed, as she wiped her lips on the back of her hand. Rising, she slipped her hand out of her doubtless ruined panties, and noticed his eyes twitch down and notice what she had been doing to herself even as she’d pleasured him.

“Coco…” he rasped.

“Shh…” she held her glistening, wet finger to her lips, smelling and tasting herself on it. Uncertain what he might think, she took a risk and lifted the finger, watching his nostrils flare at the smell, then pressed it to his lips. Hesitation crossed his face a moment, and then he opened his mouth and took the finger inside, his expression uncertain as he got the taste of a woman for the first time.

“It’s… tart?”

“Mnhmm.” She nodded. She stared up at him a moment, tempted to kiss him, but decided not to take a second risk. Some men, she knew, felt weird kissing lips that had been around their cock a moment before, while others would be fine. Now, she decided, was not the time to test Yatsuhashi.

She stepped back from him and pulled her pants and underwear down in a practiced movement, a crow hop relieving her of shoes, pants, and panties all at once, watching from the corner of her eye as he stared. Naked, she turned to him, opening her arms and sliding her legs apart.

She didn’t rush him, but let him get used to the sight of her. She could see that thing warring behind his eyes again, the citadel that imprisoned his willingness to view her, even now, as a thing to be desired vs the want and need that was driving him. His face was flushed with red, and he shivered as his eyes roamed up and down her, lingering over the wet lips exposed below her well groomed brown thatch.

Moment passed, and she found herself savoring each expression to cross his face, feeling her want and need only heightened by each time his eyes violated her sanctity. Eager as she was to press on, she marveled as the moment stretched, realizing that of all her lovers, Yatsuhashi, and Yatsuhashi alone, made her feel more, not less admired and respected when he gazed on her bare flesh.

“You’re amazing,” he whispered, his eyes coming back to her face with a reverent expression.

She moaned then, knowing for the first time what it was like to want not just sex, but to want a person with whom she could truly be vulnerable. She held her hand out to him, and he stepped to her, taking it, and she gently pushed him down onto the bed.

He lay there, muscular and chiseled, his manhood thrust up from an unruly tangle of black, watching her as she moved onto the bed. Straddling him, her thighs clasped to his sides just below the ribs, she bent down and kissed him, sweetly and gently. He brought his hands up to touch her sides, holding her, leaving her feeling, for once, small, and she breathed into him as she sighed.
The kiss broke. “I don’t know where to touch you,” he whispered.


She sat up and reached between her legs. Even as his hands came up, cupping her breasts, she found his rod and wriggled it against the quivering skin between her thighs. Satisfied with the aim, she slid backwards, and groaned as she forced herself down upon him. She felt a pinching, a stretching…

“God…” she arched backwards and moaned, her insides filled with heat, deep pressure, and need.

A welcome pain suffused her chest, and she bent back down, almost laughing at Yatsuhashi’s expression as his hands grappled her breasts in sudden shock. She sat there on him, letting both of them get used to the sensation, and her hands came up to hold his, encouraging them to loosen up.

“Easy, Yatsu…”

He groaned, then blinked. “Ah! Sorry! I didn’t mean…”

“It’s alright.” She bent down and kissed him again, her hands still holding his against her as his fingers relaxed. “But they are sensitive.”

She sat back up and began moving, simply rotating her hips to swirl him around inside her, stirring her and causing her to feel a quivering within her just beneath the hair that was tangling gently with his. He twitched and groaned again, and she knew that it would not take much, or be long, before she finished him even though they had just started.

She was fine with that. Filled as she was, seeing the amazement in his wide eyes, she knew it wouldn’t take her long, either.

He quivered beneath her, and it was not long at all before his body began moving with her. As she rocked her hips he began to curl back, slipping some length from out of her, only to come forward to seat deeply and powerfully inside of her once more. His moves may have been raw, new, but it mattered little. In mere moments she was rising, timing the motion with his to nearly pop him from her completely and leaving herself feeling desperately, almost achingly empty, then dropped back down to ram him home in an almost painful manner. She could feel her thighs quivering, feel her heart pounding, feel all sense of anything but him joining her and becoming nothing less than a part of her until she could not begin to know where she ended and he began.

And then, suddenly, his hands took her shoulders and he pulled her down. Her breasts drug along his chest, adding their own tense pleasure to her quickly crumbling body, and his lips captured hers as he groaned. He began slamming into her bent over body, pounding her upward with each thrust. She felt a pulsing, throbbing within, a heat spreading, feel a sudden rush of hot, wet something slicking her thighs…

And then the world collapsed around her as she joined him in a moment that was everything and nothing at all.
Fox didn’t bother trying the door’s latch as he hurtled towards the exit from the warehouse. There was no particular need to, and there definitely wasn’t time. Instead he simply smashed a blade clad fist into the door without even slowing, shattering it and darting through the wreckage.

Even as he rounded the corner a scant few yards away he heard the smashing sound of a second body coming through the still falling remains behind him. While there was always the possibility that it was one of the two White Fang chasing him, there were no doubts in his mind who was pursuing him. It was, and could only be, Neo.

He felt a smile form on his face.

It was strange, he supposed. She had bested him twice now, and once all four of his team had been together. Despite this he didn’t feel any fear or trepidation. To the contrary, he felt nothing but anticipation. He was not just prepared for this, he was looking forward to it.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw the tiny girl behind him with a smile that doubtless echoed his own. He felt his grin grow and he shook his head. There was really no explaining some people, himself included. They were opponents, dangerous ones, perhaps even deadly given how many times she had attempted a killing blow in their last fight, and yet they were smiling like playmates at a game of tag.

Whatever. As long as it kept her interested.

He hurtled himself down the alleyway and dashed out into the street beyond. Their previous chase had similarly wound up in a zone of traffic, but this time the roles were reversed. Neo had been uncaring of any collateral damage she might cause, and had been seeking only to break off pursuit. Fox, in contrast, had no intentions to lose her, and no desire to even inconvenience anyone else.

He scanned the street, seeking the path of least resistance. A gap between two cars afforded him an opportunity and he raced across and into another alley across the way. Horns honked and tires squealed, but no crunching of metal or bangs of heavy objects sounded, and he chanced glancing back to watch Neo literally hurdle a stopped car, the fingertips of one hand the only thing making contact as she flew through the air in a hurdler’s pose.

It was, he realized, a beautiful sight.

He smirked at himself, remembering his admission to Yatsuhashi that even if he found nothing sexually desirable in it, he certainly could admire the beauty of a female form, and Neo had that beauty in spades. He shook his head and raced on down the alleyway.

A quick zag around a corner briefly took him out of view. He took advantage, seeing a certain poetic
justice in returning favors, and paused just beyond view. As small feet slapped down the alley towards his position behind a dumpster, he braced himself, then leaped out with a punch.

A blur of brown, white, and pink flashed by, and he felt his fist forge its way through hair and slipstream. A few strands fluttered in the air, cut away by his blades, and Neo slid to a halt, twisting to face Fox. Together they watched the orphaned wisps float downward to the ground, then looked at one another. White eyes met brown and pink, and the girl blinked, switching the order of the colors she stared back with.

She smirked and touched a finger to her brow, acknowledging the point, then launched herself at Fox.

Grinning, he blocked each kick and thrust she fired towards him. He never attempted so much as a counter punch, let alone taking the offensive against her. Instead his focus was on nothing but deflecting and redirecting each blow she attempted. Each attack was perfect, each counter precisely what was needed.

Suddenly she backed away a moment, her face contemplating him thoughtfully. She tilted her head a bit, eyes on his, a little smile on her face, and she held her chin with two dainty fingers as her parasol rested on her shoulder, and the little smile became a full on grin.

He felt his own smile answer, and he stepped back, letting a hand fall to a cocked hip. “Fox,” he said, introducing himself.

She tilted her head to the opposite side, then did another graceful, low bow, then straightened up, setting both hands of the handle of her parasol as she rested the tip of it in front of crossed feet. She said nothing, but a small laugh escaped her.

“It’s fine,” he responded. “I already know your name, Neo.”

He could see a twinkle flash in her eyes. Another blink, and the colors switched once again.

He let a small laugh of his own escape, then bowed. “May I have this dance?” He held out his hand.

She contemplated him a moment then, and reached her own hand out, placing it in his. They stepped closer, gave small bows, and then she began her attacks once more.

A kick. A thrust. An attempt to hook his feet out from under him. Each move was calculated and precise, a graceful attempt to defeat him in an orchestrated fashion so akin to dancing he couldn’t help but feel a perverse sense of delight in it. Each one he deflected, he dodged, he blocked with a move just as natural and poetical. And never once did he launch an attack of his own. Instead, in a strange reversal of the roles dancers usually shared, she led, and he followed.

A moment’s misstep on her part gave him an opening, and he swept a blow out, not intended to strike, but intended to force her to react. She stepped away, deflecting with her parasol, a hand on a shapely hip, and her smile waivered ever so slightly.

He was off in a flash. Rather than press the attack as she doubtless expected he hurtled himself down the alley once more, using every inch of his longer legs to put distance between them before she could recover from her surprise. He paused at the end of the alley as she eyed him wide eyed, and he threw her a wink and a smile.

Her own grin returned and, clearly eager, she came after him once more.

Alleys and streets hurtled past him, their details analyzed and forgotten in an instant, and then he slid
to a halt with a grin. The latest turn had led to a large open area, a park, filled with playground equipment and leafless trees. Sunlight reflected off snow and ice in every direction, doubtless explaining the lack of any children playing. He glanced around, evaluating, then nodded with satisfaction, turning to watch as she slid out of the alley herself.

He backed up, slowly, until he found a bench. Never taking his eyes off of her, he dusted it free of a small layer of snow that had not yet melted away, and sat, leaning back to rest an arm across the back of the bench, knees spread apart. Imitating her, he cocked his own head to the side, letting a small, playful smile cross his lips.

She contemplated him, then slowly sidestepped, one foot crossing the other until she had found the stone lip of a frozen fountain. This she slipped onto, crossing her legs and leaning forward, her parasol open behind her head as she watched him.

“I’m curious,” he mused. “Why help them?”

She shrugged, then mimed pinching the brim of a hat with her fingers, doffing it slightly.

“Torchwick?”

She nodded, and her smile faded. She looked away, a sigh raising her shoulders and dropping them into a slump that belied her usual cockyness.

“We guessed he must be gone now.”

She nodded once more, looking dejected.

“Ah.” He nodded. “And what was his motivation.”

She glanced back at him, then straightened her shoulders. Her fingers came together, her thumb rubbing against their tips as she held her hand out.

“Lien?”

She nodded.

“Is it really that simple?”

She met his eyes, and nodded once more, her lips pinched as if to dare him to challenge that.

He refused to rise to the challenge, knowing he didn’t need to. After all, he understood.

“I suppose it really is.” He sighed, pinching his nose. “Let me guess. You grew up under bad circumstances. If you had family they were seldom there, struggling to earn anything they could to put food on the table. You were small, seemed defenseless and…” He sharpened his eyes and stared at her intently. “Couldn’t speak?”

Her eyes narrowed, and she slowly nodded.

“I was wondering,” he replied calmly. “Anyway. So then someone comes along. Older. Bigger. Willing to see beyond the obvious and take you under his wing?”

He watched her nod again. There was a little shimmering in her eyes, like they were beginning to water, but she blinked several times and a scowl took over her face. He knew the look of someone determined to no longer shed any tears.
“I grew up on the outskirts of Vale,” he confided. “My family did love me, and did care. But we were always broke. Mom, dad, they both did everything they could to keep a roof overhead and food on the table. But that meant I was on my own for the most part, the scrawny, under muscled kid with the funny looking eyes. Some people were sure I had to be a Faunus, but the Faunus knew otherwise.”

She was watching him, her head cocked with interest.

“Oh, of course, everyone was struggling there. A lot of people banded together just to protect themselves. You watched each other’s backs, defended your turf, and wrangled a meal anywhere, any way you could. It attracted plenty of Grimm, but the Grimm were, frankly, not the worst things you could face there. I grew strong, I learned some tricks. I had to, just to make it, right?” He smiled, though there was no warmth to it. “But that got the attention of a huntsman. He took me under his wing, fed me, trained me, and arranged for me to go to Beacon. I’ve been trying to live up to his expectations ever since.”

He watched her then, watched her thinking as she stared back. “I suppose something similar happened between you and Torchwick.”

She nodded.

“Luck of the draw, I guess. If life had been just a little different it might have been you at Beacon, and I over there.”

She shrugged.

“You know, a lot of people, a lot of good people died at Beacon.”

He watched her shoulders rise and fall in a nod, and she broke eye contact to look away.

“Any chance we both could let our losses go and, maybe, talk this out?”

She gave him a dark look.

“You know what I meant,” he rasped exasperated.

A small, weak smile responded, and he realized he had just been, surprisingly, teased. But then the smile went away and she shook her head.

“Yeah. I guess not.” Sighing, he stood and dusted his butt off. “I guess we should get back at it, huh?”

She gave him a surprisingly sympathetic smile, then rose herself. Her legs slid apart as she took a casual, but very well balanced stance, and the blade snicked out of the end of her parasol.

“Right,” he muttered, sliding into a stance of his own. “For what it’s worth, I’ve enjoyed the dance.”

She nodded, her smile briefly looking unreserved and honest, and then she launched herself forward.

A loud explosion rocked the park, and they both turned their heads to contemplate the fireball rolling from the direction they had come. They watched as it rose, and then, slowly, they turned to face one another once more.

Neo rose from her fighting stance and, once more, tipped her fictitious hat to Fox. She jumped backwards and, once more, disappeared.
Fox sighed. “Until next time, Neo.” He turned and ran for the warehouse.
Yatsuhashi lay on his back, staring at the ceiling, and there was a naked girl on top of him. He and Coco had both caught their breath some time ago, but neither seemed inclined to move. He couldn’t speak to Coco’s motive, but for his part he was finding her to be a very comfortable and pleasant blanket.

Well, the little, cold trickle that had left a sticky something very low down on his belly wasn’t particularly pleasant. But the rest of it was certainly fine, and he wasn’t going to displace the warm, comfortable, and very real woman on his chest just to be able to grab a towel and wipe himself off. Especially when she was drawing circles on his chest with the tip of a well manicured finger.

It was definitely a moment of peace and bliss.

It wouldn’t last, of course. Even setting aside that they were hunter and huntress, and that there were White Fang and a non-White Fang terrorist in close proximity to be fought tomorrow, eventually Fox or Velvet would be back. Fox would probably not be that big a deal. Probably. But it would be good not to test that “probably”.

Velvet, on the other hand…

He sighed, and Coco stopped stirring her finger and shifted her chin to look up towards his face. “A lien for your thoughts?”

“It was good. It was really good. I had no idea that… well…”

She smiled, and squirmed up him to steal a kiss, an experience he found quite interesting. She slipped beside him then, curling against his side and resting a hand an arm atop him. “But?”

“Velvet.”

He felt a flash of concern as he said it, worried that mentioning another girl, even if it was Velvet, would offend the woman who had just slept with him. He was surprised, however, though he couldn’t say it was a pleasant surprise.

Coco sighed as well, and patted his chest with her hand. “Yeah. Velvet.”

“This is going to be all kinds of awkward, isn’t it?”

“Yup,” Coco responded, her voice more perky than her expression.

“How awkward?”

“Pretty awkward,” she promised. “This is going to really change the team dynamic. But that was
going to happen anyway after I…"

“I guess it’s like removing a bandaid,” he sighed. “Might as well get all the pain at once and move on.”

She slapped his chest with a small laugh. “This isn’t a mere bandaid. This is much messier than that.”

“ Noticed,” he muttered, his hand scratching at the tangle of hair crusted together with their mixed juices.

She slapped his chest again, laughing. “Cad.” Then she sighed again. “Velvet did say she’d be okay with it. But…”

“But you’re as worried as I am.”

She nodded her head against his pec. “Yeah. I have no idea how the reality of it will affect her.”

“I guess we’ll only know the next time we see her.”

Yatsuhashi should have known better. Such comments, said under such circumstances, were nothing if not the surefire way to summon Karma and give it ideas. Ideas such as the aforementioned female faunus bursting through the not as locked as he’d thought door to the room.

The pair of them immediately threw themselves all over the bed trying to pull up blankets to cover the everything Velvet had seen. Yatsuhashi was pretty sure he was red all over. He certainly felt like it. And there was no question that Coco had a heavy blush and a look of utter embarrassment on her face, as he could see it out of the corner of his eye while staring at the frozen hare in the doorway.

She stood there, staring, narrowed eyes pinning them to the bed. Her expression was strictly neutral, neither smile nor snarl, nothing to indicate her mood. Nothing moved but her nostrils, which were flaring and twitching, her chest below making small jerks as she sniffed.

Yatsuhashi felt even more awkward and embarrassed as he took that in, realizes that not only had she seen everything, from his semi-flaccid member to Coco’s dripping nether lips, but she was smelling everything as well.

“Uh, Velvet,” he gasped.

Velvet twitched, her entire body looking like it had suffered a singular all encompassing convulsion that set her ears swaying. She blinked, then strolled into the room, her arm chopping as though dismissing everything. “No time for that,” she barked. She scooped Yatsuhashi’s shirt up off the floor. “They bumped up the time table. Their shuttle will be here any minute.”

Whether it was Velvet’s decisiveness, the sudden rush of realization created by her words, or just an eagerness to do anything that would end the awkwardness, Coco and Yatsuhashi were both out of the bed in a flash, grabbing at clothing and gear with a purpose.

“Tawnee got a message that they bumped the flight up a day. I came right away.”

“Tawnee?” Coco asked, tugging her pants up after a quick wipe of a dirty sock had substituted for proper clean up.

“The female Wh-White Fang,” Velvet shot out, her current mood almost sufficient to override her usual stumbling over the name. “Fox thinks she’s a Chimpanzee Faunus, so she’ll be tougher than we expected.”
Coco nodded, jerking a sports bra on and adjusting herself roughly. “Fox? Where is he?”

“Distracting Neo.”

“Already?”

Yatsuhashi heard the alarm in Coco’s voice. He reached over and placed a hand on her naked shoulder and squeezed, ignoring the twitch he saw Velvet make as she watched. “He knows what he’s doing. Let’s just do our part.”

Coco paused a moment, and he felt as well as saw her take a deep breath before nodding. “Right.” She grabbed her sweater and pulled it on, dislodging Yatsuhashi’s hand. “So, same plan as before?”

“Less subtle,” Yatsuhashi commented as he belted his shirt closed. “If Fox is already distracting Neo they probably know we’re aware of them now. No time to position for an ambush.”

Velvet nodded. “Yes. I heard Tawnee and Gil shouting as I hurried this way.”

“So fast and hard,” Coco agreed. “If we’re quick enough we may even be able to get them before the shuttle lands.”

“Since we don’t know how many of them are coming in the shuttle…”

Coco finished buckling her cincher and jammed her feet into her boots, not bothering with socks. “Right. Let’s go.”

Yatsuhashi grabbed the armor for his arm and began putting it in place. A moment later Coco was there, helping with the buckles, a process that sped things up, but which drew another twitch from Velvet. He reached over and grabbed his sword as Coco finished, and put a hand on Velvet’s shoulder. “Velve…”

She shrugged it off and hurried back to the door. “Later.”

He sighed, then walked over to the door. “Alright.”

Within moments they were hurtling down the alley towards the warehouse side door. Yatsuhashi didn’t bother allowing those inside any chance to realize they had arrived. Without slowing he brought his sword down in a slash, chopping through the door, then smashed through the wreckage bodily and immediately rolling to the side.

A spray of bullets blasted through the doorway, too late to catch him. He heard a man curse, then the whine of Coco’s gatling gun spooling up. Splinters began flying from above where he sprawled as Coco returned fire, not bothered in the least by there being a wall in the way. He crawled along the floor quickly, clearing her line of fire and feeling grateful that they had discussed exactly this sort of situation more than once. Knowing what she would do had been a big part of why he’d thrown himself to the floor.

He quickly swung around a corner formed by a pile of crates, then slapped his back to it, listening. He could hear masculine swearing from the rough direction the first bullets had been fired from. Coco had stopped firing, and a quick sound of feet told him the tall huntress had taken advantage of her own covering fire to move inside.

He shifted, tossing a glance around the corner and spotting a short pair of legs. He barely had time to get out of the way as one of them swung for his jaw, and then the woman who owned them, Tawnee, if he remembered correctly, was around and on top of him raining blows down with her
She was too close for him to accomplish anything with his sword. He dropped his grip on it and grabbed at her with both arms. One of her hands came down on his wrist and she attempted to fling herself free, but he was able to catch her with the other arm. He wrestled her arm off of his wrist and got her in both hands. With an outward thrust he tossed her into the crates across from him, adding a kick as she went, then jumped up, snatching his sword as he moved.

Tawnee glared at him, then suddenly climbed up the stack of crates she’d smashed into with a speed that had to be seen to be believed. She disappeared in a moment, and he found himself carefully stalking down the aisle formed by shipping containers and crates.

A spattering of gunfire announced that Coco and Gil had decided to exchange pleasantries again. He paused a moment, then changed directions. While he didn’t know where Tawney had gone, he did know where Gil was. If he could catch the large faunus from behind he could free Coco up to help corner Gil’s agile partner.

Assuming she didn’t pull the same stunt on him. As he moved he took care to keep an eye on the tops of the stacks of crates and rafters.

She tried it anyway. A brunette figure in a Grimm mask launched herself at him as he rounded a corner, barely missing her tackle as he crowhopped over her grab at his ankles. It was an awkward move, leading to his having to tuck and roll on the landing. She was on him in a flash, but he knew it was coming, resulting in the attack forming more into a mutual grapple.

She was stronger than he expected, even with the warning Velvet had given him. Despite his being far, far larger, he felt her slowly shifting his mass, rolling him towards his side as she began to twist a wrist behind him. He fought her until he was half way over, then suddenly went with it, flopping over before she expected it and jamming his head back, smashing into her unprepared face.

Jumping away she landed behind him as he continued the motion, rolling back to facing her again. Wincing, she was testing her lip, which had split, and spat out a gob of blood. “Now I’m going to make it hurt, human.”

He didn’t bother responding, simply brought his sword in front of him, gripping it two handed. As long as he could see her, he could do a very good job of keeping her from following through with her threat, and that was a far better rebuttal than any quip he might offer. Besides, as long as she continued to assume he was probably just dumb muscle, he had an advantage over her.

She launched herself at him again, no longer attempting anything subtle. His blade swept over, blocking, and her feet landed on the edge without any appearance of concern. A powerful kick of her legs blasted the blade aside without so much as marking the soles of her shoes, but in a perfect nod to Newton, she also flew aside, unable to continue her approach. Instead she rochetted off a shipping container, and he wrenched the sword around to block her again.

A slap of her hand against the flat redirected both blade and beast woman, only enough for her to get past. His head shot sideways as she landed a kick on his cheek, leaving his ears ringing and a spray of golden stars briefly blocking his vision. He shook it off, spinning around in time for her to come in again, and this time his intersection of her attack was more successful, launching her in an uninjured, but completely hindered, line drive down the aisle.

Getting her feet under her she landed and slid back in a crouch, staring at him. “You’re quick.”

He shrugged.
“I’m quicker.” She threw herself at the shipping crate, kicking off it at an angle that led to her bouncing off container across the aisle, back and forth at a pace he couldn’t keep up with. Just before she reached him, as he was blocking low, she threw herself upwards, and bounced off one of the beams holding up the roof, landing behind him rather than attacking as he’d expected.

He attempted to spin, but then she was on his back, her hands seizing his upraised arms, and her legs came around his neck.

Suddenly, he couldn’t breath.

A human couldn’t have managed it. Not easily, at least. But somehow her hips allowed her legs to move in such a way she basically had him in a strange version of a half-nelson. Muscles beneath her pants legs bunched, and blocked his windpipe immediately.

He dropped his sword and tried to bring his arms down to grasp at the legs choking him, but her terrible strength kept them firmly raised above him, trapped by vice-like hands. He could hear her beginning to giggle over the sound of his pulse hammering in his ears, and he could feel his aura attempting (and failing) to push her legs apart.

Desperate, he threw himself backward, slamming into a shipping container and driving a blast of breath out of her and against the top of his head. Her grip didn’t weaken in the least, however. If anything, the momentum drove her legs more tightly into his neck, and his vision began to swim.

He repeated the move twice, battering the woman, but with no better of an affect. Worried, he searched for a different move to try, certain that there was little he could do that was worse than smashing his mass into hers using a wall of metal like a hammer striking iron on an anvil.

A banshee cry sounded in his thundering ears, and he was whipped around in a spin as the chimp faunus was torn free. He fell to his knees, gasping down air, and looked to see Velvet atop Tawnee, rage on both of their faces.

“He’s MINE,” Velvet screamed. Her hands seized Tawnee’s head and smashed it down against the ground with an ugly cracking sound. “He’s mine, and I won’t let you touch him!” The smashing move repeated, and Tawnee’s limbs flailed about, attempting to grapple Velvet, roll her, do anything to regain the upper hand. Her hands seized Velvet’s wrists, and began prying them apart, only for Velvet to bounce upward, using the grip as a pivot, and smashed shockingly powerful legs into Tawnee’s face.

“Bitch!” Velvet screeched. “You’ve destroyed everything!” She jerked her hands free from Tawnee, the White Fang woman clearly reeling and struggling to control her movements. A powerful kick smashed into the woman’s face and her body twisted with the force of the blow. “You people have made the world hate us!” Another kick threw Tawnee back around. “I hate you. I hate all of you!” Another kick sprayed blood against the shipping container beside them.

Yatsuhashi threw himself at Velvet, tackling her. A fist smashed into his face and he saw stars again. “Let me go!” Velvet screamed. “Damnit, let me go!”

“Velvet!” He yelled, struggling to hold onto the enraged woman. “Stop!”

“I’m going to kill her! I’ll kill her!”

“Velvet!” He shouted again. He pinned her, holding her tight. “Stop this!”

“Yatsuhashi, Oum damnit, she deserves to die!”
He tightened his hold on her and sobbed, forcing his head down against her chest. It was that sound, he was sure, that finally made her stop struggling. “Yatsu?”

“She’s already dead, Velve,” he moaned. “You killed her.”

Velvet froze. Neither of them heard the sound of Coco’s gun as it blew the incoming shuttle out of the sky.
Winter Hunt - Chapter 24: Neo

Chapter Notes

And a holiday bonus! Here's an extra chapter!

Please take the time to read the notes at the end of this chapter for a big announcement!

Winter Hunt updates Tuesdays and Fridays.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Farmland

The column of smoke climbing into the sky over the town was growing. It expanded as it climbed, pluming out and spreading into a low hanging cloud drifting on the breeze over the southern half of the town of around 50,000 souls. The wreckage that was its source had crashed into the warehouse below, and the flames were expanding to consume the building as well.

From a rooftop in the distance, Neo watched the growing conflagration, and the chaos surrounding it. People were rushing about in an effort to combat the flames, while others kept curious onlookers back and individuals in the uniforms of the Farmland police spoke with the woman in the beret. The big man was holding onto the rabbit faunus girl as the two stared at a gurney that had been covered in a white sheet. Two police officers were talking to a belligerent deer faunus. She had never bothered to learn his name. He wasn’t worthy of the notice.

The tall, dark skinned man with the red hair, though…

Fox.

Fox was standing there, watching the whole mess with an expression of resigned acceptance. She focused on his face, and on the white, featureless eyes it framed, feeling her own eyes drain of color in a moment of empathy.

He looks like he should be blind. But he sees just fine. He sees a little too well, in fact, she thought, remembering his discussion of their similar pasts. She frowned, remembering his suggestion that a mere twist of fate separated them to opposite sides, and tried not to think about the implications that could have for the future.

She wouldn’t let a moment of empathy turn her from her path. Her course had been settled into a single, forkless track during the fall of Beacon, at that moment when…

She felt her nostrils flare as color filled her eyes once more.

Beacon

“NEO!”

She dangled beneath her parasol, the powerful winds blowing above Vale sweeping her in whatever direction it cared to, turning her so she could see the frightened face of the one man, the one person to ever mean anything to her. He’d stretched his arm out towards her, as if trying to clutch her back
and rescue her.

Desperate, she watched over her shoulder as the drafts took her hither and yon. She’d dropped below the level of the deck of their commandeered ship for a bit, and the winds were too great for her to hear any of what was happening. Worse, some of the Nevermore had noticed her floating on the breeze like a morsel being dangled before them, and she found herself having to kick and swing in an effort to influence the path of her descent, a poor substitute for a dodge, but one that kept her out of their horrific beaks.

A sudden blast of wind drove her upwards beneath her parasol, a seemingly impossible happenstance. The small half-dome of cloth certainly was insufficient to even slow her fall in any significant way, and yet somehow she was lifted, seeing the world drop away and her position suddenly rise above the level of the deck once more.

Torchwick had beaten “Red”. She was down, and he was beating her with his cane. She felt herself smirk. It was of little surprise to her. The little brat may have been a huntress in training, but that was all she was. A trainee. Neo could have… should have been able to beat the girl alone, and Roman had two decades of experience on her from having to survive a harsh world where he was given no more regard or protection than the Grimm. Red stood no chance against him.

She saw it coming, though. His back was to the Nevermore coming in from above, his focus purely on the meddling, infuriating little red bitch. And that little, vile thing never warned him, never said a word that might have saved him.

Neo had tried. She’d screamed as loudly as she could. She may not have been able to speak, something she never had been able to do, and never had understood, but she could still scream. She’d screeched so loud it had stripped her throat raw in a single exhalation of horror and warning and fear.

There had been nothing left of him. Not even his hat or cane had escaped the creature, or the explosion that had consumed both Grimm and ship after Red had driven the beast through the deck and down into the hull.

There had been precious little of Neo left, either. She couldn’t recollect anything after. Not her descent down to splash in the sea just off the coast of Vale, not the journey back to shore, or even her return into the city itself, no one even seeing her as they focused on their own panic and desperate fight for survival. Nor could she even remember the week following.

The first thing she could recall was from almost a week later, sitting in a cafe, instinctively disguised, and watching the news scrolling over the screen hung on the wall. Commentators were debating the events, no one clear about what had happened, or even how it had ended. They were debating the decisions of the still missing Professor Ozpin, the means the White Fang had used to get past Vale and Atlas defenses, and, most importantly, the role of the girl named “Ruby Rose”, who had been brought down out of the tower at Beacon by her uncle Qrow.

Ruby had been injured, somehow. She did not know what the details were, only that Red had been taken home and was under the protection of Qrow Branwen while she recovered. Neo hadn’t cared one way or the other about Cinder’s schemes, any more than Torchwick had. Cinder had simply been an employer that eventually became too frightening to doublecross. But Torchwick was smart enough to know that Cinder’s enemies wouldn’t care whether he was a true devotee or not, and Neo had taken his example to heart. She knew the name of Qrow Branwen, and knew that someone as capable as Cinder was cautious about the man. So long as she was being watched by her uncle, Ruby couldn’t be touched.
But Red wouldn’t stay put. If one thing was clear to Neo, it was that the little bitch that hadn’t saved Roman would jump back into the fray. And when she did, it would be without her guardian. So Neo had waited, biding her time, until she could catch Ruby alone. Ruby had left, and Neo had noticed, and so she’d begun her winter hunt for the only person left in the world she cared about, cared enough about to see that she suffered before she died.

Farmdale

Neo kicked one leg up over the other as she sat on the roof’s edge watching the flames. Those flames seriously inconvenienced her. Oh, it wasn’t the fire itself, it was what it represented. Perusing the shipping documents and listening to the White Fang members had made it clear what their next move. They were targeting Mistral next.

And if they were after Mistral, it was because Adam Taurus wanted it to be so. If Adam wanted it, it was because Cinder willed it. And if Cinder willed it, then she would be in Mistral.

And so would Ruby Rose.

And that meant that Neo would be there too, waiting. Courtesy of a ride provided by the White Fang. A ride that had just exploded and crashed.

She felt herself smile at that. She wasn’t sure which of them had caused the crash, or how the monkey faunus had died. She really didn’t care, frankly. She only knew that it hadn’t been Fox. He had lured her away from all of that with deliberate care, mixing a blend of running, fighting, and talking that she had found herself unable to resist, even knowing exactly what he was doing.

It had been…

Fun. It had been fun for her.

She may not have been a Faunus, but she knew the predator’s instinct to chase running prey, and delighted in the use of her skills to hunt down and kill her target. Fox had invited her to play just such a game, and she had irresistibly been drawn to do exactly what he wanted, knowing it could only end in one way.

And yet it hadn’t ended that way at all. Fox had survived. More than that, he’d even exerted some level of control over the situation. He had never endangered her. She was too good for that. But he had kept her at bay. He had spoken with her, shared a connection with her, and intrigued her.

It was as much a dance as he had termed it, a tango of bloodlust and twisted desire, and she had enjoyed it.

She glanced back toward the tall, dark skinned redhead and smiled again, licking her lips. Standing, she turned to move back over to the stairway that had brought her up to the rooftop in the first place, but paused, her head turned back over her shoulder to see him framed against the flames.

Until our next dance… Fox.

She strolled away, her semblance shifting her appearance to that of a nondescript schoolgirl, and disappeared over the edge as a warm wind shifted the smoke to let the first sun of Spring begin melting the frozen puddles below.

Chapter End Notes
And now an important announcement!

This is the end of Volume One of Winter Hunt. As such, the story will be going on hiatus, with Volume Two, Spring Hunt starting in February.

This means, though, that you have some opportunities should you choose to take them. You see, I'd like your help.

First of all, I'd like a few more beta readers. As a beta reader you'd have the advantage of seeing chapters as soon as they are written, meaning you could be as much as a month ahead of everyone else on knowing where this story is going. Of course, the downside is that you're seeing the original draft and not the version that has incorporated all the correct spelling and grammar errors, fixed the plot holes that beta readers have found and suggested fixes for, and additional scenes suggested to help clarify points that might be missed otherwise, and you would be expected to provide those very things.

Second, during this hiatus I'd like to hear from all of you. Please let me know what you do, and do not, like about Winter Hunt, ask me any pressing questions you're dying to get answers to, make suggestions, and so on. This will help me get a better idea of how to improve Volume Two for you. If I get enough comments and questions I may even do a "From the Mailbag" chapter that is just me taking the time to reply to all of you.

Finally, I do have a question for you. Would you like me to continue publishing Winter Hunt here? Or would you rather I broke it off into a "new" story that's linked together? I can see advantages and disadvantages either way, so I'd like your opinions on that.

Thank you for reading, and we'll see you in February!

Bookah
Spring Hunt updates on Mondays.
And we're back! Sorry it took longer than anticipated. Still, better late than never, right?
Anyway, as usual, your comments and questions are always appreciated!

Spring Hunt

Eastern Sanus

The movies Yatsuhashi watched on his scroll got it wrong. People suffering a nightmare did not suddenly jerk awake with a gasp, sitting upright and breathing heavily while sweating profusely. They didn't lash out, thrashing in their sleep. And touching them did not result in their immediately attempting to fight the person doing the touching.

Instead, they simply woke up as still and silent as a mouse that had just noticed a cat enter the room, and remained that way until they began working out where they really were and what was really going on.

His arms tightened gently around Coco as he felt her go stiff. It took her almost a full minute to begin relaxing into his embrace, letting out a sigh that was full of emotion and resignation. "Sorry for waking you."

"You didn't," Yatsuhashi replied. "I was already awake."

She relaxed a little further and turned her head to face his.

"What time is it?"

He could have fished out his scroll to check, but he didn't want to let go of Coco. "Probably close to time for me to relieve Fox at keeping watch."

She wiggled around to face him fully then, making their conjoined sleeping bags tight. "You should probably go do that then."

"After you're back to sleep."

She wiggled a hand free and patted his cheek. "That may take a while. Go on. Let Fox get some sleep."

"Alright." He lowered his head and gave her a gentle kiss, earning a wan smile, then wiggled out of the sleeping bag. His feet slipped into his boots and he stretched, seeing his breath puff out into the night while he evaluated his surroundings.

Nearly a month's travel past the mountains that divided Vale from unaffiliated territory the land was little different from what he'd experienced in that more civilized land. It was still mostly deciduous forest with the occasional patch of grassland. It was still prone to getting snow and rain, though none of that had occurred in a week, allowing the snow to be well on its way to melting off in the early
spring conditions that now prevailed. And it was still covered in Grimm.

He carefully turned about, checking for just such creatures. Grimm were the stuff of nightmares, and as such they were drawn to them. If it wasn't Coco attracting them, it was Velvet, and in the weeks since they had left Farmdale they had drawn several attacks in the night.

It looked like tonight wasn't going to suffer such an incident however. Shrugging, he turned and walked over to where Fox sat, poking at the coals of their little fire. "Time is it?" he grunted.

Fox shrugged. Unlike the others Fox had more or less given up on carrying his scroll. Even after the inability of Yatsuhashi to contact him by scroll in Farmdale had nearly gotten him killed, the heavily tanned man had apparently decided not to bother. With the CCT network down ever since the Fall of Beacon, scrolls had been little better than very localized ways to contact people and a way to tell time. And out here in the wilds, there was little to nothing left of a schedule. Just the time you were walking, the time you were eating, and the time you were sleeping. Frankly, Yatsuhashi sympathized, but he still carried his just in case.

Yatsuhashi nodded, and sat down on a log they had pulled over next to where they had started the fire. "Anything out there?"

"Just Neo."

He nodded. Yatsuhashi couldn't quite recall when Team CFVY had become aware of their tail. Their journey to try to find Ruby Rose, the leader of the now scattered team RWBY had started out with them following in the wake of the diminutive pink and brown haired terrorist. But during the fight in Farmdale, things had somehow reversed. CFVY had essentially gone on the run, trying to escape the terrible consequences of that fight, and Neo, it seemed, had begun following them.

They'd never really caught any good glimpses of her. Not only was she small enough to hide very easily, she was extremely fleet of foot, and had a semblance that could literally make her disappear at will. All they'd had was the occasional sight of something out of the corner of their eye, a figure framed against the sky a ridgeline back from them, a sudden suspicious silence from local creatures, or the glint of reflected firelight off of the polished beads of her necklace when she'd come in for a closer look at night.

They had tried laying a trap for her a couple of times, but never with success. Fox had fought her to a standstill during their last confrontation, and she had evidently become cautious since then. She had evaded their every effort to entrap her, and never gotten close when more than one of them had been awake. Eventually they had given up trying, and simply decided that as long as she was following them, she wasn't trying to get to Ruby first, and that would have to do for the time being.

"We should invite her into camp sometime," Yatsuhashi quipped. "I have no idea how she's been keeping warm out there."

Fox gave another small shrug. "I'll be sure to do that next time we talk."

Yatsuhashi snorted. "Alright, I'll take over. Go get some rest."

"Okay." Fox rose and dusted his backside off for a moment, then wandered over towards where the two girls lay. He slipped into the empty bag that lay just between Velvet and Coco, causing both of them to wiggle in more comfortably into the comfort of shared body heat.

Sighing, Yatsuhashi settled down onto the spot that Fox had just vacated, taking over the arduous duty of starting out into the night.
Eastern Sanus

The remains of the convoy lay on the side of the road. Traveling the unaffiliated territories of Remnant may have been dangerous, but goods had to flow. The small towns and cities out there were utterly dependent on anything they couldn't produce for themselves being shipped in. Air travel may have been safer (relatively), but it was also more expensive. And so shipments often ran in ground convoys for mutual support and protection.

It hadn't done this one any good, however. Five vehicles lay at various angles just off of the rutted, poorly maintained path. The ruts leading up to them showed that they had attempted to speed up from the slow slog the early spring mud had recommended, and that they had begun slipping, skidding, and fishtailing in their haste. The extra speed had failed them. One truck was tipped over completely, the other four remaining at various angles that could charitably be called upright if one was to squint hard enough.

Fox was already examining them when the other three came up, his shoulders inside the cab of the one furthest forward and his hips sticking out the window. The door frame of the vehicle was clearly bent, pinching the door shut too tightly for any other means of entry. Clearly disgusted, the tall, red haired man slipped back out and shook his head as he walked back towards them.

"If there were any survivors, they're long gone."

Coco nodded and walked up to look in the back of the overturned vehicle. "It's empty, too."

Fox nodded. "They all are."

"Do you think they moved the cargo and people into other vehicles?" Velvet asked. Yatsuhashi turned to regard the Faunus girl carefully, glad to see her engaging in the conversation. She had become more tight lipped ever since Farmdale, often lost in her own thoughts, and had proven hard to draw out of her shell.

Fox shook his head. "Not exactly."

"There are more tracks. They run over the top of the ones these made. But they all turned around right up ahead and came back this way. They didn't continue forward."

"So why aren't they survivor vehicles?" Velvet asked, looking perplexed.

"Because they turned off on a little side road just an hour back from here instead of going back to the town we left behind two days ago. Even with this mud that town was less than half a day travel for them. So why would they shift to what was barely a goat path?"

Velvet frowned and looked back down the road, then hunched in on herself again. Yatsuhashi fretted, worried about the girl, but there was little he could think to do in the moment and so he turned to examining the vehicles. Now that survivors were no longer a priority, he could spend more time trying to figure out what had happened.

It didn't take much work at all. He'd initially expected to see long, raking claw marks and dents in the sides of the vehicles, clear signs of Grimm swarming them. The only things even close to that were on tires, shredded by something they had run over in their haste. The sides of the vehicle were torn, but not by claws or teeth. The holes in the sides were small and circular, and carefully placed to only strike the cabs and engine spaces.
"Bandits."

"Mmhmm." Fox nodded confirmation.

"This close to town?" Coco asked.

"Why not?" Yatsuhashi shrugged. "It's winter and the CCT towers are down. The towns out here are more isolated than ever. How are the towns going to whistle up any help if their own supply of Huntsmen and Huntresses is insufficient to suppress the local color?"

"That last town was only a thousand or so strong. If they even have any huntsmen, there's only one or two of them." Coco nodded thoughtfully.

"And something this size?" Fox gestured to the vehicles. "That would take more than a few bandits. These convoys are prepared for trouble."

"And if a town is at risk from Grimm, imagine a bandit camp," Yatsuhashi nodded. "Tough people."

"Who prey on people just trying to get on with life."

Everyone turned to look at Velvet. She was still hunched, but Yatsuhashi could almost see the anger rolling off of her. She was looking up at them, rage pinching her face into something twisted and ugly. Her ears, usually upright and perked, lay back, sticking out behind her like rods.

"You okay, Velvet?"

"No. I'm not okay. I will never be okay as long as this can happen."

Yatsuhashi's eyes slid from Velvet to Coco. The tall team leader glanced up at him, her eyes concerned behind her sunglasses. She nodded a bit, then he watched as her eyes turned to Fox. Yatsuhashi watched from the corner of his eye as Fox, too, nodded.

"So let's make sure that at least this one doesn't happen again," Coco said. "Don't get so distracted that we give Neo a shot at any of us alone, but let's go take a look. Fox?"

"I'm on it." He slipped off into the trees and disappeared.

"Coco, Yatsu, let's slip inside one of these trucks. I don't want any prying eyes watching us while we wait."

Nodding, Yatsuhashi lumbered over to one of the trucks and pulled aside the canvas cover on the back. He waited for the girls to climb in, then slipped inside after them, pulling it closed behind him. The two girls had already pulled up spots against the lower side of the truck. Though they sat close to one another, there was a separation that had nothing to do with the small space between them. Each girl was, somehow, alone. Briefly their eyes met and something was exchanged there, something each seemed to recognize in the other, and which Yatsuhashi was unable to share in.

He didn't think he wanted to share in it, as whatever it was they'd shared was bleak, a moment of dread understanding.

Things were, he realized, pretty ugly. They had won the fight and accomplished their goal in Farmdale. But in the process something had become, irrevocably, broken. They'd stopped Neo from being able to get ahead of Ruby, wherever she was. But there had been a terrible price. Coco had brought down the transport Neo had been intending to use, but seven White Fang had gone down
with it, and none had made it out alive. And Velvet…

Velvet had beaten a woman to death. She'd done it to save Yatsuhashi, but something had snapped when she had done so and the Faunus hadn't been the same since.

Yatsuhashi sighed, wishing he knew what to do, and coming up with nothing.
Spring Hunt - Chapter 2: Fox

Eastern Sanus

Fox wove between the trees, near enough to the path to know he wouldn’t lose it, but far enough to avoid being easily seen. He flitted from shadow to hollow to stone, stopping and evaluating each movement ahead of time for any potential risks he might be taking. It didn’t take him long to spot the first lookout.

The man was in a purpose built hide about twenty feet up in a tree, overlooking a bend in the road. It was well built, with blue paint on the main structure beneath sticks and dead leaves that had been applied over the top, imitating the randomness of winter branches against a clear sky. The rear, however, was open, allowing access. An attempt to disguise it had been made, with a camouflaged tarp, however the current occupant had thrown it over the top, leaving it completely useless.

Fox shook his head as he watched the man piss through the opening, not bothering to move to a position that guaranteed that the stream wouldn’t get blown into the ladder.

Sloppy, he thought to himself. The hide is good, but the sentry in it is careless.

The hide was well positioned to be able to watch the road, aligned so it could look down long, straight stretches coming off of the bend in either direction. Anyone coming or going would be spotted well before coming close, allowing the sentry to provide whatever encampment lay further along a detailed warning long before anyone got anywhere important.

The question for Fox was, did this represent the entire security arrangement around whatever encampment these bandits might have, or were they paranoid enough to keep a watch out for someone just like Fox? The nearby village might not have been large enough to represent a threat, and the convoys would be determined to get by, not sweep the area clear of trouble, but that didn’t mean the bandits couldn’t potentially attract trouble anyway. Any good band of bandits would guard all of the approaches for that very reason.

Well, if they were large enough a group to be able to. Spotting additional perimeter defences would tell Fox quite a bit about the encampment even before he found it. With that in mind he waited until the man had finished his business and was back to watching the road before beginning to slowly and carefully skate around it from behind.

The second sentry post was harder to spot than the first. This one wasn’t up in the trees, forming a disguised bulk in the barely budding branches of spring. Instead it had been dug into the ground on a small rise, overlooking a small stream. It wouldn’t have nearly the view that the first had held, but the stream formed a break in the cover an infiltrator like Fox would be using, and this little dugout was well positioned to take advantage of that.

This was a problem for Fox. Just as it was meant to be. He couldn’t be absolutely certain anyone was actually inside of the viewpoint. The front only showed a narrow opening made of carefully stacked
branches meant to look like naturally fallen detritus. Anyone inside could remain completely hidden unless they moved far enough to make it obvious even through the small gap. But so long as there was the chance that someone was in there, Fox couldn’t risk trying to cross there, no matter how crafty he was at sneaking about.

Eyes narrowed, he sat down behind a small boulder that provided a good vantage point for him. The fact this second sentry point had been built not far away from the first told him quite a bit. It let him know that the bandits were, indeed, adequately paranoid to be a problem for a group as small as Team CFVY. It also told him they had sufficient manpower to build a defense in depth. And that meant…

Better head back, he thought. Coco needs to know that this may be beyond us.

He wasn’t far along on his return path when he caught a motion out of the corner of his eye. A flash of pink darted out of sight behind a tumbledown tree’s roots, and Fox jerked his head around to stare at the location. For several seconds nothing moved, and he slowly rotated to fully face the position.

“Neo?” he asked quietly. He was fairly sure no one else was near, but there was no need to advertise his position just in case.

He heard a small giggle from behind the roots, and then a diminutive girl slipped out from behind them. Her hair was dual colored, one side pink, the other brown, framing a pale skinned face before disappearing behind her back. Eyes that matched her hair, but in mirror position contemplated him as lips quirked in a mysterious smile. Her white bolero jacket and corset both showed the same dirt and wear as Fox’ own clothing, the result of a month of traveling with little chance to properly clean anything, and rested above curvaceous hips that put paid to any thoughts her lack of height was the result of being a child, rather than the adult she was. She cocked her trademark parasol over her shoulder and smirked.

“Care to talk?” he quipped, carefully leaning against a nearby tree.

She stuck her tongue out at him, then brought the parasol down so its tip rested on the ground, and both of her hands on the handle. The amusement in her eyes belied the displeasure of the rest of her expression, and Fox couldn’t help but quirk his own lips in a wry expression of amusement.

It was a strange thing, he thought. Here they were, two enemies on the flanks of a dangerous bandit encampment, teasing each other about her inability to speak and his inability to avoid poking at the fact. One might even mistake them for friends.

Shyaright, he thought.

They contemplated one another a moment, and then he shrugged as she put her tongue back where it belonged. “So, here you are. You’ve never come out when I’ve called, before. What’s different this time?”

She cocked her head to the side a bit, smiling. Her hand came up and she pointed a small, shapely index finger back towards the sentry posts.

“The bandit camp,” he stated, framing it less as a question and more simply as confirmation that he understood what she was trying to tell him.

She nodded, then held her hand up, showing four fingers. A half a second passed, and then she rolled her wrist in an elegant way, revealing the back of her hand as she popped up the three fingers furthest from her thumb.
“Forty three of them? You’ve been able to scout it out?”

She nodded, and let her hand come back to rest atop the other on the parasol.

He glanced that way, careful to keep her in the corner of his eye, and thought about that for a moment. Forty three was a fairly sizable bunch for four hunters. Their ability to survive outside the protection of civilization meant each one of them was a dangerous character, and combined they were a hefty threat. But the number could have been much larger.

He turned back to Neo. “So why tell me? We are kind of on opposite sides, after all. Weren’t we gleefully trying to kill one another last month?”

She laughed again, and then shrugged before turning to look towards the still unrevealed encampment. She brought her hand to her stomach and rubbed it.

Fox found himself chuckling a bit. “Ah. We take them down, and you loot their supplies for food.”

She gave him a thumbs up.

He grinned and shook his head. “I suppose I’ve heard of worse reasons to help someone out. Back as a kid I worked with some people I really didn’t like just because we had a mutual need and could help one another with it, temporarily.”

A frown crossed her face, as though something he had said bothered her, but he couldn’t quite figure out what it might have been. He mentally brushed that aside and fixed her with a serious look. “That’s still a lot of people for four to deal with.”

She nodded, then made several complicated hand gestures. She contemplated him a moment after finishing, then seemed to realize he hadn’t understood and sighed. She then made a few boxing throws before miming running.

“Hit and run tactics?”

She nodded.

“What’s to keep them from simply taking their supplies and running off?”

With a smile she made a flapping bird with her hands, then shook her head.

“They have no means to fly?”

She nodded again.

“Meaning any attempt would have to be made on the ground, in the spring time mud.”

She quirked a grin.

“It might work.” He shrugged. “So, if I head back towards the rest of my team, are you going to jump me?”

A strange look he couldn’t interpret crossed Neo’s face, and she slowly shook her head no.

“But you won’t come along, either.”

She nodded, her expression a bit rueful.
Fox sighed. What was it with all of the women he found himself around lately being so complicated?

“Alright then. I’m going to go back then.”

Neo gave a small sigh, then jumped into the air and disappeared from view.

Fox shook his head, then began carefully moving back to the site of the ambush.

A bit later he sat inside the back of a not-quite rolled truck. “So that’s the gist of it,” he said. “She gave me the info, and expects us to somehow bust this situation up enough for her to be able to take advantage of it for some fresh supplies.”

He saw Yatsuhashi’s head turn to look at his own pack, settled towards the back of the truck bed. “Our supplies are a little low as well. That town we passed really didn’t have much to spare for us.”

Fox nodded.

“Are we sure it’s not a trap?”

Fox turned back to Coco, who held a thoughtful expression beneath her sunglasses. “You mean there could be quite a few more than she told us, and hopes they can take care of us for her?”

Coco nodded. “We ARE trying to help the person she wants vengeance on.”

Fox nodded. “It’s a possibility,” he acknowledged. “We are definitely a hitch in those plans. But something tells me she’s being truthful here.”

Velvet stirred from where she had been sitting quietly. “Why?”

Fox sighed. “I don’t know. I can’t put my finger on it. But something just feels genuine. This time.”

Velvet watched him a moment, and for just a second something in her eyes spoke of life. It passed quickly, though, and she turned back aside to contemplate the floor.

Fox looked at her a moment, concerned, and saw the similar worry etched in Yatsuhashi’s face.

“Alright,” Coco sat up and slapped her knee. “We’ll go ahead and operate on the assumption her numbers are correct. But if anything gets dicey, we cut and run. Agreed?”

Fox saw Yatsuhashi nod, and rocked his own head in agreement. A moment later Velvet, too, nodded, her lips fixed in a grim line.

“Alright. The first thing we do is confuse them. Fox, can you get us to that second lookout? The one that kept you from going further?”

“Probably,” he nodded, thinking about the approach. “There weren’t any others between us and it aside from the one on the road. That’s easily avoided.”

“Then we take that one out, and before they figure out that one of their people is missing, you get us a better idea about how honest Neo’s being.”

Fox nodded. “And while I’m doing that?”

“We make sure Neo isn’t actually planning to jump you while you’re distracted.”

Fox frowned. He remembered the smile she had when trying to kill him in Farndale, and how genuine it had felt as well. “Yeah,” he muttered. “Good idea.”
Chapter 3: Spring Hunt - Coco

Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt updates Fridays.

Eastern Sanus

Coco followed behind Fox as he led Team CFVY through the woods. They'd lost sight of the small road leading into the camp some time before, but Fox's movements betrayed no signs of confusion as to where he was. The scarred man was in his element, flitting from shadow to trunk to stone in a way that the rest of the team could not match.

Oh, the rest of them were no slouches. A year and a half of schooling had certainly given them plenty of time to hone their skills at avoiding betraying their position to any grimm or bandit hear at hand. But compared to Fox they were clumsy, awkward, and loud. It had always been that way, and Coco wondered yet again about what had led to him being incredibly sneaky and cagey even before starting school.

She supposed she would never know.

Shaking the idle curiosity free, she made herself focus on the task at hand. Neo may have given Fox the impression she would be cooperative, at least for the moment, but Coco had no intentions of letting her guard down. Coco had gained a healthy respect (of sorts) for the woman's skills. Besides, even if Neo did remain well behaved, there were enough bandits (supposedly) for there to be a chance of someone wandering outside the camp and stumbling on CFVY. One shout at the right moment could put paid to the entire scheme, and possibly to the team as well.

Fox held up his fist and froze, and the rest matched his sudden stillness. He stared out a moment, then lowered his hand, now open, palm down. Without checking the others, Coco slowly lowered herself similarly, laying down on the cold, wet bed of pine needles and mud, sighing silently as she further dirtied her already altogether too unpleasant clothing.

After a moment, she watched as Fox slithered backwards, then turned so he could whisper to the rest of them.

"It's just ahead, right over that little bump." He gestured with his head towards where a very low rise was topped with green fern shoots beginning to push past their dead brown predecessors from last year.

Coco snaked her way up to the crest, deliberately keeping her head behind one of the small fronds as she went. Just as her nose was about to brush the little plant, she rolled slightly, allowing her head to lean just to the side and get an unobstructed view of what lay beyond.

The sentry post was just as Fox had described it, with a stream perhaps eight feet across splashing along a slight cleft just beneath it. Glances left and right revealed that the wet gash in the landscape remained about that wide for some length above and below, affording no cover for a crossing in either direction.
"You checked for additional posts?"

Fox nodded quietly. "About 75 yards to either side. None of them are any less well hidden, and neither affords a better crossing than this."

"So how do we do this?"

Coco turned her head to contemplate Yatsuhashi and his quietly whispered question for a moment. "Any attempt to cross that stream will be spotted. It's just too wide. You'd need a running start, and that would attract attention before you even got to the open gap the stream creates. One shout and…"

Yatsuhashi nodded and turned back to looking down below. "Not sure what to do then."

"I can do it."

Coco turned her head toward Velvet. The rabbit eared faunus wasn't looking at Coco. Nor was she looking at the small hide, either. Instead she was looking a little downstream.

"Velvet?"

Not turning, the girl slowly pointed. "There's a small log dipping into the water right there, with some small ferns growing beside it. I can slither down beside it and slip into the water. If I pull myself across the bottom slowly I shouldn't be seen. Then I can slip back up near that small stone, sneak in, and come at the sentry from behind." Velvet nodded gently. "I'm the only one small enough to hide behind that."

Coco swallowed a little, suddenly having second thoughts. "Are you sure, Velvet? That water is going to be freezing cold. You'll be soaked, in shadow, while moving slowly, and then you'll have to…" Her words stumbled to a halt.

You'll have to kill the sentry in cold blood, she thought to herself. She felt her breath grow thready, felt her body begin to shake a bit. She could smell the smoke, the charred sent of people she'd not given a chance to defend themselves. Her fingers clenched, digging into the cold loam of the forest floor…

"I can do it."

Coco jerked free of the thoughts, torn away by the sound in Velvet's voice. There was something cold and ugly in it, something alien to the sweet and gentle teammate Coco had grown to love over the past two years. She turned to meet eyes with the girl and froze. Behind Velvet's coffee brown eyes something dead stared back at her. Something dead… but not still.

Coco swallowed, then closed her eyes and forced herself to think a second before nodding. "Go."

Velvet started to slither away, only for Yatsuhashi's hand on her arm stopping her. "That water is going to be dangerously cold. And you won't have a chance to change clothes."

Velvet shrugged Yatsuhashi's hand aside and began to worm her way further along towards her chosen crossing, then paused. She turned her head, and Coco could see a little more life in her face as she gave a small, wan smile. "It'll be okay, Yatsu. Thank you for worrying." The girl wiggled on, slipping from view.

When next Coco saw Velvet, she gasped in surprise, then quickly covered her mouth.

"Well," Yatsuhashi quietly muttered beside her. "That's one way to solve the wet clothes problem."
Fox nodded gently from Coco's other side.

Coco continued to stare as Velvet, bare as an egg (and twice as pale) slipped down the small bank, sliding alongside of the log. The angle of it was such that the hide would not have seen a thing, but the rest of the team was seeing more than Velvet probably would have preferred.

Coco resisted the urge to slap Yatsuhashi and tell him to stop looking, but only because doing so would probably have garnered attention from the sentry.

"Still determined to treat her like she's your sweet, innocent little sister?" Fox whispered.

"Oh shut up," Yatsuhashi replied, his face going red.

"Behave. Both of you," Coco muttered, just as guilty of staring as her lover was.

If Velvet was in the least mortified by her current state of undress, she certainly didn't show it. She slithered down beside the log and then, with no hesitation whatsoever, slipped into the water like an otter, then disappeared beneath the surface.

Ten seconds later Coco spotted the girl, her skin no longer alabaster in color, but instead a painful looking red. She pulled herself up alongside the small boulder, then sat alongside of the bank, rubbing the water off of her skin briskly. Her eyes turned to where Coco was hidden, and her face betrayed no more embarrassment or shame than she'd display when fully clothed, despite nothing hiding her chest from view.

Less than a minute later, Velvet disappeared from view once more, slipping off into the bushes.

"The hell?" Yatsuhashi muttered. "What just happened?"

Coco sighed. "Nothing good."

Nearly five minutes later, Velvet rose into view from behind the hide. She gave a slow wave, then sunk back out of view.

Sighing, and unsure if it was a sigh of relief or of worry, Coco sat up. "Yatsu, go fetch her clothes, please. Fox, get over there and start scouting right away."

Both boys grunted and lurched into motion. Crouching just as low as they were, Coco moved her way down to the stream side. Neither of the flanking look out posts should have had a view to see there precise position, but there was no sense in taking unnecessary risks.

Once she reached the bank, she contemplated the gap, then threw herself into as powerful a leap as she could muster. She landed on the opposite side, barely clearing the gap, and flopped forward just to make certain she wouldn't wobble backwards and into the water, then scrabbled up the reverse slope to slip inside the hide with Velvet.

Velvet was curled up, her arms around her legs and her knees drawn into her chest. She was looking down at a body laying inside the hide, a male who appeared quite human. His throat had been stabbed, a significant pool of blood forming behind his head.

Coco wrapped Velvet in her arms, and felt the girl's shivering. "You okay, Velve?"

"Fine." Velvet wiggled a little, though Coco couldn't tell if she was trying to snuggle into Coco's warmth better, or escape from her team leader's embrace. "He was already dead when I got here."
"Neo," Coco grumbled. "She probably killed him before she even met with Fox. It would have been nice of her to tell him. He could have scouted right then."

Velvet said nothing.

A moment later Yatsuhashi slipped behind the hide, silently handing Velvet her clothes. Equally silent, Velvet shrugged herself loose of Coco and began dressing, displaying no more a thought to modesty than she had since the moment she’d slipped behind the log. Coco lifted her eyes to look at Yatsuhashi, and saw a concern that mirrored her own on his face.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine." A little heat entered Velvet's voice, her eyes narrowing a bit.

Coco let it drop.

"Alright," she whispered. "Let's take a look." Laying back down on her belly she slipped forward, approaching the crest just a short distance behind the hide.

Fox was nowhere to be seen when she got a peek at what lay beyond. Yatsuhashi slid up beside her, with Velvet following shortly thereafter. Together they silently evaluated what they saw.

The camp was surrounded by a palisade. Coco could see very little past it, the walls rising too high for her to see even the roofs of any buildings or tents they might have hidden behind it. Only a central watchtower rose above the points of the logs that formed the wall, two figures lounging about in poses of casual disregard for any potential threats that might lurk in the forest beyond. About a third of the way around, barely in view, a wooden gate was closed where the palisade crossed the road.

"How big do you think it is?" Coco whispered.

"Two acres? One and a half?" Yatsuhashi whispered back. "About right for a group of 40, if you assume they have space for vehicles and enough supplies to last all winter and then some."

"They've made a kill zone, too." Coco nodded to nearby tree trunks. "It looks like they built in a clearing, and expanded it by chopping down the trees around the edges for their wall. You'd have to cross nearly 400 feet to get to the wall, and there's not much cover to hide in."

"Where do you think Fox is?"

Coco shrugged. "No idea, Yatsu. He's sneaky. Even sneakier than our little hare here." She patted Velvet on the rump, evoking no response.

"So, what do you think?"

Coco evaluated the palisade, eyeing the gate. "Clearly we couldn't take it on in a direct assault. We're going to have to hope Fox is able to confirm that Neo was, in fact, being truthful. Hopefully we can knock out five to ten of them before they get their act together. Then, while they start scouting around looking for us maybe we can get another half dozen or so."

"That's still less than half."

"Yeah. And once they figure out that hunting us spreads them too thin, they'll probably make the smart choice and just bunker up, hoping to wait us out."
"And then?"

And then…” Coco sighed. "I have no idea what to do then."
Eastern Sanus

Aura could do an excellent job of helping someone keep warm in the cold, or cool in the heat. It always did so at a cost, however. Aura could, eventually, be exhausted, whether through staving off injury or keeping away adverse temperatures. Velvet could have survived the bone-achingly cold water on her own. But it would have taken a toll on her aura.

Coco’s arms around her helped stave off some of the loss, and so she put up with the closeness.

Not that I should, she told herself. She belongs to Yatsu now.
She flinched inwardly, feeling a roiling mix of emotions she could not sort out, and which she quickly clamped down on. It wasn’t hard. The dull, sullen low heat of anger she replaced it with did a good job of dulling everything else.

Her eyes turned to staring at the corpse inside the hide with them. She had been absolutely determined to kill whoever it was hidden within, and somehow finding him already dead had left her feeling hollow. She’d steeled herself to do it, and then all those nerves, all that tension… all of that anger… had stalled without a target.

She shivered.

“Awwww. Does the poor widdle bunnywabbit feel all pent up without anyone to kill? There’s plenty over on the other side of that fence.”

Velvet gritted her teeth and fought back a growl.

She’s not real, she reminded herself. She’s dead, and not here.

“Of course I’m dead. You killed me.”

Velvet jerked her head towards the figure sitting just at the edge of her vision.

No one was there, of course.

“Velvet?” Coco asked.

Velvet turned to look at Coco and Yatsuhashi, seeing them both tense, scanning their surroundings.

“Sorry. It’s nothing. I thought I heard something is all.”

“You sure?” Yatsuhashi rumbled.

“Yeah. It’s nothing.”

She heard a hostile giggle, and ignored it.

A shadow crossed the group, and Fox slipped down beside them.

“Well?” Coco asked.

“I counted 43. Not counting this one.” Fox toed the dead man laying amongst them. “My guess is she may have missed one or two because they were off doing something or other. Regardless, Neo’s story basically checks out.”

“Which implies her stated motive may check out as well.” Coco nodded to herself, then turned back to Fox. “Alright, give us the rundown.”

Fox flattened some of the mud beside him, then picked up a twig and began drawing in the spot he’d cleared. “Okay. The camp is more or less a circle with that watch tower in the center. The west quarter holds all of their tents. No permanent structures. I’m guessing they came here in the late fall and built the palisade just before the snow began to fall.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “During the summer they probably live further out. It’d be easier to avoid detection that way. But in winter they need to be closer because of how difficult it can be to get anything when there’s snow everywhere.”
Fox grinned an agreement. “Sounds about right. Anyway, the southern quadrant has a number of vehicles in various states of repair. They probably swap parts after ambushes to get unserviceable vehicles working, then use them to haul their loot up here.”

Velvet stirred as a thought struck her. “What about fuel? We might just be able to drive to the coast. We might even get ahead of Ruby that way.”

Coco nodded. “That’s a thought.”

The twig poked a spot on the little diagram next to where he’d drawn a few vehicles. “Right here. As for the rest of the circle, it’s stacks of crates, cases, and the like, most of them covered under tarp. Most of the people inside were working on the vehicles. It looked like they were trying to get as many of them running as possible.”

“Spring’s here,” Yatsuhashi commented. “They’re probably getting ready to go back to their summer quarters.”

“That’s my guess.” Fox poked a series of dots around the camp. “Now, these are all locations where they have lookouts like this one. There’s almost two dozen, but most of them are unmanned at the moment. My guess is they rotate people through irregularly. Otherwise they would have to have something like half their people on watch all the time. As long as people trying to scout out the place see the outposts it forces them to be cautious, just like we were.”

Velvet stared at the map. “Which ones are manned now?”

“Here, here, and here.” Fox poked the crude map. “This one is the closest. It’s about 50 degrees off from the one we’re in.”

She turned to give Coco a meaningful look.

The team leader stared at her a moment, looking as though she was evaluating Velvet, then nodded. “Go, Yatsu, go with her. Fox. We’ll start circling the other way. If we move fast enough, we’ll be done before they realize we were here.”

Velvet didn’t bother looking behind her as she slunk away through the undergrowth. Quiet as he was, her ears could pick up the small, subtle sounds of Yatsu following her as she skated around just out of view of the palisade and tower of the camp. She paid him little mind. Her thoughts weren’t on the giant man. They were focused completely on the task at hand.

“Of course they are. That’s what killers do, right?”

“Shut. Up.” Velvet hissed, refusing to chase the fleeting figure just at the edge of her vision. After a moment the specter faded away, and Velvet was left alone with her thoughts.

They scooted past several empty observation posts, and then Velvet froze. Behind her, Yatsuhashi slipped to a halt as well, then slowly crept up beside her. Silently, she pointed to where a man sat, his back against a tree, gazing out through a small gap in a wooden hide.

“He alive?” Yatsuhashi whispered.

Velvet gazed at him carefully, her ears carefully erect to catch any sound. She could hear a click! click! click! coming from where the man sat. She stared a bit harder, and watched as his left hand, partially hidden by his leg, opened and closed a pocket watch repeatedly.

“Yeah,” she confirmed. “He’s alive.”
Yatsuhashi grunted softly. “I was kind of hoping our shadow had dealt with it.”

“She hasn’t.” Velvet began creeping forward, angled so that she’d come up behind the trunk of the tree the lookout sat back against.

A hand on her ankle stopped her. “Are you sure?” Yatsuhashi’s voice was low, but the hesitation in it was clear. “I could…”

Velvet cut him off with a quick cut of her hand toward him. “Let go.”

She saw Yatsuhashi wince at the abrupt sound of her voice, but he released her and watched as she carefully moved her ankle away from where he could reach it. Turning her head once more, she inched forward, bit by bit.

Every sense was alive. She could hear the soft spring breeze through the barely budding tree branches, the call of birds, the babble of the creek below. She could smell the wet earth as it thawed, the traces of smoke blowing in from the bandit camp, her own body odor from too many days in the same clothes. Beneath her fingers she could feel every little rotted leaf, every little twig, each bit of dirt. Her eyes could make out the details of the man she was stalking, making out the weave of his coat’s cloth, seeing individual strands of hair float on the breeze. She could taste…

Bile. Bitterness and sickness. The flavor was overwhelming.

She forced her attention away from it. Her focus was… could only be… on the tree. The tree, and the man. On her approach. On silence. On the goal. On the kill.

Reaching the tree she quietly rose up, standing, just to the side and behind, and gave a cough.

“Iris. That you?” The man leaned forward then rose. As he straightened up he turned, and his eyes widened in shock. His mouth opened with surprise.

Velvet’s leg swept out and she slammed her foot into his solar plexus with all the strength her hunter training and faunus heritage could provide.

He flopped backward, striking the ground hard. Velvet watched him as he curled up, arms clamped around his stomach, and heard his tortured attempts to draw breath with a paralyzed pair of lungs. Satisfied he could make no noise, she fell on him. Her legs wrapped around his chest as she slapped his arms aside, then grabbed his head within her own arms.

She jerked her back, using all of the strength in her legs, back, and arms, and twisted fast and hard. She heard a sickening snapping sound, and the man twitched, then lay still. Her nose wrinkled as a stench filled the air, and she dropped the body, stepping back quickly, then fell to a seated position on the ground.

She stared at her hands a moment. Watched them shaking. Watched them slow, then still. She felt her chest rise and fall, a deep breath, and then she smiled.

“It gets easier, doesn’t it?”

“Shut up, Tawnee,” she muttered, but then she lifted herself up, feeling lighter than she had in weeks. It was as though a weight had lifted from her shoulders. She rose, turned, and gave Yatsuhashi a thumbs up.

His return smile, as he stood from where he’d remained watching, looked troubled, but Velvet didn’t let it bother her. She simply leaned back, stretching, and then turned, hands on her hips. “Let’s head
to the last one and see if we get there first.”

“Are you okay… with that?” Yatsuhashi asked.

A flash of irritation ran through her, heating her up, and she felt an angry comment form. She bit it down, then shrugged. “We’re dealing with a danger to decent people out here. I’m perfectly fine with it.”

Yatsuhashi gave her a slow nod. “Alright. Just, if you ever need to talk about anything…”

The irritation came back, stronger. “I’m fine, Yatsu. There’s nothing to talk about.” She turned her back to him, good mood ruined. “Let’s go.”

She stalked off in the direction of the next occupied lookout, passing by several empty ones. Yatsuhashi followed her as silently as before, but she could tell he was there. His presence was almost like an itch between her shoulder blades. A small part of her wondered at that, at how someone who was a comforting presence, that she thought she could lose herself in, could also somehow be an irritant.

She simply wrote it off as having something to do with the situation and did her best to ignore it, focusing instead on her careful attempts to approach her next target in total silence.

The next hide was more easily dealt with. The woman inside it was not sitting up, as the previous had been. Instead she was laying belly down, staring idly out of the small opening that looked out over a low, clear slope. Given her pose, she could do nothing when Velvet’s full weight came down on her back.

Velvet grabbed the back of the woman’s head, shoving it down into the soil. The woman’s attempts to cry out were muffled by ground, and her arms came around attempting to grab at Velvet. The Faunus slapped them away, no real strength needed to do so given the difficulty of trying to grab someone sitting on her victim’s spine, then chopped downward with the side of her free hand.

The woman beneath her went limp as the side of Velvet’s hand struck her neck right above the shoulder. Velvet shifted, pressing her knees into the woman’s shoulders, and leaned forward, forcing much of her weight into the hand pushing the woman’s face down. After a minute she felt the woman’s back slow in its rise and fall, then become completely still. She held that pose for another minute, then rolled off the corpse, flopping onto her own back to stare at the sky.

She ignored Yatsuhashi as he crawled next to the body and checked for a pulse before giving a nod. “Good job,” he said softly.

“Yeah,” she heard Tawnee’s voice. “Good job for a murderer.”

She grit her teeth and ignored the words in her head, content to just revel in the fact that she, at least, was very much alive.
Spring Hunt - Chapter 5: Fox

Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt updates Mondays

GrimmKaiju Writes:

I’m liking your writing style more and more as I read and the way you write the characters personality’s are great. Interesting detail with Velvet having a voice in her head taunting her. I look forward to this every Monday and can’t wait to read them.

Bookah Replies:

Thanks!

Not everyone agrees with you on the “phantom” that she is dealing with, as you’ll see below. I’ll just refer you to what I say there.

Thank you so much for following this troubling tale!

Bloodfox64 Writes:

I would like to start with that I like your story a lot, it has a good premise and Team CFVY are criminally underused in both fanfiction and the show its self. But...

I find how you have Velvet's mental state to be... Random. Out of place. Or just shoehorned in to have the situation be worse than it would be otherwise.

Honestly, the whole idea of a person haunting the person that killed them in a purely psychological manner is very over used and not accurate when it comes to mental illness. It would be different if Velvet showed some sort of sign of mental degradation before this and she got worse until some incident made her snap, but that isn't what has been shown in your story.

I'm sorry if this comes off as rude, but the way things are being shown are incredibly odd in comparison to what came before in the story.

Bookah Replies:

Thank you for the positive comment about the premise and Team CFVY.

So, in regards to the idea of being haunted. It is something that does get overused a bit, I admit. It is, however, accurate for some forms of mental illness I’m sorry to say. I won’t get into details, but I will say that I personally know this a bit too well.

Velvet has, in fact, already shown some definite degradation over the story, but it’s not what people expect. I attempted to show from early on that she has some serious internalized anger issues and a bit of a guilt complex, and this plays into her more recent personality shift. I wish I had done a better job of it, since apparently this came across poorly, if at all.

Thanks for the criticism! It’s rare to get it, and I can’t improve if I don’t know what I’m doing wrong!
The lookout that Fox crept towards with Coco was nowhere near the small stream the first position had overlooked. Instead, it was on the crown of a small hill overlooking a clearing. With no trees and few bushes there was little cover to protect anyone attempting to approach the watch position.

Of course, those benefits could only be realized if any potential threat was actually attempting to approach through the clearing. Having already penetrated the perimeter defenses of the encampment, Fox and Coco had no need to make any such approach. Instead they could simply come around from behind.

The reverse slope was still a grassy, exposed thing. This would have been a problem for someone like Coco, whose ability to be truly sneaky was somewhat limited. But for someone like Fox, however…

Fox had not had what most would consider to be a traditional childhood. While most preteens were out attending school, hanging out with friends after school, and going to bed before their curfew, Fox had experienced a very different life.

His parents had tried hard, of course. But even in a kingdom as civilized and socially advanced as Vale there were haves and have-nots. His parents lived at the very edge of Vale’s community, both geographically and socially. Though not criminally inclined, they had never-the-less worked at the very edges of legality, taking what jobs they could, and getting paid whatever their employers felt like, without the safety of the law protecting them.

Things for Fox and his siblings had always been tight. What money came in had never been enough to fully cover rent, food, clothing, and anything else the family needed. The moment he was old enough, Fox began taking on jobs, much like his parents. Of course, being a preteen there were limits to the skills and strengths he could bring to the table. The jobs he could manage tended to be even less well protected and legal than those his parents worked.

It wasn’t long before his own position became increasingly precarious. His efforts tended to earn him enemies, and having enemies tended to paint a target on his back long before he was strong enough to be able to make anyone aiming at that target work for it. He’d had to make “friends” capable of protecting him until he had the ability to do it himself, and those “friends” didn’t do anything without something in return.

In Fox’ case, the return demanded, was his ability as a lookout and sneak, scoping out potential targets for illicit activity and watching rival groups for weaknesses and opportunities. As he got older, and stronger, these activities had escalated into more… active roles in opposing the enemies of his friends. Each scar on his body spoke of a moment where his role became very active indeed.

Until the day he was caught. Expecting the worst, he had been shocked to be offered a way out, rather than put in an early grave. The alternative hadn’t been any easier, or even safer, than what he’d had before. But it was honest. And after all the less than honest things he’d done in his still quite young life, he was ready for the change.

He carefully motioned Coco to stillness as they spotted the hiding spot for the Bandit’s scout. A quick look over assured him that the man inside was still there, relaxing against a stone behind a small, carved out dip in the hilltop. He gestured subtly toward the lookout, watching as Coco gave a
“Wait here,” he breathed, the sound to quiet to even be a whisper. He began slipping along on the ground, wriggling between clumps of tall grass and low lying ground cover, moving along an inch at a time. Second became minutes, and minutes ticked along towards an hour, though he couldn’t be sure exactly how far along in that course time had gone. However long it was, he’d gotten within fifteen feet when plans went awry.

“Hey! Russet!”

Fox froze as the scout turned towards the feminine voice calling out from somewhere behind Fox’ own position. Behind him he could hear the sound of feet trodding along without any subtility to them, rustling in the grasses and thudding on the sod. In front of him the scout rose with a wave.

“How about time, Sable.” The man grinned. “I was getting bored off my ass! Sentry duty is the most boring job ever.”

“Yeah yeah, rub it in,” he heard Sable grumble. The woman’s steps grew close, and out of the corner of his eye he spotted her begin walking past him from a distance of no more than his own body length. He felt his eyes widen. He may have been as silent as the grave, but he wasn’t disguised. How the woman hadn’t seen him was beyond his belief.

“Gotta rub it in,” Russet grinned, stepping towards Sable and meeting her half way. “I’m done, and your shift is just starting. I have to get you started on the right note.”

“Yeah, yeah. Fuck you.”

“That an offer?”

“You know, maybe it is.” He could hear the grin on Sable’s face. “We haven’t had a moment to ourselves in days. And it’s not like anything ever happens on watch anyway. What’s a few minutes, really?”

“Eternity.” Fox jumped up while the two were busy sharing lurid grins. Before they had a chance to even turn he spun, lashing out with both fists. Blood sprayed out into the air, and both bandits lurched backwards from one another, and from Fox, their hands going to their throats. Within seconds they slumped to the ground, the only movement the rapidly decreasing pumps of blood from the slits.

By the time Coco had reached him, the blood had ceased flowing, and he was cleaning his blades and hands on the clothing of the two bandits. Coco stared down at the bodies with a pale fascination, then jerked, turning to Fox. “You okay, Fox?”

Fox sighed. “Yeah. I’m fine.”

“You sure?”

He shrugged. “Sorry to say this, Coco, but you do get used to it.”

Coco gaped at him for a moment, but then nodded. “Alright.” He watched her take a deep breath. “Let’s move on to the next one around.”

Nodding, Fox spared a glance for the two corpses on the ground, then turned and began leading them further around the perimeter.
They soon met up with the other half of their team not far from the sentry post more or less on the back side of the bandit camp. No one said a thing. Coco simply glanced over to Yatsuhashi, who had given a grim nod, holding up two fingers. Coco gave a nod back, holding up two fingers as well, then jerked her head away from the camp.

Together, CFVY slunk off into the lengthening shadows of the forest. The moment they entered the trees Fox took the lead, almost disappearing ahead of them as he scouted out their path tirelessly. After an hour, as the shadows began to combine into the first darkening of twilight he stopped, glancing around.

“What is it, Fox?”

Fox turned as Coco led the rest of the team up to him. He pointed out the small cliff face just to the side of their path. “It’s about dark. Time we should be setting up camp for the night. I think I spotted a good ledge up that. Let me check it out.”

Coco gave him a nod, and in an instant he was climbing the cliff in a series of bounds and hops. Landing on the ledge he spotted, he looked around, assessing it, then gave himself a satisfied nod. He crept up to the edge and stuck his head over, looking down the forty or so feet to where Coco and Yatsuhashi stared back up at him. He frowned a moment, noticing that Velvet was staring at the ground, but then shrugged and waved them upward.

It was only moments later that the three joined him. He gestured towards the back of the ledge. “There’s a sort of grotto there. It’s pretty shallow, but it’ll give us a little cover.”

“Alright. No fires, though.” Coco nodded, and immediately began unfurling the small pack of gear strapped to her back. The others quickly joined, rolling out blankets.

From his own pack Fox began producing various trail rations, dried bits of meat, vegetables, dry breads, and the like. He quickly portioned them out, setting them into four tins and handing three to the others before beginning to eat the fourth. It was pretty dry eating, and not very appetizing, but it would do the trick.

It didn’t take long for him to notice that, while Velvet was eating just as well as he, both Coco and Yatsuhashi were picking at their food. He sighed. “I know it’s not the best meal we’ve had, but eat up anyway. You need it.”

Coco and Yatsuhashi both looked at him, then frowned down at their food in almost mirror fashion. A brief flash of humor rolled through Fox, but he kept quiet as the two began eating. Coco with a grimace and Yatsuhashi a stoic expression. Soon finished, he gathered up the tins, wiping them out and storing them.

“Alright, we kicked over the hornets nest,” he asked quietly. “What next?”

“Next, they respond.” Coco frowned, pinching her chin in one hand. “They’ll discover they’re down five people soon enough, if they haven’t already. That leaves an estimated 39, right?”

Fox nodded.

“So, if I were them, I’d double or triple the sentries tonight. Then, in the morning, I’d send out scouts to try to determine what I’m up against.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “How easy would it be to track us, Fox?”

Fox thought a moment. “We’re not the sneakiest bunch out here. It wouldn’t be too hard. But they’d
probably need to do it in the morning. Faunus could try tracking us by night, but there won’t be a moon tonight. They’d struggle with it.”

“That true, Velvet?”

Velvet stirred herself. “Yes. We can see much better in the dark than humans. But we still need some light. During a full moon we can see just as well as if it were a cloudy day. But a new moon?” She shrugged. “We won’t see all that much more than you would.”

Coco nodded, thanking Velvet. “So realistically they won’t be able to start looking for us until morning if they want a realistic chance to find us. So…” She pinched her nose, then nodded. “So, depending on the size of the tracking party, we ambush them.”

For a moment, they all sat there considering that, and then Yatsuhashi stirred himself. “A stand up fight would be nice.”

“Yeah.” Coco sighed. “Alright, let’s bed down. Yatsu, first watch. Then Fox. Velvet, you get third, and I’ll finish us up.”

Grunting, Fox immediately crawled over to his blankets as the last of the sunlight winked out, plunging the world into night.

He hadn’t felt as though he had slept at all before Yatsuhashi quietly woke him to take over. At the same time, it also hadn’t felt as though much time had passed, either. Clearly he had slept, even if it hadn’t produced dreams, or much of a sense of having rested either. With a quiet nod he rose, watching as Yatsuhashi quietly crawled into the blankets with Coco, spooning up against CFVY’s leader.

Giving a languid stretch, Fox strolled to the edge of the ledge, then sat, dangling his feet over the edge. He stared out into the darkness, unable to see a thing, and mentally stretched his ears, straining to make sense of the night through senses other than vision.

Perhaps a half hour had passed when he noticed a presence. He wasn’t completely certain just where, exactly, she approached from, but he knew it when Neo sat down beside him. Only the faintest change in the blackness met his eye when he turned to her, but he felt a hand on his arm that quickly slipped upward to press a finger against his lips.

“Shh!” he heard, the sound thready and weak as Neo pitched it for his ears only. Then the finger on his lips moved off, and her hand clasped his chin, turning his head down and far to the left of the ledge.

For a moment, he sat there, surrounded by a deep silence and darkness that lent no clues that the world existed beyond Neo’s warm touch on his face. He did not move, certain that Neo’s actions had some meaning and import, and then, slowly, from the gloom he began to make out slight sounds, a soft shifting of something moving through the undergrowth below. Slowly, out of the corner of his eye a slight something began to reveal itself, barely visible. A pair of small, red points that didn’t so much glow as hint at their existence. Soon a second joined, and then a third.

Quietly he drew up his legs and lay down on the ledge, lifting his head over the edge just enough to keep an eye on what was happening below. He felt Neo do the same beside him, her arm against his, her foot against his knee.

It was not long before the ledge was surrounded by grimm skulking around. He couldn’t be certain how many, exactly, there were, as the eyes flicked in and out depending on the direction the grimm
were looking, but it was clear that there were well over two dozen, and that they were searching around. He could hear faint snuffling noises, and low grunts mixed in with the increasing volume of movement below.

They know someone’s here. But how? We aren’t making a peep! Unless…

He tapped Neo’s shoulder a moment, then slipped backward as quiet as he could, then moved to the ever so slightly lighter patches of darkness against the blackness of the stone. A quick check indicated that Coco and Yatsuhashi were fast asleep. A moment more brought him to Velvet, sleeping separately. His hand found her arm, and he felt her stiffen, her light breathing stopping altogether.

He said nothing, just scooted quietly beside her, and pulled her head against his chest. Cradling it, he stroked her hair, pressing a soft kiss to her forehead, willing away the nightmare that had awoken her, and drawn in the grimm.

He wasn’t sure how long it was before she fell back asleep, but by the time she did the grimm were gone, and so was Neo. He woke Coco, filling her in quietly on the events that had transpired, then lay back down, getting little sleep.
With a scream, Velvet threw herself at the chimpanzee faunus. It was late. It was far too late. Time had slowed. She watched helplessly as Tawnee’s powerful arm came down to strike Yatsuhashi’s jaw, smashing his head sideways in a spray of blood. This then repeated with the other arm, smashing his face the other way, Yatsuhashi’s aura being insufficient to stop his jaw from shattering under the blows.

Finally, Velvet reached Tawnee. Her leg snapped out with the strength of an enraged hare faunus, and Tawnee spun away in an uncontrolled whirl, blood whipping outward to spray the crates, the floor, and Velvet herself. Landing in an untidy heap, Tawnee twisted, an arm up to shield herself from Velvet’s next blow.

“No, stop!” Tawnee cried. “I don’t want to die!”

“You deserve to die!” Velvet heard herself scream. “Murderer!”

“No more so than you.” Tawnee leered, her arm dropping and blood dripping from her chin as she gave a cruel grin. “You’re no better than us.”

Her leg lashed out, and Velvet sent Tawnee tumbling once again. “I am! I fight to protect people!”

Her voice sounded desperate, even to herself.

In a sprawl on the floor, Tawnee turned her head, still grinning, her face covered in blood. “You fight because you’re angry.”

“Stop it!” Velvet kicked again. And again. A macabre dance of destruction took her as she rained blow after blow on Tawnee, silencing the voice that accused her.

As Tawnee went limp, her body barely recognizable, Velvet felt everything go out of her. Anger, love, faith, energy… nothing remained but a hollow feeling where there should have been something. Anything.

Slowly she turned to see Yatsuhashi, his face bloody, staring.

“Ya… Yatsu?” she croaked, her voice dry and weak. She took a step towards him.
“No!” Yatsuhashi barked. “Stay back!”

Stunned, Velvet stopped, staring.


“No…” Velvet could barely hear herself. “Yatsuhashi… No. I was protecting you. She was going to… I was…” Her voice cracked, dryness replaced by a choking flood of liquid. “I love you, Yatsuhashi!” she pled.


“Murderer,” Tawnee spoke behind her, the voice distorted by the destruction of her throat and face.


“No…” she moaned. “I’m not… I didn’t…”

**Eastern Sanus**

Her muscles were tight to the degree of painfulness as she woke. She could almost feel her ears popping off her body as every part of her focused on listening for the next attack, the next accusation, the next cause of pain. She felt a burning in her lungs, and realized she was holding her breath. It took effort to force her body to move, to let the air out and draw a new breath.

It was second later she realized that she was being held. Arms were around her, keeping her tight. They were large arms, skin a little darker than her own, muscled. She was being pulled back against a torso to match, a bulk of muscle and bone.

Her breath, only just renewed, hitched a moment, and then she was scrambling away, almost slapping at the arms as she disentangled herself and slid up against the cliff.

The cliff. She remembered. Team CFVY had camped out on a ledge built onto the side of a cliff. They were in a forest. They had taken refuge there after raiding bandits. And that meant the arms had been…

She looked around, taking in the sight of Yatsuhashi staring at her, his expression alarmed. Coco and Fox likewise were watching her, Fox’s eyes white as always, and narrowed with thought, Coco’s eyes looking almost bruised from poor sleep. Velvet felt her already too tight muscles clench further under their gaze, and she lowered her eyes to stare at her clothes, lacking in the blood she expected to see there.

“It’s alright, Velvet, it was just a dream,” Yatsuhashi crooned, his voice low and soft.

She drew in a shuddering breath, and felt a flare of anger enter her with it. “Stop that.”

She watched Yatsuhashi grow stiff, and out of the corner of her eye she caught his head turning to glance toward Coco. “Sorry, I was just worried.”

“Well, stop,” she growled. “I’m fine.”

“Velvet, you’re not fi”

“I’m FINE,” she snarled.

She watched as Yatsuhashi sighed, then turned away, noticed the small, helpless shrug Coco gave
“You’re not fine. You don’t deserve to be fine.”

Velvet grit her teeth, ignoring Tawnee.

The bandit trackers arrived two hours later. One was clearly following the trail, which was not a difficult task. Team CFVY hadn’t put in any kind of effort to avoid leaving one. The other three remained on guard, paying attention to their surroundings as they followed along. The laxness that had been on display yesterday had clearly been bled out of the bandits.

Coco had anticipated that they’d send a small group, and so had led everyone into swinging wide from their campsite of the night before, then curling back inward so as to be in a position overlooking their original track. They now lay in wait on a small hillock, watching as the small band held up at the edge of a small clearing.

“Damn!” the tracker swore. He pushed greasy black hair out of his face, glaring at the ground on the other side of the clearing.

“Something wrong, Jett?”

The tracker turned back to look up at the largest man of the three guarding him. “Yeah, something is wrong. I don’t know if the bastards that attacked us were lucky, unlucky, or really smart, but they managed to get their trail completely overrun by grimm.” He pointed to the trampled grass laying untidily on the ground. It’s a big bunch of them, too.”

“Can’t we look for their tracks on the far side of the grimm tracks?”

Another man, wiry and with a mean scar across his face slapped the back of the big man’s head. “Murado, you’re a damn fool. Even if we could find them somehow, there’s a big bunch of grimm nearby. You want to find them?”

Murado rubbed the back of his head. “No call to hit me, Roux.”

“It’s the only way to get you to think. You big guys are all the same. Just as muscle bound in the head as the chest.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Velvet could see Yatsuhashi’s face twist into the slightest of frowns, the equivalent of a raging tantrum from the big guy. She ignored it, focusing on the bickering group below.

“Just shut it, you two.” The final member of the group growled, his voice low. “So this is a problem for us. Anyone really want to go tell Azul that the people that killed five of his men got away?”

The other three men all frowned, shaking their head, but then Roux jutted his chin out. “You got a suggestion, Grey? One that won’t get us eaten by grimm?”

Grey scowled back, but said nothing.

“Well… shit.” Jett grumbled. “Alright, you three wait here. I’m going to try circling the grimm tracks and see if I get lucky.”

“And what if it’s a grimm that gets lucky?” Murado smirked.

“Then shoot me.”
Velvet watched the tracker walk over to the trampled down area across the clearing. He began circling around, looking at this and that, while the other three took various poses of semi-alertness, leaning against trees and crossing their arms or sticking them in their pockets. All three, including the maligned Murado, continued looking outward, sweeping their surroundings.

Beside her, Coco carefully tapped a finger on Fox’ arm, then pointed to the tracker. With the slightest of nods he slipped back and out of Velvet’s view.

Four minutes later, a short shout of surprise and anger burst from the trees where the scout had slipped out of view, only to be cut off. The three bandits closest immediately sprung into action, producing pistols, rifle, and cudgel, their eyes all jerked towards the sound.

“Jett?”

Velvet watched as Coco took full advantage of their distraction. The athletic woman rose from beside her, her mini-gun immediately deploying, and squeezed the trigger. A spray of bullets hosed down the bandit position, and Velvet watched all three men hurtle to the ground, with at least one cry of pain.

She was on her feet before she realized it, hurtling herself into the clearing. Beside her she could hear the heavy thuds of Yatsuhashi’s feet as he, too, hurried towards the ambushed men. Bullets flew past them as Coco continued to hose down the spot where the three men were attempting to use tree trunks and large stones to shelter from the rain of dust laced metal.

The gun stopped just as Velvet and Yatsuhashi arrived. With a powerful swing, Yatsuhashi felled a tree that Grey had been using to shelter himself from Coco, and a curdled cry overrode the sound of the conifer beginning to smash its way to the ground. Velvet herself flew over a large stone, confronting the bulk of Murado as she landed. She spun about to blast her foot into his gut, hearing the man grunt as his breath rushed out of him.

Murado was no weakling, though, and knew his way around in a fight. Despite the lack of air, he slapped his hands out with surprising speed, trapping Velvet’s ankle, and he immediately spun. Velvet felt herself lifted from the ground, swung like a bat, and a tree slammed into her side painfully. Even with her aura protecting her she could feel a sharp pain, like a small line of fire suddenly jab into her senses where the tree had struck her.

She fell to the ground at the base of the tree, and gave a twist that jerked her leg free. The burning in her side became a sharp, red hot poker for a moment, and she felt her breath hitch, but she refused to let it stop her. She gathered her feet beneath her and rocketed upward, smashing her fist into Murado’s jaw with all the force her entire body could put into it.

Murado jerked upright and back from the blow and staggered a bit, but then began to crouch, arms wide for a tackle. He was interrupted, however, as a massive blade came from the side, messily separating his upper body from his lower right at the height of his lower ribs.

Velvet spared no time to watch him fall in two separate parts. She spun around, looking for the other two men. Her eyes quickly found Grey, laying on the ground hands fluttering to try to stem the flood of blood from several wounds, and failing. A turn, and she found Roux, crawling away through a bed of fern, one arm dangling uselessly from the hole one of Coco’s bullets had ripped through it.

Before she could jump the man, the minigun spoke once again, tearing up the ferns, and the man amongst them. Roux was clearly lifeless before the last frond fluttered back to the ground.

It was over in mere seconds, a quick whirlwind of violence. Three bodies lay on the ground, blood
pooling around them. Coco was descending the slight slope into the clearing, her minigun still at the ready, smoke pouring from the barrels. On the far side of the open space Fox was walking towards them, his movements graceful and almost predatory.

“You alright, Velvet?” Yatsuhashi’s face looked a bit grey, but his eyes were turned on Velvet rather than the bodies, clearly concerned.

Velvet gingerly poked her side, her voice hissing as the hot throbbing spiked into a stabbing poker. “I think I cracked a couple of ribs. It’ll be fine. My aura should take care of that in the next few days.”

Yatsuhashi nodded slowly, then whipped his sword a couple of times, still refusing to look behind him as droplets of blood came off the blade. “Alright.”

“How about you, big man?” Coco asked, a hand coming free of the minigun to rest on a powerful bicep.

“I’m unhurt.” Yatsuhashi gave a wan smile, his color still not good, but a clear sign he wasn’t in terrible trouble just yet.

“Fox?” Coco asked.

“No problem.” He rubbed a small cut interlaced off a couple of scars. “He had a knife on him, but it’s a shallow cut. It should heal before tomorrow.”

“Alright,” Coco breathed. Velvet watched as CFVY’s leader closed her eyes a moment, clearly settling herself. “Let’s get out of here.”

Coco turned to head back down the path towards the bandit encampment, her minigun returning to its hand bag configuration. As Velvet looked on the woman reached over, her hand shaking, to take Yatsuhashi’s own shaking hand. She felt the heat of the fight drain from her, leaching away anything but a feeling of dull resentment, and she began trudging along behind the couple, her eyes on her feet.

“Poor, poor faunus girl…”

Velvet refused to look for the source of Tawnee’s mocking voice.
Eastern Sanus

Coco peered over the edge of the low rise, frowning. “Well, that was predictable.”

Beside her, Yatsuhashi nodded. “It’s pretty much like you said last night. They must have every single one of them on sentry duty.”

She snorted. “And now if we attack any of the positions, someone will notice. They’ve got a nice overlap going there.”

“So what’s the call?”

Chewing her lip for a moment, Coco thought. Owing to the fact most, if not all of the sentry positions were now manned any attack on one would draw an immediate response, sneaky or not. Which would likely mean a pursuit by a significant number of the bandits. If the odds were two or three to one, that would be one thing. At nine to one? These were people who lived lives just as violent as any huntsman, and they had been doing it far longer than anyone on Team CFVY. It was too risky.

Unless…

“Have you ever felt the need to poke a hornet’s nest?”

“Um… No.”

Coco grinned and began sliding back down out of sight of the sentries.

It was probably only a half an hour later before she felt the ground move. Even when it was not aimed in her direction, Yatsuhashi’s ability to create localized earthquakes with a swing of his sword was formidable. She doubted that he actually caused any significant injuries with the blow, but it was about the only way he could have attacked without getting right on top of anyone, and for what she had in mind, he’d need the lead time.

About two minutes later, Yatsuhashi dashed past her, not even sparing her a look. The big man could move shockingly fast when he needed to, and was surprisingly graceful as he wove between tree trunks and bushes. A few bullets pursued him, but without any effect.
Coco stepped out from behind the tree she’d been using as concealment, squeezing her trigger. Her minigun began spitting out dust laced bullets, scything down the undergrowth. She could see flashes of human and faunus flesh diving for cover, hear cries of dismay and outrage… and pain. Not all of her bullets were striking trees.

As quickly as she’d popped out, she slipped back behind her concealing tree trunk, returning her minigun to a bag-like state. She shoved off the tree, racing through the woods in a different direction than Yatsuhashi. Coco had no idea how many of the pursuers came after her, and how many continued their chase after Yatsuhashi. She only knew that after a moment she could hear the crack of firearms, and shouts of anger following behind as she darted between the trees and bushes.

A sudden scream announced the moment when the bandits flashed past Fox’ concealed position. Coco and Yatsuhashi may have had some sort of ranged capability, but Fox did not. As such Coco’d positioned him along her planned escape route in a spot the highly sneaky man could remain concealed even if he was stepped on. If he’d stuck to the plan, he’d just picked off the last of her pursuers, buying a moment for his own escape before the bandits could turn and see what had just happened.

She could hear cries of dismay behind her, shouted commands that contradicted her, and fierce arguments. The sound of gunshots was falling behind, and so she slid to a halt behind a bush, her entire right side sliding through the remains of last year’s leaves and the loam beneath it as she twisted around on the ground to look behind her.

A group of bandits came into view almost a full minute later. They were moving quickly, but were not at a full run. Fox’ ambush had clearly taught them caution, as they were swiveling their heads about, checking every direction for further sudden attacks.

Quietly, Coco readied her mini-gun once again, wondering just how, exactly, she was going to pop up and get a shot off before the now cautious bandits could get shots of their own off.

A tremor ran through the ground again, and in the distance she could hear shouts. Coco didn’t take her eyes off the bandits, knowing the experience of Yatsuhashi’s power move. The bandits, however, all turned to look towards the direction of the noise.

Taking full advantage, Coco jumped up and sprayed the group down with bullets. Bodies jerked. Screams rang out. The bandits hit the ground, some seeking shelter, some beyond the need for it.

Uncertain still of just how many bandits were there, Coco turned and ran once more. Shots rang out, and she suddenly bowled over, punched powerfully in the back. It hurt like hell, but her aura had protected her, this time. She’d have a serious bruise, and her aura had taken a hell of a hit, but she’d survive. She picked herself up and continued her flight.

The bandits didn’t give chase this time.

An hour later they had all rendezvoused at a bend in the stream that was just out of view of the bandit camp. Like Coco, Yatsuhashi was sporting an ugly bruise from where his aura had depleted the force of a bullet, this one on his arm, and Fox had a cut threatening to create a new scar on his wrist. But they were all remarkably intact for all that, and Coco had to smile, even though the adrenaline was fading, leaving her with a strong sense of exhaustion.

Her smile grew when she saw a returning grin on Velvet’s face. The Faunus held up a pair of fingers. “I got two.”

“Me too,” Fox commented. He wasn’t smiling, but his pose was almost cocky.
“Three here,” Yatsuhashi grunted. “Maybe more.” He didn’t look particularly pleased, but his shoulders were held with a certain amount of determined pride.

Coco flopped down on the ground, the last of the adrenaline gone. “I have no idea how many I got.” She stared at the sky through the tree branches above. “But they have got to be smarting pretty badly now.”

Exhaustion began overwhelming her, spiritually as well as physically. Once the combat high was gone the mind had time to start dwelling on what had happened, and begin focusing on the details, and realities. She rolled to her side with a groan, reaching behind herself awkwardly to rub her back.

“Here, let me see.” Yatsuhashi sat behind her, looking a bit weary himself. His hands came around her to unbuckle her cincher with practiced skill, and Coco felt a brief flash of warmth hit her cheeks as she remembered why he was becoming so capable at undressing her. The cincher hit the ground and she felt the back of her sweater hoisted up her back.

“Ouch,” Yatsuhashi muttered. “Someone was firing something big at you. You’ve got a bruise the size of a dinner plate on you.”

Coco groaned in relief as Yatsuhashi unhook her bra, easing some of the pressure on her bruised flesh. “I’ll be fine by tomorrow. My aura is already working on it. What about you?”

“I’m good.” Yatsuhashi slipped back around from behind her, flexing his arm and rubbing his shoulder. “It wasn’t as hard a hit as yours.”

“Fox?”

Fox looked up from where he was casually eyeing his wrist with pale white eyes. His voice sounded tired as he settled to the ground. “Tis but a scratch.”

Velvet snickered, though there was something dark to the sound. Ignoring Fox’ quoting of one of the movies the team had watched during their first year, Coco turned her gaze on the faunus girl. “And you?”

“My ribs are still a little sore from yesterday, but no one touched me today.” The girl flopped backwards, grunting a bit as the impact with the ground emphasized what she had just said about her mostly healed injury.

“Cool.” Coco closed her eyes. “At this point, I suspect they’re just going to pull inside their walls, hunker down, and lick their wounds.” She groaned softly. “I propose a nap. All in favor?”

No one bothered to say “aye”.

Sleep, though desired, didn’t come. Everytime she felt herself begin to drift away something would awaken her. Some sound, some shifting beam of light on her face, something would send a jolt through her and she’d find herself listening, looking, every sense focused on trying to find what was wrong. It would take an interminable amount of time to begin to relax again, only for the event to repeat itself, her body keyed for a threat that never came.

She was just too keyed up. It was inexplicable, given how tired she felt in the post adrenaline crash, but it was still true. She quite simply could not bring herself to rest. Or, more accurately, something inside of her seemed incapable of relaxing.

She wished it had been the first time this happened. Unfortunately, in the time since they left Farmdale a general inability to sleep had become all too familiar. It wasn’t every day, but it was still
far too often that the team’s beloved coffee had become all that stood between her and an absolute stupor as she walked through the day. And even then, “awake” had not necessarily meant “alert”. And it seemed that this was one of those many moments where sleep was simply not happening.

With reluctance, Coco reached behind her to rehook her bra over the already healing bruise, adjusting herself to properly have everything where it was supposed to be, then turned to eye the group as they, prompted by her own motions, sat up.

Yatsuhashi began distributing food for a late lunch. They ate quietly, no one having any need to start a conversation. Yatsuhashi was staring off into the distance as he ate, clearly working on some inner thoughts. Beside him, Fox was carefully scanning around as he chewed, the ever alert scout of the party on the job even now. Velvet was looking as though she was drawn inward again, hunched over staring at the ground as she didn’t so much eat as simply nibble at her food.

Coco sighed, wondering what to do about Velvet. This was not the faunus girl she had grown to love as a companion, a friend, and maybe something more. The girl she’d spent more than two years with was a shy but loving girl with an adorable excitement to her when given a chance to shine. This Velvet was a cypher, like a lump of coal that was smouldering and could burst into flame at any moment.

Not that you’re exactly the font of togetherness, Coco chastised herself. How can you help her when you can’t even help yourself?

Suddenly, everyone froze. This hadn’t been any sort of phantom sound, or false instinct that got their attention this time. The low rumbling sound had been heard by all four of them. They eyed one another a moment, then slipped down on their bellies, food forgotten. Fox slithered up a small rise beside them, an elevation of only a few feet, and peered out between two ferns. Only a couple of seconds passed before he slipped back down, voicelessly mouthing the word “Grimm”.

Coco frowned. The appearance of the grimm yet again was not just inconvenient, it was worrying. They’d been encountering much heavier pockets of grimm since living Farmdale. Was this part of the world particularly thick with the deadly creatures? Or was there something more going on?

Grimm are drawn to negative emotions. Anxiety. Anger. Fear.

Oh.

She felt her eyes drawn back to Velvet, the girl’s morose nature absent as she was quietly gathering things up to slip away from the grimm. Coco sighed, then began gathering her own things.

We may as well be shining searchlights into the sky, Coco thought. Both of us.

Suddenly, she perked up. She gave a small gesture to the others, catching their attention away from their packing.

“Listen up,” she whispered. “I have an idea.”
Spring Hunt - Chapter 8: Yatsuhashi

Chapter Notes

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another good attack and the bandits numbers are getting even lower. I wonder how long before the bandits cut their losses and run. If they did that would leave CFVY back where they started and all the attacks would be for nothing.

Bookah replies:

Thanks again for the comment! Your answer awaits! Enjoy...

Eastern Sanus

Yatsuhashi frowned in the deepening gloom. He didn’t like this, not one bit of it. Coco’s plan wasn’t the sort of thing he would ever have seen himself doing when he was younger. He probably wouldn’t even have seen himself doing something like this two months ago. Yet here he was.

*We’ve changed*, he thought to himself. *And not for the better, I suspect*.

He wondered if that explained the teachers at Beacon. They had always seemed a bit odd, somehow. There had been strange little quirks to them, things the students had joked about (when no teachers were there to hear). The teachers were weird in ways the students could never explain, or understand.

Professor Port had always seemed to be a touch arrogant, full of stories of his own daring do that sounded boastful. Many a student rolled their eyes as he launched into yet another tale of adventure hunting the Grimm. Yatsuhashi had never gone so far, but he had to admit his discipline had been tested a time or two.

Perhaps, though, these stories weren’t the chest thumping of an egotistical old man. Perhaps they were consolation for someone who had seen too much, embellishments made to try to override the real memories with things a bit more heroic in order to stave off the darkness that clung to every failed hunt, every late arrival, and those times Port’s prey had borne souls.

Similarly there was Doctor Oobleck. He’d been referred to by more than one student as a maniac. It seemed an apt description for someone who never moved at any sort of pace less than overdrive. It was possible that his haste and speed, his hyper intense need to be doing everything at once was an effort to outrun the thoughts that Yatsuhashi himself was beginning to feel take root. Idleness, he was finding, was a dangerous moment where his own thoughts could catch him, stalk him, and leave him remembering things he’d prefer not to. And he’d only been hunting, really hunting, for a few months. Oobleck had been fighting for a lifetime.

And Professor Goodwitch… Her discipline, particularly when directed towards errant students, was a fearsome thing. An angered Goodwitch was something to avoid at all costs. Even Team RWBY, infamous for its ability to get into messes, seemed cautious when Goodwitch’s eye turned their way. But was her harsh, stern approach simply an edifice? A wall built to hold the things that haunted her
at bay? A defence to keep unwelcome thoughts and feelings out?

Yatsuhashi didn’t know. He just knew that the staff of Beacon were distinctly buggy, and that he was beginning to suspect that all hunters wound up that way eventually. As a drunk had once put it while he was recovering a particularly inebriated Coco from a bar once, “hunters are batshit crazy.”

“Yeah,” Yatsuhashi muttered. “We are that. Completely batshit.”

Not liking the train of thought going in his head, Yatsuhashi crept out from behind a tree, eyeing the wooden edifice that was fading away in the gloom. As Coco had predicted, the bandit sentries had pulled in as darkness began to approach. Even Faunus had to be cautious in a Grimm filled woodland at night. Their vision might have been far better in the dark, but that would have been little consolation when Grimm attacked and everyone who might help was sleeping, likely to be blind, and behind a tall wooden wall.

Now the bandits were inside, with a few sentries up top circling, or leaning, or doing whatever they needed to to keep alert as day became night. Not, Yatsuhashi noted as he watched from the gloom under the trees, that they needed the help. It was clear that they were very alert, and very rattled. It didn’t take being a Grimm to feel the mixture of anger and fear floating in the air above the encampment.

Yatsuhashi swallowed. Fear, he had learned from Professor Oobleck, was a weapon that could be wielded. It had been used effectively in the Great War, with generals building up such a level of terror in their foes that even a failed attack could lead to the decimation of the enemy as the Grimm followed the scent of pain, anguish, and horror. It had been used again during the Faunus Rights Revolution. And, if the broadcast at the nightmarish end of the Vital Festival was an indication, it had been used once more, this time by terrorists.

And now they were using it as well.

He’d wanted to object, when Coco had proposed her plan. He’d hated the idea, felt like it was somehow twisted and wrong, for hunters to use the Grimm rather than annihilate them. He’d wanted to walk away and refuse to have anything to do with it.

But Coco had been right. There had been little option once the Bandits had forted up. The four hunters weren’t strong enough, even if they could rely on a little multicolored terrorist’s help. They needed the Grimm to do what they could not.

“But,” Coco had told him, seeing the expression on his face and knowing it like only a lover could, “plenty of the Grimm will be killed too. We’ll just need to mop up after.”

Gunfire sounded, some distance off. He turned his head toward the sound, even though he knew he would see nothing through the darkness, the woods, and the distance. Inside he felt one part of himself relax at the confirmation that Velvet’s part, at least, was done. As much as none of them wanted to truly face it, they all knew Velvet would have the best chance of getting the attention of the Grimm in the first place. The fact that Coco was now shooting meant the girl had succeeded, and that now she was turning the leading over to Coco.

A different part of himself tensed up at that. If Velvet was now out of danger, then it was Coco’s turn to be fully in it. Her ability to reach out and touch at a distance was sure to get the attention of a pack of Grimm, and in theory keep her far enough away for them to be unable to do anything to her in reply. She could simply keep goading them, drawing them, letting her anger and hate and rage out as she killed…
He sighed as he took advantage of her distraction. The bandits had heard the shooting the same as he, but they weren’t in on Coco’s plan. They had all turned towards the sounds of gunfire, talking to one another in a combination of speculation and fear. Which meant no one was looking as he dashed across the open ground in the night, hoping his aura would be enough to keep him from tripping and falling on some unseen object as he raced to the wall.

He made it safely, and resumed his silent litany of woe. The gunfire was drawing nearer, and with it, Coco.

She was his teammate, his friend, and his lover. She was also his source of greatest worry. Troubled as Velvet was, she walled herself off, keeping herself apart from the rest of the team. Coco, though, was the team’s leader. She couldn’t do that, and in the few moments of privacy the two had she made love to him with a clamping aggression that had been completely different from that first time together. She was there, she was with him, and there was no doubt in him about her utter, burning need for him in that moment. But something else was there now as well. Something about it felt desperate, frightened. Like she was using the physical to hide from something invisible, and she couldn’t even tell him what that was.

He closed his eyes, resting his head against the wall, hurting and not even sure what exactly what it was that was causing the pain. One day, they’d had. Not even that, just a few hours, and then their newly formed relationship already underwent its first strain.

Suddenly the firing stopped, and Yatsuhashi felt his breath catch in his throat. In that moment he felt fear jab through him like an icy knife impaling him in the small of his back. For a second he was certain, beyond any chance for doubt, that the lack of firing meant that Coco had failed, and that even now, as he hid against the palisade, Coco was being torn apart.

But then he heard the feet. Heard the crashing and pounding. Coco had stopped shooting for one reason. She no longer needed to. The Grimm had sensed the camp and turned toward it. And now, as he watched, the darker black of the woods against the lesser dark of the star filled night began to waver as large, hate filled monsters smashed against trunks and knocked aside smaller growth in their haste to get at what they could now smell, now taste, and hungered for.

Yatsuhashi stepped away from the wall. He drew his sword and took a breath. A decade of discipline, of training, and of dispassionate analysis wrapped him like armor. He held his breath a moment, and then threw it all away.

All of the frustration, the worry, the fear, all the things he didn’t let his teammates see, or even allowed himself to feel welled up to the surface. He didn’t contain it, or try to thrust it aside. There was no moment of meditation, no calming thoughts. He embraced all the pent up ugly of the past months, and threw it into his arms.

The massive blade rose, and then fell at the very base of the palisade as he roared out in pain, rage, and hate. He heard a cry above him, then heard it change to a terrified scream. The wooden wall lurched, then exploded inward as his sword attacked the integrity of the very earth itself. A wound opened in the world, and nearly a quarter of the circuit around the camp ceased to have any meaningful use at all.

He stood there, panting for a moment, staring at the sudden patch of slightly less dark night sky that had previously been the darker shadow of the wall, and then he turned and ran. He ran from all of it. He ran from the Grimm, from the Bandits, from Team CFVY. He ran from the plan, from the mission, and his need to protect. He ran, and kept running, as the sounds of screams and cries began to be overwhelmed by roars and bellows, and ran on as the sounds faded into the night.
Only when he tripped, crashing to the ground, and vomited from the exertion, and the disgust he felt for himself, did he finally stop running. He spilled his guts until nothing was left to throw up, then rolled over onto the ground, panting, and stared at the night sky.

Dawn allowed him to regroup with the rest of Team CFVY at what remained of the encampment. All was quiet. No voices could be heard, bandit or teammate alike. Little moved, save only a slight sway of branches and shifting of ragged canvas on the remains of tents. Bodies lay scattered about, none of them moving, none of them in any condition to even leave that a possibility.

As they stood in the gap in the wall that had allowed the Grimm in, they heard a snap behind them. Turning, they immediately took combat stances, ready to fight whatever had caused the unwelcome sound.

Neo held up her hands, palms outward. She slowly took a step back from the small branch she had clearly stepped on deliberately, then lowered her arms to her side slowly as Team CFVY slowly eased into slightly less alert poses. A few, careful steps led her in a path to the side, letting her come up beside them, just out of arms reach.

Yatsuhashi watched her, not feeling any trust in the woman. He watched as she paused, staring into the camp, watched as her body became surprisingly stiff for a moment. She glanced over towards them, her eyes brushing across his as she turned to look at the silent Fox, and Yatsuhashi felt a moment of amazement wash over him in uncomfortable realization. The look in Neo’s eyes had not been one of joy, or celebration, or even indifference.

Neo’s expression had been one of fear.
Death7559 wrote:

CFVY just did some dark shit, using Grimm to kill bandits. Directly and indirectly they killed forty some people in several days. Also, I hope Neo just becomes a member of the team. No hiding or following, just Neo hanging with CFVY.

Bookah replies:

Yes, things got a little ugly, even for what we’ve seen before in this story. And we’re not done yet.

As for Neo… Just keep reading. She’s proving to be far more of a recurring character than I’d originally planned. She wasn’t originally going to be in the last few chapters at all, but she wormed her way in anyway. I’m really pleased with how she’s influencing things. More to come!

GrimmKaiju writes:

A smart plan from Coco and one that worked well. I think there might be a possible that Neo might join them on their journey. That would be an interesting pairing of personality’s.

Bookah replies:

Wouldn’t it be? Stay tuned for more!

Eastern Sanus

The tension in the morning air was stifling. Of the four members of Team CFVY, Fox was the only one whose interactions with Neo had been anything beyond combat with deadly intent. Now, on a battlefield from which no one had emerged victorious, Neo stood beside them, and no one seemed quite sure of what to do.

Fox quietly cleared his throat. “Neo.”

Everyone, including the seemingly stoic unto death Yatsuhashi, twitched, and then there seemed to be an almost palpable release of held breath on the part of the universe in general.

Neo inclined her head towards Fox, her mismatched eyes mostly on him, though they flickered back to his companions often enough to make it very clear she was not inclined to trust.

“A truce, for the moment,” Fox commented. His eyes went to his teammates. “Right?”

First Coco, then Yatsuhashi, and finally Velvet all nodded their agreement. Fox turned back to Neo. “Supplies are over there.” He gestured toward one side of the now chaotic enclosure. Cautiously, Neo nodded before turning to walk in that direction.
“She didn’t say she agreed,” Coco muttered.

“Not like she could,” Fox gently rejoindered. “It’s the thought that counts.”

“And she thought loudly?” Yatsuhashi carefully grinned.

“If you know how to listen, yes.” Fox smiled wryly, then followed Neo.

The walk through the encampment, what remained of it, did nothing to help settle the sense of unease and wrongness that had annealed itself to the place over the night. Tents and makeshift wooden huts had been trampled, some of them being torn apart by claws and teeth. Barrels, crates, and various other bits of storage were similarly scattered and abused, leaving the ground littered with jagged wooden teeth that stuck up haphazardly from the trampled earth.

And then there were the bodies.

Grimm, it was commonly believed, did not need to eat. Some certainly would eat, though the question of if it was as a combat tactic or simply for the pleasure of it none could be certain. But none of them seemed to require it, and the bodies lying everywhere showed this.

Fox tried to avoid looking at these.

*If only we had Grimm bodies lying about we could at least feel like we didn’t just serve their purposes,* shaking his head. But, of course, dead Grimm dissolved into ash, and then nothing immediately after death. Sometimes they didn’t even manage to hit the ground before having wisped away completely. Fox could only console himself with the knowledge that the bandits were not easy prey, and would have given a good accounting of themselves against humanity’s shared enemy.

Neo shot him a quick, nervous look as he entered the supply area behind her. Recognizing it was him and not one of his teammates she relaxed visibly, leaving Fox a bit surprised. “What, you trust me or something?”

She cocked her head to the side, a finger on her chin, miming the act of seriously contemplating this before she nodded, giving an awkward smile.

Fox grunted. “You know, technically we are still on opposite sides, even if you were coerced.”

The diminutive girl shrugged, then crossed her chest with one finger.

“Yes, true. I did promise a truce for now. But so did they.”

Neo shrugged again, then shoved the top off of a damaged crate. She reached in to pull out a sealed plastic bag labeled as being dried apple chips. Ripping the top open she casually popped a few of the chips into her mouth, chewing slowly, as she rummaged another damaged crate to produce a can of peaches.

Fox watched in surprise as she extended the hidden blade of her parasol, then used it to pop a hole in the top of the can. A few more apple chips, and then she took a drink of the syrup inside straight from the can. He shuddered a moment. “You’re not seriously drinking that, are you? That’s way too sugary for normal humanity.”

She turned her eyes back to Fox, their colors switching into a mirror image of their previous mix of pink and brown. Setting down the can she sighed audibly, one of the few sounds he’d ever heard her make. She made a quick shadow play of her hands darting here, there, and everywhere, then poofed out of view, only to tap him on the shoulder a moment later.
Fox turned his head, arching an eyebrow at Neo. “It takes a lot of energy to keep up with your semblance?”

She nodded, then recovered her can of peaches and bag of apples.

“I suppose that explains why you’re after the sweets.” He pushed the lid of the crate next to him off, and pulled out a protein bar. “Instead of something like this.” Unwrapping it, he sunk his teeth into it, then fought to tear the chunk in his mouth free. “Sheesh. It’s like eating a strap of leather. What’s this even made out of?” He began contemplating the ingredients list. “What the hell is whey protein isolate anyway?”

A crash from a different part of the camp sent Neo into a violent twist, her can dropped and her hand on her parasol. She glowered in the direction of the crash, then slowly made herself relax, retrieving the peaches from the ground and making a face at the dirt now glued to it by the syrup.

“I don’t get it,” Fox commented. He watched as Neo took a seat on a crate once again, her eyes turning to him with eyebrows arched in curiosity. “Every time we’ve met, you’ve been calm, cool, and collected. You’ve never seemed to have so much as a qualm, let alone genuine fear. And yet now you’re as jumpy as rabbit in a dog run.”

Neo contemplated him a moment, her face lacking any sign of humor, and then she sighed. She nodded an acknowledgement, then gestured at the camp around them.

“That was before we took out so many bandits?”

Neo’s eyes locked with his for a moment, and then she slowly shook her head. After a second she twitched her face into a wide mouthed snarl, both hands coming up to form teeth in front of her lower lips.

“That was before we used the Grimm to take out the bandits.”

Fear clear in her eyes, Neo slowly nodded.

It was Fox’ turn to sigh. “Yeah, I suppose it could be a bit of a questionable tactic.”

Her lips curled into a scowl, Neo reached into her pocket and pulled out her scroll. She punched a few buttons, then turned it to face him.

_It was her tactic._

Fox contemplated the screen a moment, then looked back at Neo. “Her? The one who was threatening you?”

Neo nodded.

“I see.” Fox looked down at the ground in thought. “So it was her idea to attract the Grimm to Beacon?”

Neo nodded again, then tapped furiously at her scroll again, holding it out to Fox after almost a full minute.

_She hired us to steal dust. We just thought she wanted to smuggle it or something, and we could get it for her. Then she brought in two more people. Torchwick didn’t like them. They were scared of her too, but not like us. They seemed to really like her. Especially the girl. But then she had us start working with the White Fang. She has something on them. Some sort of power that was enough to_
scare even the White Fang into following a human’s plans. We didn’t know what she was planning until she showed us the train. We just thought she was stealing dust for the White Fang.

Fox handed the phone back. “Why didn’t you run when you found out?”

Neo shook her head, violently, then typed rapidly on the phone.

She was powerful enough to convince the entire White Fang to do what she told them to. She even tracked down one of the White Fang’s deserters and had him killed by her personal servants. How could we possibly escape? She even praised me for my part in rigging the match between Mercury and Xiao Long and it was genuine praise, even though I was only going along to save Roman and she knew it. You never knew where you stood with her, so you dared not cross her. Maybe that’s why she ordered Roman to let himself be captured. The only way to get him free was for me to follow her plan all the way to the end.

Fox felt himself chilled at the depths to which this mysterious woman was willing to go. He fished out his own scroll, powering it up, and quickly syncing it with Neo’s. She watched him carefully as he was doing this, but made no move to take her phone back. After a moment he finished, then handed her scroll back.

“So, she was the mastermind. She did all of this."

Neo nodded, staring at her scroll.

“Neo, why don’t you come with us? We can try to stop her.”

Neo sighed, then looked back toward the rest of the camp.

“You don’t trust them.”

Neo nodded again, then typed at her scroll. A moment later, Fox’ scroll dinged.

Your leader used the same trick.

“But she never coerced anyone, and she didn’t do it to innocent bystanders.”

Neo simply gave him a look Fox could interpret easily. He found himself frowning, and slowly nodding. “Alright. Yeah. I didn’t like the idea either. None of us did, not even Coco, and it was her idea. But we all accepted it as necessary. We couldn’t figure out another way to get at them when they all forted up in here.”

Neo shrugged.

An uneasy quiet sat between them for a few moments, unmarked by any movement, even to continue to eating their pillaged food. Fox felt the nervous tension in the air, and drew a deep breath.

“Neo. Do you trust me?”

Her eyes jerked around sharply towards Fox, and she started to shake her head no, but then paused. She fumbled at her scroll for a moment, then poised her finger above the screen a moment, indecisively, before pressing it down. His own scroll dinged, and he looked down at the message.

Not yet.

Fox sighed. “Well, that’s better than not at all.” He stood. “I need to tell the others about all of this. We’ve been thinking this was all the White Fang’s plan, and trying to help Ruby stop them. But they
were tools too, weren’t they?”

Neo nodded.

He turned and started to step away, then paused. Looking back, he asked one more question. “What was her name?”

The scroll dinged only a moment later, and then a second time.

_Cinder Fall. And her two pets were Mercury and Emerald._

Below this, a picture showed. He stared at the four figures in it. The one male had to be Mercury, the smirk on his face not one that belonged on someone who thought five moves ahead. An emerald haired girl also smiled, her eyes turned away from the camera towards the central figure of the piece. Fox immediately recognized these two, as they had been the very opponents who had taken down Coco and Yatsuhashi during doubles round of the tournament.

His eyes turned to the central individual Emerald had been smiling for. The raven haired, amber eyed beauty simply oozed a sense of power from the picture. She wasn’t merely confident, she was arrogant, assured. She had the air of someone who could mastermind the destruction of a kingdom’s strongest edifice.

He glanced at the fourth person in the picture, then tapped it so that Neo could see. “Who’s this?”

Neo laughed, a surprisingly clean and warm sound, then hopped off the crate she was seated on. She gave a flourish as she bowed deeply, and then tipped her head back up, back still arched in the bow, Fox found himself staring at a black haired, green eyed girl, her lips smirking in the same way as the image on the scroll.

Fox gaped a moment, then shook his head wryly. “That’s a clever trick.”

Neo laughed again, her usual candy colored appearance restored. She rose from her bow, then vanished.

“See you,” Fox muttered. “Or maybe not…” He began walking for the center of the encampment.
GrimmKaiju writes:

That’s the redemption arc I desperately wish they would give Neo in the show. It makes sense to me that she would have only went along with it for Roman. This chapter in now my favorite so far and they are always getting better.

Bookah replies:

I’m glad you are enjoying the story, and really liked this latest chapter. Neo’s perspective on things is interesting. Perhaps we’ll come to understand her better over time.

CyberEndDemon writes:

I’ve read a lot of fics where Neo is out to get Ruby without a second thought. It was a nice change of pace to see a different perspective on it. No matter how it traces, the death of Torchwick started with Cinder.

Bookah replies:

Well, this is a complicated matter. It’s easy to simply latch on someone to blame and not really think about things. Unfortunately for Neo, Fox doesn’t let people get away with the easy option.

Eastern Sanus

Yatsuhashi found Coco by the small collection of trucks the bandits had collected inside their camp. She had the hood up on one of them and was bent over the engine, wrestling with something. From the angle he had he could see a little of her brown hair, the tuft of flame colored hair she left long bouncing and jerking as she worked. Her back was mostly obscured from his view, as she must have been reaching fairly deep inside the engine compartment and practically laid across the engine itself to make it that deep. The obscuring object, blocking the view of her torso was…

Despite the disturbing situation, he felt a small stir of lust as he briefly contemplated the wiggling backside pointed towards him. He found himself tempted to walk the rest of the distance to her quietly so that he could cup a firm cheek and let her know how much he appreciated the view, and the person providing it. He forced it down, however, feeling some concern that his libido seemed to be ignoring the horrible slaughter that they had just caused, and the terrible evidence of it laying around them.

With a grunt, Coco straightened up, a semi-satisfied smile on her face. “Gotcha,” she smiled, holding up what Yatsuhashi assumed was some sort of filter. It looked fairly dirty to his eyes, and so he wasn’t certain what Coco’s aim was by retrieving it.

“Coco?” he asked, and she turned towards him, smiling. He gestured towards the object in her hand,
trying not to notice how dirty her sweater had become. He hoped it was just mud and not grease or oil, because otherwise the sweater would be a total write off.

Coco glanced at her prize then gestured towards another truck in the line of questionable vehicles. “That truck uses the same filter as this one, but a bullet went through it at some point. This truck here,” she thumped the fender next to her, “lost a few hoses and belts. If I swap filters I can get that one going again.”

Yatsuhashi thought for a moment, then nodded. “It’d be nice not having to walk for a bit.”

“That was my thought.” He watched Coco attempt to clean her chest off, then frowned at the utter impossibility of it. “We can load it up with as many supplies as we can and make better time. We may even be able to zigzag between towns in the area in the hope of picking up Ruby’s trail.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Yatsuhashi grunted. He turned and followed as Coco walked down the line to the truck she had gestured at. “So how is it you know so much about cars?”

Coco glanced over to him and arched an eyebrow in mild amusement. “You don’t?”

“I grew up in Mistral.” He shrugged. “It’s built on the side of cliffs and steep hills. There’s hardly anywhere you can get to with a car.”

“Vale’s large enough that cars are just about a necessity. We have a good public transportation system, but dad insisted I know the basics anyway.”

“You never talk much about your family,” Yatsuhashi commented, watching as Coco leaned in over the engine of the truck they had approached.

“There’s not much to talk about,” she replied, stretching to reach down inside the engine. “They were both married to the job. They loved me, but we didn’t interact all that much.”

Yatsuhashi raised an eyebrow. “Past tense?”

Coco glanced up from the engine with a wry smile. “Oh, they’re still kicking. I have gone to visit a couple of times. But we’re too different, they and I. Going home feels like visiting virtual strangers.” She shoved her hand down into the engine, then grunted with satisfaction and stood back up. “You guys are the closest to family I’ve got these days.”

“Don’t you dare suggest I’m the big brother you never had,” Yatsuhashi warned, though a small chuckle belied the mock severity of what he was saying. “We’ve kissed.”

Coco quickly bounced up on her toes and gave him a peck on the cheek. “More than just kissed,” she smiled, then bounced down the side of the truck to open the driver side door. “Hop in.”

Yatsuhashi went around the front of the truck, slipping onto the passenger seat. He glanced over as Coco reached down behind the steering wheel and twisted the key. A couple of pumps of her leg, and the engine coughed to life, settling into a mostly steady rumbling.

“Perfect!” Coco hopped back out of the truck, dashing around the front to slam the hood shut on the still running engine. She tugged it a couple of times to be sure it had latched, then climbed back aboard, closing her door. “Alright, let’s go over to their supply dump.”

Fox was watching with an arched eyebrow as they pulled up. He asked no questions, however, and after Coco had shut off the engine he simply went around to the back, lowering the truck’s back gate and pulling aside the canvas of the soft top.
“Neo?” Yatsuhashi asked, joining Fox as the dark skinned scout began looking among the crates for particularly choice items.

Fox shrugged. “Scampered.”

Yatsuhashi nodded, about to comment, when Velvet popped around the corner of a stack of crates. She waved some papers at him. “Yatsu. Check these out.”

He changed course and walked over to Velvet, Fox trailing in his wake. Coco appeared behind Velvet, her expression curious. He took the offered papers, immediately noticing the familiar letterhead at the top.

“More manifests?” Coco asked.

“Yes.” Yatsuhashi scowled, looking down the list of items. “More Atlas military goods.” He felt the other three staring at him intently, but kept his eyes on the papers. He jabbed a large finger to a spot on the front page. “This was the delivery site these were meant for. Farmdale.”

Coco drew a sharp breath in, but Yatsuhashi’s eyes had slipped over to Velvet. Her own eyes, gleaming with something feral, looked back, and she gave a small nod. “The warehouse.”

“Exactly,” Yatsuhashi nodded back. He then turned back to the papers, and jabbed a different spot. “And this was where the consignment was picked up…” he glanced to another part of the page, “three months ago.”

There was a moment of quiet, and then Coco straightened her shoulders. “Where are we going?”

“Oak Harbor.” Yatsuhashi grunted. “And yes, the family does have an office there.”

Coco pointed to the stacks of supplies. “Load up what makes sense. Let’s get out of here.”

A few hours later Yatsuhashi groaned and sat up, rubbing his back a bit. The movement slid Coco somewhat to the side, causing her to sprawl halfway on his lap with a laugh. She began playing with what she found there, and he gently slapped her hand away with a grunt. “Stop that.”

Still laughing, Coco sat up and propped herself up against the side of the truck bed. She straightened her back, lifting her butt off the floor so she could drag her clothes back up from around her knees. “What? I like it.”

“Yes, but it’s decidedly done. Not to mention a little… gooey.” Yatsuhashi stopped rubbing his back, then hoist his own pants back up, grimacing as he buttoned the fly over the mess. He then turned his head, looking at the bulkhead at the front of the truck bed. “Uh, do you think they heard us?”

“Probably not. Velvet’s driving fairly quickly in spite of the road conditions.”

“I noticed.” Yatsuhashi groaned a bit and twisted, trying to get the kinks out of his back. He had rather enjoyed the opportunity that the truck had provided him to enjoy Coco’s company very personally for the first time in weeks, but the floor was hard, and the ruts and potholes had added a different sort of pounding to their activity. He finished stretching, then sighed contentedly as Coco cuddled up against him in the space between crates of supplies and barrels of fuel they’d tossed inside. His arms came around her, holding her securely.

After a few moments of rocking with the movement of the truck, Coco gave a sigh of her own. “Thanks,” she muttered. “I needed that.”
Yatsuhashi nodded, then brought a hand up to cup Coco’s chin. He turned her head so he could place a kiss on her lips, then released her so he could rub her back. He didn’t need to ask what was bothering her. He’d known even before she’d more or less tackled him after the vehicle had lurched into motion, showering his face with kisses and giving laughing little jokes about introducing him to ‘road head’.

She’d as much as admitted it to him herself, back in Farmdale. That whenever she had doubts, or found herself fighting against a sense of failure or self loathing she fled from those things through a frank and demanding hedonism. She’d fight negative feelings by taking pleasure when and how she wanted, and damned be the consequences.

Coco had just unleashed humanity’s greatest enemies on a group of humans. Bandits or no, it went against everything they had been taught as huntsmen and huntresses. It had been necessary, and Coco had thrown them into the plan without so much as a twitch of self doubt or loathing as she gave out her instructions. But once it was over?

“My pleasure,” Yatsuhashi mumbled, earning a giggle from Coco. He tightened his arms around her. The truth was he’d needed it just as much as she. He’d needed the reminder that they were both still very much together, in spite of what they had just done. He’d needed the reminder that she needed him. That she trusted him. That when she needed that physical release from the pain of what their chosen life entailed, it was he she wanted to turn to for that. That he could do something for her. That he could be what she needed. That he was more than just a destroyer to her, but her comfort.

“Love you,” he muttered.

She kissed his chest, then snuggled in, warm against him. “I love you too.”

An hour later, Fox replaced Velvet as the driver, and then about an hour and a half after it was Coco’s turn again. They had offered to teach Yatsuhashi to drive, but he figured a quick trip was more important than patching a missing skill in his repertoire. Once they had some downtime, he assured them, he’d make up for the lack.

They continued in this way until almost dark, then stopped for the night. They could have continued, using the headlights, but Coco worried no one would get much rest that way, jounced by the conditions of the unpaved road in the spring. As Coco hoisted one of the large cans of fuel out of the back with little effort, affixing the spout to refuel the truck, Yatsuhashi began tossing a few choice supplies out the back.

“Gonna be nice to have a tent,” Fox commented, picking up a set of poles from where they had landed behind the truck. “Clouds are rolling in.”

Yatsuhashi leaned out the back to take in the horizon, where heavy storms were beginning to occlude the darkening sky. “Rain maybe?”

“I think so,” Fox nodded. “Break out that camp stove. We’ll cook inside the tent just to be safe.”

Grunting, Yatsuhashi nodded, ducking back under the bed’s cover to collect the item requested.

Soon he joined Velvet in setting up the tent, a structure that had mostly survived the attack on the camp and so had been tossed into the truck just before they had departed. It was a decent sized tent, the sides made of a heavy canvas that made it good for long term, all weather use. They could easily fit twice their number in it and still have room for gear.

Rain did come, heavy drops starting to strike the tent part way through a meal salvaged from the
camp. As the first drops struck, Yatsuhashi paused, his fork full of noodles half way to his mouth, and glanced up as if trying to envision the clouds above. He gave Fox a nod, receiving a mock salute in reply, then continued to eat quietly.

At that very moment, Fox’ scroll chirruped. Everyone paused, turning to look at him. Surprised, he fished the scroll out, glancing down at the screen.

“I thought you weren’t bothering with keeping that on?”

Fox looked back up at Yatsuhashi. “I guess I forgot to turn it off earlier.”

Coco fished out her own scroll. “We’re outside of any sort of tower coverage still. Who could possibly… Oh.”

Fox nodded. “Neo.”

Velvet’s blank stare took on a confused expression. “How? There’s no way she could have kept up with the truck all day.”

“And she sure didn’t ride with us.”

Fox coughed, his posture awkward. “Uh, I think she did.”

“Impossible,” Velvet muttered.

Not meeting anyone’s eyes, Fox turned the scroll so they could read it.

Those two sure get loud when fucking.

Yatsuhashi watched Coco’s face turn beet red, a color he was sure matched his own.

“She’s not wrong,” Velvet agreed, her face strictly neutral.

“Whelp!” Fox barked. “For what it’s worth, it’s news to me… Now if you’ll excuse me…”

Yatsuhashi watched as Fox rose, picking up all of his dirty dishes and walking towards the tent’s opening. He paused just before leaving, then grabbed a clean plate and fork, ladling food onto it, and covering it with a second, upside down plate.

“Say hi for us,” Coco mocked wryly. “And tell her she’s welcome for the show.”

Velvet snorted back a giggle, leaving Yatsuhashi ever so slightly grateful for his embarrassment. If it helped Velvet come out of her new shell a bit, he could live with a little awkwardness.

A sudden bump woke him from sleep in the wee hours. In the dark of the tent, only barely dented by the very low flame from an oil lamp they’d salvaged, he could see a bundle pushed up against him, playing little spoon to his big spoon. Her body was stiff, tense. He carefully wrapped his arm around her ribs, and repressed a silent sigh of relief as he felt her body slowly relax.

The smell of Velvet’s hair and sweat filled his nostrils, and a small twitch of her body shifted his hand so that the back of his hand briefly rubbed against something soft and full. With a supressed grunt, he wiggled as well, adjusting his hand to a position less dangerous, and rocking his hips away from the faunus woman’s curved backside.

The motion bumped his own backside against the bundle behind him, and he felt Coco stir, rolling onto her side to wiggle up against him. Her arm came around him, and he felt her pause as her hand landed on Velvet’s hip.
After a moment he felt a kiss against the back of his neck, and, a quiet voice whispered in his ear.
“She trusts you. You’re a good man, Yatsuhashi Daichi.”

Painfully aware of the erection Velvet’s scent and curves had stirred, Yatsuhashi wished he could be so sure.
Eastern Sanus

Velvet awoke feeling refreshed, and guilty. It had been some time since she had slept quite so well. She had felt warm, secure, and protected.

She had felt something else as well. Yatsuhashi had probably believed her to be asleep when he’d found her in his arms during the night. But she’d been awake enough to notice the stirring against her ass, and it had helped her to recover from the dark dreams that had awoken her. It had been a tangible thing, hard and firm against one cheek that she could latch her attention on to remind her of
where she was, when she was, and what she was. It had reminded her that she was still alive.

And that “alive” brought with it certain needs.

She’d also felt Coco’s hand, and heard the quiet whisper, and that had left her feeling the guilt more acutely. If she’d ever had a chance at Yatsuhashi, at either of them, if she was being honest, she’d lost it back in Farmdale. Yatsuhashi belonged to Coco now, and she to him. And yet Coco had seemed happy with their mutual cuddles, and of the physical… the erotic effect it was having on her boyfriend.

And on Velvet herself, if she was being truthful.

It wasn’t fair. It wasn’t reasonable. Velvet had no right to feel a stirring in her belly begin the moment she noticed the hardness of her best friend’s lover. She had no right to feel a tightening down low, deep. Had no right to get wet. Had no right to be absolutely turned on.

No, she realized. That wasn’t quite right. The correct phrase was “to be even more turned on.” The truck’s engine had been loud, the banging of the spring and shocks powerful, and the ever unwelcome thoughts and images in her head overwhelming. And yet, despite all of this, her ears, her cursed faunus ears had practically dialed in the sounds of the love making going on in the bed of the truck behind her.

It should have embarrassed her. It should have annoyed her. She should have felt awkward, or jealous, or even angry.

Instead it had left her oh so uncomfortably needy.

Fox had been blissfully unaware of any of it. His only human ears hadn’t heard a thing, and the squirming she’d made as she drove could probably be put down to simply the slight discomfort of the vehicle seat banging away at her backside on the rough road.

But she’d known. Known how physically uncomfortable she’d become with the wet, with the almost cramp-like tightness. Known how distracted her thoughts had become. Even that bouncing of the seat against her ass had only played things up to her hyperactive, erotic imagination, as the sensation could have been easily that of a pair of hips smacking into her from behind as she…

Cursing under her breath, Velvet slowly attempted to loosen herself from the tangled sheets in the tent. The motion only brought her attention to back to the immediate present where, she discovered, Yatsuhashi was still quite… attentive even in his sleep. And a hand was cupping her breast, squeezing a bit as she shifted. Coco’s hand, she realized, wrapped around from behind Yatsuhashi’s barrel of a chest.

She gave up being subtle and practically fled the tent, hoping she hadn’t actually awoken anyone in her haste to…

To what?

She told herself that she simply had a full bladder, that the sensitivity and need she felt in the pit of her belly was simply an overabundance of coffee from last night’s dinner. That her shivering was simply the result of her body’s strain to not wet herself.

The rough bark of a down tree was not a gentle or pleasant sensation against the back of her thighs as she attended to natures need. The spring morning was almost painfully cold against skin that had been freshly exposed after the warmth of clothed snuggles with others.
And despite all this, it felt almost orgasmic when she let things begin to flow. Shudderingly, moaningly, twitchingly orgasmic.

It was the final straw in the stack, and before she even realized her bladder was empty fingers were pressing between her thighs and down through the thick thatch of fur, pressing between her folds. Images flicked through her head, her mind needing little imagination to fill in the appearance of what Yatsuhashi had been pressing against her mere moments ago, imagining it not rubbing into her backside, but pushing in and filling her.

Her free hand crept up, pushing under her shirt and jacket, and fingers pinched and twisted an over excited nipple, her fevered imaginings turning the fingers into the large but still quite feminine digits of Coco. She teased and tormented herself above and below, moaning into the morning air, mere seconds being all it took for her to tense up and thrash on her makeshift throne.

*You are one sick bunny,* Tawnee muttered in her ear.

Velvet didn’t even have the energy to disagree with the disembodied voice.

Nor did she have the right.

She found herself contemplating the truck a few moments later, latching onto the mystery of it as a way to desperately avoid any further thoughts about her guilt, about her need to apologize for something she absolutely could never admit to doing. She clung to the odd mystery of the day before like a lifeline, anything she could do to put aside the abusive thoughts.

Fox came up beside her, still stretching after having exited the tent. “Something up, Velve?”

She twitched a bit, certain he saw through her, and realized the disgusting creature she was, but he said nothing further, gave no sign he thought anything different about her. She drew in a breath, an act of will, and then forced her thoughts to the more immediate.

She pointed down to the ground, still muddy from the rain the night before. “One mystery solved.”

Fox knelt down, then looked under the truck. “Not surprising. Neo would have wanted some sort of shelter against the rain last night.” He patted the damp ground beside a tiny footprint. “The truck’s on a every slight rise, so the water would flowed away from the truck instead of under it.”

“Still doesn’t explain how she rode with us yesterday.”

“I’m working on that.”

“We can’t let her do that. The whole point is to keep her away from Ruby, not help her find her.”

“I know. I’m working on it.”

“Fox, I mean it! I know you’re somehow able to relate to her even if she is a terrorist, but we have to stop her!”

She saw Fox blink at the heat in her voice, a heat that surprised her just as much as it did him, and she suddenly found herself staring at the ground, feeling yet another little sin weighing down her already overburdened soul. Deep in her stomach a burning coal flared, and a wash of anger and shame rolled through her.

Fox’ hand came down on her shoulder, gently. “Velvet… What’s really bothering you?”
She couldn’t bring her head up to look at him, and her voice fought against her need to let it all out. “I… It’s just…” She sighed, “I’m worried about Ruby.”

She almost felt Fox’ disappointment radiate down his arm and into her through the hand on her shoulder. A deep sigh came from beside her, and then Fox slowly stepped in closer, slipping his arm around her, the other coming around front to tug her gently into a hug.

She resisted, and not willingly. Her body simply did not want the touch, the closeness, the intimacy she did not deserve. Without her meaning to, she began to pull away, but Fox persisted, and she found herself tensed against his chest.

“Velvet,” he whispered softly. “You are always worried about Ruby. But something else is going on now. Something is not right. Very not right. We’re worried.”

“Don’t,” she groaned, her mind suddenly flooded with an unreasoning fear. She tried to push away from him, but he only tightened his grip.

“Velvet…”

“Don’t!” This time it was a shout. “Don’t worry about me! Don’t hug me! Don’t touch me!”

She struggled harder, and smelled Fox’s scent take on a small musk of fear. She thrashed, her mind set on escape, but Fox, despite his obvious discomfort, refused to let her go. “Velvet!” he called. “Stop it.”

She jerked, and the energy went out of her. She felt her skin crawling with the need to keep him from touching her, to keep him from being blemished by her foul miasma, her tainted aura from somehow tangling and poisoning his. But she had no more strength to fight his grip, and all she could do was dangle there, detached and tired. Deeply, achingly, painfully tired. “I don’t deserve this. I don’t deserve any of this. Just let me go.”

“No.”

“But…”

“But what, Velvet?” His voice was a mixture she couldn’t quite separate out into its individual components. There was compassion there. Fear. Worry. And also anger. Desperation. And even a certain weariness that tasted somehow familiar.

“It’s not right. I don’t deserve this. I don’t deserve your worry. I don’t deserve their concern.”

Fox sighed, and she felt herself pulled over to a down tree and settled on it, his grip around her shifting but not loosening, brooking no dissent on her part.

“Why?” he asked, but his voice gave her no time to try to find an answer she could express. “Because you’re terrible? Your evil? You’re a killer who harbors unhealthy thoughts and desires, thinking of people merely as people to kill and people to fuck?”

She gasped at the surprisingly crude, and harsh words, but then the gasp quickly became a sob.

“I’m a monster.”

“We’re all monsters, Velvet.”

“No. You’re all… You’re just…”
Fox shifted, his hand slipping up to grip her chin, forcing her head around. She lowered her eyes, unwilling to make eye contact, but his maneuver still forced her to catch most of his expression out of the corner of her eye.

“My first kill was when I was 14, Velvet. And I did not kill a Grimm.”

Everything paused. Time seemed to stop, and everything stopped making any sense. “Wh… what?”

Fox wiggled, twisting his body to display the scars on his arm. “There was never quite enough of anything, you see. Never quite enough money. Never quite enough food. Blankets. Clothing. My parents worked hard, very hard. But we really had nothing more than a barely adequate roof over our head, clothing we could get very cheaply because someone else had no more use for it, and food that would fill our bellies, but never satisfied us. I always had such cravings, you see. I never knew what it was, but I clearly wasn’t getting something in my diet. And there was no way to satisfy it. You can’t get something for nothing, and nothing is all I had.”

Fox sighed, and Velvet’s face came up without her meaning for it to. She gazed at his face, his pale white eyes, and realized that, for that moment, he was no longer here. She felt a twinge of unity, knowing all too well how it felt to be lost in a memory, and a strange kinship heated her chest.

“So I fell in with others. Others like me, who had nothing, and no chance to ever have more than that. At least, not if we played by the rules the world expected us to abide by. We had needs and cravings, and we were going to see them met by hook or crook. And usually it was crook.

“We weren’t the only ones. Funny thing about us humans. And Faunus too, I suppose. We get very territorial. We’ll band with a small number for mutual support, but then when we see other groups with the same needs we decide that they don’t deserve what we obviously are owed. They’d steal from us, we’d steal from them, and we’d both steal from people who barely had anything to steal. We were not good people.

It came down to fighting. And we were desperate. We weren’t fighting for pride. Or because of some sort of group ethic. Or over some sort of sense of righteousness. We were fighting because it was that or go hungry, or naked, or whatever. It was basic survival and instinct. And one day one of the boys I was fighting went down, and he never got up.”

Fox shook himself and came back to the present, his eyes locking on Velvet’s. “A Huntsman found me not long after. I never told him, but he seemed to know. He probably should have turned me in. Instead he took me in. He gave me what I didn’t deserve, accepted my guilt, and taught me to harness what I had learned and put it to a use that benefited people instead of victimizing them. Now I’m a huntsman, fighting terrorists and hunting monsters. Doing my best for everyone, human and faunus alike. But I am, and will always be, a monster myself, one that took a life over nothing more than a loaf of bread.”

Velvet gaped, shocked out of her own inward thoughts for the first time in what felt like an age. “But…” She struggled. “But if that’s true, how do you…”

“One day at a time, Velve.” He lifted his chin and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “It’s the only way I can. One day at a time.” He smiled, a sad thing. “It never goes away, but you do learn how to be able to simply keep going.”

Then he laughed a bit, a wry, almost bitter sound. “At least you killed for love, Velve.”

She jerked. “I… But…”
“But what?” Fox gave her a stern look. “But you shouldn’t love him because he’s Coco? But you killed in a fit of rage and anger? But you didn’t necessarily have to kill her but could have tried to capture her?”

Velvet swallowed, unable to answer, or even move her head in agreement or disagreement. She watched as Fox did it for her.

“Velvet. You are one of my best friends, and I dearly love you like the companion and sister you’ve proven to be, but sometimes you are truly a dumb bunny.”

Despite herself a small, almost frightened giggle escaped her. “Velvet, we’re none of us perfect. Even people who haven’t chosen the life we have are very, very flawed. And we? We chose a life where our entire purpose is to kill. Yes, we hunt the enemies of all of civilization, but at the end of the day, we are hunters. We will get lost in the moment. We will make harrowing decisions. And, yes, we will go too far in the heat of the moment.

“Hell,” he spat, his voice suddenly heated and a bit angry. “Yesterday we actually unleashed Grimm, soulless monsters, on humans. It was the right decision to make. It was the only way we could protect good, decent folk from bandits who murder as a matter of course, but it was still a very twisted, evil thing to do. And we did it. We are, all four of us, monsters.”

He gave her a squeeze. “Because we have to be. Sheep cannot kill a monster. Only monsters can kill monsters.”

Velvet sighed. She didn’t feel better. Not really. She still felt very guilty, very wrong, and very undeserving. But something had changed, and that one thing, at least, felt like a lifeline.

She felt understood. And she realized that she was not, after all, alone.

And maybe that was enough.

“Thanks Fox,” she sighed, and leaned against him, still uncomfortable with the contact, but more willing to endure it.

“Sure.”

Fox let go and stood, moving to the back of the truck to rummage in a box. He grabbed something, then paused. “Oh, and Velvet…”

“Hmm?” She felt her ears perk.

“It’s not monstrous or weird or wrong to still love Yatsu. And Coco, if my guess is right. In fact, if you could just turn off your want and need for them just like that when they became a couple, that would be the worrying thing. And if my guess is right, they can’t turn their love for you off any more than you could.”

Velvet gaped. “Fox! But…”

“Hey, I’m not saying that you should go jump one of them behind the other’s back. That would be wrong. But still having feelings for them? And, yes, desires?” He leaned over and pat her between the ears. “That doesn’t go away overnight. Give it time.”

“How…” Velvet gaped. “How did you know?”

Fox had the grace to look awkward. “I needed to take a leak too, this morning.”
“You heard…”

“Seems to be a lot of that going around,” he grinned ruefully.

Velvet pinched her nose. “Oh, Oum…” But then she laughed. “I guess we’re all simply too close to keep any secrets anymore anyway…” Then she gave Fox a sharp look. “But don’t tell them.”

Fox held up his hands, one curled around a can of peaches. “Not a word.” He turned and started to walk away.

“Fox?” She asked.

He stopped. “Yeah?”

“Why are you so good with all of this relationship stuff?”

He smiled. “I may not have a sex drive, but…” His smile turned into a quirked grin. “But I can definitely still be a hopeless romantic.”

Velvet laughed, surprising herself, then turned to follow him back into the tent.
Chapter Notes

GrimmKaiju writes:
A good support chapter but it makes me wonder. What does Neo think of all of this? She is bound to be watching everything that’s going on but she doesn’t know the whole story behind it. It would be an interesting detail if she asked Fox about it. And if he did try to explain it how would the others react if they found out. All in all a good chapter.

Bookah replies:
That’s a darn good question. Won’t it be interesting if that happens? *winks*

idkidc85 writes:
This story is really neat, very well written.

Bookah replies:
Thank you! I’m glad to hear you are enjoying it!

Ridgepeak

There was quite a bit of construction going on when the truck pulled in. A few locations along the main road still held burnt out husks in the process of being dismantled, but in most cases rebuilding had already begun, and in a few cases were well along.

Coco turned to watch a tall clock tower as she drove the vehicle through a small, open square. A statue near its base had been smashed, leaving it anyone’s guess what once had been enshrined there, though the statue on the other side of the tower’s shattered door was still intact, and likely a match. Light spilled out through the doorway, revealing that, though not touched by fire, the building the tower was built on had collapsed completely. The square had several burnt out buildings in various states of repair, and the pavement itself was pitted and cratered. Even the clock’s face was gone.

She slowed the truck to a stop, leaning out the rolled down window. “It’s a good thing they build with stone here. I don’t think that building would be standing if it had been wood.” She frowned. “What kind of grimm could cause that much damage?”

“To be fair, much of the damage to that one was a huntress.”

Coco whipped her head to the side as she saw Velvet flinch at the unexpected voice, then immediately sought the source. Through narrowed eyes she spotted a middle aged man approaching from the Faunus’ side of the vehicle. Both women watched him cautiously as he stopped a few feet away from Velvet’s open window. “Help ya?”

Velvet’s muscles were knotted, her knuckles white as she glared at the man. “What do you mean, a huntress did this?” Coco quickly reached over and settled a hand on Coco’s forearm, feeling a bit worried as the woman flinched at the touch, but then released a bit herself when Velvet shook her
head a bit and reached her other arm across to place her own hand gently atop Coco’s.

The man held his hands up a bit defensively, though his face showed little sign of worry. “Don’t get me wrong. She didn’t do it intentionally. In fact, we’re grateful for her help. If she hadn’t come along we’d probably have lost the village. It’s just that the grimm she fought were a bit prone to throwing her at things.”

Coco exchanged a glance with Velvet, then slipped her hand off the hare faunus’ arm. She opened the door on her side and got out, walking around the front of the truck to meet the man. Velvet joined her as well not a moment later, carefully looking around and watching everything while Fox and Yatsuhashi slipped out of the canvas covered back to stand alongside of Velvet. “Don’t you mean throwing things at her?” Coco asked.

“Nope. I mean throwing her at things. I was hiding upstairs in that building there watching the whole thing.” He pointed at a building alongside the square, gesturing towards an upper window with a divot of broken rock alongside of it. “Baringal nearly smashed her right through my wall at one point. Tough girl.”

Coco grunted. “Aura covers a multitude of sins. What’d she look like?”

“She wore black with red highlights, just like her hair. Bit red cape. Used some sort of strange scythe.”

“Ruby!” Velvet shouted. She whipped around, fixing Coco with a hopeful expression that nearly took Coco’s breath away as she did the little fidgety dance that had been conspicuously absent from their lives for far too long.

Coco quickly whipped out her scroll, bringing up the photo that Velvet had given all of them. “Is this her?”

The man peered a moment, then grinned. “Ayup. Outfit’s different. The new one doesn’t make her look so… young. But that’s definitely her.”

Coco nearly went over as Velvet suddenly tackled her with a hug. She steadied herself before she could fall over, and wrapped her arms around the woman, feeling excited for the first time in weeks as tears soaked the side of her neck.

The local took this in, and gave a large, gape-toothed smile. “Friends of yours, I take it.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Coco saw Yatsuhashi cock his head. “Friends? Plural?”

“Oh, yeah,” the man nodded. “She was the first one to show. A couple of moments later some more showed up. Two hunters and a huntress. The men were about average in height. One wore green and had a streak of pink in his dark hair. The other was a gangly blonde in armor. The girl was an itty-bitty thing, but you wouldn’t know it, seeing her waving around a giant hammer like it was nothing.”

The descriptions sounded familiar, but Coco couldn’t quite picture anything. She patted Velvet on the back, then gently pulled away from the girl. “Velvet?”

Sniffling, but with a big smile, Velvet turned back to the man, wiping at her eyes. “You said a hammer? Armor?”

“Yeah. And the green kid used some sort of handguns and them martial arts moves from over on Anima.”
Coco was startled as Velvet’s ears suddenly twitched, perked upright. “Nora, Jaune, and Ren.” She spun back to Coco, wide-eyed. “Team JNPR!” Then her expression faded, and her shoulders and ears both slumped a bit. “Well, what’s left of it.”

“What’s left?” Coco asked, concerned.

Yatsuhashi settled a gentle hand on Velvet’s shoulder and caught Coco’s eye. “Pyrrha Nikos.”

Coco felt herself flinch. “Oh. I hadn’t realized what team she’d been on.”

“It’s alright,” Yatsuhashi commented. “Velvet was always more interested in the first years than the rest of us.” He patted the girl’s shoulder. “Anyway, this is good news. Not only are we on the right track, but we now know that Ruby’s not alone after all.”

“And doing pretty well, in fact,” Fox commented. He gestured to the village around them.

“Saved us, that’s for sure,” the local man agreed. “If it weren’t for them, we’d have been done for.”

Coco turned back to the man. “How long ago was this?”

“A week. They stayed long enough after the fight to help look for the missing, then kept right on going to wherever they were headed. We tried to reward them, but they simply took a little food and dust and said that was all they needed.”

“Do you know which way they went when they left?”

The man thought a moment, then shrugged. “No, can’t say as I do. But ask around the gates. They should know. Ain’t but three roads that lead away from here, and you’d’ve come down one of them.”

“Thanks.” Coco turned back towards the truck. “Climb in. Let’s find an inn for the night. We have a lot to talk about.”

“Best inn in town that’s still open is three blocks that way,” the man offered, pointing down a street. “In fact, it’s where they stayed the night.”

Coco swung open the door of the truck, then paused. “Thanks again.”

“Don’t mention it.” The man chuckled. “No, do mention it. Maybe they’ll give me a free beer for the referral.”

Coco grinned and climbed in, starting the truck.

Coco’s first priority after entering the room at the Inn she would be sharing with Yatsuhashi was a shower. Yatsuhashi, it seemed, had the same basic idea, disappearing through the door to the bathroom before she’d finished dropping her pack on the queen size bed.

“Hey!” she hollered, dashing after him and jerking the door open before he’d finished closing it. “Whatever happened to ‘ladies first?’”

The big man grinned at her, then shucked his shirt. “Isn’t a leader supposed to see to the needs of her people before her own? I need a shower badly.”

Coco frowned, then leaned forward, inhaling deeply. “Yeah, you’re right. You do need a shower badly.”
“Meanie,” Yatsuhashi stuck his tongue out at her as he slipped out of his pants a leg at a time.

“Hey, you brought it up,” Coco grinned, enjoying the view as he finished disrobing and turned the water on. “Besides, it’s not like I’m a rose garden right now.”

Yatsuhashi chuckled. “I’ll admit you are a bit fragrant right now.”

It was Coco’s turn to frown. “Chivalry is dead.”

“Ayup.” Yatsuhashi stepped into the tub and pulled the curtain, switching on the shower head. A cloud of steam immediately began pouring out of the top of the shower.

“Cad.”

A moment later Yatsuhashi grunted in surprise as she stepped in through the curtain. “Coco?”

“You wash my back, I’ll wash yours.”

Yatsuhashi laughed. “I’m not sure that’s entirely fair.”

“True,” Coco grinned. “Your back is bigger. But that’s alright. It’ll even out when you wash the front of me.”

A twinkle entered Yatsuhashi’s eye, and he bent down to kiss Coco’s lips. “Maybe I’ll just start there,” he responded when they broke apart, his hands immediately reaching up to begin.

Coco felt a warm smile form on her face. “I can live with that.”

It was a pleasant shower indeed.

An hour later the four had gathered around a table in the inn’s small restaurant. A warm meal that none of them had needed to spend time preparing over a campfire using reconstituted food had gone a long way to correct a host of ills, as had being clean and dressed in fresh clothes for the first time in weeks. The mood was good, perhaps even celebratory. Even Velvet seemed to have come out of her shell, laughing at some of the jokes.

Once the meal was finished, however, Coco cleared her throat. “So, we have a decision to make.”

Velvet immediately perked both of her ears up. “I know. Now that we’ve learned Ruby has help, do we keep going, or do we go back home.” Her face scrunched, looking almost angry. “Obviously we continue following her, and help her stop the W.W.White Fang.”

Coco lifted a placating hand. “No one’s going to disagree with you about helping her and stopping the Fang. The problem is something else.” Coco turned her head to Yatsuhashi. “Just before we came down here, Yatsuhashi went out and asked which gate Ruby used to leave town.”

Yatsuhashi sighed, and turned to face the other two. “She left using the gate for Beowolf Bay.”

“So we’re headed to Beowolf Bay then, right?” Velvet’s voice sounded worried.

Coco reached out gently and placed a hand on Velvet’s shoulder, feeling the girl twitch a little at the contact. “We could. But the supply route the White Fang is using heads to Oak Harbor. Even with the truck we found, we can only hit one of them.”

Fox grunted. “Do we double the strength and size of Ruby’s current team? Or do we try to shut down a pipeline no one else knows exists?”
“Exactly.” Coco nodded.

“We can tell the authorities. Someone from the Atlas military. They could handle it.” Velvet’s expression was a mix of determination and desperation.

Coco kept her voice gentle. “We could. If we found one. And if they were willing to chase it into Mistral’s territory.”

“Unlikely,” Yatsuhashi reminded. “I’ve been listening in every time we’ve been in a village. People are scared of Atlas. The last thing they saw before the towers went down were Atlas robots attacking citizens in Vale.”

Velvet looked down at the table.

“There’s another consideration.” Fox weighed in. “Neo.”

Velvet glanced back up. “What?”

“Neo’s still after Ruby. We haven’t heard from her in a couple of days, but we already know she can somehow hide on the truck with us. My guess is she rides up top somewhere and then uses her little magic trick to disappear when we stop. So if we head after Ruby with the truck…”

Coco watched Velvet sigh, covering her eyes. “We take her straight to Ruby.”

“If we follow the route the White Fang has been smuggling their weapons on we could potentially take away much of what they plan to use against Haven Academy. And that, in turn, would make Ruby’s job easier.”

Velvet slowly nodded at Fox’ logic, but she frowned. “I don’t like this,” she muttered.

“I know,” Yatsuhashi gently rested his hand on Velvet’s other shoulder, giving it a squeeze. “But will you accept it?”

The Faunus shook herself. “I’ll have to,” she sighed. “It’s the right call.”

“Sorry,” Coco whispered. She frowned as Velvet’s face grew heavy again, her eyes elsewhere.

Two steps forward...
Oak Harbor Highway

The trip to Oak Harbor from Ridgepeak would be a quick one. To the surprise of everyone on Team CFVY, the highway connecting the two towns was paved, evidence of the relative wealth of the two towns. After a little contemplation, Yatsuhashi had remembered that some of the coastal towns, protected from land based attack in some directions by the coastline, were well on their way to becoming full kingdoms of their own. Oak Harbor was probably one such of these, and thus had the funds to push a paved road out to neighboring towns.

“It makes trade between the towns, travel, and mutual support easier,” he’d explained. “And that, in turn, makes both towns even safer and richer. In time they may even become well enough established to be able to rival places like Vale, or even Mistral.”

They had traded out drivers around midday, letting Fox get a break as Velvet drove. The skyline ahead was growing ominous, full of dark clouds and flashes of lightning. Though they were all quite fit from their lives as Huntsmen and Huntresses, driving was still a different beast than walking, and Coco had decided to enter the storm with a fresh driver.

Released from driving, Fox had immediately crawled into the back, despite Coco and Yatsuhashi...
offering to let him enjoy a seat up front. He’d declined, preferring the chance to stretch out a bit in the more roomy bed of the truck, letting the couple share the cab with Velvet.

Only a half hour later, a rumble of thunder had roared, and a blast of wind had shaken the vehicle. Pushing aside the canvas flap at the back, he stuck his head out, contemplating the dark clouds that they were just crawling overhead. A few sniffs of the air, and he knew the thunder heralded rain as well.

He thought a moment, then nodded to himself. He fished out his scroll, punching in a message.

Less than a minute later, the flap pushed inward, and a pink, white, and brown themed woman slipped inside. Neo contemplated Fox a moment, then smiled her thanks.

“I figured you were up top.” Fox gently patted the canvas top. “We haven’t seen you this whole time, but you kept eating the food I left out.”

In the now slightly cramped space, Neo gave a seated bow, a gesture Fox took to mean thank you a second time, and he shrugged. “You’re welcome.”

Neo settled back against a crate, rocking a bit as another blast of wind pushed the truck a bit. She watched Fox a moment, one eyebrow arched in a question.

“Well, we could talk for a bit.”

Neo gave a small laugh, then pulled out her scroll. A few taps, and then Fox felt his own vibrate. He lifted it so he could read the screen.

*I'm not much of a talker.*

“No kidding,” Fox drawled. “I would never have guessed.”

Neo gave another little laugh.

“Alright, Neo. I have to ask. Why are you here?”

Neo continued to smirk a bit as she tapped away.

*You invited me.*

“Ha ha. Very funny. I meant in general, not inside the truck at this exact moment.”

Neo gave another little smirk, but then her face turned serious as the sound of fat drops of rain began striking the overhead canvas.

*Seriously. You invited me.*

Neo locked eyes with Fox as he looked up from his scroll. One eye was brown, one pink, and both held something inside of them that left no question about whether or not she was joking.

“Oh, so I did. I would have thought you’d have continued to chase Ruby, though. You do know she went a different direction.”

Neo nodded, then shrugged, glancing to the side as the truck gave another lurch as a gust crossed the road. She stared a moment, then began typing on her scroll, pausing, erasing, typing again, then stopping and looking a bit exasperated by something.
“What?”

Neo frowned, then gave an audible sigh. She typed again.

*You have a different path, sure. But you still have the same goal. Mistral.*

Fox contemplated Neo for a moment, then leaned back a bit, still watching her. “You could have gone straight for her. You might have caught up, and she’d have had no idea you were coming. But if you stick with us…”

It was Fox’ turn to shrug. “We know you’re around, and what your goal is. Believe me, Velvet would be glad to see you in a cell. Coco and Yatsu probably would too.”

Neo flashed a smile that could only mean “good luck with that,” but then began typing again.

*I haven’t given up on Ruby. She did nothing to save Roman when she saw the Nevermore. But I also know what you are doing. Cinder put us there, on that ship. It was her plan. And the White Fang weren’t forced like we were. I want them to hurt.*

Fox nodded slowly. “I could talk to Coco. Maybe she’d let…”

Neo cut him off with a sharp shake of her head and a hand slashing across her body. She began tapping furiously.

*I’m not looking for redemption. Yes, we were scared for our lives, but we still did those things. We weren’t the good guys even before Cinder hired us. And I won’t stop being that person. Not in the eyes of your team, or the eyes of the kingdoms. Or my own. I’m not in this for forgiveness. I’m in it for revenge. Your team is right not to trust me.*

*You shouldn’t trust me either.*

Fox glanced back up at Neo, seeing how intent her eyes were as she watched him for a reaction. He sighed, and scratched his head. “I guess we’ll just have to do our best despite that.”

Neo stared at him a moment, then began laughing.

*You’re impossible.*

He felt himself smile a bit. “I suppose I am.”

A gust of wind blew the canvas back open, pushing a blast of cold air and rain in through the gap. Neo jumped, giving a small shriek of surprise at the sudden damp chill striking her neck and leapt deeper into the truck, towards Fox. Instinctively he caught her, tucking her safely against himself.

The truck lurched, brakes squealing as it slid to a halt.

Neo gave Fox a quick, surprised look, then pushed away, out of his arms. The moment she was clear, she poofed out of view.

The flap was thrown open, and Yatsuhashi stuck his head inside, rain spattering off of his hair and the crates closest to the back. “You okay?”

Fox shook his head ruefully. “Fine. What’s up?”

Yatsuhashi looked around, eyes a bit narrow. “We thought we heard something.”
Fox laughed. “You did. Even Neo dislikes ice water down the back of the neck.”

Eyes narrowed, Yatsuhashi started scanning the surroundings. “Still with us, huh?”

“Yeah,” Fox nodded. “Don’t bother searching for her. You won’t find her.” He jutted a chin towards the rain outside. “It’s still spring and the rain is really cold. Get out of it and back in the cab. Snuggle with Coco and Velvet or something.”

Yatsuhashi jerked his head back to Fox. “Velvet?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Fox sighed. “I should be telling you to not encourage her because your with Coco now and she needs to just get over it and yada yada blah blah blah, right?” Fox gave Yatsuhashi a wry look. “But you still have feelings for her, right?”

“It doesn’t…”

“Right?” Fox pressed.

Reluctantly, Yatsuhashi scratched the now soaking back of his neck, contemplating a crate. “Maybe.”

“And Coco does too, right?”


Fox rolled his eyes. “You three are still completely hopeless. Look, I’m not suggesting you climb up in the cab and stick your hands down Velvet’s pants. But she’s going through a hard time, and she feels safe around you. Put your arm around her shoulder, put a kiss on the crown of her head, and let her feel safe for a moment.”

“Coco…”

“Needs to do the same damn thing. Maybe she could get away with the hands down the pants thing.”

Yatsuhashi gaped at Fox, then shook his head. “Sometimes I just don’t get you, Fox.”

Fox sighed. “Jut get back in the truck. You’re soaked.”

Yatsuhashi eyed Fox a moment, then nodded his head, dropping the flap.

“Bloody martyrs…”

The flap opened once again, and just as the engine restarted, Neo slipped back inside. She turned and fastened the flap in place, clearly not wanting to risk being splashed again.

“A bit late for that,” Fox pointed out. “You’re soaked. I can almost see your corset through your shirt.”

Neo shot Fox a dark look, then tapped at her phone.

*It’s called a bolero.*

“Fine. I can almost see your bolero through your shirt.”

Neo sighed and put her face in her palm, then pulled the hand away, glaring at the sopping wet glove. With a groan she sat down and began peeling the gloves off before shivering.
“You need to get out of those wet things. It’s not exactly warm in here right now.”

Neo shot Fox a dirty look.

“It’s not like that,” Fox objected. “I’m really not trying to get you naked or anything.” He held his hands up in surrender. “But you’re going to get sick if you don’t dry out.” He quirked a grin. “Besides, I’m not into little girls.”

In a flash, Neo hit him. It wasn’t a hard hit, and she’d aimed for his upper arm, not his face. Still he rubbed his arm, laughing as she jerked off her bolero and leaned towards him, a challenge in her eyes. He obliged her, glancing down briefly, then back up, still grinning. “Alright, not so little.”

She nodded, emitting a surprising loud sniff of indignation, before sitting back and slipping off her boots and socks. She reached behind her, beginning to unlace the corset, then paused, looking intently at Fox.

Fox snorted. “Look, I admit, you’re good looking, and definitely not a little girl. But you don’t have to worry about me.”

Neo pursed her lips and nodded.

“Oh, you knew that?”

Neo rolled her eyes, then brought her hand in front of her again. She pointed one at Fox and then at the cab, while making talking motions with the other.

It was Fox’ turn to roll his eyes. “You sure eavesdrop a lot.”

She produced her scroll again.

Bad guy, remember?

“Whatever Neo. I still don’t get those urges.

Well, I do. And I am still a cold, wet girl in the presence of a weird, weird man.


Neo took the blanket, wrapping it around herself. She turned her back to Fox, wiggling and shrugging, before popping first the corset and then her pants from inside the blanket. She tucked the blanket tight around herself, blushing a bit as she eyed Fox.

He made a show of looking up at the canvas top. “See? Not looking.”

Her bare arm came out the top of the blanket and slapped his arm again. Chuckling, he lowered his eyes back to her face. “Oh, so now you actually do want me to look?”

Neo rolled her eyes, then twisted sideways before leaning against Fox’ shoulder.

Fox snorted. “After all that about you being almost naked in front of me?”

His phone vibrated.

_Bodyheat._
Fox chuckled, then, carefully, put his arm around Neo’s blanketed shoulders. He felt her stiffen a moment, then soften as she clearly made a decision.

*Don’t get any ideas. My parasol is still in arm’s reach.*

“Not a chance of it. I’m allergic to being made into a pincushion.”

Neo snorted, then lapsed into a silence beside him. Fox felt no need to break the quiet, but rested there, Neo at his side, as they listened to the rain on the canvas as the truck continued on.
Spring Hunt - Chapter 14: Coco

Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt Updates Mondays.

(My replies to comments are actually at the top of the story this time. The replies were too long for the Notes section to handle! Woo! Go me!)

Burn_It_totheground wrote:

I look forward to this story every Monday. Keep up the good work.

Bookah replies:

Thank you for reading! It amazes me that so many of you are enjoying this story. I never expected to have so many follows on it!

GrimmKaiju wrote:

Neo continues to surprise Fox with her spying which is an interesting detail although she probably doesn’t have much else to do when she is on top of the truck. As she gets more comfortable with talking to Fox I wonder if the rest of CFVY is getting suspicious of Fox. My guess is Yatsuhashi suspects something but I don’t know if he would tell Coco or Velvet just yet.

Bookah replies:

I admit, having Neo get away with hiding on a small, moving vehicle has been interesting. Honestly, it was starting to push even my own suspension of disbelief, which is why I went ahead and "let" her move into the truck with Fox. Not that I am really "letting" everyone do anything. They've taken on a life of their own, and I'm really not sure who is really in control anymore, me or them. I never had originally intended to have Neo and Fox form this... whatever it is they have going. But Neo insisted, and Fox' own background kind of ran with it.

It'll be interesting to see how it further develops, though I already have an idea where this is probably headed. I usually don't give "spoilers" to thinks, but in this case, I'll drop a small one. Fox may be asexual, but he's not aromantic...

SWTOR_Queen wrote:

Unsurprisingly another good chapter, Fox is a bit fucked up, and YAY CROSSHARES IS SUPPOSED TO BE COMING BACK! CAN'T WAIT!

Bookah replies:

"Fucked up" is pretty much the defining characteristic of this story. I'm a bad, bad girl. But when you look at it, these characters are all people with some seriously screwed up personalities. Coco is a frank hedonist who makes bad choices whenever she is feeling down, trying to perk herself up with alcohol and one night stands, and has enough self doubts about her own leadership for this problem...
to come up often. Yatsuhashi managed to develop a serious Modanna-Whore complex as a teen and has a serious over-protective vibe to him. Velvet fingers herself to images of two of her best friends having sex and hates herself for it, which only complicates the fact that she has serious rage issues stemming from her childhood. Add in the fact that she has one hell of a guilt complex and she is one fucked up bunny. Is it any wonder Fox is also pretty screwy?

In some ways, he's the most fun of all of them to write. He is just as screwball as the other three, but being asexual allows him to "divorce" himself from some of the hangups everyone else suffers from. It gives him a unique perspective on the relationship woes of the other three members of CFVY and allows him to cut the Gordian Knot of social "rules" and "expectations". He also happens to be a big time shipper-on-deck.

And then there's Neo. Oh god... Neo...

As to Crossshares... Hold on to your butt. Things are going to be "a little on the crazy side", as the song goes...

Incursio5991 wrote:

Loved this chapter, I love how you write for all of team cfvy but the way you write for fox with him having no dialogue in the show and not a lot of screen time is just really amazing, loving the fox and Neo interactions, always really interesting seeing their conversations, really interested to see what happens in the love triangle, can't wait for more of the story

Bookah replies:

It has been interesting developing all of these characters. Fox may have the least screen time and not a word to be found in cannon, but the truth is we have little chance to learn about the rest of CFVY as well. Neo is the character we've seen the most of, and even she is pretty much a cipher. This is both a problem and an opportunity.

The problem is that I am attempting to write something meant to be cannon compliant as of Season 5, with very little to go on. Trying to keep them believable within the framework of Monty's vision can be pretty tricky when there is so little of their personality, background, motivation, and dynamic to work with. Given my own somewhat grim... er... grim style of story telling I often fear that the result has been to plunge them into a somewhat darker story than RWBY itself. I comfort myself with the thought that, if you read between the lines, RWBY itself is just as dark, it's just more subtle about it than I am.

The opportunity is the flip side of that same coin. Because there is so little known about these characters it leaves a lot of room for interpretation and development. In fact, this story started out specifically because I wanted to know so much more about CFVY than RWBY tells us. It's gratifying to see that so many other people want that same thing and are happy to let me indulge myself with it. I know not everyone has been fully happy with where things have gone, but enough have to keep me going even during weeks I haven't felt very confident in my ability to tell this story.

Oak Harbor Highway

“Is everything alright?” Coco watched as Yatsuhashi climbed back into the truck, sliding up alongside of her on the bench seat.

“Yeah,” he responded, though his voice was clearly full of some degree of distraction. “Just Neo.”
On her other side, Velvet twitched a bit. “Oh.” The Faunus woman started the engine and put the truck into gear. “She was back there with Fox?”

“According to him, yes.”

Coco shook her head. “I’m really not sure what to make of his getting cozy with her.”

“Not that cozy,” Yatsuhashi grunted. “He seems to think getting cozy is our job,” the giant rumbled.

Coco arched an eyebrow and shot Yatsuhashi a sharp look. Velvet hadn’t seemed particularly jealous or angry about their relationship, but it still seemed a bit wrong to refer to it while she was there. “Yatsu…”

He shook his head. “Later.”

Beside them, Velvet snorted. “I’m right here you know. It’s quite alright to talk about the Goliath in the room.”

Yatsuhashi gave Coco a serious look, silently mouthing the word “later”. She gave him a quick nod and changed the subject.

“Well, at least we know she’s taken the bait and gone the wrong way.”

“There is that,” Yatsuhashi grunted. He shrugged, then frowned, his eyes glancing down at his shoulders. His hand came up and ran across the top of his head, spraying Coco with water.

“Yatsu!” she shrieked, elbowing him. “Stop that!”

The man beside her grunted, a wicked twinkle in his eye. “Aw, don’t be like that, Coco!” He twisted, grabbing her with both arms and dragging her into his soaking wet chest.

“ACK! YATSU!” She pulled away, pushing at his sodden chest. “You’re getting me wet!”

Behind her Velvet gave a snort. Coco rounded on her. “Don’t encourage him!”

Velvet half-turned her head towards her, one eye on the road, and one on CFVY’s now dampened leader. “Why not? I thought you liked it when he…” She trailed off, her ears erect, and both eyes now turned toward the man behind Coco.

“What are you…” Coco spun around. Her face smacked into dangling, very wet green cloth, damping her face and almost literally choking out her question. The cloth quickly retreated, to reveal the now bare skin of Yatsuhashi’s chest and side.

“Warmer this way,” he grunted, draping the sodden shirt across the dash.

Coco gaped at Yatsuhashi for a moment, her mind completely off track from any path it had previously been traveling down, and then she jerked her head back around to catch Velvet still staring. “Eyes on the road, rabbit!”

Velvet’s head jerked back to the front, the girl clearly intent on focusing on the road, and only the road, her legs fidgeting against one another.

Nodding in approval, she rounded back on Yatsuhashi. “Please stop stripping in front of the driver. You are very distracting.”

Behind her, Velvet audibly swallowed. “Yup.”
Coco couldn’t help but giggle, though she wasn’t sure why Velvet’s obvious fretting amused her so much. Yatsuhashi, however, merely shrugged. “Fine. I’ll leave my pants on,” he deadpanned.

“Oh thank Oum,” Velvet breathed, and Coco fought very hard to keep from laughing. The Faunus’ girl’s voice clearly had some of the humor in it that had been rare of late. There was something else as well, however. Coco’s mind began to pick at that extra bit, but then she forced it away. Velvet was doing something besides moping for once, and that was not something she was going to put a stop to by worrying.

She leaned over and poked Yatsuhashi’s shoulder. “Good. Any further, and I’d have to break up with you and find a new lover.” She turned and threw her shoulder over Velvet, feeling the girl twitch hard with shock. “You’re still single, aren’t you honeybunny?”

“Coco!” Yatsuhashi wailed, though there was laughter in his voice. “No! I’ve already started picking out the china!”

“Fiiiiiiiine,” Coco groaned, though she was smiling. “You’re off the hook, bubba.” She turned and gave Velvet a small kiss on the cheek. “Sorry, kiddo. I guess he wins this round.”

Beneath her arm, she felt Velvet shiver. The hare Faunus’ skin turned red, and she quietly muttered, “Golliath in the room,” her expression something Coco couldn’t quite figure out. Still, the girl leaned ever so slightly inward, and Coco left her arm in place.

**Oak Harbor**

She darted through the still heavy downpour, carrying her bag into the hotel they had located in the depths of Oak Harbor. Rushing in through the doors, she dumped the bag, then proceeded to try to wipe as much of the water off of her clothes as she good before proceeding further inside, eventually reaching the room she was sharing with Yatsuhashi.

The moment the door closed she began shucking layers. “I really hate spring storms. They’re too cold to enjoy.”

From the bathroom, Yatsuhashi grunted. “Yeah.” He sounded slightly down.

“Something wrong, Yatsu?”

“I’m wondering if we made a mistake.”

Concerned, Coco walked over to the bathroom door wearing nothing but her pants. She peered around it, watching as Yatsuhashi began filling the tub with steaming hot water. “What do you mean?”

“Horsing around like that with Velvet.”

Sighing, Coco padded into the bathroom, then leaned against the countertop and began removing her pants and underwear. “What’s wrong, big guy?”

Yatsuhashi rose, turning to face her as he began removing his own clothes. “It’s something Fox said earlier today.”

Coco paused, one leg still half in a pant leg, the other in the air and cloth free. She made a go on gesture, then shifted legs so she could finish removing her pants.

“He thinks she’s still crushing on us.”
Coco fixed Yatsuhashi with a look. “Crushing.” He had the good grace to squirm a bit under the influence of her expression. “You actually said ‘crushing’.”

He fidgeted. “Well, I mean…”

“I know what you mean, Yatsu.” Coco sighed and balanced her weight on both feet, unembarrassed by her now fully nude state. “She’s still interested in us. Romantically and physically.”

“Well, he seems to think so.”

Taking a step, Coco began helping Yatsuhashi out of his own clothes, focusing her eyes on buckles and buttons so she didn’t have to look him in the eyes. “He’s probably right. She talks to him. We all do.”

“He also thinks we still feel the same way about her. Both of us.”

Coco fumbled the belt she was working on, her brain suddenly distracted by a million thoughts she couldn’t sort out. She forced her brain to stillness and returned to working on the buckle. “Does he?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged out of his shirt, leaving a green and black pile on the floor by his ankles. “I bet he told Velvet the same thing. Then we went and…”

Coco’s head jerked up, her eyes locking on Yatsuhashi’s face. “I was just joking around. She knows that! It was giving her a laugh that she really needed!”

“Was it just a joke, Coco?”

“Yatsu…” She stopped fumbling with his clothes and stepped in closer, resting her hands on his bare chest. “We’re together now. You know I would never…”

His arms came around her as he cut her off. “I had feelings for her, too.” He looked to the side, as though seeking wisdom in the rising steam coming from the tub as it filled.

Coco felt a small hitch in her breath, then leaned against him, resting her head against his chest. “I know.” She sighed. “I guess I did too.” She gave a small, rueful laugh. “No, that’s not true. I definitely did. I told myself to never lie to you.”

His arms tightened around her. “I know I’m not supposed to. We’re together now, and I should only feel like that about you. But I think… I may still have feelings for her. Shouldn’t they go away? I don’t want to… hurt you like that. Or her.”

Coco lifted her eyes upward to see Yatsuhashi’s face, still staring into the steam, his face red, his expression ashamed. She gently patted one hand against his chest. “You won’t hurt me, big guy. I trust you.” She pressed a kiss over his heart.

She felt his arms squeeze her, tight enough for the affection to get across without causing discomfort. But then the pressure eased. “Do you feel like that?”

Coco sighed, examining her feelings, and finding them to be a mess she couldn’t sort out immediately. “I really don’t know. I… might.” She pressed her face against his chest.

It was Yatsuhashi’s turn to sigh. His face finally turned downward, and she felt his lips on the crown of her head. “So, what do we do about this?” he asked.

“Raid the bar and get roaring drunk?”
Yatsuhashi stepped back, putting his hands on her shoulders. “Coco…”

“I know, I know. It’s what I would have done. So it’s a good thing you’re here to keep me from doing something stupid.” She sighed, and pulled the last belt free, lowering his pants to the join the rest of the clothing on the floor. “For now, just… put me in the bath and join me. I just want to feel you hold me for a while.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “Alright.” Strong hands slipped around her, scooping her off her feet like she was a child. He turned and lowered her into the water, eliciting an almost pained gasp as the hot water touched her ass. He paused. “Too hot?”

She drew a deep breath, then shook her head. “Almost, but no. Go ahead and put me in, then get in here.” She tensed as he lowered her the rest of the way, then slowly let her muscles unknot as the heat began feeling comforting rather than painful. A moment later Yatsuhashi put a foot in by her hip, then slipped the other in, lowering himself behind her. A small grunt escaped him as his hips entered the water, clearly feeling the heat in a sensitive place.

Sighing, Coco lay back against him, reaching for his arms as they came around her waist and pressing them against her with her own.

“Coco?”

“Just… let me feel small for now. Okay?”

“Sure, Coco. Sure.”

That night she lay in bed, the little spoon to Yatsuhashi’s big spoon, nestling in his arms. She could feel his deep, contented breathing, the big man sleeping comfortably as he sheltered her.

It was a wonderful feeling. He was about the only person she could feel small around. Could feel weak and protected with. She could just relax, and let herself stop being a stoic, strong badass woman and just be a frightened little girl. It was, frankly, a relief.

Only, tonight there was no relief. Coco’s brain kept spinning in circles, unable to let go of the unfortunate topic that Yatsuhashi had brought up. Velvet was still in love with Yatsuhashi. And Coco as well. Yatsuhashi still had feelings for Velvet. And if Coco were being honest, so did she. Reciprocal feelings.

Yatsuhashi’s question resonated in her mind. What were they to do about that? Fox clearly had an opinion. He didn’t seem shy at all about expressing it. He made it pretty obvious he thought she should become their… what? Their girlfriend? Lover? Can someone even be two people’s girlfriends? How do you balance the time? How do you make sure that no one gets jealous? Can you even prevent jealousy?

Her mind cruelly presented her with an image of Yatsuhashi and Velvet, the faunus girl writhing in pleasure as she was pinned beneath Yatsuhashi’s gigantic weight. Immediately she cast the image aside, knowing Yatsuhashi wouldn’t cheat on her like that, not wanting to face what that might mean, not…

Not sure how she felt about it. Even if it was just in her head, shouldn’t that thought have provoked some sort of anger? The jealousy that she had just been worrying about? Yet those feelings seemed to be somehow absent. Instead, all she felt was…

Affection? For Velvet?
Disgusted with how little sense her brain was making she started to wiggle out of Yatsuhashi’s arms. The big man woke, his arms tightening around her. “Where you goin,” he muttered, still half asleep.

“I can’t sleep. I really need a drink.”

“Nope.” He pulled her back against himself.

“Yatsu, I just want to take the edge off. I promise I won’t go on a bender.”

“Nope.”

“Yatsu…”

“Nope. I got a better idea.” She felt him shift, heard the lilt of mischief in his voice. Fingers climbed her side before finding her breast, and she gasped instinctively as her nipple was pinched and pulled just enough to sting without really hurting. Behind her, he wiggled, and she felt something hard poke against her thigh.

She giggled. “Well… If you insist I suppose we could try something else.”

Yatsuhashi laughed, now fully awake, and seconds later she found herself in much the position she had just pictured Velvet trapped in. Coco forced the image aside again and made herself focus on what Yatsuhashi’s hands were doing to her breasts.

It wasn’t hard to do.
RandomName3064 commented:

its really nice to see some background time for other characters while that main story goes around.

guess that means you will keep this canon compliant up until you catch up? should make it interesting for who shows up in canon first, Neo or CFVY...

i like my shows to be kinda dark. i mean i love Code Geass and Death Note. love me some important character death, ya know? things like that.

the idea of them disrupting WF supplies is great. cant help but wonder if you might throw in a bit of Blake near the port. she did only get on her boat around the start of V4...

either way, would be interesting if you caught up before V6 to create your own canon, or after so you can show them JUST missing them at haven. either can lead to great ideas.

-RN3064

Bookah replies:

Thanks for the comment! I do plan to try to keep this cannon compliant as much as I can. Obviously I am not part of the writing staff at Rooster Teeth (HIRE ME!), but I want to participate in that world, not create my own. I do have to interpret a lot when it comes to Team CFVY, but the world itself is simply built off what we've seen in the show.

Of course, if (WHEN!) Neo or CFVY show back up in canon it will utterly destroy the "cannon" nature of this story. But that's a sacrifice I will happily, gleefully make, because I want them back in the show. XD

As a little spoiler, as I see this story, I expect the final chapter to come out part way through Season 6, with that chapter being set right after the final episode of Season 5. And yes, there will soon be a boat. =^.^=

No Blake, though. Don't get me wrong, she's my favorite among the mains. But Menagerie is on the opposite side of Anima from Sanus. It'd be like going from Hawaii to La via New York. ^_^ But don't worry! I have plans!

GrimmKaiju comments:

Another good chapter as always. It’s interesting to hear what Coco thinks of Fox and Neo but I surprised she didn’t elaborate a little more. Neo following them is a big part of
their plan and Fox “getting cozy” with her, I think, would be something she is more worried about. It was still good to get back to the whole love triangle that involves the rest of CFVY and what Coco is thinking.

Bookah replies:

Believe me, the Fox/Neo thing is going to become more of a big deal for Coco than it already is. Things are about to get iiiiiiiinteresting! Read on for more!

**Oak Harbor**

Velvet tossed and turned in her bed. Unlike Coco and Yatsuhashi, Velvet’s room had two beds in it, the one she wasn’t using holding the sleeping body of Fox. Though no one had spoken a word, it had seemed pretty clear after their return to civilization that everyone simply expected this sort of arrangement.

After all, it wasn’t like Fox and Velvet were strangers to sharing a room together. For nearly two years they had done exactly that, only with Coco and Yatsuhashi also present. They had grown used to not thinking about, not having to think about the fact half of them were boys, and the other half girls. They were simply teammates, they trusted one another, and that was that.

Sharing blankets over the winter had only strengthened that attitude. There had been a complete trust, a total sense of intimacy that had nothing to do with sex. It had been simply the proximity and comfort of people you could share space with, almost skin to skin, without any worries or fear.

At least, that’s what she had told herself. But the truth was there had been more to it. She’d noticed how soft Coco could feel under her hands and against her thighs. Noticed how hard Yatsuhashi could get, and how good it could feel when his hand accidently cupped her in his sleep. It should have made her uncomfortable. Made her want to separate herself and get away from these almost sexual invasions of her private space. And she had slipped away every so often when it became too intense. But it wasn’t to stop the perverse feelings. It was to indulge them where her team couldn’t be hurt by her shameful behavior.

She’d thought that would come to an end with winter, and with Coco and Yatsuhashi becoming a couple. No more intimate sleep. No more need to feel ashamed of her reactions to being accidently touched. No more masturbating whenever they thought she couldn’t hear them together.

Frustrated, she threw the blankets off and slid out of bed, stomping towards the bathroom.

*Dammit, Coco. Why did you have to put your arm around my shoulder and tease about being my girlfriend? Why did Yatsuhashi have to look so damn good with his naked chest still wet from the rain? Why the hell do I have to be… sick?*

Her fingers itched to press between her folds and bring her a pleasure she would only half enjoy, laced with shame as it would be. Instead she shut the door to the room behind her and immediately jerked the shower curtain aside on the bath, turning on the cold water tap. A few jerks rid her of panties and top alike, and she thrust herself under the almost freezing spray of water, her throat exhaling a loud, pained moan that was anything but erotic.
She plopped down onto her butt in the cold tub, letting the frigid water run over her head and body. She curled her arms around her knees, dragging them up against her chest.

*It’s not like I belong in a relationship anyway. Somebody so sick she fantasizes about her two best friends while she fingers herself doesn’t deserve someone’s trust and affection. I’m just a sicko and a killer.*

She felt a small spot of warm amongst the cold rivulets down her cheeks, and sniffled.

*You’re a mess*, Tawnee commented.

Velvet jerked her head around and glowered at the mirror through tear filled eyes. The shadow she’d thought she’d seen had disappeared. “Shut up, Tawnee,” she growled.

*Why? It’s the truth. You should listen to me. I’ll always tell you the truth. I’m the only friend you have.*

“I have the others. Fox…”

*Fox is a freak too. And how long do you think they’ll stay friends when they learn what you do at night? She heard the dead woman snicker. I’m the only friend you deserve.*

“Go away.”

*No. You’re stuck with me. It’s only right you have to bring me with you everywhere you go.*

“Go away!”

The bathroom door opened, revealing Fox, a concerned look on his face. He looked down to where she sat in the tub, then jerked back. “Oh. Uh…”

“Fox…” she moaned, her hand reaching out.

Slowly, he walked into the room. He settled on the toilet and took the hand she’d stretched out. Mercifully, he didn’t look away, nor did he leer. He simply looked at her as though it was just another day, though there was a touch of pity to it. “Rough night?”

She nodded spastically, finding herself unable or unwilling to speak. She grasped his hand tightly in her own, shaking.

Fox reached his other hand out, sticking it in the water. “The hell, Velve! That’s freezing!” He immediately twisted the knob for the hot water, adjusting it so that it was probably merely warm, though the effect felt scalding to Velvet.

“So, what was it tonight. Dreams?”

She shook her head. “I hate myself,” she muttered, the warmth freeing her voice.

“I hate myself too,” Fox responded, his own voice soft. “Sometimes, at least.”

Violet sobbed a little, then nodded. “Tawnee won’t leave me alone, either. She says awful things…”

She heard Fox sigh. “I don’t have that little aspect, I admit. But my own head gives me plenty of crap.” She heard him slip a little closer, patting her shoulder despite the wet. “You just have to remember that after what you’ve been through your brain loves to lie to you. It’ll tell you how awful you are, and ignore all the good you’ve done, and will still get to do.”
She sniffled. “Do you really believe that?”

“Sometimes,” Fox admitted. “On the good days.”

She nodded, squeezing Fox’ hand. She felt weak, but forced herself to loosen her arms from around her knees. “Can you hand me a towel?”

He leaned in enough to turn off the water, then pulled a towel from the rack and opened it, holding it out in front of him. She stepped into the towel, feeling a strange sort of relief at the chivalrous gesture, despite her having sat there naked for several minutes as he watched.

Wrapping the towel around herself, she stepped out of the tub. “Thank you,” she whispered.

Fox nodded. “Think you can get any sleep now?”

Velvet sighed. “Probably not. But at least I can try.”

He nodded, then stepped out of the room, starting to close the door behind him before he paused. “Look. If you think it will help, it’s fine if you crawl in bed with me.”

“Thanks.” Velvet gave Fox a nod. “I appreciate it.”

Velvet breakfasted early, then headed out without having seen anyone else from the team. She’d rested well enough after speaking with Fox, but a sense of restlessness had her eager to go out and run, the past few days lack of walking having left her full of pent up energy. She’s slipped on a pair of shorts and a simple tank top after eating, and then begun running along whichever street met her fancy.

She’d only been at it for ten minutes or so when she slid to a stop, ears twitching. Something had caught her attention, but she wasn’t sure what. Slowly she turned, eyes watching everything, ears alert for every sound, her nostrils flaring.

Nothing stood out to her. She couldn’t find anything to justify her sudden alertness. Yet every nerve was twitching with a need to find the threat and do something.

She snarled. “I’m going crazy,” she muttered, trying to force herself to a state of calmness, and failing.

A figure then stepped out of an alleyway half way down the street. Black haired, the woman was wearing a maid outfit like she was some kind of domestic. Velvet immediately locked her eyes on the diminutive servant, then swore.

“Neo,” she growled.

Neo, disguised, cocked her head to the side and smirked, then put a finger to her lips, shushing the Faunus before waggling the finger in a come hither motion.

Velvet stared a moment, then shook her head. She wasn’t going anywhere near the psychotic woman.

Neo frowned, then stomped a foot in a clear mini-tantrum. She gestured down the alleyway she had just come out of, then crossed her arms across her chest, glaring at Velvet.

Velvet stared a little longer, then turned her eyes to the end of the alley, evaluating it a moment.

“No funny business,” she said, her eyes narrow and untrusting.
Neo rolled green eyes, then held up one hand like she was being sworn in to testify, the other hand crossing her heart in an exaggerated gesture. Then she slid her legs apart, resting a hand on each hip, giving Velvet a look clearly stating that the ball was in her court.

Sighing, Velvet cautiously stepped towards the woman. Neo waited for her, then turned and began leading her down the alley. Velvet followed, slipping up behind the smaller woman when they reached the far end of the alley.

Neo held her finger up to her lips again, then pointed across the street. Looking, Velvet could see a sidewalk cafe. At one of the tables several faunus sat, enjoying breakfast. Velvet immediately turned her attention to them.

One of the group stood out from the rest. Amid the various pairs of ears, tails, and various other clear signs, he lacked any “non-human” features. Still, he drew attention amidst that crowd.

“Oum,” Velvet breathed. “He’s absolutely huge.”

A delicate hand hooked her arm and drew her back into the alley. Turning, she watched as Neo walked back into the alley to a shuttered window. The woman went up on tiptoes and blew across the glass, fogging it in the cool, spring morning air. Quick flicks of her finger wrote out a message.

WF sub boss. Led train attack.

Velvet’s eyes narrowed. “Vale?”

Neo nodded.

Velvet ducked her head, chewing her lip in deep thought. A White Fang sub boss was here? She had thought everyone and everything involved in the Fall of Beacon would have

Headed to Mistral.

*They are* headed to Mistral. *Enough of them to need some sort of White Fang Lieutenant in charge of this bunch.*

Velvet spun towards Neo. “Punch me.”

The short “maid” stared at her, mouth agape.

“Punch me!” Velvet insisted. “Or kick me. Right in the mouth!”

Neo cocked her head, looking a touch confused, then shrugged. She suddenly spun around, and Velvet bounced off the brick walls in recoil from the blow.

The waitress put the cup of ice on the table in front of Velvet, her eyes sympathetic. “That’s quite the knot on the side of your head. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine,” Velvet muttered, refusing to look up. She hunched over, her hands nervous in her lap, feigning fear. “I just need a little ice on it.”

Nodding, the waitress pulled a towel out of her apron and lay it on the table. “Put the ice in this. It’s clean. I just traded it out.”

Velvet nodded, gratefully, then sat quietly until the woman turned to walk back to one of the other tables. She then, slowly, began pulling ice out of the glass, setting it on the towel before folding the ice and bringing it to the split in her lip. The wince she gave at the contact wasn’t the least bit
feigned. For someone so small, Neo kicks like a mule!

She heard a chair slide out two tables over. Glancing over, she saw a faunus standing and walking over. He looked mostly human, aside from brightly colored plumage in place of his hair, and soft down along the back of his arms. He stopped with the table she sat at between them, his body language slow and careful. “You alright?” he asked.

She flinched, and kept her head low. “I fell.” She pulled the towel away from her lip, twisting the bloody spot away from her and shifting the ice pack to the large lump where the side of her head had struck the wall.

The man grunted, then sat down in an empty chair. “That’s not what I asked. I asked if you’re alright.”

Velvet lowered her voice to something barely above a whisper. “It’s fine. Just a little lump.”

“Oh huh.”

“I don’t want any trouble.”


Velvet shook her head. “I don’t want to get in the way.”

“You won’t. We’d be glad to have you.” He smiled encouragingly. “Trust me. You’re a lot less likely to... fall down around us.”

She remained silent for a moment, then faked a slight sobbing sound as she said okay. She started to stand, and his hand came out to steady her.

“There you go. My name’s Forest, by the way.”

“Velvet,” she replied, letting him lead her to his table. He held a chair out for her, seating her where he had been before turning and taking another chair from a neighboring table.

“Order what you want. We’ll cover you,” Forest smiled. “Guys, meet Velvet. She ‘fell down’.”

There were various sympathetic grunts and murmurs, and several glances exchanged. Velvet lifted her eyes to take in the half dozen people at the table with her, trying not to stare too openly at the big one. “H... hello.”


Velvet carefully crafted a faint smile, wincing honestly again as the expression tugged at the split in her lip. “I don’t remember seeing any of you before?”

“We’re just passing through. We travel a lot.”

“Doing what?”

The big man leaned forward, piercing Velvet with small but intense eyes. He smiled, showing a mouth full of sharp teeth. “We help our brothers and sisters when they keep... falling down.” His smile twisted into something predatory as he held his hand out to her.

Velvet suppressed a shudder. She reached back across the table, letting his large hand enfold her
own. “Thank you,” she rasped, as something deep inside her chest burned.
Oak Harbor

Yatsuhashi woke with an absolute determination to not think about last night’s conversation. The fact that there was a substantial amount of skin on skin contact going on between him and the woman he was pretty certain about did help. It was a soothing, calming thing that was intimate without being erotic. He let it focus his thoughts on the steady breathing that pushed Coco back against his chest.

Something else was being pushed back against, and he grimaced. He gently disentangled himself from Coco and the blankets, raising a few objecting murmurs from the still mostly sleeping Coco, and slipped off the bed, cursing nature’s insistence on ruining a good snuggle by blessing him with a full bladder.

Situation resolved, he stepped back out into the main room and began collecting his clothes. He heard a small, approving hum behind him as he began slipping into his pants, and turned his head to see Coco smiling, watching. “Nice glutes.”

Yatsuhashi chuckled. “I thought men were the visual ones.”

Coco snorted. “We like eye candy too. We just don’t prioritize it quite as highly.” She sat up and stretched, letting Yatsuhashi get a chance to admire her fitness right back.

Grinning, he quickly cinched up his pants, then strolled over to the bed to plant an affectionate kiss on her lips. “Morning.”

Coco smiled. “Morning.” She then slipped from the bed, padding towards the bathroom herself.
He finished dressing, then settled in a chair, waiting for Coco to finish. When she left the little room and began dressing as well, he kicked back. “Unless you had other plans, I thought I’d go visit… family today.”

Coco nodded as she finished pulling her second sports bra over the first. “We do need to figure out how to get to Anima, but your visit may give us some ideas about how, and which part.”

“True.” He leaned over and scooped up Coco’s turtleneck, handing it to her.

She took the garment from him and began wrestling her way into it. “Mind if I come along?”

“Not at all.” Yatsuhashi smiled. “We can make a date of it.”

“You always take me to the nicest of places,” Coco purred, batting her eyes, then laughing. “Alright. Let’s drop by Velv and Fox’ room before we leave. Until we have a better idea what’s going on I have no plans for them. We can tell them to knock off for the day.”

“They might like having a day off,” he agreed. “Alright. You finish getting dressed, I’ll go let them know.” He rose, departing the room.

The room Fox and Velvet shared was across the hall. A pair of steps were all it took to reach the door, and Yatsuhashi gave a gentle knocking against it with the back of his knuckles. A couple of seconds passed, and then he could hear the door being unbolted.

Fox peered out at him as the door opened a crack, and then the scarred man opened the door fully. “What’s up, big guy?”

“Coco and I are going to go see what we can learn from the shipping company. Until we have more information we really don’t know what to do next, so Coco suggested you and Velvet just take the day off and relax.”

Fox’s face wrinkled thoughtfully. “Sure. I’ll let Velvet know when she gets back from her run.”

“Thanks,” Yatsuhashi nodded, then turned away as the door latched shut again. The door opposite opened, and Coco stepped out, looking fully put together.

“How do you do that?” he asked casually.

“Do what?”

“Look completely made up, styled, and classy in a mere ten minutes? It takes me that long to wrestle with my bed head alone.” He quirked a grin and ran his hand over the stubble that was all the hair he allowed himself to grow.

Coco laughed, then waggled her finger at him. “A woman has to have her secrets.”

Yatsuhashi blew a raspberry. “I’ve closely examined your most intimate of secrets already, but go ahead, keep this one.”

Grinning, Coco patted Yatsuhashi’s arm, then reached down and tangled her fingers with his. “Let’s go, loverboy.”

“As you wish.”

Breakfast wound up being scones in a coffee shop along the way. Through the window they could look out over the bay that had given Oak Harbor its name. Winding streets zigzagged up the side of
low hills surrounding the water, giving the small city a look that was half haphazard, half natural. Some of the architecture looked to be over a century old, with new construction utilizing the latest building techniques and trends right alongside.

Towards the sea, two arms of the surrounding hills stuck out, forming a natural breakwater with a relatively narrow gap for shipping to pass through. Two very utilitarian towers rested on either side of that gap, lights flashing from atop them, and with a series of very heavy chain nets draped into the water between. As the two watched and ate, a horn sounded, and the chains pulled towards one tower, dangling from a very high wire, opening the space for a container ship to pull in to the harbor, heading for one of the many jetties that stuck out into the protected bay. The nets closed behind it once it had cleared the passage.

“You can see why this place may wind up being a kingdom in its own right someday,” Coco mused. “They don’t have as good a natural barrier inland as Vale does, but that’s an excellent harbor. This is probably one of the safest places for shipping on this side of Sanus.”

“Which means there is a lot of money to be made here,” Yatsuhashi agreed. “It’s probably the reason the family moves so much through here. A safe harbor with high traffic? It’s the perfect place to play a little fast and loose and not get noticed.”

“How big is the office here?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged, then sipped some java. “No idea. I never really paid attention. Dad’s influence, I suppose.” He leaned forward and pointed out the window towards one of the jetties. “That’s one of our ships, though.”

He watched as Coco focused on the vessel down in the harbor. The ship was crawling with activity. Cranes and gantries were in constant motion, removing freight in large containers, while people moved this way and that, directing and inspecting. Having grown up in Mistral itself, Yatsuhashi found the activity no less fascinating.

“Big chunks of iron have no business floating,” he opined.

Coco laughed. “It does seem counterintuitive, I guess.” She finished her cappuccino. “Will the office be down there by the ship?”

“No,” Yatsuhashi shook his head. “The whole port basically is one giant facility run by the city. We’ll have trucks taking direct delivery straight off the ship and driving them to warehouses, or even going immediately inland.” He held up the manifest. “The office is just down the street.”

“Okay.” Coco rose. “Let’s go.”

The office was a larger structure than they had expected, though on reflection it made sense. A little place like Farndale only needed a small office to cover what was, for the most part, simply passing through. But Oak Harbor was a major port, a transhipment center. Everything coming off ship had to be sorted, organized, transferred to new forms of transportation, and then sent along the correct routes in the care of various drivers or pilots. This required a very large staff.

The building housing it was two stories, and of fairly modern construction, a thing of glass and steel. Double doors swung outward, granting entrance to a lobby area that was staffed by three people behind a counter. Coco beside him, Yatsuhashi walked over to the counter like he owned the place.

“I’m here to meet with Daichi Kaito,” he said without preamble. Coco cocked a hip, resting a hand on it in a confident fashion.
The man behind they had approached looked up with an expression of boredom. “Is he expecting you?”

“No.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to schedule an appointment, then. Mr. Daichi is very

Yatsuhashi leaned over, his hand not quite slamming onto the countertop. “He’ll want to see me.”

The receptionist glowered up. “I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Coco slipped onto the countertop, sitting half-assed on it, twisted around sideways as she pulled a paper from Yatsuhashi’s belt. “Call the cops, then.” She purred. “They’ll get to see this.”

Yatsuhashi smirked as he watched the man turn to eye Coco and the paper. He didn’t really like playing the bully, but there were times it did feel a bit justified.

“And what,” the receptionist asked cautiously, “is that?”

Yatsuhashi leaned in even closer, until the man began to lean back. Quietly, he spoke. “Proof the Daichi family transported the stolen Atlas military equipment that was used by the White Fang to commit the largest terrorist act in history during the Vital Festival.”

The receptionist stared at Yatsuhashi, mouth agape. After a few seconds he scrambled for the phone on his desk, punching a button. “Kelly, there are two people here to see Mr. Daichi,” he muttered into the phone. “Yes, I know he is in a meeting. End it and get everyone out.” He listened to the other end, face purpling. “I know I don’t have that authority. Do it anyway.” A few more comments, and then the phone was hung up.

He turned back to Yatsuhashi, who was still looming. “Up the stairs, down the hall. Last door on the right.”

Yatsuhashi led the way up the stairs, Coco trailing slightly behind him. He heard her snicker a moment as they reached the top. “You play the big man well,” she commented.

“I am a big man,” he responded, shrugging. “I just don’t usually take advantage of that.”

Coco laughed. “It suits you.”

At the end of the hall the pair opened the door, just in time to step aside as several clearly irritated people approached it from inside. Yatsuhashi graciously stepped aside, letting them filter past, before stepping through himself and holding the door for Coco.

As he closed the door behind him, a fox Faunus stepped up to the pair, anger on her face. “I don’t know who you two think you are, but you had better have a damn good reason to interrupt Mr. Daichi, or there will be hell to pay.”

Coco grinned. “There already is. Nice jacket and skirt combo, by the way. Klein?”

“Who the hell do you

“Kelly, I’ll take it from here, thank you.”

Yatsuhashi glanced over to the man in the doorway to the inner office. Short, greying hair rested atop a face that bore a wrinkled topography. Eyebrows arched downward over eyes narrowed in displeasure. The man’s mouth was bent in a frown. “I’m Daichi. Why don’t you tell me why you’re
Yatsuhashi turned his eyes back to the fox faunus, saying nothing.

“She stays,” Daichi stated, his voice brooking no dissent.

Yatsuhashi shrugged, catching Coco’s growing smile out of the corner of his eye. “It’s your funeral,” he commented. “We have proof you shipped the materials used by the White Fang on its attack on Beacon. If you don’t want us to turn it over to Atlas or Vale, you’re going to tell us everything you know about your dealings with the White Fang.”

Daichi paled, his face rigid. He glanced over toward Kelly, and swallowed, before turning back to face Yatsuhashi. “Bullshit.”

Coco, smirking, held the paper out, pinched between two fingers, offering it to Kelly. A frown on her own face, the fox woman snatched the paper away, looking it over. Her body grew stiff as she read over the contents. Reaching the bottom, her head jerked over to fix Daichi with a stare. “Boss…”

The man sagged against the doorframe, seeming to age years in a moment. He pinched his eyes shut and took a deep breath, before forcing himself upright again. “Come inside. Kelly, coffee, please. Bring some for yourself, too.”

Kelly tore her eyes away from the man, staring a moment at Yatsuhashi and Coco, then back to Daichi. “Y… yes boss.”

Yatsuhashi walked forward through the open doorway, trailed by Coco. He couldn’t help but feel that, no matter how justified it was, something had just been damaged beyond repair as collateral damage, and he was guilty of that.

Chapter End Notes

And now for those announcements I mentioned.

To start with, I recently had some bad news. I've been having a lot of problems with my laptop the past few months. My little sweetie has become rather flaky of late. Fortunately, I do my writing using online resources, so I don't risk losing anything I've already written if she crashes or anything, but it has been making it a troubling process. I finally broke down and let some techie friends look at her, and they've pronounced her to be terminal. She has several pieces of hardware that are beginning to fail, and they say it's only a matter of time until she's gone for good.

Since she's kind of important for all of my writing, whether fanfic or original, this puts me in a bad position. If she happens to fail that will pretty much lock me out of any access to my writing platforms, and this website. If I don't have a replacement, this means I could, without notice, drop out for a while. No updates, no new chapters, no replies to comments, nothing. And unfortunately, getting a replacement before that happens is unlikely.

I seldom talk about my life outside of writing, but the simple matter is that I am disabled, working part time at a seasonal job. We don't work during the summer. That means I
have no means to buy a replacement currently, and am desperately hoping this poor, terminal girl will manage to survive long enough to get those means.

Which leads to the next announcement. In order to attempt to start getting those means, and to further advance my ability to function as a writer that others can enjoy, I have resorted to starting one of those accounts on that site for people who like to *cough* patron *cough* artists they enjoy. Because some of my writing gets rather "adult" in nature, you won't find me using their search (it's in their ToS. Seriously. Look it up.) So to find me, simply go to that site for *cough* patrons *cough* and simply add a /Bookah to the end of their URL. If you can help, I'd love that. I really don't want to drop off the face of the planet when I'm starting to see many readers joining at this stage.

Of course, don't fear. Even if you can't help, none of my stories will be put behind a paywall. I will continue to make my stories available free to everyone. People who patronize me will simply get a few additional perks, is all. Winter Hunt, Spring Hunt, and the future Summer Hunt will continue to post here as regularly as I can.

But this leads to a final announcement. Many of you have come to know me as a fanfic writer, and I love that fact. But I also write original fic. Over the next few days, I will be migrating my original fic from fictionpress to Archive of Our Own. I won't be erasing anything from the old site, but in the future any new works will be put on AO3 only. Spring Hunt will continue to update on fanfiction, but when Summer Hunt starts it will also be AO3 exclusive.

Anyway, that's it for now! Thank you for reading, and for sticking with me all this time!
Oak Harbor

Coco felt herself taking an immediate disliking to Daichi Kaito. She was, as of yet, unsure about Kelly. The interplay between the human and the fox faunus left quite a few questions rolling around in her mind, and provided precious few answers. Whatever was going on between them, it did not seem altogether good.

Daichi took a seat behind the large oak desk that dominated the far wall of the office. Two walls held windows that looked out over the harbor and which framed Daichi with enough light to obscure his features in his own shadow. It was, she had to admit, a good position to help reduce tattletale nervous ticks that might give something away in negotiations.

Fortunately, she thought, this is no negotiation.

Yatsuhashi swaggered up to the desk like a supremely confident sailor on the deck of a rolling ship. Coco almost laughed at the sight, knowing that, despite his ties to the illicit shipping family, he’d never been a sailor in his life. Still, that cocky walk could have fooled anyone, as far as she could tell. Still, she could recognize the powerful image Yatsuhashi was clearly intentionally putting on, and could certainly play that card as well. She put an extra little bit of sexy into her own sashay as she strolled over beside him.

Yatsuhashi sat, his massive bulk filling the seat he’d chosen across from Daichi. He immediately leaned back, looking for all the world like he believed himself to be the most important person in the room, and Coco had to bite back another laugh. Yatsuhashi was confident, sure. But he also tended to be a rock steady and modest individual, who did his best to disarm everyone with a gentle nature when not fighting. Right now, however, it was clear he was playing The Big Man to the hilt.

With a smirk, Coco decided to up his game. Rather than taking a seat of her own, she stepped beside him, then leaned into him, his shoulder against her ribs. She wrapped an arm around his neck, her
fingers idly playing with his hair. She felt his arm come up, and a large hand caught her hip, pulling her tightly against him.

*I almost wish I hadn’t worn the turtleneck. But, hey. The rules don’t actually require you to flash tit to be mistaken for eye candy.*

She grinned, making no attempt to hide it as she continued to play with Yatsuhashi’s hair.

Behind the desk, Daichi sat slightly slumped. His expression remained uncertain, even a tad bit frightened. Still, the shriveled man wasn’t the top of the local shipping office for no reason. Coco watched him evaluate the pair of them in spite of his clear trepidation, then lean forward with a sigh. He addressed Yatsuhashi, clearly dismissing the possibility that Coco might actually be the one who called the shots.

“May I?” he asked, holding his hand out palm up.

Almost carelessly, Yatsuhashi tossed the paper across the desk, letting it land near, not on Daichi’s outstretched hand. “Feel free,” he rumbled.

Daichi picked up the paper and contemplated it for a bit, then let it drop back to the desktop with a grunt. “This is clearly a forgery. The paper is too fresh to have been a bill of lading.”

Coco felt as well as heard Yatsuhashi’s chuckle. “Of course it’s fresh. Did you think I’d walk in here with the original? That’s merely a copy. I assure you, any agent from one of the kingdoms would be able to authenticate it easily.”

The older man groaned, the sound a mixture of fear and annoyance and looked at the paper again, only glancing back up as Kelly entered the room with four steaming mugs of coffee in her hands. She took in the sight of Coco wrapping herself around Yatsuhashi and frowned, her fox-like ears flat with disapproval.

Daichi pushed the paper back across the desk as Kelly began setting cups of coffee down on the desk. “Even if it is just a copy, I fail to see how this proves that we shipped any so called weapons to the White Fang. This manifest clearly says the receiver was a Mr. Torchwick, and that the equipment was labelled as prosthetics.”

Coco noticed Kelly twitch at the name of Roman Torchwick before going around the desk to stand by Daichi’s chair. Subtly, she tapped Yatsuhashi’s temple, sliding her finger towards Kelly’s new position. She felt a subtle shift in his head, and guessed he’d gotten the message.

Yatsuhashi pulled his hand off Coco’s hip so that he could steeple his fingers in front of his face. “There are two flaws in that, Kaito. Kelly, I suspect you could tell me the first.”

The woman frowned, shooting Yatsuhashi a dark look. Still, she noticed as Daichi turned to look up at her, and so she cleared her throat. “Roman Torchwick was captured and arrested before the main attack on Beacon. He was pegged as the ringleader of an attempt to attack Vale by using tunnels to lure Grimm into the city.”

Coco had to bite back a snicker as Daichi’s face curdled. “That could be a coincidence. We run a legitimate business. These,” he tapped the paper, “were a legitimate cargo. Prosthetics, not weapons.”

“Sorry, but no,” Yatsuhashi shook his head. “You got sloppy. I’m sure that if those crates had been opened they would have revealed mechanical arms, alright. But there’s not human, or faunus, alive that requires an arm that weighs 75 lbs. An Atlesian Knight, however…” Yatsuhashi unsteepled his
fingers, one hand going up to idly play with Coco’s colored bang. “These were spare parts for Atlas military hardware.”

Kelly immediately leaned forward. “I don’t recall hearing about any Atlesian Knights during the tunnel attack.”

“There were none. They’d managed to upgrade before the attack, using Paladins instead.” Yatsuhashi grinned, then turned his head to look adoringly up at Coco. “We were there at the beach when it happened and didn’t see a single knight. Isn’t that true, dear?”

This time Coco did let herself snicker at the overly sappy term, and the tone of voice Yatsuhashi said it in. She turned her face to look down at Yatsuhashi. “That’s right, Mr. Daichi.” She quickly leaned down to give him a peck on the lips.

“Daichi?” Kelly turned to look between Yatsuhashi and her boss. “Your name is Daichi?”

Mr. Daichi, eyes narrow, leaned forward. “Just who are you?”

Yatsuhashi dropped any pretenses at being friendly. He leaned forward, bumping Coco upright. “My name is Daichi Yatsuhashi. I’m your several steps removed cousin, Kaito. And the family has a big problem on their hands.”

Daichi gaped at Yatsuhashi, clearly stunned by this revelation. Coco snickered again, this time letting the cruel amusement she was feeling color the sound. Yatsuhashi turned to glance at her, his face regaining its amused affection. “And this,” he said, “is Coco Adel, my partner and lover.”

“You’re huntsmen,” Kelly hissed.

“Yep!” Coco agreed. She slipped her arm back around Yatsuhashi, popping her hip onto the arm of his chair so she could drape herself over him. “And we are here to hunt the people who killed our friends.”

Kelly had moved in an instant, throwing Daichi out of his seat and standing in front of his fallen body. Coco couldn’t be certain exactly where the fox woman had hidden it, but an elaborate dagger, glowing with dust crystals, was pointed towards them, and the woman was baring dangerously sharp looking teeth.

Neither Coco nor Yatsuhashi had bothered moving. She could see out of the corner of her eye the still mostly amused expression on Yatsuhashi’s face, and feel her own smirk still in place. “Thought so,” she purred. “You’re too aggressive to be a secretary.”

“Put the knife away before I have to take it away from you,” Yatsuhashi suggested, his voice casual. “I have no intention of harming either of you. But if I have to disarm you I can’t promise you won’t be.”

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Coco could see the hesitation in Kelly’s eyes as the woman took in how casually the pair of them were acting. The woman was clearly attempting to decide if Yatsuhashi’s comment had been a boast, and if she’d need to call it to protect her boss.

“Do it, Kelly.” Mr. Daichi was slowly climbing to his feet. “We haven’t killed anyone.” His eyes sought out Yatsuhashi’s. “Right?”

“Right.” Yatsuhashi confirmed, and Kelly slowly lowered her arm. The knife remained in her hand, but she was no longer brandishing it. “The family has, frankly, made some very, very bad decisions in this matter, but they haven’t actually killed anyone. So as long as I get what I want, I won’t need
to hurt anyone. Or,” he added, and Coco watched as he leaned forward to take advantage of his massive reach to sweep up the contentious paper on the desk. “Or to show this to Atlas.”

Daichi frowned. “Well, that’s the problem. I can’t give you the White Fang. You know that.”

Kelly fidgetted. “That’s why you hired me, isn’t it?” Still keeping one eye on Coco and Yatsuhashi, she twisted her head enough to contemplate Daichi with her other eye. “You were worried about the White Fang?”

“If they get even a hint that our relationship could be used to trace them, they won’t hesitate to erase all traces. Including those of us who know about it,” Daichi sighed. “Which is why I hired you. Even if I don’t say a word, they might decide to try anyway.”

Kelly growled. “I don’t like this one bit. Random thugs is one thing, but an entire terrorist organization?”

“And now,” Daichi commented, looking back towards Yatsuhashi, “we are in an impossible position regarding said terrorists.”

Coco stirred, sitting back up from where she’d been draped across Yatsuhashi. “If you give us what we want, you risk the White Fang finding out and retaliating. But if you don’t, you run the risk of Vale or Atlas coming down on you.”


“And possibly Oak Harbor as well,” Kelly agreed. “I didn’t know about this particular deal, but I do know this. Most of the shipments that are shipped by this company come through here at one point or another. If any of the kingdoms wanted to shut down the pipeline hard, Oak Harbor is the heart they could stab at.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “That makes sense. And it would be a mess, too. Oak Harbor is too big to simply let Vale or Atlas come walking in to deal with just this office. It would be a blow to their ambitions to become a kingdom themselves, making them appear too weak to be secure. They’d have to resist.”

“And none of these possibilities leave much room for survival. For me, or for the Daichi family.” Mr. Daichi looked as though he had aged in just the last few minutes. “Which means I have to choose the best option I can.”

Something in the man’s wrinkled, desperate expression set Coco on edge. She realized with a start that he’d been backed into a corner by the situation, and that his apparent fear did not accompany a lack of any spine.

Daichi gave a humorless smile. “Neither Vale nor Atlas would come in quietly to investigate this. It’s not their style. And Oak Harbor wouldn’t give them permission to come in anyway. Too much of this city’s wealth is tied up in trade. Trade of all sorts. The White Fang, however, would have no qualms about coming in quiet.” He sighed, then glanced over at the faunus beside him and her knife. “Kelly’s good, but they’d have the numbers. And frankly, they’ve shown they don’t mind using brute force.”

He rose then, his smile completely fake. “Besides, you two are hunters. Even if it meant getting a personal revenge on the White Fang, you would never plunge an innocent city into a war just to force an old man’s hands.” He walked around the desk, opening the door to the office. “Kelly, would you please escort these two out of the building?”
A sour expression on her face, Kelly looked back and forth between Mr. Daichi and Yatsuhashi, then growled. “We’re going to have a long talk later,” she stated.

“I imagine so,” the man agreed. “But for now…”

She sighed, turning to Yatsuhashi. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Coco slipped off the chair arm, standing and straightening her beret. “Well, I’d say it was a pleasure, but…”

Yatsuhashi’s broad hand fell gently against her back. “Come on, Coco. Let’s go.”

She sighed, and turned to lead the way out the door. Once out in the street, she let loose with a string of profanity that would have raised blisters if the road had been asphalt instead of concrete.

“Well,” Yatsuhashi grunted. “Now what?”

“Now we head back to the hotel. He’s right. I’m not willing to get Atlas or Vale in on this. Tensions are high enough they might just do exactly what that asshole predicted. The last thing any of us needs is a war.”

“Yeah,” Yatsuhashi agreed. He stepped in beside her as she began walking. “Oh, and Yatsu? This isn’t over. I don’t know what he’s capable of doing to protect his interests.”

She heard Yatsuhashi grunt. “You may be right. We’ll have to warn the others.”

Just then, Coco’s scroll chirped. She pulled it out and glanced over the screen to see a message from Fox. She felt her feet slide to a stop as she took it in, her hands beginning to tremble.

“Coco?”

“Oh, I am going to kill her. I’m gonna kill her! What the fuck does that rabbit think she’s doing?”

She felt Yatsuhashi’s hands grab her by the shoulders and turn her to face him. “Velvet? What’s she done?”

Coco held the scroll out for Yatsuhashi to see. “She’s gone and infiltrated the White Fang on a whim!”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone!

I had a pretty good week, managing to pound out four chapters! It was great to just feel the groove, and run with it. I hope you are all looking forward to it just as much as I enjoyed doing it.

Just a reminder that I do have a Patreon now and, thanks to circumstances, could really use your support there so that I can continue to do this! (Baby needs a new computer, for one.) So please check me out at patreon.com/Bookah if you have the opportunity. Remember, no one has to support me to get access to this story, or the many others that I work on, this is simply a way to help make things a bit more stable for me.
Thank you all for reading and I hope you look forward to next week’s Spring Hunt!
Hello everyone!

You're getting an early update this week because I have been called away to help a relative who lives half way across the country and have no idea what my schedule and net availability will be like for the next few weeks. Sorry! I'll try to keep posting weekly, but for now I can't promise anything. But don't worry, even if things don't update for a couple of weeks, I will be back! I've had a great week, and as a result I have a buffer of almost six chapters now, so this story is definitely plugging along!

Just as a reminder, I do have a patreon now. My writing will never be hidden behind a paywall, so you will always be able to access it here. But I do need a little support to be able to keep going, so if you can drop by patreon.com/Bookah and consider helping out I would be ever so grateful!

And don't forget to follow me on Twitter! twitter.com/Silent_Fudanshi

Spring Hunt updates Mondays.

GrimmKaiju wrote:

I liked the tension in this chapter and the way Yatsuhashi can change his personality for dealing with situations like this. The “negotiations” ended as I expected them too. Yatsuhashi can’t beat the info out of Daichi or Kelly without blowing the situation up. However I would not be surprised if Neo went to him to do that later on. I could even see Fox being a part of that although he might not agree with it 100%. This story is always getting better and as soon as I get a computer I’m pretty sure I’ll donate to you.

Bookah replies:

Thank you again!

Yes, sometimes things don't go the way you want them to. But don't worry! Our heroes(?) here are quite resourceful.

And on that note, I bet you're going to love the new chapter...

Oak Harbor

Velvet winced as Yatsuhashi examined the bump on her head. He’d seated himself on the foot of her bed the moment he’d followed Coco through the door and immediately began fussing with her hair, trying to get a good look at her self-chosen injury. The pain of his prodding wasn’t enough to make her eyes water, or even to encourage the dull ache she felt to blossom into a full fledged headache, but it was enough to capture and keep her attention.

Something that Coco was intently attempting to do as well.
“You are insane,” her team leader insisted. “Absolutely bonkers. Clinical.”

“It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“It could have gotten you killed!” Coco roared, her face beat red.

“Coco, calm down please,” Yatsuhashi commented, still pulling apart the hair over Velvet’s goose egg. “She has to have a headache from this. You should have let your aura heal it, Velve.”

“And let them know I had an activated aura? No way,” she sulked. She should have expected them to be angry about what she’d done. After all, she’d gone in without any backup if anything had gone wrong, and with her aura deliberately suppressed as well. She had to agree with Coco. It was the stupider idea she’d ever come up with. She deserved Coco’s wrath.

“For Oum’s sake, Velvet! Don’t you ever try something like that again!” Coco barked.

In the corner, Fox smirked. “You know Coco’s only this angry because she’s still in love with you, right Velve?”

Coco immediately rounded on Fox. “This isn’t the fucking time, Fox!”

Velvet watched as the dark skinned man spread his arms in surrender. “Just trying to kill the mood. You’re a little intense right now.”

“The hell you are!”

Velvet made a mental note to thank Fox later. She couldn’t think of the last time she’d seen Coco this angry, and it was nice to have Fox redirect it away, even if only for a moment.

“I’m serious,” Fox continued. “You’re scary!”

“Oh, you think I’m scary? You think I’m mad? You haven’t seen anything yet! If I ever get my hands on that little girlfriend of yours I’m going to kill her! She actually helped Velvet with this lunatic idea!”

“So I take it that’s a no to being my best man at the wedding?”

Velvet stared as Coco’s mouth worked like a fish out of water, the woman’s anger clearly too highly stoked for her to remain articulate. Several seconds went by as she simply stood there, her face purple.

“Too far?” Fox quipped.

Coco screamed. It was an agonizingly loud thing filled with fury and utter frustration. The woman spun around, a flash of red mixed in with brown as her hair whiplashed behind her, and she stomped toward the door.

“Where are you going?” Yatsuhashi asked, letting go of Velvet’s head to stand up off the bed.

“To get a drink! Or five! And you can’t stop me! Not this time!” The woman almost tore the door off its hinges, then slammed it behind her as she left.

“I’ll go stop her,” Yatsuhashi declared, then exited as well, though he was far more gentle with the door.

Velvet stared at the door in the stunned silence that remained behind. After a moment she shook

“Not really. Coco’s just terrified of the risk you took,” Fox said, coming up behind her. He put an arm around her shoulder and pulled her into a sidelong hug. “Once she’s calmed down she’ll be able to think about this rationally and recognize the opportunities that come with it.”

“Sure,” Velvet replied, her voice dull even to her own ears. “Like the opportunity to get killed, or kidnapped by the White Fang.”

“See?” Fox quipped. “Those are excellent opportunities.”

Velvet snorted, though she didn’t feel up to putting much strength behind it.

Something flickered at the corner of her eye, and the strength missing from her exhalation suddenly flared up. Angered at the appearance of a very unwelcome mental tic, she whipped her head around, swearing. “Dammit, Tawnee, stop…”

Neo starred at Velvet, her expression cautious. She slowly shifted her heterochromatic eyes to Fox, then twirled a finger beside her temple,

“I’m pretty sure she thinks that too,” Fox commented wryly. He then carefully looked at Velvet. “Somebody hit her in the head pretty hard earlier.”

Velvet heard a distinctly feminine sniff as Neo tossed her head. The small woman pointed at Velvet. “Yes, yes. I know she asked you to.”

Still feeling some of the adrenaline surge from her anger at the ghostly Tawnee (and irrational annoyance that it had not, in fact, been her), Velvet shrugged out of Fox’ hug. “She’ would like to remind you she is right here.”

Fox chuckled. “Why, so she is.” He patted the bed beside him, opposite from Velvet. “And I suspect that she won’t bite if Neo were to have a seat here.”

“Don’t count on it.” Velvet dropped her eyes off of Neo as the smaller woman strolled by. Neo didn’t sit next to Fox, but she did get closer, dropping into one of the seats with a graceful spin of one leg as it went astride the other. Velvet contemplated the apparent ease the girl had displayed after Fox had vouched for her, and cocked her head to the side to better glance at Fox.

“You were joking about the wedding, right?”

She could hear Neo quietly snickering as Fox gave a wry grin. “Well, yeah. It did defuse the situation nicely, though.”

“In the same way stepping on a landmine defuses it… Coco’s going to kill you, you know.”

“Only if Yatsu fails to keep her from the bottle.”

Velvet shook her head, then turned to contemplate Neo again. She still didn’t know what to make of the woman. She was a terrorist, even if she had been frightenened into it. But she had also given Velvet the opportunity, and the cover story that opened that opportunity up. Velvet grunted a little, then leaned forward a bit, deciding to give the small woman a chance. “So… why are you here, anyway?”
Neo casually fished her phone out of her bolero and began pecking away at it. After a moment Fox’
scroll chirped. He pulled it from a pocket, glancing at it, then held it out for Velvet to see.

*I was curious if you learned anything.*

Velvet frowned. “I suppose you do deserve that much, since you helped me get it in the first place.”

The phone pinged again.

*Also, I do have to make sure Fox isn’t cheating on me.*

Velvet gave Neo a cross look. “She is joking, right?”

Fox shrugged as Neo smirked.

*Of course I am. It’s not hard to miss that you have other plans. You’re very fun to tease about it.*

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Velvet felt her skin heat up.

“Now now, Neo. Be nice.”

To Velvet’s surprise, Neo shrugged and set her scroll down, still smiling. Velvet gave Fox a sidelong
glance. “You’re absolutely sure she’s not jealous?”

“Who knows?”

Velvet glanced back to Neo as the girl stuck out her tongue. “Maybe I should join Coco in that
drink.”

Fox snorted, but any further comment was forestalled by the room door opening a bit too forcefully.
Velvet saw Neo tense, but remain seated, as Coco stomped into the room, followed closely by
Yatsuhashi.

“Alright,” Coco announced. “Since a certain rock headed meat wall won’t let me get near the bar,
let’s hear it.” She glowered at Velvet, though her skin was a less angry shade of red.

Velvet carefully shifted her eyes to Neo, then back to Coco. “I suppose this will save time, since Neo
wanted to know what I found out as well.”

She could see Coco stiffen, her head slowly turning to pin Neo down with her gaze. Neo sat a bit
more upright, her hands slowly raised in front of her in a clear gesture of surrender. The two stared at
one another a moment, and then Coco slowly turned her look back on Velvet. “Fine. Tell us.”

Velvet sighed as Yatsuhashi very gently tugged Coco back a pace, then lowered her to a seating
position on the room’s other bed, sitting himself down beside her. “Alright. First, they clearly have
no idea who I am. They believed my story that I had been attacked for being a faunus.”

“Did you really tell them that?” Fox kicked back in his position on her bed, propping himself up with
his elbows.

“No. I told them I fell.” Velvet sighed. “It’s kind of become the accepted excuse for mysterious
injuries, so it really doesn’t fool anyone when one of us explains our injuries away like that.” Out of
the corner of her eye she saw Coco twitch, followed by Yatsuhashi placing a hand on her shoulder.
Velvet lifted her hand to touch the split in her lip. “Add that to the fact my little injuries were clearly
not something you’d get in a fall and they all came up with that on their own.”
Fox whistled quietly. “I suppose they’d believe the story more strongly if it was the one their own minds were already happy to provide.”

Velvet nodded. “Anyway, they’re passing through, on their way to Mistral.”

Coco gave Velvet a sharp look. “They confirmed that?”

“They even asked me if I wanted to come along.”

Fox popped up off his elbows. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope.”

“There’s no way the White Fang would operate so openly. Not after Beacon. The whole world is looking for them.”

Velvet gave Fox a deep look. “They never said they were White Fang.”

At that, Neo leaned forward, looking cross. She pursed her lips, her eyes trading colors several times.

Velvet glanced over towards the potentially hostile girl. “Hey, I didn’t say they weren’t White Fang. I just said that they never admitted it. And I was careful not to ask.”

“Why’s that?”

Velvet thought about how to answer Yatsuhashi’s question before starting. “Even before Beacon, the White Fang was very controversial among the Faunus. Some of us despised them as zealots making things worse for the Faunus, while others saw them as avenging heroes finally taking a stand. After Beacon, those opinions have only grown more extreme. I can only guess that they were being careful about it, and were trying to sound me out before I had the chance to sell them out.”

Coco leaned forward. “So what did you tell them?”

“That I came here after Beacon because Vale was becoming too dangerous for Faunus. And that this place wasn’t feeling all that safe either. That’s when they invited me along. ‘Mistral’s a fine place,’ they said. ‘They care more about your money than your ears.’”

“They’re not that far off with that,” Yatsuhashi replied. “Oh, there’s still some bigotry, but I imagine Vacuo is the only place more open.”

“Menagerie?” Fox posited.

“Is not the most open place in the world,” Velvet disagreed. “Now, I haven’t been there, but we hear rumors of that semi-sort-of promised land. All faunus are welcomed there with open arms, regardless of where they have come from. Humans need not apply, however. In a strange way, it’s an even more closed off society than Atlas.”

Fox nodded, and flopped back down on the bed. “I guess that makes sense.”

“So, did you tell them you’d be joining them?”

Velvet glanced over at Coco. “No. I told them I’d have to think about it. I’d only just met them, after all.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “How’d they take that?”
“They told me I had a little time. They’re going out by sea, and the ship doesn’t arrive for two more days.”

Coco nodded thoughtfully at that. “Did they tell you what ship?”

“Not yet. I think they want me to commit first. They’re playing cautious.”

“Gee, I wonder why?” Fox snarked.

Coco frowned. “Alright Velve.” She sighed. “Alright. I admit it. You did good. Just don’t ever scare me like that again. I don’t want to lose you.”

“Told you,” Fox snarked.

“Oh, shut up Fox.”

Velvet could hear Neo quietly laughing. “Well,” she sighed. “I’m just glad I got away with it. It was harder than I thought it would be. I wanted to strangle them.”

Coco slipped off of the bed, walking over to her. She stopped, one hand on her hip, the other on Velvet’s shoulder. “Which makes me feel really guilty about this, but I have to ask. Do you think you could keep the act up?”

Velvet blinked, a pit in her stomach. “Why?”

“Yatsu’s family called our bluff. We won’t be getting any help from that direction. Right now, your new friends are the only lead we have when it comes to finding them and their equipment. You’re going to have to find out which boat they’re taking.”

Velvet closed her eyes. “I’ll have to try then, I guess.”

She felt Coco pull her up onto her feet and a tight hug wrap around her. “Sorry. I wish I didn’t have to ask this. Frankly, it scares me to death.”

Velvet brought her hands up to complete the embrace. “Me too, Coco. Me too.”
Spring Hunt - Chapter 19: Yatsuhashi

Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt updates Mondays.

And it's time once again! Thank you all for reading! You have no idea how much I appreciate knowing you keep coming back for more.

Just as a reminder, I do have a twitter (@Silent_Fudanshi) and Patreon account (patreon.com/Bookah). Please feel free to follow me or contact me through those means!

And on to your comments!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another great chapter as usual. Coco’s reaction was about what I expected and having Velvet undercover could work out good but it might not as well. Fox’s way of “defusing/redirecting” Coco’s anger was amusing and it would seem that he and Neo have been talking more. The next few characters will be very interesting and I will be looking forward to them.

Bookah replies:

The next few chapters will be very interesting indeed! And there may even be some work under the covers. *cough*

I am having entirely too much fun with this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Oak Harbor

“Excuse me, miss.”

Yatsuhashi watched as the sailor he’d just addressed turned to look up at him. The sailor had an expression that was half irritation, half resignation. “It’s not ‘miss’. I’m not a she, I’m a they. If that’s too much for you, just use my name, Matte.”

He blinked a couple of times, then shrugged. While he’d never encountered someone who was neither male nor female, he’d heard about it before. He guessed that such individuals probably suffered even more persecution than the Faunus did. At least Faunus fit neatly in people’s preconceived boxes. He certainly wasn’t about to join in that any more than he would harass a Faunus.

Realizing he’d paused too long, he apologized. “Ah, sorry about that Matte.”

They shrugged, then scratched the back of their neck. “Awe, don’t worry about it. I’m just a bit sensitive to it, is all. It seems like I have to mention it a dozen times a day.” Matte shrugged, then gazed back up at Yatsuhashi. “Anyway, what can I help you with?”
“Your ship wouldn’t happen to be leaving for Mistral tomorrow, would it?”

“Nope! We just came from there.” Matte turned and gestured towards one of the ships nearby. “That’s mine right there. Lovely little thing, eh? The Pride of Place. We’re a passenger liner doing the Anima - Sanus - Menagerie run. We head down the coast of Anima for the next week, then pop through the Sea Feilong Straights and move on to Menagerie. We won’t make landfall near Mistral for weeks.”

“Menagerie?” Yatsuhashi felt surprise at this. “I thought they weren’t too friendly towards Humans.”

Matte looked chagrined, scratching the back of their neck. “Well, as long as we stay at the docks we don’t get too much grief. Besides, there aren’t that many ships that’ll go to Menagerie on account of all the grimm, so they tolerate us better than most, I suspect.”

“I see,” Yatsuhashi rumbled. “Well, thanks anyway.”

Matte nodded. “Hey, if you’re trying to get to Mistral, I recommend you try that one. The Daichi Mariner.” They pointed at a large ship a bit further down the docks. “I think they’re leaving tomorrow. They go north around Anima and put in at Wind Path. Mistral’s just a short distance away from there.”

“Why around the North?”

“The water is a lot colder. Not many grimm can survive it. That’s part of why Atlas is so safe.”

“I can see how that would work. Thanks Matte.”

“Sure,” Matte waved.

He ambled on down the harbor front, drawing closer to the large ship. Unlike the one Matte had pointed out as theirs, this one bore few windows of any significant size in the hull, simply relegating those to the large superstructure aft. No elegant liner, this ship was a working vessel, with most of its space dedicated to cargo, and passengers being an afterthought, assuming it even had space for passengers.

Eventually Yatsuhashi drew near the monster. Looking around, he quickly found a sailor manning a gangplank that led into the ship. “Hey, sailor.”

The man looked around, frowning. Spying Yatsuhashi, an easy task, the man gave Yatsuhashi a onceover. “Whadaya want?”

“Are you taking on passengers?”

The man’s face looked sour. “Nope.”

“You’re full?”

The sailor spit on the dock. “We’re not taking on passengers. Get lost.” He turned around and walked back up the gangplank toward the ship.

Frowning, Yatsuhashi turned back the way he’d come, heading for the town.

“You’re right,” he told Coco later. They were together again in the hotel, along with Fox and Velvet. Neo was nowhere to be seen, having disappeared sometime after Coco had hatched the plan to have Velvet continue her infiltration work.
Coco frowned. “They won’t let us go aboard?”

“Nope. The sailor guarding the gangplank looked me over and declared they weren’t taking passengers.”

“Only they are,” Velvet muttered. “The White Fang.”

Coco shook her head. “It’s a Daichi boat. He’s probably warning every ship they own not to take on a really big huntsman in green and his crazy ass girlfriend. You could get aboard with the White Fang, and I bet Fox could possibly get passage if he went alone. But Yatsu and I are boned.”

Fox cocked his head. “What about Neo?”

Yatsuhashi had to laugh. “Do you think they could stop her? She hid from us on a truck.”

Fox laughed in reply. “True.”

“What about hiding us?”

Yatsuhashi turned back to Coco to see the thoughtful expression on her face. “Coco?”

“Neo has no reason to love us. She doesn’t even have reason to see us as anything but enemies. She’s still after Ruby, and we still aim to stop her. But she seems happy to work with us when it comes to inconveniencing the White Fang. Do you suppose she could actually help us get aboard and stay hidden?”

Yatsuhashi arched an eyebrow. “What’s in it for her? Besides inconveniencing the White Fang?”

Coco gestured with her chin towards Fox. “Him.”

Fox stared at Coco, a look of consternation on his face. “Uh, Coco. I’m not sure what you are getting at here…”

Velvet snorted. “I am.”

Yatsuhashi turned and contemplated the hare while she composed her thoughts. “She’s lonely. Since losing Torchwick, she hasn’t had anyone she can be around to talk to, or relax around. It has to be desperately lonely for her. You not only seem willing to tolerate her, but to actually sympathize with her.”

Coco nodded. “Exactly. I’m still not quite sure what to make of any of that, by the way. I trust you, Fox. I really do. But at the end of the day, you two are still on opposite sides when it comes to defending people vs terrorizing them.”

“Perhaps,” Fox allowed, and Yatsuhashi couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow at Fox’s quiet non-agreement. “But I do see your point. If she had a chance to travel openly for a time with someone who she likes being around, she might be willing to smuggle you aboard to do it.”

“Do you think she’d be able to?” Yatsuhashi asked.

“I don’t know. She still hasn’t told us how here semblance works. It might only apply to her, it might not.”

“So ask her.”

Fox nodded and pulled out his scroll, quickly writing up a message and sending it off.
“So, assuming that she can do it somehow,” Coco mused, “what about you two? Velvet, you can get aboard with the White Fang.”

“I could,” Velvet said softly. Yatsuhashi could tell by the droop of her ears that she wasn’t happy with it, however. “But if I do, that means staying with them until whatever point we make our move. Pretending is something I can do for an hour or two, but for days on end?” She shook her head, then muttered something acidic under her breath, glaring at a space off to her left for a second. “I don’t think I could do it. And I definitely know I don’t want to.” She looked down, and Yatsuhashi felt the urge to walk over and hug her as she sunk into a bit of a glum funk.

Coco frowned, but then nodded. “I understand. And team leader or not, I am not going to push you anywhere you don’t want to go.” She sighed. “I suppose that means finding out if Neo can smuggle all of us onboard without anyone noticing.”

“Not necessarily,” Fox disagreed, and Yatsuhashi found himself turning to contemplate the man. “It means sneaking the three of you on board, yes. Having Velvet come aboard without the White Fang would look very suspicious to them, so we’d have to keep her hidden. And the crew clearly are looking out for you two, so you would need to be hidden as well. But I just bet Neo and I are off their radar. If they are still taking on passengers, the two of us could book passage and be able to roam the ship as freely as the White Fang.”

Just then, Fox’ scroll buzzed. He looked down, reading what appeared to be a fairly lengthy message, before glancing back up. “She says she can sneak people aboard, though it would have to be one at a time.”

Yatsuhashi snorted. “That was an awful long message to say that little.

Fox looked a bit sheepish. “She also said something about sharing a cabin with me…”

Velvet snickered, stirring from her usual passive gloom. “Someone’s got a girlfriend. You’ll have to tell us if she tastes like ice cream.”

“Velvet…”

“No,” Coco interrupted. “She’s right.” Yatsuhashi snorted in amusement at the scandalized look Fox gave Coco. The woman immediately waved Fox off. “Not about the ice cream. No one needs to know that. But Velve is right about her being your girlfriend.”

“She’s not really my girlfriend.”

“You're right. She’s your wife.”

Fox gawked at Coco.

“Hey, you’re the one who asked me to be your best man,” Coco grinned, and Yatsuhashi couldn’t help be amused at the expression Fox’s face took on as he realized Coco had flipped his poorly timed joke back around on him. “But seriously. If you two were newlyweds you’d have reason to ask for a particularly large and unshared cabin.”

“Fucking on the furniture…” Velvet drawled, and Yatsuhashi fought back a snicker as Fox flipped the hare faunus off.

The man frowned a moment, dropping his digit impudicus, but then shrugged. “A large cabin would mean a place large enough for the three of you to hide.”
Coco nodded. “It’d be cramped. Even a big ship like that isn’t exactly going to have spacious rooms. But it would work. And, of course, if you hang up the sign keeping any of the staff from entering, well, it’s only natural given how amorous you are, Fox.”

Yatsuhashi felt himself giggling right along with Velvet, as Fox rolled his eyes. “Very funny.”

Just then Fox’ scroll buzzed again. He dropped his eyes down to the screen, then snorted. “Neo thinks it’s funny, too.”

Yatsuhashi looked around, spotting the girl lounging in the armchair behind him. “When did you get here?”

The woman smiled, giving a casual shrug.

“Just now,” Fox answered for her. “I didn’t see her get in the room, but I saw her sit.” Neo tapped at her scroll, making Fox’ scroll quiver again. He read the message, then rolled his eyes again.

“Not going to read us that one?” Yatsuhashi asked.

“Nope,” Fox replied. He turned to Neo and waggled a finger. “And you’d better get used to disappointment.”

“As much fun as it is to watch you two flirt, we probably need to put this in action,” Coco frowned. “Fox, Neo.” Coco turned to face Neo directly, then paused a moment, thinking. “Neo, if you are willing, would you mind going with Fox and booking passage in the largest cabin you think you can come up with?”

Yatsuhashi watched as Neo carefully evaluated Coco, then glanced at Fox. He could see Fox give a very small nod to the diminutive woman, bringing Neo to nod and smile.

“Thank you. While you are there, see if you can figure out the best way to get us aboard.” Coco frowned. “As much as I don’t want to, I’m having to trust you with this part of things. You understand, right?”

To Yatsuhashi’s surprise, Neo gave a solemn nod, then tapped on her scroll. A moment later Fox spoke up. “She knows she hasn’t exactly given us reason to trust her.”

Coco nodded. “And yet here we are.” Coco locked eyes with Neo for a moment, then deliberately turned her head aside. “So… good luck. Let us know as soon as possible if this won’t work. The ship sails tomorrow. If we can’t get on board, and are unable to figure out a plan B quickly this little jaunt is over.”

Neo nodded, and then rose. She stepped to the doorway, opening it, then turned to look at Fox.

Rolling his eyes, he hurried over to her. She held her hand out for him and, after a moment, he took it, strolling out the door with her and looking surprisingly whipped.

Yatsuhashi turned and looked at Coco with surprise. “Well, he looked shockingly comfortable with this.”

Coco sighed. “Just because he doesn’t have a sex drive doesn’t mean he can’t be interested in a long walk on a beach with an attractive girl.”

“I don’t know about him, but she definitely finds him attractive,” Velvet added.
Yatsuhashi quirked his eyebrow, curious about the odd tone to Velvet’s voice. “Oh?”

Sighing, Velvet tapped the side of her nose. “Definitely attractive.”

He rolled his eyes. “Well, that gives me an idea of what she said that Fox wouldn’t relay…”

Coco snorted. “And why she’s going to be disappointed. Can he even get it up?”

“Coco!” Velvet flung a pillow at Coco.

Coco took the pillow to the face and went over onto Fox’ bed in a heap. She pulled the pillow away, looking as innocent as the day was long. “What?” she asked. “We were all thinking it.”

Yatsuhashi pinched the bridge of his nose. “Well, I am now. Thanks Coco.”

“You’re welcome.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick end note about Matte.

In case anyone doesn't recognize them, Matte is the mate aboard the ship that took Blake and Sun to Menagerie in Season 4, Episode 3. Though Rooster Teeth themselves have not given any official comment on the matter, Kendra Ziegler, who provides the voice, has stated that their head cannon for the character is that they are a nonbinary individual named Matte Sky, who prefers they/them pronouns.

I have several nonbinary friends, and one of them asked me if I would be willing to drop Matte into the story in some minor way. I couldn't be more happy to do so as my gay, gay little heart understands the importance of finding characters like yourself in fiction.

Representation matters, yo.
Oak Harbor

Fox was strolling down the street, holding hands with a surprisingly pretty girl. Oh, she wasn’t as pretty as usual, in his opinion. The moment the door to the hotel room had closed behind her, Neo had changed her appearance with the slow moving red light show she’d allowed him to see only once before. She now sported black hair, purple eyes, and, to his surprise, the uniform of an Atlas airship officer. She’d even managed to sneak in a wedding band on her left hand. It was a look he had not expected, and pretty enough, if a touch severe. But he had to admit to himself that, as lovely as she was now, he found her more attractive in her natural state.

He stifled a snort at his train of thought. Yes, he lacked any real desire for sex, even when Neo had jokingly messaged him suggesting they kick the others out of the cabin for a night and enjoy their fake honeymoon thoroughly. But that did not mean he lacked any sense of attraction, or romance, and, despite himself, Neo was becoming surprisingly welcome to him. He couldn’t help but marvel at the perversity of it, given how just two months ago she had attempted to kill him, and had almost succeeded.

He decided to unpack all of that later, instead choosing to focus more on Neo, much like a new husband probably was supposed to. He glanced down to her as they walked down the street hand in hand, and smiled. “So, what’s with the new look?”
Neo glanced up, smiling back. She brought her free hand up to her mouth, hooking two fingers into fangs, then gestured to her eyes before wagging her hand before her torso.

“Ah, they’ve seen you before.” He watched Neo nod in reply, then elaborated. “Oh, right. The tunnel attack.”

Neo sighed, looking a bit sad at the reminder of who she had been with at that time. Fox let go of her hand and reached around behind her to take her shoulder, tugging her up against his side. It was a bit of an awkward way to walk, but Neo quickly took to it, wrapping her arms around his waist. He was amused to discover that the top of her head barely reached his rib cage in this position. He smiled down at her, and saw her smile back.

“Better,” he said. “This is supposed to be our honeymoon, remember?”

He could feel the shaking of her laughter against his hip as they strolled awkwardly down the lane. After a few moments Neo let go her hug about his waist and took his hand in hers again, allowing them to speed up.

A half an hour later found them standing before the gangplank of a truly impressive ship, with the Daichi name painted across the stern. Fox allowed himself to gawk a bit as he stood there. He’d seen large ships before, sailing into the harbor of Vale, but he’d never actually been that close to one. They looked smaller from a distance, he realized.

The sailor walking down the gangplank chuckled, clearly amused. “First time, huh?”

“Well, it’s my first time being this close, at least,” Fox admitted.

The man chuckled again. “You get used to it.”

“I suppose you’d have to, or you’d never get anything done.”

“True enough. Now, what can I do for you two?”

“We’re looking to book passage to Wind Path. She took leave for our honeymoon, but she needs to be in Mistral before her leave ends so she can catch a military transport to Atlas.”

“Newlyweds, huh?” The man grinned. “You’re in luck then. I believe the bridal suite is still available. Let me just go fetch the purser so he can take your money.”

Next to him, Neo laughed, and Fox found himself smiling. “Taking my money would be just fine. Right sweetheart?” He leaned down to her, smiling as her face turned up to his before she did a quick toetip bob upward to meet him for a chaste, but surprisingly pleasant kiss. He had to school himself to not reveal his surprise at Neo’s bold move.

“You two are entirely too cute for an old sailor. Just wait here. I’ll be right back.”

“We’ll be waiting.”

Almost an hour after dark, Fox watched as Coco suddenly appeared out of seemingly nowhere. Neo was more or less wrapped around Coco’s waist, and Coco seemed a touch unsteady, but regained her balance with a huntress’ haste.

As quickly as she’d appeared, Neo was gone again.

“Well,” Coco mumbled. “That was a thing.” She dropped a backpack on the floor.
Fox grinned. “More importantly, it worked.”

He watched as Coco did a slow circle, evaluating the room they were in. “It’s a little bigger than our dorm room. Only one bed, though.”

“It’s quite a bit larger, in fact. It’s nearly twice the size. You’re right about the bed, though. Fortunately, there are several couches. This ship was clearly meant to keep people from feeling cramped during weeks long voyages.”

Coco nodded. “It’ll be pretty hard to hide if they insist on cleaning the place.”

“If it comes to that, I’m sure there are plenty of places to hide aboard a ship this large. Especially if they aren’t aware anyone snuck aboard in the first place.”

“True,” Coco agreed. “Good thing, too. I checked while you were getting the tickets. This boat takes almost two weeks to make it to Wind Path.”

“Long time to be cooped up,” Fox observed. He felt himself grow a bit concerned with the task of keeping everyone hidden that long. “And there’s no way they’ll go two weeks without changing the sheets.”

“Especially in the bridal suite,” Coco laughed. Fox resisted the urge to plant his face in his hand. Fortunately he was rescued from Coco’s unreserved sense of humor by the appearance of Velvet.

Like Coco, Velvet took a moment to quite get her bearings in the room. As soon as she had she immediately walked over to a chair in the corner, plopping down in it and crossing her arms over her chest. “That was weird.”

“Unpleasant?”

“No,” Velvet shook her head, looking at Fox. “I wouldn’t say that. Just… weird.”

Fox glanced over to Coco, who nodded. “She’s right. Though I imagine it was a bit less weird for her than me.”

“Why’s that?”

Coco laughed awkwardly. “Her boobs were hitting me in the butt.”

“They’re surprisingly big,” Velvet muttered.

Fox shook his head. “You just defied physics by teleporting in some strange and weird way that can only be explained by saying ‘Aura’, and her size was the part that struck you as weird?”

“I never claimed to be completely rational,” Coco shrugged.

“Thank goodness. You’re not delusional,” he snarked, then contemplated the space again. Team CFVY had been almost constant companions for a long time now, but he wasn’t completely certain how they were going to fare in this space. Previously, they’d been able to take moments to get away and have some time apart. This, however…

“We’re gonna wind up killing each other, aren’t we?”

“I’m not ruling the possibility out,” Coco agreed.

In an instant, Yatsuhashi stood between Coco and Velvet. Even with a shockingly tiny looking Neo
wrapped around his thigh, he didn’t so much as lean, let alone wobble. Fox watched Coco frown, then reach over and punch the giant in the arm.

“What was that for?” Yatsuhashi asked, an eyebrow arched in confusion.

“General principles,” Coco replied.

Fox rolled his eyes, before he felt a tug on his arm. Glancing over he saw Neo smiling up at him, pulling his arm to guide him to the bed. Only two steps later he wound up sitting on the bed, his legs kicked out before him and his back against the headboard, with Neo proudly sitting in front of him, leaned back against his chest.

He took in the bemused look Coco was giving the pair of them, and shrugged. “I guess dibs on the bed have been called.”

Yatsuhashi chuckled. “Well, Coco did say that Neo could have you if she agreed to help out.”

“Gee, thanks for the help,” Fox snarked. Nevertheless he wrapped his arms around the small woman, earning a small giggle.

“I’m regretting it already,” Coco mused. She turned and sat in the remaining chair, then waited as Yatsuhashi settled on the floor and leaned back against her legs. “Anyway, so now that everyone is here, listen up. Fox and I were realizing that, even if this space is bigger than our dorm room, being stuck in here for two weeks will be, frankly, maddening. And that’s assuming no one comes in insisting on cleaning the place. So here’s the deal.” Fox watched her glance around at everyone as though evaluating. “The ship won’t be leaving until tomorrow morning in the wee hours. Hopefully we’ll all be asleep at that point. But until then, there’s going to be quite a bit of activity going on aboard as they finish loading cargo. Fox, Neo, you two can stroll about as you like, you’re supposed to be on board. But don’t draw suspicion by spending your honeymoon walking the decks all night.”

Fox nodded, and Neo reached up and patted him on the cheek. “You don’t have to pretend in here, you know.” He sighed as she merely laughed quietly in reply.

“Right,” Coco drawled, watching them with something akin to distaste on her face. “The rest of us are staying here all night. We’ll have to remain in here all day tomorrow as well. I hope everyone brought a good book. Again, Fox and Neo will be able to wander around all day, leaving us some room.”

“They do have some nice public spaces,” Fox agreed. “They are primarily a freighter, but the ship was built with some passenger traffic in mind. They have a small library, a work out room, a pool, a lounge, things like that.”

“Don’t make us jealous, Fox.” Coco made a mock threatening gesture. “Alright, tomorrow night, sometime in the middle of it, the three of us will sneak out. The cleaning staff should let a “keep out” sign keep them away for a day, but after that all bets are off. We’re going to have to find a nice niche to hide away in for the trip, and only wander around at night. Even then, we’ll want to be cautious. Fortunately we brought our own food.” Coco nodded to the packs each of them had dropped to the floor after being ported in by Neo.

“Goody,” Velvet replied, sounding anything but enthused. “Cold rations are my favorite.”

“You don’t like it, you don’t eat it,” Coco shot back, though she was smiling as she said it. “From that point on, we’ll work two angles. Fox, try to figure out how many White Fang are onboard. The three of us will try to see if we can locate White Fang equipment in the cargo.”
“And once we know?” Fox asked.

“That we can make a definitive plan based on hard facts.”

“Works for me.” He shifted, gently moving Neo aside and checked the bed stand clock. “For now, though, I’m hungry. Want to find out if the lounge is open after 9:00?”

The woman smiled and bounced off the bed, setting her tightly bound black hair to bouncing.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” He slid off the bed himself, walking to the cabin door.

“Don’t be out past curfew,” Yatsuhashi joked as Fox put a hand to the door handle.

“Yes, dad.” He heard the man chuckle as he opened the door, holding it for Neo before stepping out himself.

Outside the cabin, Neo and Fox stood in a fairly narrow passageway. Her hand immediately sought his out, her fingers tangling with his and giving a quick squeeze. He smiled at the fact that, even as tall as he was, he and Neo were thin enough to still be able to walk side by side.

Another passenger turned into the passage from a crossway, but paused when he saw them coming. The man glanced down to their hands, then smiled and backed up down the hall, making room for them to take the cross passage before heading down the way they had come from. He heard Neo chuckle as they headed for the outside door.

“What?” he asked, turning to look down at the amused woman at his side. He watched as she pondered for a moment before fishing out her scroll and typing on it one handed. Glancing down at the screen, he arched an eyebrow. “Do you really believe he thought we made a cute couple?”

Neo nodded her head, then pocketed her scroll. She turned sideways to face him, and waved her hand for him to duck down. Curious, he did as she bid, only for her to pop up on tiptoes to place her lips against his.

Without the audience this time, he couldn’t distract himself from the sensation. Neo’s lips were soft, with just the right amount of moisture. He could feel her holding her breath as she remained on her toes, her free hand coming up to grip his shirt for stability.

It was nice, he thought. He’d certainly never sought out a partner to experience the phenomenon of kissing with before, so it was a new experience for him. He knew some people with the same lack of sex drive he possessed also distinctly loathed being touched. He didn’t mind it, so much, and in fact the kiss certainly stirred certain pleasant emotions in him. It didn’t stir up any sexual desire, of course. But it certainly felt warm and companionable. He could live with that, he supposed.

A cough broke the kiss, as they both turned to look up at a very large faunus, easily the equal of Yatsuhashi in size. The large man easily filled the passageway, and he contemplated the pair with an expression of discontent.

“Sorry,” Fox said, having the good grace to look embarrassed. “Kind of got lost in the moment.” He half picked up half guided Neo into a narrow alcove beside a door, then squeezed in beside her, making room for the giant bear faunus to get past. As the huge man went around the corner into the main passageway, Fox peeled himself out of the alcove, gently pulling Neo with him. He took her by the hand and led her out of the outer door and onto the outside gangway circling that deck of the ship’s castle.

“Was that him?” he asked quietly.
Neo nodded, then made a quick fang gesture in front of her mouth.

“Well, now we know that he’s on board, at least.”

Neo nodded, then turned and began pulling him toward the lounge, clearly eager for some food. Fox chuckled wryly at the way the chance encounter had gone down, and followed her, equally eager, and not necessarily just for food.
Spring Hunt - Chapter 21: Coco

Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt updates on Mondays

Once again I relieve the doldrums that are Monday with another chapter for your enjoyment! I do hope everyone finds some solace in its existing. I know I do!

Just as a reminder, I'd love to hear your thoughts. Feel free to drop me a line here, or through either my patreon (www.patreon.com/Bookah) or my twitter (twitter.com/Silent_Fudanshi).

One additional note: My computer is slowly dying on me owing to an increasing collection of hardware faults. If I drop off the face of the planet for a time it will be because the computer finally died for good and I can't afford to replace it for now. So don't freak out! I'll be back just as soon as I can.

Speaking of your thoughts:

Incursio5991 writes:

Well this was a great chapter, I feel bad for team cvy, being stuck in a room for two weeks would drive me insane, but even worse even at night if they snuck out, it’s probably be easy to see the mountain that is yatsuhashi, and as for the Fox and Neo stuff I’m not going to say I ship it... but I totally do, really interested how the next two weeks on the ship are going to go down and what they can learn, can’t wait for next chapter, keep up amazing work.

Bookah replies:

Oh, yeah. Definitely. I wish I could claim I planned all of this with malice aforethought, but unfortunately only some of that is true. Fox and Neo kind of snuck up on me. Thank goodness! As for the remaining three, fear not! Their cabin fever will be a thing to behold! In fact, you get to behold some of it in this chapter. Good luck, CVY!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another good chapter that keeps me hooked on this story. Seeing Fox and Neo grow closer is a nice bit to see and makes me appreciate the way you write this even more. You take the time to set it up and give it time to develop. I have a feeling that Velvet will find someone eventually. Maybe get someone to defect from the white fang or something like that. Altho I doubt that would happen anytime soon.

Bookah replies:

Well, to be honest, part of the reason that Fox and Neo took time to develop was because it snuck up on me. It had never originally been planned to be a part of the story. So it kind of snuck up on me. Not that I mind! I think it's kind of cute, myself. As for poor Velvet... I have had plans for her all along. In fact, you're about to see a huge development specifically along those lines. Read on...

CoopBro writes:
I love how the team interacts and teases with each other. My own teammates would probably say the same in a similar situation.

Bookah replies:

And now I so want to meet your team. XD

**Anima Straights**

Deep in the bowels of the ship, they had found a niche. Coco, Velvet, and Yatsuhashi had remained more or less trapped inside the cabin now shared exclusively by Fox and Neo for a full day after the ship had set sail in the wee hours of the morning. The next night, however, the three had successfully snuck out and begun exploring for a place to remain hidden. They had found a good one deep inside the vessel’s cargo spaces. An auxiliary breaker room had been nestled into the ship not far from the keel, leaving some awkward spacing to stack cargo around. The ship’s crew had simply gone around that by taking several large containers and building what was basically a stack over and around this room. Thanks to the shape of the hull itself as it swept beneath that particular area, this left a dead space beside the breaker room and beneath the stack that was too small to put any shipping containers in, and too difficult to access for the storage of loose cargo.

Coco had gleefully moved them in there, as there was plenty of room for the three of them, and two smaller escape routes they could take advantage of if any of the crew came by for whatever reason. So far, two days later, nothing of the sort had happened. They’d been able to move around in the lower cargo spaces with near impunity, emerging above in the depths of night whenever they started feeling a bit claustrophobic. Further, Velvet had sniffed out an auxiliary refrigeration space, and thus “fresh” refrigerated goods had been supplementing their rations admirably for the last day and a half.

She was kicked back, unsure (and uncaring) of the time, enjoying the feeling of peach juices running down her chin. Across from her, curled up on a stack of boxes, Velvet was biting into a particularly large strawberry.

“I wonder where in the world they get these from? It’s hardly the season for them,” Velvet mused, and Coco had to grin as she wiped fruit juice from her chin.

“Beats me. I’m just glad you found them. They taste much better this way than they do in a tin.”

“Absolutely,” the girl agreed, smiling. White teeth flashed between berry reddened lips, and Coco found herself savoring more than just the peach, even as she struggled to resolve what it was she felt for Velvet, and how that impacted Yatsuhashi. She fought down a sigh as she realized she still had no idea how to solve anything.

Before Velvet could figure out that there was something troubling to Coco’s silence, Yatsuhashi wiggled his way into the alcove. The easiest way in and out wasn’t the largest of spaces, and Yatsuhashi had to exercise quite a bit of flexibility to avoid scraping himself in the process of getting in. Coco turned appreciative eyes his way as he contorted his hips slightly to wiggle past the last obstruction before slipping inside.

Coco bestowed a smile on him as he finished shimmying in. “Welcome back.”

“Thanks,” he responded, giving her a smile in return. She let it warm her, knowing full well that, regardless of any other issues the two may be trying to sort out, they definitely had no questions...
about how they felt towards one another. Yatsuhashi loved her, no matter what, and it was a surprisingly strong anchor for her whenever she was feeling any doubts.

At the moment, however, she felt nothing of the sort. Only curiosity. “Any luck?”

Yatsuhashi shook his head. “Not so far. But it’s a big ship, and it’s highly unlikely the White Fang would mark their cargo ‘Terrorist Equipment, Unauthorized Use Only’.”

Velvet snorted. “Highly,” she commented. The faunus girl slipped off of the crate she’d been sitting on, then strolled past Yatsuhashi, reaching up to pat him on the shoulder. “There’s fresh fruit in the corner. I’m going to stretch my legs.”

Coco watched her go, trying and failing to ogle the girl’s butt as she left. She sighed a bit as she caught herself at it, then noticed out the corner of her eye that she wasn’t alone doing it.

“Caught you,” she spoke in a soft undertone, and watched as Yatsuhashi jerked his face away, a blush forming.

“Ah. Um, Coco…” Yatsuhashi began rubbing the back of his neck with one hand.

“Don’t worry about it,” she smiled wryly. “We were both doing it.” She turned to glance back down the way Velvet had gone. “She scared me to death, you know.”

“Velvet?”

“Yeah. Going off and infiltrating the White Fang like that. I mean, I know she got away with it, but I just kept thinking of the possibilities. They really hate Faunus who work against them.”

Yatsuhashi walked over to her and sat beside her, putting an arm around her to pull her in tight against him. “Yeah. It scared me too.”

Coco snuggled in, grateful for the muscular presence beside her. She closed her eyes and sighed. “I’m terrified of the thought of losing her to them.”

“We’ll just have to make sure that doesn’t happen, then.”

Coco turned and gave Yatsuhashi a bit of a look out of the corner of her eye.

“Yeah, yeah,” he rumbled, his usual inscrutability completely in abeyance. “Easier said than done, especially when she does things like that.”

Coco nodded. “I really don’t know what to do with her.”

“When she does things like that?”

“Things like that. Or when her… whatever it is is whispering nasty things in her ear. Or when she’s locked into hunting something. Or… Or even when she’s doing good. Even when she’s happy and smiling and joking, I get so worried about her because I’m scared of what will happen when it changes.”

“Sometimes I just want to sweep her into my arms and smother her with protection.” Yatsuhashi frowned and looked down at the deck.

“So why don’t you?”

“She’d kick my butt.”
Coco laughed. “Maybe.” She shook her head gently and patted one of Yatsuhashi’s solid pecs. “I like it when you do it to me though. It makes me feel safe.”

“Does it really?” He turned his gaze to smile down at her.

Impulsively, Coco tipped her face up and gave him a quick peck on the lips. “Very.”

He smiled, then relaxed a bit beside her. “I’m glad.”

“Big oaf,” Coco chuckled softly, but then turned serious again. “Seriously, though. I know she’s become less… touchy feely than she used to be. But I wonder if being held like that would help her feel safe. She’s scared, Yatsu.”

“We all are.”

“Not like that.” Coco shook her head, and thought a moment. “Look, Yatsu… if you feel it right, do it. Just… pick her up and hold her. I care enough about her to want her to feel safe. Like I do.”

She felt him shift awkwardly beside her. “Are you sure?”

She snorted. “Yes, Yatsu. I’m sure.” She patted her shoulder. “Relax. It’s not like I asked you to fuck her.”

Yatsuhashi was silent beside her, stiff, barely even breathing.

She slowly pulled off his shoulder so she could turn to face him fully. “You want to fuck her.”

Yatsuhashi looked pained, his gaze turning to contemplate a shipping container that formed one wall of their hideout. “I really wish you wouldn’t phrase it like that.”

Coco closed her eyes and hung her head, drawing her knees up. “Sorry.” She sighed. “Still, you do, don’t you?”

Yatsuhashi squirmed. “I… Wow, this is awkward.” She watched his hand come up to rub the back of his neck. “I really don’t know, Coco. I mean, I do want to hold her, and make her feel better, and happy. And… I mean… Yeah, sometimes I notice… how…” He stuttered to a stop.

“How hot she is?”

Yatsuhashi’s face turned to contemplate Coco as she peered over her knees at him. She answered the look with a wry smile. “Believe me,” she muttered. “I have noticed for myself. She’s sexy as hell.”

Yatsuhashi contemplated Coco for a moment. “So does that mean you…”

“Hell yes,” Coco admitted. “And I’m trying hard not to. I don’t want to be unfair to you, or to her. She doesn’t deserve to be my little bit on the side, and you don’t deserve any less than all of me.”

She watched Yatsuhashi’s eyes drop to the deck again, and felt herself sink inside. She didn’t want to make things awkward, or raise doubts. But she also did not want to let anything linger, festering, that could hurt Yatsuhashi. He deserved the truth, even if it was a truth she did not plan to act on.

He shifted. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to think about this.”

Coco shifted her eyed down to her knees and hugged them tightly against her. “Sorry.”

“No, no.” She could see Yatsuhashi lift his face up at the edge of her vision. “I’m serious. I really
don’t know what I’m supposed to think about this. I know what I’ve always been taught. I know what society expects of me. I know what I am expected to think about it.” He sighed, then flopped onto his back, kicking his legs out beside her. “But I also know what Fox keeps saying about it. What he wants me to think. And now I know what you think.”

Coco lifted her eyes up, carefully, and eyed Yatsuhashi as he stared at the overhead. “So, in that case…” She licked her lips, hesitating, then plunged ahead. “In that case, forget what you’re supposed to think. What are you actually thinking instead?”

She watched his face, saw the struggle as he debated inside about whether or not to say it, or wondering if he even could. She waited, patiently.

“I think…” he said slowly. “That… I hate the idea that… our happiness comes… at her expense. I hate that she loves you… and can’t have you because I do.” He sat up, his voice growing less hesitant. “I hate that you can’t make her feel the way you make me feel. And I hate that I can’t give her what she wants either.” His eyes locked with hers. “And I hate that I feel like I’m not supposed to feel that way, and that there’s no good way to fix any of this.”

Coco felt a hard sigh rip through her, felt herself almost collapsing inward on herself. She flopped backwards, her feet landing up near Yatsuhashi’s head. Her head was spinning, full of thoughts.

He’d articulated it. It wasn’t perfect. It lacked a lot of nuance. But it did sum it up for her. All of her thoughts, and confusion, going back to even before she’d gotten with Yatsuhashi, had been put into words.

She wet her lips. “I’m scared of what everyone else would think.”

Yatsuhashi’s head popped up, looking down his body at her. “Coco?”

Coco laughed, though there was no pleasure in it. “Isn’t that stupid? The girl who goes out, gets drunk, then fucks strangers is scared of what people would say if she was actually in love with two people.”

She watched his head thunk back to the deck plating. “I wish you wouldn’t talk about yourself that way.”

“Sorry,” she muttered. “But it’s still true. I’ve been slapping everyone in the face with my insistence on not playing by their rules. And now, suddenly, the rules have me scared? It’d be laughable if it wasn’t so pathetic.”

She heard Yatsuhashi sigh. “So who are you scared for?”

“Not me,” she laughed, her smile sour. “At least I don’t think so. But Velvet…”

“You worry she’d be judged harshly?”

Coco said nothing. She didn’t need to. They both knew the answer.

Yatsuhashi sat up. “Fuck everyone. You know who wouldn’t judge her?”

Coco lifted her head.

“Fox.”

Coco snorted. “I swear, Fox wants her with us more than we do.”
Yatsuhashi laughed. “Yeah.”

The two remained there in silence for a few moments, their mutual amusement at their fourth companion easing some of the tension. After a bit though Yatsuhashi stirred.

“So, where does that leave us?”

Coco groaned and sat up. “Well, you and me, we’re cool. We’re still us. I don’t want that to change.”

Yatsuhashi nodded to her. “And Velvet?”

“I don’t think we really have the right to make decisions for her, without her input.” She rubbed her forehead. “But I will say that, if she creates the opening then… well, don’t hold back for my sake.”

She heard Yatsuhashi’s sharp, indrawn breath, then watched as he leaned forward. “Yeah. Same for you.”

Coco nodded, then laughed. “God, she’s going to be one lucky bunny when you get your hands on her.”

Yatsuhashi gave Coco a strange look, then shook his head with a grin. “I don’t know about that.”

“I do. Believe me, I do.” Coco smiled, then leaned forward. “Hey, Yatsu?”

“Hmm?”

“Remind me how lucky I am?”

With a smile Yatsuhashi scooted forward and wrapped his arms around Coco. “Gladly.”
Hello once more. On this Monday I bring to you yet another chapter of Spring Hunt! I've been enjoying this story so much, and things are really rushing forward now. I can't wait to show you what comes next!

Remember, if you enjoy this story I would love to hear from you. Leave a comment below, or come hit me up on my Twitter or on my Patreon. And remember, Patreons get access to chapters early, so if you are just dying to know what comes next, you know what to do. ^_^

One last thing, I want to give a shout out to a couple of other authors. prettygirllostd has recently started an original work that has my attention well and truly captured. It's a high fantasy where the villains are the protagonists, and have good reason to be bad. I'm loving it. It's called Sand Storm. Go check it out! The other author I want to mention is annathemonstereffer She has some original fiction that is, quite simply, some of the most ridiculous, over the top monster erotica I have read, and I am loving it. So if you want irredeemable smut with a monster fetish, go check her out!

But first, your comments!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another good chapter as usual. And this one me wonder how Velvet would react if that “opportunity” arose. On a side note now that Neo is playing a bigger role should we expect any chapters from her point of view. I would like to hear what she thinks of everything at this point.

Bookah replies:

Oh, you're looking forward to seeing Velvet react if the opportunity arises? Good news!

That doesn't happen in this chapter. XD

Oh, that wasn't good news?

Anyway, I assure you, you shall not be left wanting!

And as to your other question... I have plans.

Aren't I informative? XD

Anima Straights

Fox gazed out over the rail at the sea. The surface of it rippled and rolled with gentle waves, each illuminated and set to flashing with reflected moonlight. Above a horizon that was shockingly clear for the late hour, stars shone in great multitudes, bright and plentiful even in comparison to those times Team CFVY had camped far from civilization.
A pair of arms slid around his waist, and he found himself smiling as Neo, still disguised in her black haired, green eyed form snuggled up against his back. Neo, he had discovered, was a total sucker for spooning, and this fondness of hers extended to their waking hours.

He’d tried dissuading her at first, trying to remind her that she didn’t need to act when there was no one around to enjoy the performance. Her pouting behavior had quickly convinced him of what he’d been speculating on for several days now. It was not, evidently, an act.

And if the truth were to be told, he was glad. He found he genuinely enjoyed the contact. He may have lacked a sex drive, but that did not mean he was immune to the simple pleasure of holding or being held. Neo’s small but warm body was certainly no exception to this, and he hadn’t even bothered putting up even a token resistance the second night she’d crawled into bed with him, dressed in a simple pair of shorts and tank top.

He lifted a hand from the rail and, without looking, reached around to pat Neo affectionately. The first time he had done it he had been aware that they had company, and thought that the slightly sexual touches on her bottom would publically further their cover, and privately land him in a world of pain. When he’d started to apologize the first chance he had alone with her, she had immediately put her finger to his lips, stopping him with a wink and a quick little text telling him he was welcome to touch her like that anytime.

That had earned her an eye roll, though he had smiled while doing it.

“Time for dinner, sweetheart?” He asked, stepping away from the rail and turning in her arms. He brought his own around to encircle her, leaning down for a quick kiss. She gladly gave it, then pulled away and took his hand in hers, dragging him back inside the ship.

Neo quickly pulled him along to the ship’s mess. The compartment served both passengers and crew, as the ship took on passengers more as an incidental, rather than as a primary concern. The ship’s designers hadn’t seen fit to design a galley just for the passengers, given their low priority. That didn’t mean everyone mingled, however. There had been a bit of segregation that took place within the room, despite its open build. The ship’s officers tended to eat apart from the crew, while the passengers dined separate from both. Even there, separation continued, as it was clear from the looks they were given that everyone, from officers down to the other passengers all expected Fox and Neo to eat at a different table than the five Faunus that were already in the room when they entered.

This fact left Fox with mixed thoughts. On the one hand, he was well aware that all five Faunus were members of the White Fang, and it was probably for the best that they did not interact with them, giving them a chance to discover the true identities of the “newlyweds”. On the other hand, he had grown quite used to dining with Velvet, so the thought that there was an unspoken but clearly expected wall being thrown up between human and Faunus bothered him.

A steward set a plate before him, a substantial roast sitting on it soaked in gravy with a quite appetizing side of stewed vegetables along side of it, and mashed potatoes forming a final component. Neo immediately tucked into her own matching meal, and Fox looked up at the steward with a smile. “Thank you. It looks delicious.”

“We eat well here,” the woman replied, smiling back. “Officer and crew, passengers, it doesn’t matter. It’s a lucrative run.” She shrugged.

“Nope. Just you two and that other bunch.” The woman shrugged. “Things are crazy right now. A
lot of people are scared to travel because they don’t know what kind of reception they’ll receive at
the other end of the journey. And many of those that are traveling anyway are on the run.”

Neo paused in her eating to contemplate the steward for a moment. Fox caught her interest, though
his own had needed no pushing. “How so?”

“Refugees.” The woman shrugged, then leaned in conspiratorially. “We’ve had an awful lot of…
those people on board of late.” She nodded her head toward the table full of Faunus. “They’re
running away from Vale and Atlas, trying to get to Mistral or Menagerie. Those places aren’t as
discerning, you see.”

Fox fought back the urge to respond with something biting. Under the table, he felt Neo’s toe stroke
his shin, sufficient distraction to keep himself in check. He swallowed back his irritation and gave a
bit of a nod towards the subject of conversation. “So, they’re refugees?”

She glanced toward them, then shook her head. “Not those ones, no. You’d do best to avoid those
ones. They’re… something else.” She frowned. “I wouldn’t want something to happen to you two.”

Eyes narrow, Fox leaned in conspiratorially. “If they’re somehow dangerous, why do you let them
aboard?”

“They pay well. Really well. And so long as they keep to themselves, their money is welcome.”

“I see…”

The woman gave a smile, then wandered off to check on those of the ship officers not on watch. Fox
gave Neo a long look in the woman’s absence, wondering what she had to think about all of this.
Neo glanced up, giving him a happy smile, and her hand fluttered in a way that clearly said “later”.
Nodding, Fox turned his attention to the food, finding it quite good.

After the meal, the two retreated to their cabin. Fox was settled on a chair, thinking about the
implications of the steward’s conversation. “She wasn’t one for keeping secrets, was she?”

Neo emerged from the cabin’s small bathroom and walked over. She smiled, then slipped onto Fox’
lap sideways, her legs dangling over the arm, her own arms wrapped around his neck.

Fox smiled, bemused at her actions. They were certainly not unwelcome, a fact that continued to
surprise him. He wasn’t completely certain she wasn’t just messing with him, but she seemed pretty
genuine, and so he had decided to simply take her odd affection at face value.

Curled up contentedly in his lap, Neo got out her scroll. She typed away for a short bit.

Even before she had completed her typing, Fox had already pulled his scroll off of the little table next
to the chair. When it chirped with a message, he turned and glanced at the screen.

She all but said they were White Fang. Sloppy of her.

“I get the feeling she doesn’t like them much.”

I get the feeling she doesn’t like any Faunus much.

Fox nodded and sighed. “Yeah.” He looked down at Neo’s upturned face and, hesitantly, asked
something he’d wondered for a while. “What about you?”

Neo frowned, and began typing.
I don’t like the White Fang. They’re arrogant. But I understand them. I know what it’s like to be treated different because you were born a certain way.

Fox nodded. “I suppose you would.”

Neo touched a finger to her temple in mock salute, and he lifted a hand to gently ruffle her hair while she turned to typing again.

You seem very sympathetic with them.

Fox grunted. “Not with the Fang, no. But with Faunus, yes. Watching Velvet has opened my eyes to quite a lot of what Faunus have to deal with. I understand the anger and frustration. And the fear, too.”

Velvet has a lot of anger issues. I sympathize.

Fox snorted. “Yeah. I wish I could do a better job helping her regain her sense of balance.”

A good killing spree does wonders for me.

Fox frowned and poked Neo in the forehead. “Not funny.”

Neo shrugged, and Fox quickly changed the subject. “Still, we were finally able to confirm that there’s no one aboard but us, White Fang, and the crew of this smuggling vessel.”

Nobody here but us chickens.

“We should let the others know.”

Neo smiled, then popped off Fox’ lap and strolled quickly over to the door, popping it open to reveal Velvet, hand raised to knock, her eyes surprised.

Fox arched an eyebrow, then waved languidly. “I don’t know how she does it either.”

Velvet gave Neo a suspicious look, then walked in as Neo bowed before closing the door. “Riiiiight.”

“Any luck?”

 Velvet shook her head, dropping onto the couch with a sigh. “Nope. We haven’t found anything yet. This ship is huge. It’d be very easy to hide illegal weapons aboard. You?”

“We had a lucky break.” Fox started to lean forward, only for Neo to slide into his lap again, her eyes locked on Velvet as if declaring ‘He’s mine’. Fox watched as Velvet stared back, her expression inscrutable, but ignored the possibility that there was some sort of confrontation building. Instead he simply took to gently running fingers through Neo’s hair to keep her calm as he related the earlier conversation to Velvet.

When he finished, Velvet sighed. “Well, I suppose that’s a mixed blessing. We do know how many of them there are now, and we don’t have to worry about running into anyone not involved in this. However, it also means there are more people free to stumble across us instead of waiting on passengers, and no potential allies in the making.”

“Well, the crew is a question mark. At least one of them doesn’t seem fond of the White Fang.”

Neo quickly began tapping away, and Velvet politely joined Fox in waiting.
They know who and what they transport. Even if they throw their hands up and claim they weren’t involved they know whose money they are taking. Fox read aloud.

“Isn’t that the same of you?” Velvet locked her eyes on Neo.

Solemnly Neo nodded. And I won’t apologize for it. But I also won’t claim it’s not my fault. I know what I did, and accept responsibility. These people never will.

Velvet continued to stare at Neo for a moment after Fox finished reading, then sniffed and gave a reluctant nod of her own. “I suppose I can respect that much, at least.”

“So I take it that we don’t consider the crew to be innocent bystanders,” Fox frowned.

“If it comes to it, I really doubt they would take our side. After all, if Atlas or Vale found out what they’ve been transporting…”

Fox nodded reluctantly. “The Atlas Navy would be out here boarding, if not outright sinking anything bearing a Daichi flag.”

“And I wouldn’t blame them.”

They’ll do anything to keep that from happening.

“Which means that, if they learn who we are and what we know…”

Do unto others before they do unto you.

“Right.”

Fox looked between the two women. “You two think more alike than might be healthy.”

Two pairs of eyes both gave him cross looks. Fox carefully raised both hands in mock surrender.

“Alright, fine. You’re nothing alike. At all. Ever.” he muttered, then returned to the original subject. “So we make certain they don’t find out who we are.”

“And on that note I think it’s time I leave.” Velvet hopped up and walked toward the door, eyeing Neo as the small woman sprawled across Fox’ lap. “Don’t have too much fun with your cover story.”

Fox watched Neo laugh quietly, the sound rich. But then the small woman popped out of his lap and rushed ahead of Velvet, popping open the door and sticking her head out before signalling the all clear. As soon as the Faunus had disappeared out into the passageway, Neo quietly closed the door, locking it.

She turned and gave Fox a smouldering look, a finger tugging her little black dress off of one shoulder.

Fox snorted. “You know that’s not going to work, right?”

Neo gave a wink, then casually pointed to herself.

“Alright, it doesn’t work on me.”

Neo laughed, then crawled up on the bed before patting it next to her.
“Yeah, yeah. Coming sweetheart. Just remember, snuggles only.”

Neo smiled, then reached out and turned off the cabin light.
Once again Monday has rolled around, and it's time to cheer you up (yeah, right) with another chapter of Spring Hunt! Many of you have been hoping for certain events to happen for a while now, and I'm just going to spoil you a bit by saying I am really looking forward to what you have to say about today's chapter. Go ahead and let me know what you think here, or on my Twitter or Patreon. Oh, and be forewarned, this chapter is a doozy in both size and content. Enjoy!

But first, your comments!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another great chapter. It doesn’t surprise me that parts of the crew do not like the white fang and that could be something that CFVY can take advantage of. As Fox grows closer to Neo I don’t think Neo will wait much longer to act on how she feels about Fox. I always look forward to reading this every Monday or sometimes a day late but keep up the good work.

Bookah replies:

Yes, the White Fang are rather prone to attracting dislike, I would say. But there are always people for whom lien are more important than ethics, so as long as they are willing to pay...

Neo and Fox are heading in some interesting directions I never expected, and this will only continue. We’ll see where that ends up, won’t we? But for now there’s a different relationship to focus on, so... read on!

Anima Straights

Velvet carefully walked back down into the belly of the ship. Both pairs of ears were fully alert, even though the thrumming of the ship’s engines were creating a bit of a loud, unpleasant harmonic she might have been able to tune out when less alert. Still, she did not want to risk stumbling across a stray crew member she’d could have avoided simply because she was trying to avoid annoying engine noises.

As she drew near the team’s hideout, her hare ears picked up sounds that had nothing to do with the ship and everything to do with people. She flattened herself against a shipping container, breath held, and listened intently to identify exactly where and what the sound was, and whether it meant they were about to be discovered.

She heard a low moan, a panting gasp, and a wet, slippery sound that immediately drew the mind to secretive and primal places. A quick sniff of the air only confirmed what her ears were telling her, and she slipped down the side of the container, eyes wide, her mind in turmoil.
Coco and Yatsuhashi were having sex. That much was patently obvious from both the scent and the sounds assaulting Velvet’s senses. There was certainly no surprise in that. She’d smelled the scent of their lovemaking on them before, though she’d never caught them in the act.

But now she had done just that, and her mind had simply gone blank upon the realization. She knew what she should do about it. Every rule in the book said that she needed to stand up and walk away, giving them privacy. It was the respectful thing to do. It was the right thing to do. It was absolutely, incontrovertibly, what needed to happen.

But she couldn’t seem to do it. Her legs were utterly failing her, refusing to do more than tremble slightly. Her thoughts were simply too unfocused to override their unruliness.

No… Her thoughts weren’t unfocused at all. Rather, they were hyper focused. Her every sense was suddenly tuned in to what was happening further down the passageway. Perhaps a human couldn’t have heard, or smelled, what was going on. But Velvet was a faunus, and her capabilities were finely tuned. Her mind was very intent on piecing together exactly what her superior senses were sending it. It wasn’t just her ears. Or her nose. Her sense of touch was getting in on the act as well.

She could feel every vaguery of the metal against her back as she sat propped up by the shipping container. She could make out the pattern of the no slip surface of the deck plating on her ass, small bumps pressing up through the cloth of her shorts and tights. And low down in her belly, she could feel heat. Feel pressure. Feel…

She fidgeted uncomfortably, painfully aware of just how damp things were becoming. The scent of her own musk flooded her nostrils, and her hyper focused mind insisted on painting a picture of her state. She couldn’t prevent herself from thinking that her secret garden had to be glistening, of how hard her little nub was becoming between slippery lips. Her breasts felt tight, like they no longer fit inside of her bra, and her breath hitched, hard. She found herself biting down on the knuckles of one hand to prevent an anguished moan from escaping her.

Her excitement was physically painful.

In all the times she had thought of them being together like this, bodies interlocked, Coco’s flesh swallowing and welcoming Yatsuhashi deep into her core, Velvet had tried to fight the things it had stirred in herself. She had tried to resist the urges, the need, the want. Resist the temptation to slide a hand over her own skin, to part her folds with her fingers, to indulge. She had seldom succeeded.

When the sounds were real, the scent fresh, her body painfully excited, there was no resisting. Not even knowing how guilty she would feel about it after could stop her. It couldn’t even slow her down.

Her hand came down and loosened her golden colored belt, letting it fall to the deck, and fingers unzipped her with a harsh jerk. Her hand plunged inside of the sheer black tights, the knuckles violently pushing sticky wet panties and leotard away from her cleft. Without preamble fingers inside her, the slick wet sound the action made an echo of the sounds that had so excited her to begin with, her mind numb to the fact that she was doing this to herself.

Her working within herself was rough and hard. Her palm ground against her lips, rubbing her erect clit violently as she dug inside herself, her fingers curling to better touch that certain spot just above and within. Her thighs grew slippery as the action spread the all too present moisture of her lust from fingers to hand to leg.

She needed relief, and she needed it badly. The sooner, the better, because everything hurt in the best and worst of ways.
Velvet never had noticed when her senses stopped listening to the world around her and became focused purely on the way she gouged deeply inside of herself. Her focus closed completely onto the way her other hand squeezed and pinched her nipple through the cloth of her jacket. She never realized when the sounds that had started all this had stopped, lost to the focus on the sensations within. She never realized her peril until the moment she felt a soft touch on her cheek, a touch she had no free hand to cause.

The hare faunus froze, her eyes jerking open wide. A flood of terror rolled through her as her mind suddenly jerked back to awareness and took in the face of Coco looking at her, the tall woman’s fingers gently touching Velvet’s face. She stopped, petrified, stone hard fingers deeply shoved inside, a drip of moisture trembling and falling to the deck below her crouched legs, in full view of Coco, a liquid damnation condemning her for her crime of passion.

“C-C-Cco! I…” Her throat spasmed, attempting to blurt out her leader’s name, to find some way to explain the inexplicable, yet too tight to do more than eject the gutterals within it. She felt herself literally choke with the tension of it, a gagging sound cutting off any further efforts.

Spastically, she went to rip her fingers free of herself, only for her thumb to tangle in the wet cloth that failed to hide anything from the world. She gave a jerk as her hand caught, her entire body twitching, and then another’s hand caught her wrist, stopping her before slowly drawing the offending thing forth like a sword being brought out from a sheath before an execution.

Coco looked down at the incredibly slick, soaked skin of Velvet’s hand, and Velvet stared as the woman’s eyes grew as wide as her own.

“Holy shit, Velve…”

Velvet felt her heart try to explode, and she jerked her hand free, clapping it to her face so she could hide behind it, the scent of her juices overwhelming as her palm covered her nose.

She heard Coco heave a large sigh, heard as skin shifted against the metal of the deck, and then a hand gently rested on her shoulder.

“Come on, Velvet. Let’s at least get out of the passageway before we talk.”

Air flooded into Velvet’s lungs in a shuddering rush as she suddenly sobbed, released somehow from her petrification. “Oh fuck Coco! I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! I knew it was wrong but I just couldn’t… I’m so so very sorry! I just… I don’t know what’s wrong with me!” She sobbed. “I’m sick and messed up and a terrible person.”

Coco’s hand slipped off Velvet’s shoulder and gently but firmly peeled the wet hand from Velvet’s face. Stern eyes locked onto her own, forcefully entrapping Velvet’s gaze. “Okay, that’s enough of that, bunny rabbit. No more putting yourself down.”

Velvet could hear the humor in Coco’s voice, but also the strain. “But…” she stammered.

“Nope!” Coco pressed a finger to Velvet’s lips. “I’m giving you the option of pulling your pants all the way off or back on, but insulting yourself is not an option I’m allowing.”

“Oh… Off?” Velvet gasped, shocked even out of sobbing.

“You are a bit overdressed for the occasion,” Coco snarked, her voice as dry as the deserts of Vacuo as her eyes went down to the patch of brown pubic hair peeking out around the disarrayed bottom of Velvet’s leotard. The woman rose, a hand fisted against a hip, and Velvet received another shock to her system as she came face to face with the fact that Coco was still very, very naked, her skin
glistening. Velvet swallowed, completely unable to parse the incongruity as Coco’s other hand reached down to her, offering help in rising from the deck.

Velvet spastically grabbed at the waistband of her shorts, dragging them awkwardly upward as she was pulled up by her very exposed leader and half led, half dragged towards their hidey hole. Coco pushed her firmly, but without animus, into the passageway, and Velvet very nearly tripped as the unclasped shorts drooped, tangling her legs. Desperately she attempted to hitch them back upwards, then gave up and pulled her legs free of them, leaving them to lay suddenly on the deck before finishing her entry to the space beyond.

She froze right after entering, caught up in Yatsuhashi’s inscrutable stare. The giant of a man was seated on the deck, a single cloth covering his lap enough to hide things from view, but with a suspicious bulge revealing he hadn’t lost any of the ardor Velvet had cruelly interrupted. He was otherwise completely unclad, his muscles defined all the further by the highlights cast by the sheen of sweat on his skin. He said nothing, but lowered his gaze a bit, his eyes widening, and Velvet suddenly realized he was getting a very personal understanding of just how wet she was through her not properly settled underthings.

With a gasp she jerked her hand down to cover herself and dropped to the deck beside the gap that Coco’s naked leg was now emerging from. Brown shorts dangled in front of her face and Velvet snatched them off Coco’s extended finger, shoving them down in a wad between her legs.

“Oh, sure. Just a couple months ago you swam a stream as naked as could be without any thought of what we could see. But now, just as things are getting good, you suddenly rediscover your modesty?”

Velvet twitched at Coco’s acerbic tone. “You’re angry.”

“No, Velve, I’m not angry. I am pissed off.” Velvet flinched, but couldn’t get a word in before Coco continued. “I am also very, very turned on right now. Do you have any idea how confusing that is?”

“I… I should go…” she whispered, rolling toward her side to begin a three limbed crawl toward the passage, one hand still pushing her shorts up against her vulva. She felt a hand tangle in the collar of her jacket, nearly pulling it off, as it had become unzipped at some point during Velvet’s fevered fingering.

“Oh no you don’t.” Coco pulled Velvet back into their sleeping area. “We’re having a chat, Velvet Scarlatina. All three of us.”

Velvet heard Yatsuhashi grunt as she was drug back, then pushed into a seated position on her roll of blankets and sleeping bags. Coco then settled down across from her, sitting in a cross legged style that hid nothing. Velvet forced herself to look away.

Coco sighed. “Look, Velvet. I really have no idea what to do right now. On the one hand you were… Velvet…” Suddenly the woman laughed. “We were having sex!”

Velvet winced, nodding an acknowledgement.

“It was getting really good. I mean, REALLY good. And then we suddenly hear a moan that wasn’t either of us… Not that we weren’t moaning. I mean, we definitely were, but… Dammit Velvet!” Coco cried. “I was so… fucking… CLOSE.”

Velvet bit her lip. Somehow knowing she’d managed to interrupt Coco’s climax made things worse. As if that were either relevant or possible.
“I’m pretty sure Yatsuhashi was too, given how hard he was squeezing my tit…”

Yatsuhashi shifted a bit, his inscrutable expression turned slightly embarrassed.

“And then… For fuck’s sake, Velvet! I don’t know whether to hit you or kiss you!”

“I…” Velvet’s brain fragmented. “What?”

Coco flopped backward, her naked state making the movement shockingly lewd as her cleft exposed itself and her breasts rippled and slid with the shift in gravity. “I said I don’t know whether to hit you or kiss you.”

Velvet gave Yatsuhashi a nervous glance, but the man refused to give her any help in figuring out Coco’s statement.

“I don’t… understand?”

Coco sighed, the motion lifting her chest. “You were spying on us in our most intimate of moments. That’s just… I mean… It makes me angry. Really angry. But…” Coco jerked herself back upright, reducing her exposure slightly. “I also saw just how… how incredibly wet that was making you. You were dripping, Velvet. Actually dripping on the floor. The thought of how much you were getting turned on by us is…”

Velvet felt herself flush powerfully, and she was certain that if she were to look she’d be bright red in places she did not want to expose. Her eyes shifted to glance at Yatsuhashi, who was coloring up himself.

“I…”

“You have no idea how confused I am right now, Velvet. My head says I shouldn’t let you get away with this, but my body…” Coco shook her head, then cruelly shoved her hand down beneath herself in a quick wiping motion before showing her fingers, slippery and bright. “Holy FUCK I’m horny.”

Velvet gaped, then jerked her head to Yatsuhashi. The man shrugged. “That’s not entirely my fault,” he muttered, his cheeks crimson. “Partly, yes. But not entirely.”

“But…” Velvet jerked her head back to Coco.

“But nothing.” Coco pointed the lewdly demonstrative fingers at Velvet. “Velvet, the two of us have been trying very hard to not rub our relationship in your face. Knowing how you feel about us. We also have been struggling with the fact that our relationship had not changed the fact we both still…”

Coco hesitated for the first time, her expression locked.

With a sigh, Yatsuhashi took over, shifting himself in a way that threatened to expose what the blanket hid. “We also still have feelings for you. Both of us.”

“What?” Velvet squeaked.

“We both worry about you. We care a great deal about you. We want to hold you when you cry, to hug you when you laugh, and to be there for you whenever you need us. And…”

It was Yatsuhashi’s turn to stagger to a halt, and for Coco to take over for him.

“And we want to fuck you.”
Velvet’s jaw hit the floor. She could do nothing but stare at Coco as the woman stared back, something predatory in her expression.

Yatsuhashi sighed. “Coco. Could you possibly have put it more crudely?”

“Probably.” For the first time since things had gone south, Coco smirked. “But there’s no way she could mistake my meaning.

“I suppose that’s true…” Yatsuhashi allowed.

“You… both? I mean… But you’re…”

“Yeah. We are. Complicated, isn’t it?” Coco rolled her eyes, then scooted around to sit next to Velvet. The faunus felt her eyes go wide as an arm came across her shoulders, pulling her against Coco’s naked side. “This is hardly how we wanted this all to go down. None of it. We didn’t want things to be complicated. Just a nice, simple, girl friend boyfriend thing. But that wasn’t happening. No matter how much we tried to pretend otherwise. And we both knew it. So, in the end, we talked. Quite a bit. At first it was little hints, little questions. Then we began being more open about what we both knew was bothering us. And eventually we realized we had to face this head on. Even though we had each other, and are very happy about that, we couldn’t get over you. We were both very troubled about this, about the fact neither one of us could get you out of our head. I was worried about hurting Yatsuhashi. He was worried about hurting me. And we were both worried about hurting you. And Fox certainly wasn’t helping us ‘get over it’ either. So… we talked. We’ve been talking for weeks.”

Yatsuhashi nodded, then scooted around to sit on the other side of Velvet, the cloth briefly giving her a glance of territory she’d only imagined before things were concealed again, and she swallowed. Yatsuhashi either didn’t realize it, or didn’t want to make a big deal of it, because he settled down beside her, his arm coming around to rest atop of Coco’s. “We did. And ultimately we were able to talk through things and reach a basic, fundamental understanding. We both love you, Velvet. And not just as a teammate. As something much more”

“So,” Coco resumed. “Just tonight we finally agreed that, if you ever showed interest in… well…”

“Fucking,” Yatsuhashi supplied wryly.

“Yes. In fucking, we each gave the other permission to go ahead and give you what you wanted.” Coco gave Velvet a bemused side eye. “And guess what we caught you doing? It’s pretty clear you need it. Badly.”

Velvet felt herself flush again, curling in on herself in embarrassment. “Sorry,” she muttered.

Coco nodded. “Like I said, this is definitely not how I wanted it to come up…”

Yatsuhashi nodded as well.

“But,” Coco continued. “Having come up… I am in love with you, rabbit.”

“As am I,” Yatsuhashi rumbled. “Even though Velvet’s a hare, not a rabbit.”

“Smartass.”

Velvet giggled in spite of herself. She was incredibly, so very incredibly confused. She felt very guilty, very intrusive, and very much like she was sick to have done what she had done. She also felt relieved that neither of them hated her for it, and in fact still…
Still loved her.

She swallowed as it sank in, as something in her twisted and broke. She shuddered, and felt tears begin to flow. “I’m... so sorry this is how you had to tell me. I love you too. Both of you. But what I did was... I... I’ll try to be... better.”

Coco laughed. “Better? Dammit, Velve... You don’t need to be better. You just need to be with us instead of merely... nearby.”

“Coco?” Velvet turned her head to Coco, and watched in a tear blur as the tall woman’s face closed on hers. Warm lips pressed to her own, and only the slightest of hesitations occurred before she twisted and began returning Coco’s kiss, her hands coming up to touch the naked skin of Coco’s back.

Coco broke the kiss, smiling, then wiped the tears from Velvet’s cheeks. “With us.”

“You mean...”

“I DID tell you that you were overdressed for the occasion.”

Velvet sucked on her lip, then turned her head towards Yatsuhashi. The man nodded, then pressed a hand to the side of Velvet’s cheek. “That is, if you want. I mean, you shouldn’t feel pressured, and you might want to take a moment to think about it and all, but if you want to...”

Velvet twisted around, her leg rolling over the top of her now forgotten shorts. She brought her arms up, wrapping them around Yatsuhashi’s shoulders as she leaned in to press her face against his chest. She felt him lower his head, felt his lips on her hair, and she tilted her head back, inviting him into a kiss he quickly accepted.

She felt Yatsuhashi pull her close, a strong arm wrapped around her shoulders even as his other hand continued to caress her cheek. His was not the only touch on her, though, and she felt Coco slipping up behind her, an arm coming around to gently encompass her stomach as the other began brushing aside her short jacket. As it came loose Coco’s fingers slipped inside, wiggling between Yatsuhashi’s chest and her own to fondle her breast through the black leotard she wore beneath. The feeling of four hands on her body pierced through her haze of doubt and worry, and she found herself moaning into Yatsuhashi’s lips.

She felt his kiss turn into a smile, and his head pulled back. “I take it that means you want to.”

“Oh so very much,” she moaned. “I really do want to. But...”

A painful pinch twisted her nipple, causing her to give a surprised yelp. “Nope!” Coco declared. “No more ‘I’m sorry I get so turned on by you I finger myself’ crap. I’ve decided I’m going to take it as a complement for now, and finger you yourself. Yatsu, get her out of that jacket.”

Velvet gaped in amazement, not just at Coco’s clear understanding of what was going through her head, but at her blunt approach. She also did not resist as Yatsuhashi slipped his hands inside her jacket, displacing the one Coco had just used to twist her nipple. He squeezed both of her breasts, causing her to shiver in pleasure, then slid the palms up and over her shoulders, pushing the jacket, epaulets and all, onto her arms. A tugging motion pulled it back, and she put her arms behind her to help Coco finish stripping it from her.

Even as the jacket slid, her palms met naked skin. She should not have been surprised by the contact, yet still a gasp escaped her. The jacket slipped over her wrists, and she twisted them, laying one hand on what she quickly found to be the ripple of ribs along Coco’s fit torso, as the other fell down to
comb fingers through a neatly trimmed patch of fur.

Coco laughed. “She is definitely eager.”

“Oh?” Yatsuhashi smiled, arching an eyebrow as Velvet suddenly flushed with renewed embarrassment.

“She went straight for the prize.”

“Ah.” He grinned, and she felt his fingers caress her collar bones before hooking the shoulder straps of her leotard, tugging at them to pull them down. She slowly brought her arms to her sides, reluctantly leaving the exploration of Coco, as the garment began dragging down her body. Her eyes watched Yatsuhashi’s clear enjoyment as he stripped her top off slowly, savoring each moment of his delight as his actions revealed creamy skin inch by inch. He paused a moment as he began to see the top of the cups supporting her breasts, the black color chosen to hide it beneath her leotard, and then he hastened the pulling. Soon, the leotard was wrapped loosely just above the curve of her hips and his eyes were fondly studying her.

She was distracted from her nervousness at his open ogling by the feeling of fingers unhooking her from behind, and she moaned in both relief and anticipation as the restricting bands compressing her seemingly swollen chest and ribs were replaced with cool air and a feeling of freedom. Coco’s hands came around and slipped between cups and skin, fondling and gropping her as she slipped tightly against Velvet’s back. Velvet groaned in pleasure, though she could not say whether it was from the feel of fingers against her naked breasts, or from the realization that her fondest wish was finally being fulfilled by someone she’d loved for two long years.

“No fair, Coco.” Yatsuhashi laughed. “I can’t see them like that.”

Velvet began to wonder if she could turn any redder as the thought of Yatsuhashi’s eyes ogling her modest tits rolled through her. She was momentarily spared from this, however, as Coco leaned her head forward, looking at Yatsuhashi. “Too bad, big boy. You’re not done with the job I gave you yet. Her tights are simply ruined. Do take them off, won’t you?”

Before Velvet had a chance to have any final second thoughts as she realized Yatsuhashi would be getting the most intimate of views of her if he did as Coco ordered, her thoughts were scrambled. Just as her hands were moving to prevent a sudden exposure to the giant, should he do as he was told, Coco turned and placed her lips against Velvet’s neck, beginning to suck. Velvet felt her head go back, exposing her neck thoroughly, and her eyes closed as the loosened bra fell from her shoulders and down to her elbows, Yatsuhashi forgotten. She leaned back, a hand going behind her, and her fingers once again found the thin brush covering Coco’s mound.

Hands cupped her hips, pulling at the cloth entrapping them, and thoughtlessly she shifted awkwardly to lift off the blankets. A simple peeling motion pulled all layers away, leotard, tights, and unmentionables alike. Cold air struck wet skin, and she shivered with a groan.

Oh god… Her thoughts beat wildly in her head. The shock of air on her dampened sex suddenly reminded her that she was now bare, her secrets completely exposed to Yatsuhashi. She felt her heart beating hard in her chest as fear and desire fought one another for mastery over her rapidly fraying thoughts. He’s looking at me

Suddenly she cried out in surprise and pleasure. The cold air had been replaced by warm breath, and she felt Yatsuhashi’s head bumping against her naked stomach. She arched backward, pressing hard against Coco, the hand that had been stroking Coco’s patch suddenly shot up to tangle in the red tipped brown hair growing from the back of Coco’s head. Coco released her breasts, both hands
going around Velvet’s torso in order to support the girl’s weight, and Velvet could feel her twist to begin kissing her way along the side of Velvet’s face.

Two pairs of lips met two pairs of her own lips, and her body was invaded by two tongues at once. She moaned loudly around Coco’s exploration of her mouth, her body bucking against the pressure Yatsuhashi was applying lower down. He tickled her small erection with his tongue, plunging it inside of her, and exploring her cleft from front to back. Wet heat, both his and hers, left her blanketed in pleasure, and her fingers clenched against the back of Coco’s head.

In a mere moment she was jerking and gasping, her body rippling with waves as the tension suddenly exploded out of her. She felt Coco clinging tightly to her, felt Yatsuhashi digging his face deeply into her, and felt everything spark through her from knees to tits. She gave a garbled cry, then collapsed against Coco in a long, drawn out groan of ecstasy.

“Did she just…” Coco was laughed quietly, squeezing Velvet from behind as she continued to tremble. “Holy shit, Velve. That was fast.”

“And hard,” Yatsuhashi agreed, his face slipping from between her thighs in a shuddering slide of wet skin on wet skin. “Your thighs are well muscled.”

Velvet groaned again, then muttered a soft “sorry.” It was all she could do to find the energy to do as she lay there, her body floating, quivering, flooded with clouds of pleasant intoxication.

“Oh, don’t go to sleep on us yet, hare,” Coco laughed again. “As fun as it was to feel you doing that in my arms, it’s my turn.”

“Hmm?” Velvet opened her eyes just as Coco gently lowered her torso to lay on the blankets. She watched Coco curl over her from above were her head now lay with a face full of wickedness.

“You did interrupt mine. So I demand paybacks.” With a lurid grin, Coco lifted herself, and the view was obscured as Velvet found herself between Coco’s thighs. Wet lips descended toward her, framed with soft, manicured fur and, in an instant, Velvet found herself kissing a different set of Coco’s lips.

Only a moment of hesitation held her before she eagerly drank the woman, her tongue darting out to taste the tang of her team leader. Coco tasted like a tart fruit, a certain something uniquely hers, neither delicious nor unpleasant, but distinctive. She lifted her head a little, pressing the tip of her nose up between full, soft cheeks, and began exploring with lips and tongue.

Coco sighed in pleasure from somewhere above, and then leaned forward. The action ground her intimately against Velvet, and the girl took advantage, popping her tongue inside as deeply as possible and wiggling it.

Her own climax had come too fast for her to realize exactly everything she was feeling and experiencing. But as she tongued Coco her mind began to re-engage. She found herself in a state of delighted shock. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined any of this. Rather, she had feared jealousy, or anger, should she have attempted to be physical with either of her two crushes. Instead, Coco had not merely embraced Velvet lovingly after Velvet’s admission, but had held her, pressed up against her, and kissed on her intimately even as Velvet was orgasming on the face of Coco’s own lover.

And Velvet wanted to do the same for her. She wanted to make up for all she had done wrong, and show Coco that she truly loved her, that she desired her, and wanted Coco’s pleasure to become paramount in this moment. She wanted to give Coco what she herself had just experienced. She
wanted Coco to cum, and cum hard. The realization flooded her with energy, and she withdrew her
tongue to free her lips. Remembering what Yatsuhashi had done to drive her to madness, she lipped
around, hunting. Soon, her lips captured Coco’s little stem and she began sucking and bobbing,
feeling it swell and twitch before releasing it, and running her tongue from the start of Coco’s
intimate cleft all the way back to wiggle against the soft, tight entry to the rear.

“Oh… GOD Velvet…” Coco moaned.

Velvet giggled and brought her arms up to pull Coco’s nether cheeks apart. Before she could go
further, Yatsuhashi reminded her of his presence and participation by taking her hips in both of his
hands, lifting them up high into the air so that she rested solely on her shoulders her toes pointed to
the sky. She paused, distracted, then felt the length of him, hard and warm settle against her
intimately.

“Oh?” she gasped into Coco, and then she felt him lean forward. She could hear him capture
Coco’s lips, feel Coco rocking further forward on her face, taking that tempting little forbidden cave
away from Velvet’s tongue and replacing it with a far wetter thing. Something tapped against the
innermost part of her thigh, soft and hard all at once, and then Coco’s hand was there. Fingers tickled
her. Caressed her. Parted her. Felt Coco’s other hand moving along her thigh, then up onto
Yatsuhashi, and she knew, beyond any doubt, what Coco was reaching for.

Oh god...

She whimpered in pleasure and anticipation, then began working Coco in earnest. Ass forgotten, she
slipped her hands up and around Coco’s thighs, a finger wiggling down to press against Coco’s clt
even as she began darting her tongue in and out of the tall woman, a repeated penetration that caused
Coco’s own finger to twitch spasmodically against Velvet. She heard Coco give a small moan in reaction
to her ministrations, and she smiled inwardly, pleased to be showing Coco what she meant to her in
the most intimate of ways.

Coco shifted, her moan muffled by Yatsuhashi’s mouth on hers, and the finger teasing Velvet slipped
away. Velvet paused in her licking, feeling a sense of loss as the sensations it was causing were
suddenly denied her.

She had no time to object, however. Fingers spread her, opening her so that she could feel cold air
inside the start of her, making her twitch. Coco’s wrist twisted against her own, shorn mons, and then
the thick thing poking her thigh shifted. Pressed. Entered.

She cried out softly into Coco’s body, her fingers digging into whatever bit of flesh they held as she
felt Yatsuhashi push into and stretch her, guided by Coco’s hand. She heard a soft, pleased snicker
from the woman who sat on her, felt the woman’s fingers begin stirring on her naked stomach,
marking wet circles on her air-cooled skin, and she whimpered as she felt him bottom out against the
entry to her womb.

“Ooooooh,” Coco crooned. “She likes.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “She’s not the only one.”

She couldn’t reply, her face trapped as it was. She wasn’t certain she would be able to anyway, so
lost was she in the realization that he was just as big as his height implied. A small, detached part of
her brain noted that it was a good thing she had been so well prepared by everything Coco and
Yatsuhashi had been doing to her up at that point. Otherwise, his penetration might have been
painful. As it was...
“Fuuuuuu…” she groaned, her lips vibrating against Coco’s labia as she felt herself stretched further than her fingers had ever accomplished, her body quivering around his shaft.

Coco laughed softly. “Oh, shit, Velve. You have no idea how sexy you sound right now…”

The sound of Coco and Yatsuhashi kissing returned, and Velvet felt her loins being stirred as Yatsuhashi began a slow grinding motion inside of her. Each thrust opened her widely, each slow retreat left her feeling almost pulled inside out. She gasped in shocked pleasure and, filled with a primal passion, sank her fingers into Coco’s inner thighs. Her tongue came out once more, and she began an eager, hungry feasting on Coco’s flesh, lapping at the woman’s feminine wine and driving deep into her grotto.

In mere moments the three of them had developed a rhythm as they danced in an intimate entanglement. With each stroke Yatsuhashi nearly pulled free of her, leaving her insides almost painfully vacant before he plunged in once more, gouging her belly from the inside in ways she’d never experienced at her own hand. Each of his thrusts was matched with one of her own, as she pressed her tongue deeply into Coco, each withdrawal timed with his so that she could briefly mash and squirm the tip against Coco’s clit. And soon enough Coco was anticipating, wiggling, her hips grinding forward on Velvet’s face to ride her velveteen tongue before pulling back to slip her trembling mound against Velvet’s lips.

It may have been mere seconds. It may have been centuries. Velvet couldn’t know. Her own breathing was growing harder by the moment, a sound matched by the pants and groans of her two lovers. She felt heat growing there where Yatsuhashi speared into her, felt a trembling and tension in her thighs and belly. She felt Coco shaking on her, felt the woman’s hand began scraping nails against the skin of her stomach. And then…

An animalistic grunt was the only warning Yatsuhashi gave her. She felt a sudden thrumming and twitching within her body that was not of her own doing. In the depths of her stomach she felt a heat, a slippery pressure of something pumping in deeper than he could penetrate, and she cried out in amazement as she realized he was flooding her with his seed. The sheer intimacy of it, the totality of the trust, and passion she felt him planting inside of her… She felt herself almost sob into Coco’s cleft.

Above her, it seemed that was all that was missing from Coco’s pleasure. Whether it was Velvet’s own amazed cry or the realization her lover was unreservedly flooding Velvet with his orgasm, Coco suddenly curled atop her, her thighs tightening in spasms and jerks as she suddenly went silent, her voice choked off in ecstasy, then wailed in passion, a crying, almost weeping sound full of pleasure and awe.

As her lovers slowed, then stopped, panting and quivering, Velvet marveled. She had no idea how this had happened, how she had found herself between Coco’s thighs, and Yatsuhashi inside of her. She recalled, though only through a fog, the events that had lead to her being pulled back into the niche, the conversation that had resulted in Yatsuhashi stripping her naked and Coco lovingly molesting her breasts. She knew all of that had led to this moment where she lay, feeling something hot and wet began dripping out of her to drop onto the blankets, her face soaking wet with Coco’s intimate juices. But how?

Coco gave one last small jerk, then bent down, her arms coming around Velvet’s waist in an upside down hug and she heard the woman give a deep, satisfied sigh. With clear regret, Yatsuhashi eased out of her, leaving a small rivulet flowing down over her backside, and lowered her, and Coco alike, back to the blankets. He rolled from between her legs, then leaned down to press a kiss to Coco’s cheek, then slid up to press his lips to Velvet’s.
And Velvet forgot all about wondering how this had happened, returning the kiss.
Well, last week's chapter is pretty hard to top. So I guess we'll just have to see how I do. It's Monday, and that means that I'm back with another chapter for your enjoyment! Please let me know what you think, whether it's through a comment below, sending me a note over on my Twitter, or while supporting me as a member of my Patreon, I totally thrive on comments, so help support my comment habit!

Speaking of comments, here are yours!

**Burn_It_totheground writes:**

I was waiting for the day those three finally stopped beating around the bush!

**Bookah replies:**

You and me both! I've been planning this from the start! 47 chapters and 110k words later... At last!

Of course, the fact that they've stopped beating around the bush doesn't mean that easy times are ahead of them. Things are only just getting started! So look forward to more of their troubles, trials, and occasional spots of warm and fuzzy as we continue on!

**BubbleSorted writes:**

That's right. Never forget she's a hare!

Nothing else important to see here ;)

**Bookah replies:**

Nooooope! Nothing at all! Move along.

**GrimmKaiju writes:**

I guess we didn't have to wait long to see how that turned out. Hopefully this helps Velvet's mental state and starts the road to her getting better. Now that this is taken care of it leaves me with one more question for now. Actually two questions. How will Fox react to hearing of this and my question from last week pertaining to the Fox and Neo situation. All in all another good chapter and I can't wait for next week.

**Bookah replies:**

Nothing like a good snog to make one right as rain, yes? Well, we shall see how things go from here.

As for Fox (and Neo), the reactions are coming, let me assure you. But since I am a fan of delayed gratification (unless it's me being delayed) you'll just have to wait and see. Ain't I mean? ^_^ As to whether or not Neo gets any perspective chapters of her own, the answer is a definite maybe. *wink* (Actually, since you comment every week I'll treat you. Yes, she will, but not until Summer Hunt.)
Anima Straights

Yatsuhashi groaned happily, while staring at the overhead above him. Beside him he heard a similar, if higher pitched sound, and he grinned as he fought to regain his breath. He sat up a bit, and noticed that the two women he loved were still quite entangled, even if they weren’t doing anything.

Well, mostly not doing anything. One of them, it seemed, was staring with a mysterious smile between the legs of the other from a distance of less than two inches.

Yatsuhashi fought back the urge to quirk an eyebrow at this. Instead, he schooled himself to his usual stoic appearance, regardless of how truly pleased he was with life at that particular moment, and gave a quiet cough. “Coco, what are you doing?”

The tall woman smirked, though there was a good deal of lazy enjoyment in the expression. “Watching your sperm drip out of Velvet.”

The third member of their freshly post-coital hideout suddenly began bucking and twisting beneath Coco. “Oh god! Coco! That’s… Off! Get off! Off!”

Bounced from her faunal mattress, Coco rubbed her elbow where it had struck the deck. “What? It’s surprisingly hot.”

“Gross!”

Yatsuhashi felt the eyebrow he’d been trying to keep steady nearly escape his control. “Should I feel insulted right now?”

Velvet froze from her awkward, splaylegged hunting through the blankets. She brought a hand to her face, hiding it. “No! No, not at all. You were good! Great! You felt amazing inside… I mean…”

Coco laughed. “It’s alright, Velve. I get it. As awesome as sex is, it’s also messy, and it doesn’t take long before slippery and warm becomes tacky and cold.”

“Ew!” Velvet agreed, her hand falling from her face enough for her to catch a glimpse of what she was looking for. She snatched up her leotard and began wiping between her legs.

“Do little squeezes inside. I find that it helps get more of it out.”

“I know that! Oum, Coco! TMI!”

Yatsuhashi shook his head. He rummaged around himself, finding a discarded sock and using it to clean as well. “Well, it looks like we’re going to need to find a way to do some laundry.”

Coco snorted as Velvet grimaced, dropping the leotard to the deck. “It was kind of… messy anyway.”

“No kidding.” Coco pinned Velvet with her eyes. “I bet even your shorts got ruined. I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone that wet before.”

Velvet curled up on herself a bit, parts of her flashing red. Yatsuhashi was privately amused to see
that the color extended to the top of Velvet’s breasts. “Sorry,” the faunus muttered.

“Stop that.” Coco gently slapped Velvet between her two tall hare ears. “No more apologizing for being turned on by your lovers. That’s a GOOD thing.”

Velvet sputtered a bit, and Yatsuhashi decided to have mercy and intercede. “So I take it we’re all official now?”

“We damn well better be. We’re covered in one another’s body fluids, after all.”

Yatsuhashi finally lost the fight to control his eyebrow, feeling it climb his forehead. “Coco…”

The woman grinned, unrepentant. “Yeah, yeah. ‘Could I have put that more crudely?’ The answer is yes, by the way. I could have used the word ‘spunk’.”

“Coco…” Yatsuhashi growled, though there was no true ire behind it. If the truth were to be told, he actually took some amusement from Coco’s refusal to play by the rules of polite society. It made a nice contrast compared to his own usual discipline.

Before Coco could go any further with the low banter, Velvet caught their attention with a sudden naked roll, ears erect, her eyes locked on the narrow passageway that led into their secretive love nest within the belly of the large cargo ship. She froze like that, staring, and Yatsuhashi slid his eyes over to Coco. Team CFVY’s leader met his eyes with her own, and gave a slight nod.

Slowly, quietly, he reached over and grabbed his pants, slipping them on and cinching them tight to his waist. Beside him Coco was similarly moving, making no sound as she slipped into her form fitting trousers. After a moment, Velvet began feeling around, though her eyes remained on the passageway. Yatsuhashi glanced around, then found Velvet’s shorts and slipped them into her hand, watching as she quickly slid them on and zipped them up.

“What have you got?” Coco whispered, draping Velvet’s short jacket over the woman’s shoulders.

Quickly pulling the jacket over her arms, Velvet, turned so that one eye remained towards the passage. “Voices. I can’t make out the words. But they’re getting closer.”

Yatsuhashi felt a frown form on his face. In the few days since they had found their niche, no one had come near the auxiliary breaker room they nestled alongside of. This meant there was no pattern or routine they’d come across to explain the behavior. It could be that the crew only inspected this part of the ship weekly. It could be that they needed to access the breaker room for some maintenance task. Or it could be that someone suspected that something larger than rats was lurking in the bilges.

“Hey!”

All three of them froze, their anxiety suddenly spiking. Velvet’s fingers stopped any effort to work to close up the zipper of her jacket, while Coco peered out of the neck of the undershirt she typically wore beneath her cardigan. For his part, Yatsuhashi stopped looking for his tunic. It was clear that neither of the two humans had needed to have Velvet’s ears to hear the startled voice clearly. Nor to hear the conversation that followed.

“There’s something laying on the deck over there.”

“Probably some sort of strap or something from the loading.”

“That doesn’t look like a tie down to me. Go check it out.”
Feet began echoing through the gap, boots making dull clunks on the no slip surface of the deck. The trio eyed one another, then began grabbing weapons with silent haste, the remaining need to dress suddenly subsumed by a more immediate concern. Yatsuhashi’s hand found his sword just in time for the footsteps to stop just outside of the niche.

“It’s a belt.”

“What kind of belt?”

“A lady’s belt.” The voice paused, then snarled. “Do you smell that?”

Yatsuhashi winced. He strongly doubted that whoever it was that was now holding Velvet’s belt was referring to her scent on it. The air, he was realizing, was pungent with an odor far more animalistic.

Outside, he heard the sound of a weapon being drawn. “Yeah. Someone’s been fucking.”

There was a pause, and then. “It ain’t those newlyweds, either. The belt doesn’t smell like that little human bitch. It smells faunus.”

“Gimme that, Forest.” Boots hurried close. There was a moment of quiet, and then the voice spoke again. “Shit! Get the boss! Hurry! It smells like that bunny from the cafe!”

“You don’t think…”

“Fucking hurry! Tell the boss that stupid doe was a huntress, and she’s on board with friends!”

Yatsuhashi didn’t wait to hear feet running before he threw himself down the narrow crack that led back out to the passageway proper. He felt his chest scrape against a shipping container as his shoulder blades rubbed the bulkhead behind him, but his aura prevented his bare skin from catching and tearing. He burst out into open space just in time to see a brightly plumed figure dash around a corner, headed for the stairs that led to the top decks.

He began to give chase, but paused as another figure stepped out of a pocket of dark in the ill lit passageway. The man was short, but broadly built. He grinned, his face pink and his mouth full of flat teeth. He scrunched his nose up, and Yatsuhashi recognized its similarity to that of a pig. He found himself grateful the smile hadn’t revealed a pair of tusks.

“Heh.” The faunus smirked. “Figured you were close by, given the smell. Did the race traitor feel good on your cock?”

Yatsuhashi clamped down on his emotions, refusing to let the man bait him into anger. He brought his sword in front of him, evaluating just how to utilize it in the enclosed space. The massive blade suited his fighting style very well, but was certainly optimized for the broad outdoors, not a cramped ship’s passageway. “Surrender. Even after what you did to Beacon, I’m inclined to show mercy if you give up.”

“Not happening,” the man grunted. “Not to you, human. Nor to that other human behind you. And definitely not to someone that takes sides against her own kind.” He frowned. “Hello again, Velvet. Nice tits.”

Yatsuhashi glanced behind himself to see that Coco and Velvet had both come out of the crack just behind him. Velvet was brandishing her camera, her vest still open.

“Yatsu!” Coco barked, and he spun around too late to avoid the attack. The White Fang terrorist had taken full advantage of Yatsuhashi’s distraction, lashing out at him with a metal studded whip.
Yatsuhashi grunted as the lash cracked against his cheek, raising a welt even through his aura. He brought a hand up from his sword hilt, rubbing his cheek with the back of it.

“Like that?” The man grinned. “I do. There’s something delicious of using a whip against a race that wants to see us enslaved, don’t you think?”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “I think you talk too much.”

His opponent snorted, then began waving the whip around in the air, making it dance in narrow arcs and circles in front and behind him, angled along the narrow passageway. Yatsuhashi grimaced as he watched. The whip had been quite fast when the attack had come in. He’d be hard pressed to block another one, and even if he was able to maneuver his massive sword in the claustrophobic space, the whip could well simple curve around the blade to still do damage.

“Shoot him.” He heard Velvet behind him, her instruction clearly meant for Coco.

“Can’t,” Coco replied, her voice tight with frustration. “I’d probably hit Yatsu with the ricochettes.”

The faunus laughed. “Lesson number one of shipboard life. The small guy has the advantage. Narrow as this space is, I only have to fight one of you at a time, and I have more room to maneuver than a monster like you does.”

The whip struck out, the tip breaking the sound barrier with an audible cracking. Yatsuhashi brought his sword in a fast sweep before him, feeling the blade catch the whip and force it aside, but as he expected the tip still struck him. He felt the pain as it raised a bloody abrasion on his pec, a drip of blood quick to start rolling down onto his stomach and into the waistband of his pants.

“See?” The man grinned.

A brilliant flash illuminated the passageway. Yatsuhashi blinked, after images ingrained on the inside of his eyes. He realized how fortunate he was, however, to be blessed with merely human eyes. Pigs, if he recalled, had poor close in vision, but excellent distance vision. Velvet’s camera had just taken full advantage of that, directly flooding the man’s eyes with bright light in the shadowy corridor while Yatsuhashi had merely caught the reflected light.

The faunus was stumbling back down the passageway, his hand on the wall to help him keep straight in spite of his momentary blindness. Yatsuhashi needed no encouragement to immediately begin giving chase. His feet made a slapping sound as they struck the rubberized decking, and he quickly found himself gaining on his target.

A sudden opening to the side led to the stairway heading up. Still blinded, the running criminal hadn’t seen it coming, and fell to the right, all balance lost. Grinning, Yatsuhashi threw himself towards the junction, spinning around it.

The whip cracked out, striking the bulkhead behind Yatsuhashi, and he felt the rush of air beside his ear as the flexible weapon flew back from the strike. Startled by how close the blow had come to striking his eye, Yatsuhashi swung his blade in an instinctive counter attack.

The entire passageway rang like a giant bell with serious flaws in it. Metal vibrated and groaned as bolts and bands rattled and banged. The sound echoed back and forth, a cacophony that hurt Yatsuhashi’s ears.

The Faunus was leaned up against the stairway heading up, shaking his head violently as though completely lost to the double attack on his senses that had first robbed him of his sight, and now of his hearing as well. The motion suddenly stopped as both he and Yatsuhashi felt, rather than heard
what happened next.

The short passageway to the stairs twisted as Yatsuhashi watched, the stairway springing free from the deck as the bolts sheared and ricocheted with a sound like gunshots. The bulkhead behind gave a low, almost subsonic groan that Yatsuhashi could feel in his bones. More bolts began to snap, bouncing off the surrounding metal surfaces hard enough to leave dents.

And then a pipe broke. Followed quickly by a second. A seam in the bulkhead beside the stairway opened, and a sudden blast of water began showering down from both pipes and wall, knocking the faunus to the deck and rolling over Yatsuhashi’s feet in a wave of ice cold water.

“Oops?”
Spring Hunt updates Mondays.

Oh, I always get so excited when Monday rolls around! That’s the day I get to share the latest chapters of my stories with everyone. I think I enjoy that as much as you do!

Oh! And there’s some exciting news! Not only am I getting excited that Season 6 of RWBY is coming soon, but the first episode will be shown in a great big extravaganza event an hour from where I live! I am soooooo stoked! And even more... my greatest fear and biggest dream are coming true! Team CFVY is BACK! They won’t (so far as I know) be showing up in Season 6. But they will be getting their own book! It will, of course, totally destroy any cannonicity this little story previously held, but so, so worth it! I can’t wait until 2019! For anyone wanting to read more, check out Rooster Teeth’s announcement!

Of course, you didn’t come here to learn about any of that. You came here to read the next chapter of Spring Hunt! So here it is. Please feel free to leave your comments and questions regarding it down below, or over on my Patreon or Twitter. I’m always eager to hear from you, and revel in your continued support!

So, let’s get to your comments on last week’s chapter, then get to what you really came for!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Another good chapter. And now everything has gone very south very quickly with no signs of stopping. CVY has been found and the ship has a leak which could end badly unless it is repaired soon. This might cut Neo’s fun with Fox short but there is a chance of things being fixed

Bookah replies:

Poor Neo. Every time she seems to get a chance, someone goes and breaks the boat. Will she ever be able to enjoy something beyond pleasant snuggles? Stay tuned... because you won’t get the answer today!

But seriously... just keep reading. I’m not saying exactly what is going to happen. But something will.

Soon.

Eventually.

Ish.

CoopBro writes:

Uh-oh Spaghetti-O’s!

Imagine explaining to Fox how they got caught. He’d likely say "I don’t know if I want to
high five you, or punch you."

Bookah replies:

*I believe the technical term for what just happened is "It done gone pear shaped". And yes, Fox is just gonna LOVE this one...

Speaking of Fox...

**Anima Straits**

Fox couldn’t be certain how long he had slept, curled up around Neo like a protective shell. He could, however, be certain it hadn’t been long enough. The cabin was still shrouded in black. The porthole still looked out on darkness. Not even a hint of dawn could be seen beyond. He grumbled, then wiggled in more tightly against the diminutive girl bundled up against his stomach.

His determination to return to sleep was dashed a moment later. He felt the slightest of vibrations coming to him, transferred through the mattress of the bed from its source. It wasn’t the shaking of the ship’s engines. Those had been minor from the start, and he’d quickly grown accustomed to them. This was different. It was subtle, somehow, but it also felt a bit irregular, less like a rhythmic beating of machinery and more a tiny shivering and shuddering coming from a living thing.

He brought his hand up to rest lightly on Neo’s side. Nothing more than the even rising and fall of her breathing came to him through the touch. He frowned, as Neo should have been the only living thing besides himself in the cabin.

Just as he began to slide out from under the sheets, the night was torn by the sound of a klaxon going off. Neo jerked awake with a start, slamming against Fox, who instinctively wrapped his arms around her. The two paused like that for only a moment, and then began grabbing at clothing that had been stacked neatly on chairs to either side of the bed.

The klaxon cut out, followed immediately by a disembodied voice. “Flooding in compartment 12. Flooding in compartment 12. All hands to damage control stations.”

Fox and Neo exchanged a quick glance, then hurriedly finished dressing. Together they stepped out the door and jogged down the hallway to emerge out onto the brightly lit deck of the ship. He glanced down at her as they stood on deck, then led her forward towards the bow. “How bad do you think it is?”

He felt a tug at his hand and turned to look back. She shrugged, no smile on her face, but no fear either.

“Oh, so you’re not in the Atlas Navy? I thought you knew everything about ships.”

She stuck her tongue out at him with a laugh, and the pair rounded the corner of the deck house and emerged onto the ship’s bow.

“We got problems!”

They turned and watched as one of the White Fang members bolted out onto the bow. The man scurried over to the side, where the largest of that gang stood gazing out at the sea.
The giant faunus turned and grabbed the brightly plumed figure. “Slow down, Forest. Explain.”

“Hunters. Three of them. And that Velvet girl’s one! They were hiding in the hold.”

Fox could practically feel the aura of the White Fang group leader darken and grow in a sort of tranquil fury. “Get the others up. Where’s Ze Dong?”

“Down below, holding them off while I get you.”

The big man growled and began marching toward the door into the ship. “Get my weapon. I’m going directly there. I’m going to kill me a house slave.”

“I don’t think so.” Fox stepped into the terrorist’s way, casually crossing his arms.

His path blocked, the man stopped half way across the deck, eyeing Fox from twenty feet away with a casual disregard. “I don’t suppose you’re the one who hit the little bunny rabbit.”

Fox grinned. “First, she’s a hare, not a rabbit. And second…” He jerked a thumb over to where Neo was sitting casually against the railing examining her nails with newly revealed pink and brown eyes. “She did it.”

Eyes jerked to contemplate the diminutive woman, then narrowed. “Neo. I knew we shouldn’t have trusted you or that arrogant fop you followed around. I should have killed you both when I had the chance.”

Neo rose from the railing and strolled forward, her hips rocking in a provocative way Fox knew was deliberate. She stepped in front of the White Fang boss and rested one hand on a cocked hip. The other came up and she waggled her fingers as one.

Fox grinned. “She says, ‘come get some.’”

The giant faunus flexed his fingers, making the joints crack menacingly, and the muscles in his arms tautened, ripping the tight shirt he was wearing. He reached up and pulled it off, revealing tribal tattoos on his left arm and shoulder. “I’m gonna enjoy this. Forest! Use the deck hatch and get my weapon up here!”

“You got it boss!”

The other faunus ducked away towards an open hatch near the ship’s prow, ducking down inside it. Fox watched him go, then gently patted Neo on the head. “Can you handle him on your own?”

She turned her head and smirked up at him, the difference in their height giving him the impression he was looking down upon her from on high. She reached up and patted him on the cheek.

“Touching.”

Fox glanced over at the large man as he sneered at their display. He patted ruffled Neo’s hair with a smile. “Of course. We’re newlyweds, aren’t we?” He bent down and gave Neo a fast kiss. “Kill him, sweetie.”

Neo’s laugh was anything but warm and affectionate as he spun around to race back inside the ship. He hurried down the passageway, rushing past his own cabin door. The faunus passengers had all been housed down towards the end of the passenger accommodations. He’d never lingered long enough to figure who had which cabin, worried about arousing suspicion, but it was enough to know
they were all down that way.

At a T-intersection just before reaching those cabins he slid on the carpet, coming to a halt. The moment he was no longer moving he shot his leg out, swinging it up in a kick at head level.

A flash of colors flew out of the corridor, arching over the outthrust leg. Fox watched with mild surprise as the Forest avoided the kick, his hands actually catching the top of Fox’ leg to assist him in the vault.

The man careened off the wall almost behind Fox, and sped away down the narrow hallway. “Sorry, not much of a fighter,” he called.

Fox bounced back onto both feet and hurried after the man. Before he could catch up, however, he watched as the avian snatched a latch and threw the door open with a blood curdling screech no mere human throat could have caused. He heard a shout in reply, and a fist thrust out of the cabin, nearly accomplishing what he had attempted to do to Forest at the junction behind him.

The fist was followed by a whip thin woman with scales. Despite the small size of the space they were in, she slipped past him, a brief moment of contact between their two chests startling Fox. As she went she grabbed his arm in her hand and jerked him around before swinging up to wrap her legs around his arm.

He swung his arm violently at the wall in an attempt to dislodge her. She slid off and flipped mid air, landing on all fours facing him, her mouth opening in a hiss to reveal two oversized fangs.

“Well… Shit,” Fox sighed. “Poisonous?”

“Venomous,” came the reply behind him. Fox ducked and rolled towards the snake faunus, careful to avoid coming into her reach. He glanced behind to take in the curled horns of a ram standing behind him, The ram grinned, tugging at a scruffy beard. “I recommending letting her bite you. It’ll be a lot quicker and less painful than letting me be the one to kill you, huntsman.”

“You’re blocking the way, Grey.”

“So’s he.”

Fox grimaced as he saw the feathered head emerge from the cabin, along with the tip of what had to be an absurdly large chainsaw.

“You have got to be kidding me.”

The ram grinned, then lowered his head and charged. Fox immediately backpedaled, then kicked off into the air just in time to avoid having the woman tackle his legs from behind. For a moment he hung there, grimacing, as he felt the snake faunus sliding across the rug beneath him and watched the ram flying above him, a dangerous threesome threatening to sandwich him. Then his eyes widened as he realized that Forest, moving even more quickly than the ram, was sailing over the top of his comrade, the chainsaw held tightly to his chest.

Fox landed hands first, pivoting on them to add extra speed to his feet as he cartwheeled. His leg connected with the Ram, sending him even further down the passage with a grunt. He then landed on his feet in time to see the feathers of Forest disappear back out onto deck.

*Neo won’t like that*, he sighed, then carefully put his back to the wall so he could watch both of his remaining opponents out of the corner of his eye. He watched as the two rose to their feet, the ram with a slow grin as he came upwards completely, the woman with an alien grace as she poisoned
herself in a crouch that felt dangerously similar to a coiled viper preparing to strike.

_This is not good_, he realized. Sandwiched between them, he could only take half measures against either. Any move he made to counter one’s attack could be taken advantage of by the other, with him half blinded to their actions by his own. Trapped in that narrow space, he could only really go two directions, up the passage, or down. It severely limited his options. And so long as that was true, they could simply keep coming at him from opposite directions, knowing that the venomous woman only needed one lucky bite, while he needed to be quite lucky every single time.

So make your own luck.

He made a sudden rush towards the ram, flicking his wrists to produce the blades of his gauntlets. The ram lowered his head, preparing to receive the attack without hesitation, and Fox smiled at the ram’s clear intent not to give any ground. He swung his arms around in a strike, aiming it deliberately at one of the horns, rather than between them, then adjusted the strike at the last minute.

Rather than striking the horn with one of his blades, he instead grabbed it in his hand and kicked his legs into the air ahead of him. He slid past the ram’s ribs, his momentum carrying him past and jerking the ram around by the horn. The large beast-man’s head came around, followed by his shoulders, and then his feet went out from under him. The man crashed to the carpet, with Fox landing atop him.

A pained hiss came from beneath, and Fox could see the legs and snake like tail of the female faunus coming out from behind the ram’s head. As Fox had hoped, she’d attempted to attack while his focus was on the ram, and his unconventional maneuver had resulted in the ram landing on top of her.

A shout of surprise came from beside him, and he and the ram both turned to look down the side passage. Fox spotted the woman who had talked to him about the faunus at dinner a day earlier, her hand over her mouth and her eyes wide as she stared at what was transpiring.

“Sorry,” Fox quipped. “You did warn me to stay away from them.”

The ram exploded upwards with a bellow, and Fox lept sideways down the side passage. He landed in front of the stewardess, who immediately fell backwards then began crabwalking away head first with a cry of terror.

The klaxon suddenly sounded again, and Fox turned to evaluate his opponents.

Both had risen, though the snake woman looked a tad wobbly. This did nothing to reduce the clear anger on her face as she gave Fox a definite death glare. The ram was shaking his head, his eyes glaring at the klaxon mounted on the wall instead of on Fox.

Before anyone could say anything, the alarm cut out and was immediately replaced by the same voice that had spoken earlier.

“All hands to arms. Stowaways are attempting to sabotage the ship. Deadly force is authorized.”

A moment of stunned silence filled the air after the loudspeaker died away, and then the ram smirked. Behind Fox, he heard a clicking sound. Turning, he saw the human woman behind him, still sitting on the floor, but with a gun clamped between both hands and pointed directly at him.

“Well… crap.”
Chapter Notes

Spring Hunt updates Mondays.

It's always exciting to post new chapters of this! And this week I get to do it a little early! (Monday will be so very busy for me I'm doing this Sunday Night.) Whoopy!

As always, I love hearing from you, so please drop me a line with questions, suggestions, and comments below, or through my Twitter or Patreon. It always makes my day!

Speaking of your comments...

CoopBro writes:

Perhaps the sinking ship is a metaphor for the sinking ship of Fox and Neo's ship being interrupted by people wanting to kill them. Will they survive to meet up again?

Bookah Replies

They do seem to have a lot of people shoot at them, don't they? Perhaps they're not fans like you and I are? Well, we shall certainly see how well they do at scuttling the ship! I suspect Neo might have a thing or two to say about their trying though...

GrimmKaiju writes:

And things go even farther south as the situation grows more dangerous. Fox can only hold out for so long until he gets help but CFVY and Neo will have their hands full if everyone on the ship is trying to kill them. Things are looking a little “grimm” for CFVY and Neo if something doesn’t happen soon. I look forward to seeing how it all plays out.

Bookah replies

I see what you did there... XD

Believe me, things have only just started! Thank goodness none of them are channeling Han Solo. "I've got a bad feeling about this..."

Anima Straits

Coco hissed as cold water rushed past her bare feet. She splashed forward quickly to where Yatsuhashi stood at a T intersection looking slightly abashed. Water ran down off his skin, and he shook his face to get some of the drips off of it.

“I think I broke the boat,” Yatsuhashi muttered.

Coco glanced into the passageway the water was flowing out of. Pipe junctions were showering the
place with water at a rate of gallons per second, and the wall against which the staircase should have been mounted had sprung, with water flowing out of it at an even greater rate.

“Is that the ocean flowing in?”

“Maybe? That’s not the outer hull. Maybe some sort of tank?”

Velvet splashed up beside the pair. “I hope the pumps can keep up. Where’s the bad guy?”

Yatsuhashi gestured to where the man he’d been chasing was groaning and attempting to pull himself upward using the tilted wreckage of the staircase. Blood was dripping into the water from a messy wound in his leg. “I think a snapped bolt got him.”

Suddenly, an alarm began ringing throughout the spaces surrounding them, echoing off the bulkheads and causing Velvet to wince. “Flooding in compartment 12. Flooding in compartment 12. All hands to damage control stations.”

The three turned to look at one another for a moment, then Coco shrugged. “Time to go. Leave him. I’m more worried about uninjured White Fang.” She turned and began splashing her way down the passageway towards the nearest set of intact stairs. She could hear the other two following.

The water running down the deck made movement tricky. Though the surface of the deck had been coated with some sort of no slip substance, the momentum of the water kept trying to push her feet out from under her. She kept a good grip on her bag with one hand and used the other to grasp at anything that offered itself in order to maintain an extra bit of traction to keep her stable.

“The water’s coming from this way!”

Hearing the shout, Coco immediately jerked a door open and darted inside. Velvet and Yatsuhashi quickly followed her, diving into the dark. As soon as he cleared the hatch, Yatsuhashi put his weight behind the door, pushing it against the water that was flowing in. He couldn’t shut the door properly, but he could, at least, make it appear closed to eyes that had more pressing concerns.

Seconds later, grunts of exertion and splashes marked the passing of several people, headed towards the source of the flooding. “What do you think?”

“It’s not bad enough to sink us. But it’s gonna make a mess.”

“Great place for it. Why the Straits of all places?”

“Don’t call for problems we don’t need! Bad enough we’ve sprung a leak.”

“Sorry.”

The sounds faded, leaving behind only the splashing of the slowly rising water in the compartment, and Yatsuhashi let the door push open under the force of it. Coco stuck her head out, quickly evaluating the passageway, then stepped out, leading the way once more.

“The stairway is just ahead. We’ll go for the deck. At this point I really doubt we can hide any longer.”

“You think?”

Coco grinned at Yatsuhashi’s wry response to her comment. “The only thing to be done now is to take down all of the White Fang, and hope the crew decides to let it go.”
“And if they don’t?” Velvet asked.

“It’s going to be a long voyage.”

Coco threw herself around the corner to the staircase heading to the upper decks, only to feel herself bounce off of something. She landed with a splash, spluttering as water rained down on her face, and she thrashed about to stand upright.

Once the water cleared from her eyes, she saw Yatsuhashi wrestling around with a sailor nearly as large as himself. The two slammed into a bulkhead, leaving room for Velvet to leap past and land thighs first on the head of a second sailor, taking him to the deck. With a splash the pair landed and, without pause, Velvet leapt up and slammed her foot into the back of Yatsuhashi’s opponent’s head. The man went down like a sack, landing on top of Velvet’s first victim.

“Was that really necessary?” Coco asked.

Velvet was already pulling the smaller man out from under the larger, propping him upright against the bulkhead to keep his face out of the water. “As soon as he saw Yatsuhashi he went for a wrench on his belt.”

Coco sighed. “Bad idea on his part. Let’s go.”

The trio launched themselves upwards, spiraling from one deck to the next, racing for open air. A sudden clanging filled the space around them, and Coco turned to watch Velvet’s face curl into a snarl, though the hare faunus didn’t slow in her climbing.

“All hands to arms. Stowaways are attempting to sabotage the ship. Deadly force is authorized.”

Coco snarled. “Well, this just got complicated.” She threw herself up a final set of steps, then blasted through a door at the top, sliding to a pause. Yatsuhashi almost piled into her from behind, barely stopping in time, only for a brown dart to somehow squeeze past the both of them.

Before Coco had quite finished figuring out what was happening, a gun was discharging into the roof of the hallway, a female cry of pain accompanying the sound. Velvet had spun with the kick that had sent the gun spiraling out of the crew member’s hand and immediately applied a second blow to the woman, this time striking the side of the woman’s head. The woman flopped over onto the deck.

“Coco!”

She jerked her head to look further down the passageway, just in time to see Fox get hit, hard, by one of the White Fang members they’d been told about. The ram had struck Fox from behind while he was distracted, and was continuing to race down the passage with a stunned Fox in his arms like a shield.

She began to convert her handbag to its gun form, but quickly changed her mind. There would, quite simply, be no room for her to use it in the narrow space, even if doing so wouldn’t have hit Fox. She cursed, uncertain what to do, when a large form stepped past her.

Yatsuhashi interrupted the ram faunus with the simple expedient of throwing a haymaker right past Fox to slam into the assailant’s face. Fox rocketed forward to tumble to the floor next to Coco, while the ram was stopped dead in his tracks, shaking his head.

Yatsuhashi didn’t let the man have time to recover. Dropping his sword from his other hand, he immediately seized the ram by both horns. The White Fang member’s hands shot up, grappling
Yatsuhashi’s wrists and squeezing, causing Yatsuhashi to grunt, but he didn’t let go. Instead, he jerked the ram’s head downward, bringing his knee up to meet it, smashing the man’s nose with a spray of blood.

“Watch out!” Coco jerked as Fox shouted from where he was rising beside her. “Snake!” She watched as a small, highly flexible woman leapt into the air beyond Yatsuhashi, flying over the top of the ram’s head. The woman was aimed straight for Yatsuhashi, whose hands were still being held by his opponent.

“Nope!” Coco stepped forward and reached up, grabbing the woman just as she would have landed on Yatsuhashi’s face. With a heave, Coco jerked her to the side, then threw her further down the passageway. The woman spun around in mid air, then landed in a crouch, hissing, and Coco frowned at the sight of clearly venomous fangs in the woman’s overly-open mouth.

“They’re this way!”

Coco cursed at the shouts coming from around the corner behind the snake faunus, and she immediately deployed her rotary cannon. She might not have been able to use it in a close in fight in such a space, but with no one in front of her she cared about, that same narrowness now became a choke point for her to control. She grinned with malice and squeezed the trigger.

The dust laced rounds blasted away from her looking more like a solid beam than individual rounds. The snake woman whipped away with shocking agility, diving around the corner at the end of the hall as shouts of alarm greeted the sudden destruction to the bulkhead in front of Coco. With a curse, Coco let up on the trigger and watched as the once solid wall fragmented, bits falling away to reveal a starlit night beyond.

“Velvet!” she shouted, and a brown blur shot past her, racing around the corner and after the faunus. “Fox!” A second, not quite as fast streak rocketed after the two faunus, and Coco turned around to evaluate Yatsuhashi’s situation.

The wrestling match was nearly over. Yatsuhashi had his arms around the ram’s neck in a choke hold. The ram was struggling as best he could, trying to beat Yatsuhashi with his fists, but lacked the leverage to do enough damage to dissuade the giant. He was purpling as he began running out of oxygen, but Coco was not satisfied with waiting it out. Unable to spin her cannon in the narrow space, she simply jerked it backwards, running the back end of it directly into the ram’s stomach with all of her might.

The ram spasmed, then fell into a stupor.

Even feeling the man go limp, Yatsuhashi didn’t let the man out of the hold. He jerked his head to the wall near Coco. “Fire hose.”

Nodding, Coco turned and smashed the glass box holding a coiled fire hose and began dragging it out. Starting at the ankles she proceeded to wrap the man up like a mummy, keeping the loops as tight as she possibly could. Only when the man was wrapped up almost to his shoulders, the end of the hose woven through lower down and knotted off to prevent any slipping, did Yatsuhashi let go.

Coco sighed. “Okay. One down, and one injured somewhere below. That leaves three. Fox and Velve are after the snake. That leaves the one with the feathers and the boss.”

Yatsuhashi grunted. “Any idea where they might have gotten off to?”

“Same place as Neo?”
The sudden harsh roaring of a chainsaw came to them from the opening Coco had made in the ship’s superstructure. Yatsuhashi jerked his head that way, then frowned. “I think I know where Neo is.”

“And the boss, too. Go.”

Yatsuhashi snatched his sword up off the floor and raced towards the bent and twisted metal at the end of the passageway. Without slowing he smashed through it, finishing the work Coco had begun, then began racing forward towards the ship’s bow. Coco began racing after him, only to stop as a colorful flash streaked back in through the hole.

The feathered faunus dropped to the floor, glancing at Coco, then smirking. “Oops. I bet that gun is pretty worthless inside.”

Coco glanced back down at her canon, then shrugged. “Ish,” she admitted.

“Perfect! Then you won’t be a problem at all.” He tossed her a wink, then darted towards her, jerking at the last minute to avoid the gunfire she’d immediately replied to the move with. His twisting motion threw him into a hatch to the side, and she dashed after him, catching up against a railing and jerking her head downward to see him practically flying down the stairway leading back down into the ship.

“See you, human!” he shouted.

She whipped her cannon over the rail and cut loose, letting a spray of bullets chase after him futilely. She could hear his laughter over the sound of the rotary gun firing and the sound of metal shredding, and with a snarl she brought the gun back up. She hesitated a moment, then screamed in frustration, throwing herself down the stairs in pursuit.
And the next chapter is here! Things are definitely getting pretty crazy for Team CFVY and Neo. I know I ask every week how things could possibly get worse, but here I am asking again! Let’s find out, shall we?

But first, your comments!

**GrimmKaiju writes:**

> As the fight heats up Fox and Neo don’t know that the ship isn’t gonna sink so their actions might reflect that and cause them to look for a way off the ship. That would be interesting if they got off the ship only to have Coco tell them the ship was fine. Altho they might need to get out of the ship if the crew keeps attacking them.

**Bookah replies:**

> My goodness, that would be embarrassing, wouldn't it? I can imagine the amount of teasing Fox might get for "trying to run away with Neo".

As always, Please feel free to drop me a line with your own comments, questions, or suggestions. You can hit me up here, on my [Twitter](https://twitter.com), or over on [Patreon](https://patreon.com). Thanks so very much!

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**Animus Strait**

A colorful streak flew past him as he used the rail to redirect himself forward. Yatsuhashi frowned as the feathered faunus went by, but the sound of the chainsaw drew him onward, leaving the man to Coco. He rushed forward, Coco’s cannon flinging rounds into the night behind him, and slid out onto the bow, brandishing his sword.

Neo was leaning casually against a capstan, watching the gigantic faunus stalk towards her with his chainsaw dragging behind him, kicking up sparks. She lifted her hand, examining the nails through her black gloves in casual disregard, as though bored with his pace. As he finally closed and swung the machine up in a sweep, she twisted, letting the chainsaw blade buzz past her head before spinning and smacking him in the back with her parasol.

The faunus lieutenant turned, still quite calm, and paused as he saw Yatsuhashi standing there. The man’s face, as expressionless as the mask he so often wore, turned to briefly evaluate Neo, then back to Yatsuhashi, and he grunted. “This might even be fair,” he rumbled.

Yatsuhashi heard Neo giggle, and then the girl suddenly was racing forward in a flurry of flips and kicks. The lieutenant watched her come, raising his chainsaw, but then suddenly let the tip drop to gouge the deck just as Neo arrived. His hand shot out, snatching her out of the air and slamming her downward.

She’d vanished by the time his fist smashed into the deck, but Yatsuhashi still found himself shocked.
that the man had caught the nimble girl at all. He found himself tensing up at the realization this man might be a much more capable opponent than he had originally taken him for, and carefully poised his sword for defense as the faunus slowly turned to face him full on.

The pair evaluated one another for a moment, then both launched forward simultaneously. They came together in a shower of sparks, Yatsuhashi’s substantially large sword resisting the cutting action of the ridiculously overgrown chainsaw. He stared into the snarling face of the White Fang Lieutenant, refusing to allow any emotion to show.

He felt himself start to slide backwards as his opponent pushed, and he lowered his stance. The sliding stopped, and he pushed back, it being the faunus’ turn to slip back a bit under the pressure. He heard the man grunt, and then the two jumped apart, each gauging the best way for the next attack to be launched.

In a heartbeat, the large faunus whipped his chainsaw backwards, the blade intercepting the attack Neo was launching against his back. Neo flicked away, her heterochromatic eyes briefly glancing at the six inches of pointy steel sticking out of the end of her parasol. Yatsuhashi spared the weapon a glance as well, wincing as he noticed chips in it, though he suspected its integrity had not been compromised.

He jumped forward, hoping to take advantage of the chainsaw being behind his enemy, but suddenly bounced off course as he was struck from the side. His head skewed, and he realized Neo had somehow tackled him while he was focused on his attack. Before he could even begin to wonder why she had done that, a crack filled the air, and the sudden whinging sound of a ricochet echoed off the crane beside him. He jerked his eyes away from Neo to see a crewman up on a bridge wing lining a rifle up for a second shot.

Neo was gone before Yatsuhashi could even stop his sideways momentum. Flashes of pink and brown were here, there, seemingly randomly placed as she bounced, flipped, and jumped her way up to where the sniper was already lining up a second shot. With a high pitched scream the assassin suddenly pitched forward, upending over the side of the bridge wing to fall out of view and into the waters beside the ship. Neo gave a quick wave towards Yatsuhashi, then turned and dashed into the bridge proper, the sounds of fighting immediately ensuing.

A grunt brought Yatsuhashi’s attention back to the White Fang on deck with him. “Now that we’re free of interruptions...” the faunus rumbled. He lifted his chainsaw and charged at Yatsuhashi, swinging it down in a heavy strike that Yatsuhashi was able to dodge. A sweep of Yatsuhashi’s own blade set the man twisting to the side, the blow glancing off the chainsaw with a clang.

A series of blows were exchanged that way, as the duelists evaluated one another’s skills, each looking for an opening. Yatsuhashi seemed to be the nimbler of the pair, able to bring his large weapon to bear quickly from a multitude of directions. Though slower, the Lieutenant was able to take full advantage of his massive chainsaw, wielding it as much like a shield as a blade, stepping behind it every time Yatsuhashi changed the angle of attack. The pair seemed to be evenly matched.

The White Fang man launched forward in an attack, and Yatsuhashi suddenly changed his tactics. Rather than meet the attack head on, he backpedaled, keeping out of reach. His sword shot out in a wide sweep, the reach insufficient to make contact with his opponent. Despite this lack of sufficient distance, the attack was not meaningless.

The Lieutenant suddenly flew backwards, sliding on his feet as he nearly doubled over. Behind him the deck crane tore free of its mount with a squeal of tearing and bending metal. A pair of capstan’s skewed, still mounted to the deck but with the wooden planks cracking and splintering and the metal below warping upward. Beyond this the railing simply disintegrated, gone over the ship’s side in a
series of small splashes as metal fragments rained down on the sea.

There was a brief pause, and the faunus glanced back over his shoulder at the destruction behind him. He turned back to Yatsuhashi and grinned. “That’s not a good idea, you know. Such a destructive semblance may be useful on land, but how much of it could the ship withstand?”

Yatsuhashi shrugged, and swung the blade again, wreaking further havoc in the ship’s bow. Splinters flew, metal shrieked, and things twisted and bent. The Lieutenant frowned, bracing himself, and dug the screaming saw blade into the deck. The cutting action opened up a line in the deck as the man slid backward, but the friction of cutting did serve to slow him, like an anchor being drug along the bottom by a still moving ship.

“You’re insane,” the man growled, eyeing Yatsuhashi. “You’re going to rip the bow clean off.”

“You could always surrender.” Yatsuhashi looked at the man, his face placid. In truth, he wasn’t feeling particularly placid. His efforts to simply blow the man over the side were a definite gamble, and one he knew would likely backfire. But he also knew that he could not take the man one on one without resorting to his semblance. Two on one might work better, but with Neo ensuring no one else could take potshots at him he couldn’t expect that to happen soon enough. With that chainsaw, the faunus only needed one lucky hit, and Yatsuhashi’s aura would shatter like so much glass.

With a grin, the White Fang let go of his esoteric weapon. “Or we could make this interesting.” He stepped away from the abandoned chainsaw and straightened up. He extended a hand and waggled his fingers in a ‘come get me’ gesture.

Frowning, Yatsuhashi evaluated the man again, then sighed. He supposed taking the man up on his proposal would be a bit less lethal, not just to them, but to the ship as well. It might also extend the fight long enough to allow other fights to end, and backup to come to the bow. For one side or for the other. He let his sword drop to the deck and straightened up from his ready stance, turning to the side to present the man with his left shoulder.

“Very well. But just one question. What sort of faunus are you? I can’t tell.”

“Grizzley.”

Yatsuhashi glanced at the man’s hands. “No claws?”

“Does your little pet have a puffball on her ass?”

Yatsuhashi felt himself bristle for a moment, and made himself take a deep, calming breath. Rather than lashing out, he nodded. “Point taken.”

“Don’t worry. Even without claws, I am more than strong enough for a mere human.”

With a shrug, Yatsuhashi readied himself. “Let’s put that to the test.”

The two smashed together with a palpable thunderclap. Yatsuhashi had gone low, throwing his shoulder into the faunus’ midriff, his arms wrapping around the man’s waist. He immediately thrust upward with his legs, using the momentum of their crash to throw his opponent over his back to tumble to the deck behind him.

He spun, nimble, only for the grizzly fauns to return the favor. Thick arms wrapped around his ribs as he was struck in the chest with the man’s forehead, driving him backward to slam into a crooked capstan. The metal hammered into his back, a grunt exploding from him at the force of the impact, and he doubled his fists together to bring them down on the Lieutenant’s back.
The blow drove the man to his knees, but he didn’t let go. With a roar he twisted, and Yatsuhashi found himself rolled right off of his feet and slamming to the deck. His enemy swept a leg over him, straddling and pinning him, raising a fist into the air.

Yatsuhashi didn’t give the man time to land the shot, instead thrusting a jab straight up into his chin. The faunus rocked back a bit, his eyes temporarily glazed, and Yatsuhashi thrust himself upward, throwing the man off.

He rose to his feet, rubbing his back painfully for a moment as he watched the faunus likewise rise, wriggling his jaw.

“Ow.”

“Likewise.”

The pair charged one another again. At the last instant, Yatsuhashi stepped to the side, throwing his arm out sideways. The arm caught the faunus in the neck, clotheslining him and sweeping him off his feet. Yatsuhashi let the force of the blow spin him around, but then his feet went out from under him as a pair of hands tangled with his ankles, and he crashed downward. He suddenly saw a field of gold and black swirling as his jaw smashed against a cleat. He got his hands under him just in time for a knee to smash down into the small of his back and a pair of hands to wrap under his pained chin, pulling upward and arching his neck and back further than they were meant to go.

The position put him at a painful disadvantage, leaving him with few ways to escape. He attempted to roll, but the motion merely dug the knee into his spine even more strongly, and he abandoned that effort. He scrabbled his hands outward, looking for any advantage, and one found the broken wood of the cleat he’d smashed down upon. He clenched it and swung his arm downward, feeling the sudden thud of meat being torn into by jagged wood.

With a scream of pain the faunus was off of him, and Yatsuhashi scrambled away before turning. His eyes found the White Fang Lieutenant sitting on the deck, wrenching the bloody stump of metal out of his leg just above the knee and tossing it aside. The man rose then, murder in his eyes and, with a distinct limp, began stalking towards Yatsuhashi.

He didn’t allow the man to continue the motion. With a roar Yatsuhashi threw himself forward, certain the man’s leg would not be up to the task of bracing against the full body blow. He watched the faunus ready himself for the crash anyway, and felt a moment of doubt over his plan. This was interrupted, however, when a streak of candy color crossed his vision directly behind his target. Muscle smashed into muscle and Yatsuhashi felt the man going over backwards. He held on, riding the motion as it went from horizontal to vertical, and felt a sudden jarring just before his face smashed down onto that of his foe. He felt the world spinning as stars swum in his vision, and he tried to force himself to see, to remain conscious as he rolled sideways. His back banged into a roll of anchor chain. He quickly slapped a hand to it, then grimaced as he felt something sticky coating the chain.

Behind him he could hear Neo groan a bit, and he hefted himself into a sitting position. His vision cleared enough to be able to take in the diminutive woman, sprawled out beneath the calves of the large, unmoving faunus. He twisted and forced himself to focus against the headache and wobbly vision he was experiencing to take in the man’s other end.

The faunus lay on his back on the deck, a growing pool of blood haloing his head. Yatsuhashi brought his hand up before his face to see the palm coated in red, and glanced at the anchor chain. It was likewise covered, and Yatsuhashi realized that Neo had thrown herself beneath the man’s legs,
serving as a hazard to trip him. The White Fang Lieutenant had gone over backwards and the back of his skull had smashed down on the chain, only for Yatsuhashi’s face to deliver a second hammerlike blow that had, probably, cracked the man’s skull back down onto the chain a second time.

Yatsuhashi groaned and struggled to his feet, then carefully, dizzily offering a hand to help Neo upright. He glanced at the woman, or women, as she seemed to have become overlapping doubles. “That wasn’t your most graceful attack,” he slurred.

She gave him a pained smirk, then pointed at him before tapping her nose.

He gave a very cautious nod her way, knowing what she was saying without having to check. He could taste the blood trickling down the back of his throat from what was, no doubt, an impressively broken nose. “Yeah,” he said before spitting out a red gobbet onto the deck. “But the other guy looks worse.”

Neo laughed.
Well, things just get worse for our heroes every Monday, don't they? And today is Monday! So let's make things worse! Poor Team CVFY (plus one?)

As always, I love hearing your thoughts on the story. So please, please please feel free to leave me a message down below, over on my Twitter, or on my Patreon. If you happen to use my Patreon, consider becoming a supporter! I, unfortunately, finally lost the ability to use my old writing laptop. That meant that I had to get a new one this last week when I really couldn't afford it. Anything helps offset that little burden, so... yeah.

Anyway! Comments! You had a lot of them this week! So let's get to them right away!

**An Anonymous Guest wrote:**

*Just finished chapter 18. Ah, what wonderous benefits a "triplet" relationship can result in, lol. Perhaps they'll realize that, too, hmmm? Great story so far!*

**Bookah replies:**

*Thank you so much! These three are always such a riot when they get to trying to get in touch with just how they feel about one another. The silly schmucks. XD*

**FeugoFox42 wrote:**

*I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed Winter Hunt. With how you've chosen to do this story, seeing the Coco Bomb from everyone's perspective was very different; I loved it for that reason.*

*Look forward to reading Spring Hunt soon*

**Bookah replies:**

*I have to admit, I was very worried about how I handled that event. It wasn't the Coco Bomb itself that worried me. It was the fact I basic showed that scene four times. I was afraid people would get annoyed or bored with it, even though I really wanted to show just how differently each member of CFVY understood that moment, and how each came away with a different understanding of what it meant. It's a relief to hear you liked it.*

**FeugoFox42 later wrote:**

*And like that, you've given more character growth to Neo that canon has. I appreciate it*

**Bookah replies:**

*Well, the whole reason I did this story was to learn more about these people. We know so little about them. So even though my story certainly is not, (and never shall be) canon, it's a means for all of us to get to know them a bit better. Neo included. Thank you for the comment!*
A great chapter and fight scene with an even match for Yatsuhashi. Chapters like this make it fun to imagine what that fight would look like. With the White Fang member now dead I wonder if the crew will keep fighting or possibly abandon ship.

I try to get enough description in to give people a feel for a fight, while keeping the combat descriptions as minimal as possible to keep the flow going. It’s a hard balance! But I’ve seen too many people write fight scenes that drag, or make no sense. So I’m glad that you liked this one!

As for the crew, well...

I’m curious to see how Velvet and Fox are holding up. Now being in combat, I wonder if Tawnee will give Velvet some problems again.

Funny you should mention all that. Allow me to present...

Animus Strait

Velvet pounded down the corridor after the snake faunus. The woman was quick, and maneuverable as well. Velvet could keep up with her on any straight section of passageway, but lost ground each time the woman went around a bend. Unfortunately, the ship’s corridors were full of bends. Rounding yet another corner, Velvet found herself outside, on a catwalk that skimmed along freight containers stacked a dozen high, and with no sign of the snake girl.

She paused, her ears twitching, as she listened for clues as to the woman’s whereabouts. She heard Fox come up behind her and slide to a stop, saying nothing. She could hear the various rumbling sounds of the ship. Hear gunfire from down below as Coco cut loose on someone. She could not, however, hear a snake.

“Damn…” she swore, turning to look at Fox.

Fox leapt at her, tackling her to the deck just as something flew past her head. They tumbled together as Velvet felt the deck strike her in the back hard, and she caught sight of the White Fang woman pushing off the deck where she had landed after missing her strike. Velvet grabbed Fox, rolling and twisting towards the woman, causing her to overshoot a second time.

Fox bounced upward, Velvet following, and the snake faunus spat on the deck and turned to begin running again. Velvet groaned and took off after her again.

Rounding a corner in the catwalk, she blew past a surprised crewman, hearing him exclaim in shock. A meaty blow sounded immediately after, marking Fox’s simplistic means of ensuring that the man wouldn’t be shooting anyone in the back as the pursuit continued, and Velvet winced a bit in sympathy. Still, it was clear the crew was not inclined to let stowaway huntsmen wander about at
will, so she was grateful for Fox’ actions nevertheless.

Another turn resulted in her losing sight of the fleeing terrorist, and Velvet slowed to a stop once again. This time, however, she didn’t merely freeze and listen. She quickly began taking in her circumstances visually as well.

It was dark out, though the ship’s lights fought the night in an ostentatious display of power. The arclights made the catwalk a place harsh with reflected light and pockets of inky black shadow. Velvet shielded her eyes as she slowly turned, checking for any place her target might have climbed or hidden.

A motion caught her eye, and she quickly turned to catch a scaled tail slithering away into a deep, shadowy alcove. Velvet eyed it, and carefully gestured to Fox, pointing to where she had just caught the betraying movement. From the corner of her eye she saw him nod, then gesture towards a side passage. Velvet nodded, and the two split up, Fox trying to get ahead of the woman, while Velvet slowly padded forward, bare feet quiet on the deck.

She braced her fists before her as she slipped into the shadow, her senses stretched to detect any movement while her eyes rapidly adjusted. She heard nothing, and no murky movement disturbed the black as she waited a few seconds, and then she began moving. Her feet shifted slowly, carefully, as she stalked along the catwalk, waiting for the woman to attempt another ambush.

At the far end of the catwalk, a figure occluded the light, and she recognized the tall, slender shape of Fox. She paused, watching him, and the man shook his head with a shrug. She nodded, and redoubled her examination of the space she stood in.

A bang of metal from above betrayed her foe’s position. Velvet jerked her head up to see the woman, tail dangling, as she climbed upward on a series of girders, wires, and anchor points for the stacked shipping containers. Velvet frowned, staring upward, and debated what to do next.

Fox answered that question for her. With a quick windmilling of his arms he punched the girder beside him, sending the metal ringing and groaning. The catwalk beneath her rippled, and the entire structure above her warped and swayed under the force of the blow. She heard a shocked cry above, and the snake woman was suddenly falling, bouncing off a bracer as she descended.

Velvet shot forward to intercept the woman. She grasped the railing beside her, stopping the forward motion of her shoulders as her feet continued on, sweeping up into the air. She gave a powerful kick, striking the woman just before she would have struck the deck. So propelled, the faunus rocketed away from Velvet, and straight to Fox. With a quick punch, Fox stopped the White Fang terrorist, causing her to flip ragdoll-like in the air before crashing down to the deck, unconscious.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Velvet smiled.

Fox shook his head as he bent down to grab the unconscious faunus’ shoulders and started dragging her back into the light. “Can I ask a question, Velve?”

“Sure.”

“Why are your tits hanging out?”

Velvet gasped and jerked her head downward to see the soft, creamy flesh of her breasts revealed even in the dark shadows of the catwalk. She jerked her hands up to seize her jacket top, pulling it closed and fumbling for the zipper. She could feel her skin warm with embarrassment. “They… uh… caught us at a bad time.”
Fox paused in his dragging, and Velvet could see the arched eyebrow. “Us?”

Velvet gave an awkward giggle. “Yes, well… we might have been… and not had time to dress after, and…”

Fox shook his head and began dragging the limp snake woman once more. “I don’t know whether to give you a high five, or slap you in the back of the head for having the worst timing ever.”

Velvet gave a nervous laugh. “Well…”

“Which one?”

She flinched, and felt her shoulders hunch a bit defensively. “Um… both?”

Fox paused once again, then sighed. “‘Bout fucking time…” He shook his head wryly. “But now that you’ve zipped up, a little help? We need to find something to tie her up, and or find a place to lock her in. I do NOT want to risk a round two against those.” He nodded toward the woman’s open mouth and the inch long, needle-like fangs stretching past her incisors.

“Snakes hunt hares,” Velvet grumbled. “So I know what you mean.” She bent down and grabbed the woman’s legs. Together they struggled down the catwalk towards better lighted areas. “Good lord, she’s heavier than she looks.”

“Tell me about it,” Fox replied. “She’s got to be all muscle.”

They rounded a corner then, finding themselves standing on a narrow stretch of railed deck between stacked shipping containers and the open sea. Velvet took a deep breath of the salty air, and looked down the walkway in the hopes of finding somewhere they could put their captive.

Just then, the ship gave a strange lurch. It wasn’t a fast roll, even compared to many of the usual motions they’d become accustomed to since the ship had left port. Instead it was almost leisurely, a simple tipping. It wouldn’t normally have caught Velvet’s attention, except that it kept going, much further than she was used to before the roll slowed and then stopped.

Startled, Velvet dropped the woman’s feet and seized the rail. Fox similarly dropped his portion of the burden, letting the faunus’ head bounce off the deck with an unpleasant thump, as he, too gripped the rail.

“That doesn’t feel right.”

Velvet nodded, and stared out over the side. “Was that some sort of weird wave? Are we entering a storm?”

Fox shook his head. “The stars are still bright, so I doubt it’s a storm. I don’t know enough about waves, though, so…”

The ship began rolling back upright, the motion just as lazy as before. The pair said nothing, simply riding the motion as they watched one another. The deck beneath them leveled out, hung there for a second, and then began slowly tilting in the other direction.

A klaxon began ringing, although out on deck it was less painful for Velvet’s hearing than it had been below decks when it rang earlier. Almost immediately a voice became clamoring for attention.

“Engineering casualty, pumps three and four! Damage control to pumps three and four immediately!” The voice paused a moment, and then continued with a near panic. “Stop shooting up
my ship!”

Velvet caught Fox’ eyes with her own. “That doesn’t sound good.”

“Nope. Not one bit.” He quickly bent down and scooped up the fallen faunus again. “We’d better get her someplace fast.”

Velvet nodded, bending down to seize the woman’s feet. She twisted so that she could face forward, hooking the woman’s ankles above her hips, one foot resting atop her camera case, and she began hurrying towards the bow.

Just as they closed on the forward section of the ship, a crewman rounded the corner of the forwardmost stack of shipping containers. The woman slid to a halt as Velvet did likewise, and they stared at one another for a moment.

Velvet’s eyes slipped downward to where the woman held a gun. Half a second later the woman likewise looked down at it, then shrugged. She tossed it over the side. “No time for that, or for you either.”

Velvet breathed a sigh of relief. “How bad is it?”

The woman glanced sideways as the ship began rolling to the side again. “Feel that?”

“Yeah?”

“She’s wallowing. You people have ripped all kinds of holes in her, and with those two pumps down, we can’t get the water out fast enough.”

Velvet blanched. “So we’re sinking?”

“Unless we can get the pumps working again.”

Velvet nodded. “Anything we can do?”

“Yeah. Get out of my way.”

Velvet squeezed up against the shipping container beside her, feeling Fox do so as well. The crewman pushed past them with a dark look, and hurried off without another word. Velvet turned her head to watch her go, and caught Fox looking towards her.

“Do you have a vague sense of guilt too?” she asked.

“A bit, yeah.” Fox jerked his chin down towards the woman they were carrying. “Let’s get her secured quickly.”

The ship’s roll was slowing, the deck canted at enough of an angle to make footing a bit treacherous, and Velvet was finding it difficult to move forward and keep her balance while managing the awkward load. The motion stopped, and then the agonizingly slow movement back towards plum began. Velvet sighed in relief as this made the footing easier. She began moving to make the turn towards the centerline of the ship.

The deck suddenly went out from under her feet, and she felt herself airborne. A roaring crash overwhelmed her hearing, becoming almost a physical sensation of being punched, and she dropped the feet she was holding to wave her arms around, flailing for something, anything, and felt a wave of relief run through her as her hand tangled with the railing beside her.
She heard Fox shout, and then the deck slammed up into her hard enough to leave her certain her ass would have spectacular bruises later. She gave a cry of pain, rolling over onto her stomach, and then pushed herself upward, careful to keep a grip on the railing.

Fox was similarly pulling himself upwards, eyes wide.

Velvet stared at him for a second, then suddenly felt a moment of panic. “Where’s the faunus?”

“Over the side!”

Velvet threw herself against the rail to look down into the waters alongside the ship. The ocean was black, a few ripples of white topping waves forming the ship’s wake as it passed through the sea. Nothing else could be seen, and Velvet felt a moment of despair.

*Killed another one, have you? You really do hate our own kind, don’t you?*

Velvet grit her teeth against Tawnee’s accusation, and began climbing the rail, before being tackled back down to the deck by Fox.

“Velvet, no!” He screamed. “There’s nothing you can do!”

Velvet fought a second, then stilled, biting her lower lip.

She felt Fox relax and begin climbing off her. “Besides,” he said. “We have bigger problems now.”

Velvet peeled open her eyes and felt a moan rip free of her throat at what she saw. Beside the stricken ship, arching high into the air, was the biggest grimm she had ever seen. It’s body was fish-like, with fins and a dorsal spike multiple stories tall coming up off its back. As she watched it twisted, rolling upside down in the air, and began descending downward, the spike aimed at the ship’s side. Just before it crashed into the side of the forward superstructure a second time, sending the ship shaking and twisting once again, it opened its mouth in a massive, toothy grin.

“How are we supposed to fight a grimmwhale?”

Beside her, Fox grimaced. “I don’t know.”
No real time for the usual chat, so I'll just jump straight to your comments!

CoopBro writes:

I see that Fox had some inspiration for a particular line. He is also got straight to the point with both Velvet's lack of clothing and how to deal with a whale.

Meanwhile, things do not get any better for the group. How are they going to get out of this one?

Bookah replies

Yes, yes he did. And thank you for that. ^_^

As for getting out of this... Good luck, Team CFVY + 1. You'll need it.

GrimmKaiju writes:

I'm gonna call Tawnee the ide of Velvets mind for easy reference and it makes a little sense. Tawnee is all of Velvets dark thoughts and insecurity’s and the ide of a mind is similar enough. Velvet has gotten used to it for now but I don’t think that will last unless she seeks help dealing with it. As for Fox he’s his usual “to the point” self right now but it’s looking like Neo might get to run away with him after all if the ship sinks.

Bookah replies:

Yes, that's probably as good a way to point to Tawnee as any. Velvet has had issues from the start, and Tawnee definitely represents things having gotten worse for her. Poor thing.

Fox and Neo running off together. Hee! That could be fun!

And on with the show!

Animus Strait

Coco was getting pissed, if she were to be completely honest. The feathered faunus who had dove deep down into the ship’s bowels had been proven more correct with his assessment that Coco wouldn’t get much use out of her gun in the confined spaces than she would have liked. It was proving to be singularly frustrating, and she had long since given up any pretense at trying to be either quiet or calm about it.

“God DAMN it!” she cried as she whipped the heavy rotary cannon around again, too late to train it on the criminal’s flight as he darted down a side passage. She hurried down the passageway, splashing frigid water about as she forced her way through nearly a foot of it. Rounding another corner, barrels first, she found herself looking down a stairway that had been transformed into a
strange sort of cascade or waterfall by the water flooding in from the rupture Yatsuhashi had opened in the ship’s guts.

A flash of colored feathers whipped past the bottom of the stairs, and Coco smashed her fingers down on the trigger. Spinning barrels spat, and dust laced bullets smashed into the water below before exploding against the metal of the deck. Water sprayed everywhere, and a cloud that was half mist and half steam made a haze of the view.

“Shit.”

Coco forced herself to take a deep breath. All her life she had been able to rely on a combination of exceptional height and prodigious strength. When wrestling or brawling she had the reach to get her hands on people, and the muscle to make them regret it when she did. She’d specifically chosen to craft a gun most people wouldn’t have even been able to lift, let alone brace and fire accurately simply because of the advantages her leverage and her powerful semblance created. But now they were letting her down.

That had been happening a lot, lately. Whether it was the tournament, the fight with Neo, or this current situation, her strength was failing her. She could take out a bloody Beowulf with a single swing of the handbag version of her gun, or mow down Ursi by the dozens with a simple sweep of her arms and the trigger held down. But lately? All of the fights were against foes too fast, in spaces too small, for her strength to do anything for her. The very thing that defined how she fought was failing her. If only her foe felt as hemmed in as she could at least gain some smug satisfaction at his own woes!

Coco’s eyes fell on the water tight hatch that was dogged down against the wall, and suddenly she felt a smile cross her face. Perhaps such a thing could be arranged after all. Her finger twitched, changing the dust ammunition she had selected, and then she began down the stairs, closing and sealing the hatch behind her.

She peered down the passageway in the direction the White Fang terrorist had flown. No sign of him could be seen, but she knew he had already been down the opposite direction, as that was where he had come from when she chanced a shot at him. She grinned, realizing what that meant.

He’s looking for something. But he’s not sure where it is.

Grinning, Coco turned down the direction he had already explored. Finding another hatch, she heaved it closed against the slowly rising water in the compartment, then spun the wheel, locking it air tight. Backing a few steps, she fired a quick burst at the hatch, destroying the wheel and punching a few holes through it that leaked water.

Coco quickly brought up a mental map of the ship’s layout. Ever since it had left port she, Velvet, and Yatsuhashi had taken turns exploring, trying to find the same thing she surmised the faunus was hunting. The fact he had only just begun looking created an advantage for her. She already had a basic understanding of how the ship interior was formed, while he was twisting and turning about in a warren that was a far cry from the open air a bird might be more comfortable with.

She quickly reviewed the interwoven passageways, mentally annotating where the two blockages she’d created now lay. Two exits from the section she was remained, and threw herself headlong down the passage, powering her way through water that was now almost knee deep. Finding the next hatch she was hunting for, she treated it similarly to the one she’d just turned into an impassable wall.

“There! There’s a cutoff valve just down that way. Close that, and that’s half the flooding dealt
Coco darted into a side passage upon hearing the voice of what had to be one of the crewmen. She pressed herself against it as two women dressed in soaking wet mechanic’s uniforms splashed past.

“What the… The bulkhead door is jammed!”

“The fuck? Quick. Pop up one deck and come back around from above.”

Coco quickly slunk away, taking a roundabout path to the remaining opening as further splashing occurred behind her. Soon she found herself at the open door, and began pulling it closed, fighting an outflow of water with sheer strength, and winning. A quick spin of the wheel sealed her in, though this door she left undamaged.

“This one’s jammed too!” She heard the desperate shout from above. “What’s left?”

“The passage into the bow spaces. Go!”

“Where’s that?”

Coco grinned as she heard a third, male voice. It was the same voice as had mocked her just a few minutes earlier, but with much of the amusement removed. Evidently he, too, had realized he’d become trapped and zeroed in on the noisy crewmen.

“The hell?” One of the crew members shouted. “What are you doing down here, faunus? Trying to wreck us?”

“Fuck you, human!”

Coco carefully listened to the rising sound of anger and panic, then swiveled slowly until she was pointed toward the ship’s hull. “Hemmed in,” she muttered, smiling, and then mashed down the trigger on her cannon and began swinging slowly at the hip.

The rounds spitting out of the weapon looked less like mere bullets and more like a stream of volcanic fire. They smashed against the hull, denting it and opening up the occasional hole through which water sprayed violently. Then the rounds began striking interior bulkheads, thinner things meant to create work spaces and provide interior compartmentalization rather than intended to hold the ocean at bay. The metal simple disintegrated under the attack, flying apart to leave jagged, twisted edges that slowly walked along in an arc that reduced, foot by foot, the space in which anything could live within that compartment.

Screams of panic gave notice that the three others in the compartment had noticed the titanic destruction being wrought by Coco’s wrath. She could hear them splashing and scrambling to rush towards the front bulkhead through the various passages and spaces not yet touched. A feminine voice screamed angrily, then got cut off with a gurgle as she heard a splash and a masculine shout to get out of the way. Curses came from the other woman, followed by coughing as the first of the two humans re-emerged from wherever she had been dunked.

A shuddering bang and a light vibration sounded from somewhere within the wreckage, promising something Coco was sure was not good. She ignored it. She had finally created an advantage over her speedy opponent, and if she let it go now, she doubted she’d get a second chance. She could deal with whatever she’d broken later.

A flash of color shot into view in the corner of the compartment that remained untouched. Coco jerked her head around, feeling herself grinning as she took in the sight of the sodden faunus. His
bright plumage was a pitiful sight, the smooth feathers now discombobulated and turned into chaotic spikes and poofs. Beneath them, the man’s face was a picture of fright. His eyes were wide, the irises small and made dark by the dilation of his pupils. His jaw hung open, and his fingers, covered in wet, messy down, clenched at every beam and knob he could find.

“Found you,” Coco purred.

“You’re insane!” the man shrieked. “You’re gonna kill us all! If you hit the explo

His voice was cut off by the sound of a meaty thunk. Coco’s eyebrows rose with surprise as she saw one of the two crew members step up behind him, a large wrench in her hand. “Fucking cock.”

Coco snickered, and the woman jerked her hand upright, brandishing the wrench as she spun towards Coco. The woman took half a step forward, her face angry, and then she caught a full view of Coco’s gun, leveled at her midriff. The woman froze, then dropped the wrench, and lifted both hands in the air, her face ugly with hate.

Coco watched her a moment, then stepped aside, opening the path to the hatch closed behind her. She waggled the barrel of the gun towards it. “Go on.”

The woman stared at Coco, then, hands still raised, stepped past her. She began spinning the wheel as the second woman, still coughing, rounded the corner as well, her hands also lifted in the air, and joined her. The hatch opened, and, with a dark look towards Coco, the two stepped through.

Coco kept the weapon pointed at them the whole time. The less drowned of the pair moved to start closing the hatch, and Coco waggled the barrels. “Uh uh.”

The woman glared. “You took out the pumps for this section, and poked holes in the hull. If we don’t seal it this ship will flood.”

Coco thought a moment, then nodded. “Fair ‘nuff. Close it.”

The crew member gave her a surprised look, then shoved the door closed, spinning the wheel and sealing it.

Coco waded over to the faunus and hooked a hand in his collar. She hoisted him up and gave his face a good look. Unseeing eyes stared back, and with a frown she dropped the body back into the water. “Tough luck,” she muttered, and wiped her face with her hand. “Okay. So, now to get out of here.”

The water was continuing to rise as Coco made her way back to the set of stairs she had used to first enter the section. The door remained dogged shut. When she had closed it, the water pouring in from the next compartment had helped her close it. Now, however, it fought her, the weight of it pressing against the hatch as she attempted to open it. Even with her preternatural strength, she couldn’t fight the weight of the entire ocean.

“Alright. So I either wait until this compartment floods fast enough to equalize the pressure on the door, or I keep going up. Regardless of whether there are stairs and a hatch or not.”

She hesitated a moment, then pointed the gun straight up. A burst blasted upward, shredding the overhead and creating an opening not only there, but in the next two decks up. She thrust the barrel up through the hole, then twisted the weapon so that the muzzle rested on one side of the hole and the receiver on the other before using it as a chin up bar to pull herself up through the jagged opening. She felt her shirt snag and tear in the back, and breathed a sigh of relief that the jagged bit of metal had not quite managed to reach skin.
Clear of the hole, and a deck up, she quickly jumped to her feet and turned, looking for a hatch or stairway up. She quickly spotted a way to climb to the next deck, and grinned, snatching up her weapon.

A blow struck her from behind, leaving her seeing stars. She fell forwards, the deck plating coming up at her chin, and she forced herself into a roll, letting her shoulder take the blow.

“Fucking humans…”

She blinked against the stars filling her vision, and discovered her attacker standing over her feet. The boar faunus that had first fought them stood there, one arm dangling uselessly, and blood dripping down from a gash in his scalp. He leaned forward, an ugly smile on his face. “No friends, this time. It’s just you and me.”

Coco started to jerk the gun upward, but the White Fang man stomped downwards, smashing the gun back to the deck under a heavy foot. Coco struggled a moment, but discovered that even her strength was not enough to lift both gun and pig.

The faunus realized it, too. He leaned down enough to prop his good arm on his knee, grinning. “Oops.”

Coco looked back up at him, and smiled. Her finger twitched.

With a roar the gun fired, the spinning barrels wrenching out from under the terrorist’s foot and sending him spinning in the air once again. Recoil sent Coco, lubricated with her sodden clothes, rocketing away along the deck as the far end of the passageway shredded.

Water roared in through the hole, rapidly flooding the passageway and forming a whirlpool as it drained through the hole in the deck that she had previously opened. With a gasp Coco fought to get her feet under her and stand, wiping salt water from her eyes so she could see. Grabbing an upright pipe, she drug herself forward against the flow of inrushing water until she could grab the rail of the stairs she had spotted earlier. Thus stabilized, she began climbing upward and away from the flood.

Moments later she threw herself out onto the deck, soaking wet and gasping with exertion.

“Coco!”

She felt massive hands grabbing her shoulders, half-dragging her upright.

“Hey Yatsu,” she croaked.

“You okay?”

She struggled to get her feet back under her, using Yatsuhashi’s grip as a stabilizing presence. Finally feeling halfway balanced and upright, she twisted and wrapped her arms around his barrel chest. “Half drowned, but I’m okay. I can’t say as much for the two faunus below decks. One’s definitely dead. The other… maybe?”

“I think we have bigger problems.”

“Wassat?” Coco lifted one hand up and slicked her hair back out of her face, looking around. She took in the condition of the massive White Fang Lieutenant and grimaced. “He’s definitely down. So what’s the problem now?” She forced herself to ignore her exhaustion.

“You feel that?”
“What?” Coco blinked, then tried to take in more about her surroundings than merely their appearance. She could smell the odors of the ship, rusting metal, exhaust, and stagnant bilges. She could hear waves splashing, the engines thrumming, an alarm coming from the direction of the bridge. She could feel…

“Uh, that doesn’t feel right.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “It’s water inside the ship. Every time the ship rolls the water tries to shift from one side of the compartment it is in to the other, and back. It makes the rolling slower. And deeper.”

“Does that mean we’re sinking?”

“Yeah. Apparently they lost a couple of pumps.”

Coco cringed. “Oops?” she mumbled.

She felt Yatsuhashi shake his head. “Really, Coco?”

She pushed herself away from her lover and looked around the deck. “Recriminations later. We need to find Velvet and Fox.”

“Neo’s already looking for them. With that little bamfing about trick of hers she’ll get them here no matter where she finds them. But if we go back in there…”

Reluctantly, Coco nodded. “I really, really do not like the fact we’re stuck trusting her again.”

“Same.”

Just then the ship gave a powerful lurch, sending Coco flying. She smashed down sideways against the housing of the deck crane, a mind-blanking pain announcing the displeasure of her ribs at this treatment. The ship groaned and rolled, and Yatsuhashi went sliding past her, nearly reaching the railing before the ship righted itself.

“What was that?”

She heard a sudden running of feet and, as she lifted herself from the deck yet again, she turned her head to see the hurrying forms of Fox and Velvet, followed shortly after by Neo.

“Oh, thank the gods!” Fox exclaimed. “Coco, we got a problem. A big problem!”

Coco felt stomach lurch at the thready tone of Fox’ normally calm voice. “You mean things can get worse?”

Velvet frowned. “Grimmwhale.”

Coco dropped butt first onto the deck, gasping as she felt flames shoot through her side. She sucked down a breath of air, fighting back against the pain. “Peachy.”
Chapter Notes

It's Monday again, and that means a chapter! But first, your comments!

**GrimmKaiju writes:**

Is that some hope for Neo and Fox I hear? Anyways before that they need to deal with their “problem” and the sinking ship. It's starting to look like there really is a “Grimm Kaiju” on the loose. I think I have an Idea on how they might get out of this but I’m not sure how far away from land they are. Keep up the great work.

**Bookah replies:**

I am loving the term "Grimm Kaiju". Now I almost want to see a Pacific Rim crossover with RWBY some time.

Hope for Neo and Fox is about as high as anything is with this little fic of mine. Which is to say... Good luck!

**CoopBro writes:**

Coco did "titanic" damage to the ship.
I see what you did there.

**Bookah replies:**

Let's just hope that the ship I am sinking isn't also metaphorical.

**Guest writes:**

On chapter 36 now. So A) I can't help but feel bad for that very helpful man cuz I imagine team CFVY got to the inn and tried to tell the clerk that they were referred to the place by... only to realize they never got his name. I guess no free drink for him, lol And B) i like this turn of events cuz CFVY now going after a different objective means there's really no interference with the established canon. If you wind up ending this story with them going vacuo to enroll in Shade academy it'll wrap this all up with a pretty bow : )

**Bookah replies:**

Yes, the poor man isn't getting his kickbacks this time. LOL! I am actually thinking about how to tie the story up with the announced Vacuo storyline for CFVY. It's a bit tricky given that this story should be ending some time this winter but the YA novel won't be out yet. But yes, I definitely have Vacuo in mind. ^_^
The Animus Strait was, in many ways, a safe patch of water to sail, in so much as the word ‘safe’ can be applied to anywhere in Remnant. The waters there ran cold and deep, being chiefly controlled by currents that originated near the icy shores of Atlas. Much like Atlas itself, these waters were, therefore, too cold for most grimm to be able to survive. This meant the usual sorts of grimm to be found at sea, such as the giant serpents that could be seen around Menagerie, or the airborne grimm that nested in seaside cliffs didn’t frequent these waters.

As with anywhere else, however, there were exceptions. Unlike the slender and graceful Sea Feilong, the Grimmwhale was an ugly thing. The body was fat and round and easily large enough to swallow a house, with stubby fins and massive flukes. The bone plated head was easily the size of a bullhead landing pad. Just behind a blow hole the size of a serving tray, a spike of bone stuck upward from the spine. Hunters like Professor Port theorized that they were protected from the near freezing cold by massive layers of fat under the skin, and that these same layers also served to pad them against the shock of their favorite means of attacking ships: breaching and then falling over backwards, spike first, against the ship’s side and tearing it open.

Fox stared over the rail, dumbfounded as he watched the spike sticking up out of the water, kicking up a fantail of spray as it circled. He’d watched it strike the ship twice already, gouging deep breaks in the ship’s side. The holes had swallowed water greedily, and the previous slow, deep rolls had already been replaced by a significant list.

“No question about it,” Yatsuhashi commented, his voice level, though Fox noticed the giant had a deathgrip on the rail. “This ship’s a goner.”

A little further down, a crew member nodded. A number of crew had fled to the deck after the first massive blow and, having seen the creature, completely forgotten any animosity towards the stowaways. Also a large man, the seaman tore his eyes away from the circling monster. “We’ll have to abandon ship. And soon. But as long as that thing’s out there…”

“Anything we put in the water will be fish food.”

The man nodded at Yatsuhashi’s end to his statement. “Aye.” He shrugged. “You know, on the one hand, this is kind of your mess. On the other, we ain’t exactly huntsmen.”

A shout came from up on the bridge wing. Fox turned to gaze upward to where another member of the crew was waving. “I’ve sent a distress call. Turns out one was already sent when we first started taking on water.”

The man at the rail turned and cupped his hands around his mouth. “Where’s the bridge crew?”

The woman wobbled a moment, then turned her head. “Everywhere…”

Fox winced, and made a point to not look at Neo as she leaned against him, watching the grimmwhale.

“What’s it waiting for?” Velvet asked.

“Us.” Yatsuhashi replied. “It knows the ship’s done for. Now it can just wait.”

Behind him, Fox heard Coco sigh. The tall woman was sitting atop a stanchion, one hand pressed tight against her ribs. He turned to watch her as she pushed herself upright with a wince. “Yeah, fuck that.” She peeled her hand away from her side, and gripped her handbag. “I know rescue is on the way, but this things leaning more and more by the minute. I don’t think we have the time to wait like it does.”
Fox pushed himself off the railing. “So, what’s the plan, boss?” He forced himself to smile, even though he knew there was nothing left to smile over.

Coco deployed her gun. “Get it mad.” She mashed the trigger.

Spouts of water shot into the air, illuminated by the ship’s lights, as bullets struck the waves. Coco walked the splashes outward until they intersected with the swell beneath which the grimmwhale swam. She maintained this for a moment, and then the beast suddenly shot upward into the air, one eye turned towards the stricken vessel as it climbed skyward.

Coco never let up on the trigger, spraying the creature as it peaked, only the flukes of its tail remaining below the waves, and then following it down as it crashed back to the foam. A large wave rolled outward, preceded by a blast of spume that splattered against the ship, rolling up and over the railing so that Fox was suddenly wetted to his knees. He shivered as he felt the cold water, and frowned.

“I’m not sure that

A massive form suddenly rocketed upward mere feet from him, and Fox leaped backwards in surprise. The grimmwhale flew past, climbing to what seemed an incredible height as he backpedaled, then began arching over the deck as though it planned to smash everyone standing there. Alarmed sailors fled every which way, attempting to get out from under it, but struggled owing to the steepness of the list.

Fox closed his eyes and took in a deep breath.

He felt a sudden blow against his side, and looked down in surprise to see Neo wrapped around his waist. The wood of the deck was gone, replaced with the metal grating of a portion of the ship he was not immediately familiar with, and he realized he now stood on the bridge wing beside a very surprised woman in a uniform.

He quickly directed his gaze out over the deck to see himself at eye level with the grimmwhale. It was beginning to descend, bent over, the giant bone spike twisting down towards the deck. And then, it wasn’t.

Yatsuhashi staggered as he caught the edge of the shockwave, and heard the entire superstructure thrum like a beaten drum. The grimmwhale was flying overboard, bent nearly in two before crashing back down into the sea.

Glancing over the rail, Fox looked down to see Yatsuhashi bringing his massive sword back to the ready. Even from there, he could tell the giant was breathing hard.

“Got another one in you?” Coco shouted, though her voice was ragged.

Yatsuhashi nodded. “Bring it.”

Coco leaned over the rail again, a spray of bullets reaching out to where the bone protrusion signalled the monster’s path.

Fox watched as the great spike shivered and changed directions, coming back in towards the ship once more. He shook his head in realization. The grimm might have been smart enough to realize the ship was doomed, but it was not smart enough to ignore being taunted. And as long as it came in close, as long as it left the water in response to the stings Coco administered…

The massive shape flung upward beside the ship once again, and Fox suddenly climbed the rail and
leaped into the air. He heard Neo give an inarticulate cry behind him, but ignored it as he arched through the air on a collision course. Below him he could see Yatsuhashi winding up for his strike, and he twisted mid air, thrusting a blade covered wrist forward.

The monster gave a horrific cry, like some eldritch horror of the depths, as Fox felt the blade cut deep into the dinner plate sized eye of the grimm. He continued forward his fist sinking into a depth of slime and gore, and as the great leviathan jerked and began rocketing away on the bow wave of Yatsuhashi’s semblance empowered cut, Fox heard a pop and felt a blast of fire in his shoulder as his arm twisted behind him much further than his aura had the ability to prevent.

He came free of his embedded position in the grimmwhale’s eye, thrown away by centrifugal force, and he tried to see a landing point through pain-teared eyes. Blackness tipped in green and white foam were all he could see, and he realized there was nothing for him but the ocean.

A warmth suddenly wrapped around his waist again, and his good arm rested atop white clad shoulders. He saw the brown and pink of Neo’s hair, and with a sudden odd change he found himself with the wood of the deck beneath his feet once more.

“Thanks, N

His head rocketed to the side, and he gaped in amazement as he realized his cheek stung. He brought his chin back around to see Neo staring into his face, anger writ large upon it as she jabbed a finger into his chest. She shouted at him, no words in the sounds, but the outrage clear in spite of this.

Fox felt a moment of shocking contriteness. “Sorry,” he muttered, then gasped as a roll of the ship unbalanced him and he struck a capstan with his injured shoulder.

The anger left Neo’s face, and her gloved hand came out to cup his cheek. She leaned forward, gently capturing his lips in a kiss. Realizing he was forgiven for his recklessness, he pushed forward into the kiss.

Neo danced away and, without warning, grabbed his dangling arm, twisted, and shoved.

Fox had never screamed before. Not to his knowledge, at least. Even when the shoulder had bent just a few moments before, he had been too alarmed by the realization he was trapped in the eye he’d meant to blind to so much as curse. Surprised by the contrast between Neo’s sweet kiss and her tortuous action, Fox discovered he could actually sound like a wounded rabbit.

Eyes streaming, he turned towards Neo as she stood beside him. “Gods… Neo…”

She reached over and patted him on the head, smiling.

Fox gave his shoulder a few experimental rolls and shrugs, then groaned. He could move his arm again, and that, at least, was an improvement. But it hurt well beyond the power of his aura to damp the pain, and the movements were slow, dull, and crude. He frowned, realizing that he stood little chance of being able to contribute to the fight any further.

Grumbling, he turned toward where Yatsuhashi stood, wobbling. Beside him Coco was pouring yet more ammunition into the sea, her skin pale. A sudden blast of water upward marked yet another launch of the grimmwhale beside the ship, and Fox caught a streak of brown and skin arching upward from the top of the crane.

He jerked his head upward, wincing as the motion strained his swelling shoulder. He watched as Velvet flew through the air, foot first, in an attack mirroring his own. She, too, struck the monster, her foot smashing into the glowing red of its good eye. Another bone shaking cry roared out of the
beast and it began sailing back away from the deck. Fox felt his breath hitch as he was struck by the sudden fear that Velvet, too, would wind up flying out to sea, but just as the creature began to twist she struck out with her other foot, smashing just below the wreckage of its eye and throwing her back away from it to land gracefully on the inclined wood surface of the ship.

The monster crashed back into the sea once more. Beside him he became aware of the various members of the crew cheering. He felt himself smile, but it faltered as he took in the rest of CFVY. Yatsuhashi was staggered, the tip of his sword embedded in the deck and his weight pressing down on it. His chest was heaving and his skin covered in sweat and salt spray. Blood was pouring down his face from his ruined nose, and Fox could see the man’s knees shaking.

Beside the big man, Coco looked like she should have been in better shape. She bore little in the way of visible injuries, but her skin was a grey pallor that should not exist in nature. She’d dropped her weapon, which now dangled solely by the strap over her shoulder. One hand pressed once more to her ribs, while the other was mashed up against her mouth. Blood dripped out from between her fingers.

Only Velvet remained standing fully upright. Of all of CFVY, she alone seemed none the worse for wear. Fox watched her head turn to evaluate each of them, a grim expression on her face. She frowned, then turned and walked to the railing even as waves began to lap up and onto the deck. Fox watched as the faunus woman reached both hands down to where she had lashed her camera case to her waist with an uncomfortable looking rubber tie down strap.

Suddenly the deck twisted beneath him, rolling away from the list the ship had taken on as though it had suddenly, perversely decided to right itself in defiance of physics. He felt himself in the air as the deck fell away from beneath him. He could see Velvet being propelled upward from where the deck had come up beneath her and smashed her to her knees. Yatsuhashi was tumbling, his sword gone from his hand, and Coco… He couldn’t even see Coco anywhere.

His flight swung him around, and he could see the grimmwhale stretching up alongside the ship. Blinded it had misjudged, and come up too close. The massive bone sticking up from its back had caught the underside of the ship and so it had become caught up. He heard a groaning, screaming banging sound and watched the deck below him bulge and then break as the bone spur tore upward through the ship. The grimmwhale came free, nearly half its length above the now nearly level deck.

This is it, then. Nothing’s left to push it away.

A sudden brilliant light flashed, impossibly bright, and Fox found himself smashing onto the deck. He jerked his head around this way and that, but he could see nothing but the afterimages of something striking the grimmwhale and blowing it apart. The world spun wildly, his ears full of sounds too maddened to be sensicle.

Warm arms wrapped around his waist, and then, just as suddenly, he was inhaling the icy cold sea.
Hello everyone! It's time once more for this over the top fanfic to take up far more time than its worth in your lives. Thank you all so much for continuing to read it anyway! I have a few announcements at the end of the chapter, so be certain to check those out. But for now, your comments and then the chapter!

CoopBro writes:
What a roller coaster of emotions for Fox. From up, down, all around. And it seems that the others aren't faring any better. Everyone got a taste of love and pain today. I am curious to see how they get out of this.

Bookah replies:
This has been quite a harsh series of events for them, that's certain. And for me as well! I love writing them, and all the troubles and trials, and even some of the triumphs put me through almost as much of a wringer as them. But do not fear! I assure you I do intend to keep things as close to cannon compliant as I can, even knowing that the YA novel is being worked on.

GrimmKaiju writes:
Now it looks like Neo is trying to run off with Fox altho it is to save him. I wonder if she will go back for the rest of the team. With most of the team hurt I think they will need a rest soon but that doesn’t seem likely at the moment. Neo must be feeling drained as well with all the use of her semblance in such a short period of time. I can’t wait for the next chapter.

Bookah replies:
Well, here comes that chapter.

It does seem like it would be absolutely fitting for Neo to just run away with Fox (whether he's into that or not) and leaving the rest behind doesn't it? Wouldn't that be interesting!

Incursio5991 writes:
Finally all caught up,binge read the last seven chapter,with starting work I haven’t had a lot of time to read and this has just been sitting in a open tab for a while,it feels so good to be reading this again,a lot I want to say but in short last seven have been amazing as usual and can’t wait to see what happens next
Bookah replies:
I am so glad you've been able to catch up, and appreciate your kind words about these chapters reading well as a single lot. It's really encouraging to know that people come back even when life has kept them away. I always worry that people will wander away and forget...

Ghillieskier writes:
Whelp I'm all caught now which means I can't binge read anymore, lol. This story is awesome and I can't wait for more!

I'm glad we finally got to see that "triplet/polyamorous/whatever it's called" relationship with CVY blossom :) and im excited to see Neo and Fox develop as a couple too. Here, more than ever before, Neo shows she's not quite the sociopath the show makes her out to be, crying out in fear for Fox's life and yelling at him for being reckless, despite her inability to form words, which perhaps drives the emotion behind even more effectively!

Bookah replies:
Believe me, the launch of the ship I call "Hot Crosshaired Buns" has been a long time coming, and it was so exciting to finally get to write it. I had been aiming for this from chapter 1. And I did so love getting the chance to show Neo actually have a small, frightened tantrum over Fox taking risks. It's a big moment, I think, in developing her as a character.

Thank you for taking the time to read this over-large hunk of text! It means a lot to me that someone would take the time to look at a story that is already 130k words long, and still only two thirds done!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She was terrified. Whatever had happened, it had blinded her. Twist and turn as she might, blink as much as she could, she could see nothing. And without sight she had no way of knowing which was was up, which down. Which was salvation, and which was death.

One way or another, she knew that the effect would be temporary. There was little choice in the matter. Either she’d regain enough of her sight to be able to see which way was up, or she would not. And if she did not, eventually she would have no choice but to breath. Breath, while surrounded by nothing but water.

If that was to be her fate, then so be it. She had already survived one terrible loss. She didn’t have it in her, she thought, to weather a second.

She shouldn’t even have had a second. She’d never grown attached to anyone before. Never allowed herself. Being different had assured her that no one was worth getting close to. They would all turn on you. Mock you. Torment you. Even the ones who originally swore they wouldn’t would eventually decide you were too much work, and push you away with scorn and harsh insults.
disguised as apologies.

Until him. Until a man with fiery hair and a fancy cane had found a wordless girl on the street. He’d fed her. Clothed her. Shown her how to fight, how to survive. Even how to thrive, and all at the expense of the people who had discarded her and despised her. Words could never have expressed how much she admired the man who was as good as a father to her, even had she been able to use them. But her laughter had been all he’d ever asked for, and she’d given it gladly.


The one thing that had made life worth living, had actually given her reason to laugh, to fight, and to kill, had been snatched away in an instant, swallowed by the maw of nothingness itself.

When, at last, she’d regained some sense of presence, of self, after watching Roman die, she’d awoken with nothing to live for. No reason to laugh. But she still had a reason to kill. She had something to die for.

Vengeance.

But then, as she trailed the foolish hunters who would lead her to the last person she would ever kill, would ever need to kill, something had happened. Something frankly impossible. Again, someone tall, with fiery hair, though this was the sullen shade of slumbering coals rather than the brightness of dancing flames, had stopped. Had spoken with her. Had shown understanding.

She’d thought him a fun toy, at first. But over time the game had stopped being fun. No, that was incorrect. It would be better to say that the fun had stopped being a game. She found herself genuinely enjoying his company. The conversations had been mostly one sided, but he’d proven empathetic enough to figure out her hand gestures, and patient enough to let her type her replies. And he’d proven to be… To be understanding. And funny. And clever. Clever enough to tease her about her terrible, horrible dehumanizing absence of words and make her actually laugh with him about it. He neither mocked it, nor ignored it. He simply accommodated it. More, he saw her as so much more than just an absent voice. He saw her like Roman had.

Only not quite the same way. Roman had never touched her like a young man would. He had hugged her, but he had never caressed her. And he certainly had never curled up with her in the same bed.

He’d never made her want him to.

She clutched tightly to the man in her arms. Fox was struggling, just as lost in the water as she. She could feel the way his chest was heaving. He, it seemed, had already flooded his lungs with saltwater. He was nearer to death than she, she knew.

She gave up trying to see. Gave up hoping for a chance that they both might live. She sighed, letting air bubble up from her mouth, and accepted that, even if nothing else, they could at least die together.

She drew the water into her lungs, contented with her decision, only for something to suddenly seize her by the hair and pull. Surprised, she tried to scream, but merely choked on the water she had only just inhaled. She nearly loosened her grip on Fox, but felt as his hands suddenly clutched her arms, and she tightened down on him, hanging onto him as the last and only thing precious to her even as she felt herself being yanked by her hair.

Her lungs spasmed as she broke into air, water gurgling and splashing from her mouth in sickening sounds. Her ears caught the sounds of a second person coughing, felt the splashing on her hands as
Fox’s chest heaved and jerked.

“'I need another hand here! She’s got one in her arms!'”

Neo fought for clarity, for understanding. She knew the words. She knew she could parse what they meant. But just then nothing seemed to make sense. She should have been dying. The way her lungs were burning and her vision, previously flooded with blinding light was now greying, it was possible she was dying. But hands were on her, dragging her painfully on some surface, and a second set of hands were trying to take Fox from her, trying to pry him away.

“No!” she tried to cry out, but the words were no better formed than they ever had been. A splash of water and racking coughs were all that she managed. All she could do was fight them off, cling more tightly to him, to Fox, to someone that was HERS.

“Dammit, let go! We’re trying to save him, you crazy bitch!”

Again, the words made no sense. She squeezed Fox as hard as she could, refusing to let him die without her, or she without him.

“Dammit, she’s lost it. Gimme that!”

“Here, Arslan! Don’t poke yourself!”

Something sharp suddenly stung her, right in the shoulder, and everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Alright! I said I'd have some important announcements at the end of the chapter, and here they are!

This marks the end of Volume 2 of the story, Spring Hunt. It's been a long road getting here, and that's a fact!

Unfortunately, getting here has exhausted my buffer of chapters. I'm working at what is supposed to be a part time job, but I am actually working overtime almost every day. It is leaving me with little time and energy to write. Hopefully things will get better soon.

That's not to say that I won't be doing Volume 3: Summer Hunt! I am most certainly going to do that! It just means that it's going to be a little delayed, and posting frequency might have to slow down. We shall see. But for now, Winter Hunt/Spring Hunt/Summer Hunt is on hiatus until November 2018. We'll see how much I can get done in a little over a month.

In addition to this delay, the Patreon is another victim of my current workload. Those of you who have been considering joining, thank you. But I quite simply don't have the time to currently keep posting early access chapters and updates in addition to updating here, so I'm putting my Patreon on hold for now. In the mean time, feel free to continue to leave comments here or over on my Twitter. Thanks again, and we'll see everyone in November!
Summer Hunt updates Sundays

Hello Everyone! We're back, just as promised! Let's see how long that lasts though. (nervous laughter) This is the start of the third and final volume of this extended story. I can't believe we're already over 130k words and still have a third of it left! Well, I guess that's what happens when you're having fun. As always, I look forward to hearing from you, so please let me know if you have comments, thoughts, and questions! Thanks for sticking with me.

Now, on to your comments!

GrimmKaiju writes:

I'm happy to see a chapter from Neo's point of view again. I hope you get some great inspiration on your short break and I know that this story will keep getting better. Keep up the great work.

Bookah replies:

Thank you! I'm looking forward to bringing more of the story to you, with Neo's perspective on it finally being just as on stage as everyone else. I hope you continue to enjoy it! Honestly, writing Neo's perspective makes me a little nervous. (laughs)

CoopBro writes:

This fanfic i definitely worth my time. It is always a nice way to take a break and read what you've written.

Don't worry about taking a break. It is needed sometimes. School has been kicking me ever since it started.

A nicely written chapter and I'll patiently wait for what will happen next.

Bookah replies

Thank you for your patience and your kind words! While I wasn't able to get as large a buffer built back up as I wanted, I did manage somewhat, so that was good. With the holidays coming up I'm hoping I'll be able to enlarge it. We'll see. I'm so glad you have stuck with this!

Incursio5991 writes:

Loved the Neo focused chapter and nice to hear her thoughts on fox,Interested to see what team ABRNs take on this whole situation is, It's no problem,real life stuff should come before stuff like this,I just recently started to learn just how much time a job actually takes up, but you know got to get money somehow, I hope everything goes well with your job/life, and We'll all be excitedly awaiting this coming November.

Bookah replies:
Thanks for sticking with me! Just remember you said this in a few chapters after *mumble mutter REDACTED*, (worried laugh). Seriously, though, I hope you enjoy the final volume of the story. I've been looking forward to being able to begin wrapping the story up!

Song Be

Fox struggled to wake up. Usually this was not a difficulty for him. He’d been a fast riser since young, a product of a life lived on the edge of destruction every day. But he could feel the heaviness of sleep on him like multiple layers of gauze, obscuring his senses and muffling his ability to think.

He struggled against it, hating the feeling of not being fully alert, or having total control over himself. It was as though he had been robbed of the ability to control his own body, and he felt a growing anger at the situation. That helped, burning the cotton away and giving him the strength to force his will back upon his limbs.

With a groan he tried opening his eyes, feeling a painful scraping as he did so that left his eyes burning and unfocused.

“Easy there.”

The voice was feminine. It held deep, rich tones to it, a bit of huskiness that even he recognized as being a bit sensual. He rolled his head, trying to make out the blur of brown and gold at the side of the bed he knew he was lying on.

“Close your eyes and give them time. It will help.”

He did so, the burning in his eyes not lessening in the least, but at least the energy of fighting to focus them was no longer bleeding him dry. “Where…” he rasped, but the sound was barely a croak.

“Hold on.”

Fingers lifted his head up, and he felt a cup pressed to his lips. Water trickled into his mouth and he drank, his swallows initially painful, a sensation that passed quickly as the water moistened his throat.

The cup parted from his lips and he heard a soft clunk as it was set back where it had come from.

“To answer your question, you’re in Song Be. I’d say welcome to Mistral, but that might be premature. You have some explaining to do.”

“Song Bay?”

“Close enough.”

“Where’s that, exactly?”

“It’s on the northwest coast of the continent, not far from the tundra zone.”

“That’s pretty far north…”

Fox fought his eyes again, and his eyelids grudgingly opened, the pain less than it had been as tears
lubricated their movement and pooled at the corners of his eyes. He focused on the blur before him, this time forcing it into some semblance of order. The woman who was the source of the voice was young, probably close in age to Fox himself. A crown of wild blonde hair topped her head, beneath which stern, olive green eyes were framed by a rich brown face. The woman wore a single sleeved yellow tunic of a Mistrali style over a black tube top, and had a pair of bandages around her bare arm.

Fox sniffed the air, smelling the scent of industrial cleaner and medicine. The walls were painted a disturbing shade of pale green, lacking any decor. His eyes quickly glanced at the rails to either side of the mattress he lay on, and took in the equipment filling the small, two bed room he lay in.

Ah.

“So, he rasped, his voice not fully recovered in spite of the water. “What are you in for?’”

The woman blinked. “What?”

Fox jerked a chin towards the bandages. “Your arm.”

The woman glanced toward the indicated items, then shook her head. “I’m a huntress. The ribbons are part of my weapon. I’m not here for medical help. I’m here to find out what happened out there.”

“Ah,” Fox sighed. “What happened on the ship, you mean.”

“Yeah.”

Fox nodded. “Fair ‘nuff. But can I have two things first?”

Without a word or a nod the woman reached over to the small table next to the bed, grabbing the cup. She helped him drink the rest of the contents down, then put it back. “And second,” she said, revealing she knew the two requests without his having to mention it, “Yes, they’re all here. At least I think so. One of your companions is really rather slippery.”

Fox gave a coughing laugh. “I see Neo is okay, then.”

“Is that her name? We couldn’t get her to tell us.”

“You wouldn’t have been able to even if she wanted to. She can’t speak.”

The woman frowned. “That explains a few things. We tried speaking with her, but she just gave us dirty looks. The next thing we knew, she was gone. We had no idea how she did it. But now we have an explanation for her unwillingness to even tell us how she was. Anyway, speaking of explaining…” The woman focused on Fox, her expression less than friendly. “We have a few survivors amongst the crew of the ship who spun quite the story about a group of stowaways and pirates sinking their ship.”

Fox laughed, the sound made harsh by his current condition. “How about I change that to ‘a group of huntsmen whose cover was blown?’ Does that change things any?”

The woman did not seem surprised by this. “It would help if you elaborated on that.”

Fox nodded, feeling a bit more strength. “We were tracking some of the terrorists who attacked Beacon. We’d managed to uncover a supply chain they were using to move men and materials from Vale to Mistral. That ship was part of the supply chain. Did the crew happen to mention having five White Fang members on board?”
Eyes narrowing, the woman leaned in a bit, her hand coming up to pinch her chin thoughtfully. “No. They mentioned a few passengers, but only said they didn’t think any of them made it.”

“Well, check with the rest of us. I bet they can tell you that there were five White Fang Faunus, and identify that one was some sort of giant of a man with no obvious animal traits while the rest were a boar, some sort of bird, a poisonous snake, and a ram. They figured us out and things got… messy.”

“Messy.”

“They decided to try to wipe us out. Obviously, we felt it was in our best interest to not let them do that. Unfortunately, two of my companions use weapons that really weren’t designed for boarding actions. The collateral damage to the ship was… extensive.”

“So you did sink the ship.”

Fox shrugged. “In a manner of speaking, but it was definitely not with intent. I don’t know ships well so I couldn’t say whether the ship could be saved or not before the Grimmwhale showed up. All I know was that it was definitely taking on water and the crew was certainly concerned. Then the Grimmwhale found us and, well… That pretty much sealed the deal, if you will.”

“The surviving crew members said that the ship was lost before the Grimmwhale showed.”

“They also withheld the fact they knew they had White Fang terrorists on board as paying customers. Did we actually damage the ship beyond recovery? I couldn’t say for certain. Only that if we did so it certainly wasn’t our intention. Our plan had simply been to follow the terrorists to port, then deal with them safely on land after discovering the next leg of their supply chain. That’s pretty much not happening now. We’ve lost their trail well and good now.” Fox sighed.

“Well,” the woman shifted in her seat. “I definitely have further questions for you, but those can wait until after I’ve brought a few new details up with the crew.” She scowled. “I hate coverups, and your story sounds better than what they spun. I’ll also need to check with the rest of your team.”

“About that, you said Neo is up and active?”

The woman nodded, and sat back, slightly more relaxed than she’d first seemed. “She was the first of you to wake up. And the most obstinate of you as well. She absolutely refused to stay in bed and pulled her disappearing act within two hours of waking up. We keep finding her here curled up in bed with you, but the moment any of us comes in she just poofs away. She was here when I arrived a short bit ago.”

“That’s so very like her. And the others?”

“Well, the big guy is still unconscious. Whatever happened out there put him through the wringer. He was half dead when we pulled him out of the water. Someone beat the everloving hell out of him. Broken ribs, a cracked skull, lacerations, a torn muscle… His aura has been working overtime trying to fix him up, but almost drowning suppresses aura like nobody’s business. Once he wakes up it should rebound, but for now it’s slow going.” The woman frowned.

Fox chuckled. “You should see the other guy. Anyway, the big guy’s name is Yatsuhashi. Yatsuhashi Daichi.”

“Daichi?” The woman looked surprised. “That’s very interesting.”

“Especially if you’ve researched who owned that ship.”
The woman nodded to herself, then looked back to Fox. “The faunus girl is physically fine. Mentally, though, there is something going on there. She is completely refusing to talk with any of us. It’s not that she’s unresponsive, it’s just that her answers are very curt and completely uninformative. The best information we’ve gotten is overhearing her arguing with someone who isn’t even there.”

“Tawney?”

“Yeah, that’s the name.”

“Yeah, long story. I’ll see what I can do as soon as I can get out of bed. Velvet might be willing to listen to me.”

“Speaking of you, let’s talk about your physical condition. According to the doctors, you’re the best off of the bunch. Your arm had been dislocated, but someone had already popped it back in before we fished you out of the sea. You also had a good bit of bruising. But for the most part you were fine. The only thing really keeping you down was inhaling half the ocean. Again, suppressed aura. Basically you suffered a brief bout of pneumonia caused by the water we couldn’t get out of your lungs until your aura could fight that off. But you should be up and about within the next couple of hours.”

“Thanks.”

Fox forced himself to sit up, sliding backwards to prop his back against the metal frame ‘headboard’ to support himself. “And what about Coco?”

“Coco?” The woman looked puzzled for a moment, and then her expression took on a sharp feature. “You don’t mean Coco Adel?”

“Yeah.” Fox gave the woman a sharp look.

The woman looked troubled, and Fox dread settling deep down in his chest. She pinched her nose, her eyes closed. “We only fished four of you out of the water. You, the big guy, the faunus, and the slippery girl.” The woman’s shoulders fell. “Are you sure that…” She jerked her head in negation of the unfinished question. “Of course you are. Shit. I wish we’d known this sooner. We’d have continued the search. We just assumed we had all of you because teams are usually four in number.”

Fox nodded distractedly. If they hadn’t found Coco in the icy waters surrounding the stricken vessel, they probably wouldn’t now, after… He realized he didn’t know how long he’d been unconscious.

“How long?”

“Four days. She’s been missing for four days. Shit shit shit. Fuck, Coco….”

Fox found himself staring at the woman. Certainly any rescuer would be distraught to learn they’d failed to find and save someone. But this woman’s response seemed a bit more personal than that. It echoed the individual fear he was feeling himself, but that made no sense to him. As far as he could recall he’d never met this woman in his life, and that should have been true for Coco as well. The woman had been no more of a traveler than he before coming to Beacon.

The woman shot upward. “I’d better get some new search parties going. If there’s a chance, any chance at all that she’s still out there I’ve got to find her. Shit!” She began marching to the door.

“Wait!” Fox called, and she stopped, clearly agitated. “Do you know Coco?”
“Intimately,” the woman snapped back. “She gave me the best fucking I’ve ever had in my life.”

“Wait… what?” Fox boggled. “Just who are you?”

“Arslan Altan. We met at the Vytal Festival.” She seized the door and jerked it open. “I’ll need to go. Now.” She whipped out the door, slamming it shut behind her.

Fox lay back on the bed, draping his arm over his still uncomfortable eyes. “Where the hell are you, Coco?” He swallowed back fear, and prayed, though he knew not who the prayer was to.
Summer Hunt - Chapter 2: Velvet

Chapter Notes

Summer Hunt updates Sundays

And we're rolling along! Yet another chapter for everyone's enjoyment. But first, let's respond to your wonderful comments. Keep them coming!

Burn It totheground writes:

Well aren't you just a ray of sunshine. Pulling punches like that, like it's the end of Volume 3.

Bookah replies:

Who, little ol' me? I'm jess a bundle o' sunshine!

darkvampirekisses writes (about chapter 22)

I ship this.... I ship this so hard.... They make wonderful dance partners

Bookah replies:

We all do, dear. Trust me.

And then darkvampirekisses writes again:

Wow.... Just, wow. Two days of well-spent bingeing time to catch up, and it was worth it. I have quite enjoyed the journey thus far, and I look forward to seeing where it goes from here.

I just want to give Velvet so many cuddles right now.... She is going through so much, and she deserves all the cuddles!

And as for Coco.... I'm not worried. She's too stubborn to die...

... Right? *Nervous laughter*

And Bookah replies to this:

TWO DAYS? I feel really special... and like I did something wrong, like some sort of evil temptress luring you from your path in life... *laughs* Thank you so much for letting me this story is bingeworthy! That's high praise!

As for Velvet and Coco... *fret fret fret*

Incurso5991 writes:

Yay welcome back!,wow times flies,so we come back into the story to a basically fine fox, neo warping around the hospital, a pretty battered Yatsuhashi, a physically fine but mentally not so much stable velvet (so not much change) and a missing coco (hopefully not for long). well we’re off to a great start, well can’t wait to see how the final volume progresses, also how are you enjoying the 6th volume so far, for me the first two episodes have been amazing, really excited to see where the crewby takes us this volume
Bookah replies:

Yup! It's business as usual for Team CFVY. XD I swear, someone needs to host an intervention. Not for them, for me. I really need to be nicer to them...

As for Season 6... Oh. My. God. They CANNOT bring episodes out fast enough to satisfy me. The things we learn about [Spoiler] and [Spoiler]... Shoot, even the opening credits are made of deep, needy, anticipatory want. I mean, when I saw the [spoiler] go flying past [spoiler] I almost went insane, even if it does mean that this story is probably no longer cannon compliant. But SQUEE!

And speaking of Squee...

Song Be

Velvet sat at the head of the bed, her arms pulling her legs to her chest. Her back was pressed against the reassuring cool of the wall, freeing her attention to focus on the doctor currently attempting to take her pulse, his fingers wrapped around a wrist that barely angled away from her knee, his eyes on his watch. The moment he let go, she slapped her hand back against her knee.

Awwwww. You don’t like your kindly healer?

Velvet growled low down in her chest, drawing a sharp look from the doctor. She forced herself to still, ignoring the invasive voice in her head as Tawnee laughed. She was quickly distracted from the taunting by a movement by the doctor as he reached for her throat. She twitched, stiff, her hands coming free to block his movement.

"Easy," the doctor ordered, his voice firm, but quiet. "I just want to check the lymph nodes at your neck. You’ve fought off most of the infection, but I want to see if it’s still lingering."

Velvet willed herself to relax, only achieving partial success. She remained quite rigid as he placed his fingers against her neck, pressing against the previously painful and swollen glands just below her jaw. He prodded only a few times, withdrawing quickly, to her immense relief.

"Almost normal. Now stick out your tongue."

Slowly, Velvet complied.

"And open your mouth." The doctor sounded slightly cross.

Scowling, Velvet did as instructed.

"Okay, you can close up now. He leaned forward. “Let me see your eyes.” He pulled out a medical device with a light on the end of it. Velvet recoiled back, thumping her head against the wall. The doctor chased her, leaving her feeling a bit panicked, but the man leaned back after only a couple of seconds.

Whelp, it looks like you’ll make a full recovery. Unless you bump your head against the wall again.”

The doctor shook his head and then stood, and Velvet felt herself lean toward the opposite side of the
bed at his sudden motion. Her eyes were locked onto his looming presence as he wrote a few notes on a clipboard before picking up the chair he had been sitting in and turning away to go exit the room, leaving the chair beside the door before he closed it.

Velvet sighed and slid down the wall a bit, trying to relax. She felt exhausted, but knew that sleep wouldn’t be coming any time soon, a fact that frustrated her to no end. She didn’t really have anything else to do but sleep, but despite the fact hospitals were supposed to be quiet places she found herself twitching at every footfall in the corridor, every rustle of the curtains, every little change in the soft electronic noises of the medical equipment in the room.

A tap jerked her head around, causing her to tense up yet again, her muscles cringing at the soreness the action exacerbated. Against the far wall she found Neo sitting in a chair, contemplating her without any of the insouciance she would previously have shown. Velvet glared at the diminutive woman, finding her presence anything but reassuring.

Neo slowly brought her hand up and gently gestured toward Velvet, then tapped her temple. Velvet glowered. “Yes. I’m crazy as a loon. Happy?”

She watched as the ice cream colored woman shook her head slowly. Then the woman pointed to Velvet again before patting her chest, then pantomimed flexing her arms before giving a questioning shrug.

With a snort, Velvet cautiously lowered her chin to her knees, still glaring at Neo. “I’m fairly healthy, physically. Not like you care.”

Neo sighed, shaking her head again. She brought her hands up to the side of her head, index fingers pointing up to mime pointy ears at the top of her head, then used one hand to mime pulling her nose and mouth into a snout.

“Fox?”

Neo nodded. She then swirled a finger at her table before pointing to Velvet.

“Fox thinks I’m crazy?”

Neo frowned, her expression a little angry, and she gave a small stomp of one foot that was a bit less effective an expression owing to the small woman’s seated position. She slapped both hands to her cheeks, mouth open wide, her eyes just as stretched, then began wringing her hands in front of her.

Velvet sighed. “Fox is worried about me.”

Neo smiled approval and nodded.

“He shouldn’t be. I’m really not worth worrying about.”

Neo stomped her foot on the floor again, then made an angry jabbing towards Velvet.

“Oh, like you care.”

Her expression of doubt received a scowl as Neo crossed her arms across her chest and hunched into a sulk, her face turned away. Velvet watched the woman through narrow eyes, then shrugged. “Fine. You care. Why?”

Neo turned her head back to look at Velvet. Uncrossing her arms, she made the ears and snout with
her hand again.

“Because Fox cares.”

Neo nodded.

Velvet contemplated the woman a moment, then sighed. “What does he mean to you, Neo?”

The surprised expression the woman gave her gave Velvet a moment of cruel levity. She probably shouldn’t have been so happy to have clearly made Neo uncomfortable, but she sagely observed that, for the jaded, misery loves company.

Neo sat there, clearly uncomfortable. She opened her mouth and her hand fluttered out, as if she meant to try to answer, but lips and fingers both wavered uselessly before the girl turned away and shrugged.

“Uh huh.” Velvet frowned. “Neo, if you ever do anything to hurt him...”

Neo drew her knees up to her chest, looking a bit miserable and not meeting Velvet’s eyes before feebly pointing towards Velvet before drawing a thumb across her throat, then ending with a gesture towards herself.

“Yup.”

Neo, still not looking at Velvet, nodded slightly.

They sat there like that, mirrored lumps of misery, for several minutes, the silence growing between them. Then, with a sudden toss of her head that made Velvet twitch, Neo popped out of existence.

Just a second later a knock came at the door, and Arslan opened it. The woman bustled in, her face deeply furrowed, her attention clearly elsewhere. But then she visibly shook herself before settling into the freshly vacated chair and looking towards Velvet.

“Alright. You don’t want me here, and I don’t want to be here. I have things to do, but I can’t do them just yet, so I’m just going to try this again.” The woman sighed and pinched her nose. “Luckily for both of us, now I just need a few things confirmed instead of fully answered. Alright?”

Velvet stared at the woman, all of her senses fully alert.

The woman’s cheeks pinched in a bit with displeasure. “A yes or no would be nice.” She shrugged. “Alright. First off, your name is Velvet Scarlatina?”

For a moment Velvet didn’t reply, but then she nodded.

“Finally,” Arslan muttered. The sound was clearly meant to be a private thing, but the barely breathed comment was easily made out by Velvet’s hearing. Before Velvet could even give the woman a dark look, Arslan was pressing on. “You’re part of a team of huntsmen and huntresses from Vale, right?”

Again Velvet nodded. “Yes,” she whispered.

Arslan’s eyes grew a bit more interested. “Can you confirm their names for me?”

Velvet pursed her lips in thought, then nodded.

Arslan gave her a patient look, but then sighed when Velvet said nothing. “Can you tell me their
names please?”

Velvet scowled. “Coco Adel, Yatsuhashi Daichi, and Fox Alistair.”

She saw Arslan frown, though the expression was not directed at her this time. She muttered something, this time low enough that Velvet couldn’t make it out, and then the woman drew a deep breath. “Alright. Fox told me you were hunting. Can you tell me what you were hunting so I can confirm what he told me?”

A growl escaped Velvet again, and this time she made no effort to repress it. “Fox wouldn’t lie to you.”

A surprised look crossed Arslan’s face and she held her hands up in supplication. “I didn’t say he would. But I have to double check just to make sure he hasn’t gotten some details confused as a result of the shipwreck.”

Velvet stared at the woman, not taken in one bit by Arslan’s careful phrasing. She knew that the huntress wasn’t worried Fox might be confused. Angry, she spat out her answer. “We were hunting some of the terrorists that attacked Vale.”

With a sigh of clear relief the woman sat back in the chair, closing her eyes. “Okay.”

A gristled older man stuck his head in the door. He glanced over at Velvet, then turned to look at Arslan. “The airship’s ready.”

Arslan leapt up out of the chair fast enough to make Velvet flinch. “Finally. Let’s go right away. I want to start checking every fishing village north of here first. Maybe, just maybe we might be lucky.” The woman rushed out of the room, closing the door less than gently.

Velvet sighed, then flopped over on her side, still curled into a tight, protective ball.

I thought all you huntsmen and huntresses were on the same side. But you were sure harsh on that one.

“Shut up, Tawnee.”

Another knock came at the door, and Velvet’s eyes immediately darted around for somewhere to hide. Between the doctor, Neo, and Arslan, she was distinctly peopled out. Before she found anything, however, the door opened and Fox slipped inside, closing the door behind him.

Gentle white eyes contemplated her a moment, and then he softly slid up to the foot of the bed, settling on it gently. “Hi.”

Velvet felt herself trembling as she stared at Fox. She didn’t know what to do. On the one hand she wanted to run away, to hide, to not let him see how messed up, how absolutely broken she was. On the other, she wanted to throw herself at him, clinging to him and never letting go.

Fox made no moves, but just sat there as she stared. She began to grow terrified. What was he seeing when he look at her? The killer animal she’d become? A broken toy not to be touched lest it shatter completely? A failure who couldn’t remain strong when facing the same things he had endured? A…

Her eyes went wide as Fox held out a hand towards her, again, not saying a word, and with a face that said she didn’t have to take it, but it was there if she wanted it. Slowly, her hand came up from the ball, seemingly on its own. It stretched out tentatively, trembling, until the tips of their fingers touched.
Fox smiled to her. “Hey, Velvet.”

Explosively, Velvet threw herself toward Fox, wrapping her arms around him and clinging tightly as she lost herself to the tears. A hand came around to pull her shoulders tight in a hug, and she could almost hear the gentle smile in Fox’s voice as he whispered, “Go ahead and cry all you want. We can talk when you’re ready.”

An hour later, Velvet sat at the head of the bed once more. She still held herself stiff and ready, but her knees weren’t pressed to her chest this time, but instead simply rested at elbow’s length ahead of her. She wiped at itchy eyes, and her voice sounded harsh in her ears.

“Is there any hope?”

“Sure.” Fox sighed, worry writ strong on his face. “Coco’s tough. She probably has the strongest aura of any of us. It’s possible she’s sitting on some beach resting up until her wounds will let her come looking for us.”

“But what if she isn’t?”

Fox sighed, and Velvet felt herself regretting asking the question.

“Only time will tell. But the sooner we heal up, the sooner we can be out there looking for her.” Velvet watched him turn a stern look on her. “So make sure you cooperate with the doctor, okay?”


“Good.” Fox gave her a smile, then stood. “Well, if you’ll pardon me, I’m going to try arranging something. It’d be nice if Yatsu could wake up next to his girlfriend.”

Velvet swallowed, saying nothing as Fox left. She wasn’t completely sure she agreed.
Hello once again, everyone! It's that time again. I know people have been looking forward to chapters from Neo's perspective for a while, so here it is at last! Neo! I hope everyone enjoys, and as usual, please feel free to leave comments! I look forward to hearing from you!

Speaking of comments:

darkvampirekisses writes:

*sends a care package of cookies and hot cocoa*

Poor Velvet... She is so wounded inside.... Tawnee needs to keep her trap shut and let our favorite bunbun recover!

Bookah replies:

Ooh! Cookies and cocoa! YAY! ... Wait, these are for Velvet, aren't they? Sigh...

GrimmKaiju writes:

And if course I missed a chapter because of work but now I'm back in the story. Neo without a way to effectively communicate, Velvet on a downward spiral, Coco lost, and Yatsu still out. Fox is trying to pick up the pieces of the team but he isn't doing so good himself it would seem. I look forward to reading these again.

Bookah replies:

Sometimes I think I should not be allowed to play with Team CFVY. I seem to have a bad habit of breaking my toys...

CoopBro writes:

Everyone needs a hug from time to time. And so does every-bun. I'm glad Fox and Neo came to talk (or I guess Neo tried to "talk") since isolating oneself is the worst thing to do.

Let's just hope Fox can keep picking up the pieces and not fall to pieces himself.

Bookah replies:

Fox surprises even me, with his sometimes being able to stand under amazing amounts of pressure, and sometimes being unable to take it. I like him. He's so very normal, in his own, scar covered way.

Alright! Let's get on with this!
“I don’t suppose you’ve figured out what they’ve done with our scrolls, have you?”

Neo frowned as she curled herself up against Fox’s belly in the far too small for two hospital bed. It was the first time she’d been able to be alone with him since he had woken up, and that was the first thing he’d said to her. She’d hoped for something a bit more affectionate, but instead she got something utilitarian from the tall, scar covered man.

“I haven’t learned to read any of your signs properly yet, so the scrolls would make it easier to understand what you’re trying to tell me.”

She blinked a second, then smiled, before twisting a bit to give him a peck on the cheek. She then wiggled more deeply against him, reaching back and pulling his arm over her, depositing his hand on her stomach.

It felt good, being like that. It didn’t leave her feeling safe, or protected. Honestly, she didn’t need such things, not from Fox, not from anyone. But feeling welcome, and cared for… If she had to, she’d admit that she needed that very much. And Fox was very welcoming and caring.

As if to prove the point, she felt Fox shift, bending down a bit from his position as the big spoon to place a gentle kiss on the crown of her head. She gave a little coo of pleasure and patted the back of his hand affectionately.

“Sometimes I wish…” he muttered into her hair, but then he trailed off, leaving her feeling curious about the part left unsaid.

Of course, she too had wishes. She gave a mental sigh, not wanting to disturb the moment by making the act a physical one. She simply adored cuddling with Fox. It felt good. It felt right. His tall figure could wrap her small frame up almost completely, and she loved knowing that. But sometimes she wanted more than that.

It wouldn’t happen, of course. Fox had made that clear. He was gentle about it, even a bit teasing so as to lighten the sting. But he had no interest in extending the romantic into the sexual.

No, that wasn’t quite right. ‘Interest’ wasn’t the word. The word was ‘desire’. He had everything that was needed for that. Neo had certainly noticed that his body definitely had the ‘functionality’ for it to happen. And he’d never seemed hostile to the concept of sex. If anything, he seemed more bemused by the whole thing.

Occasionally, it made her doubt herself. Of course, such doubt was foolish. Neo was hardly unaware of her own attractiveness. In fact, she was well aware of the fact that some people might find her proportions (small but curvy) to be outright fetishy. A few had even made the grievous error of telling her so. Not that she was afraid to take advantage of the fact. She knew just what the combination of her diminutive height and cleavage could do to distract people, and used the fact ruthlessly when the occasion called for it. But none of that really affected Fox, and for the first time in a long time, she actually wanted to be someone’s fetish.

She wondered what Roman would have had to say about that. Something wry and sarcastic, no doubt. He’d never seen her as a fetish object either, for which she was grateful. Such would have felt a bit incestuous, frankly. He’d never quite been a father figure, nor quite an older brother either. But it was something close to that, and frankly she’d been glad he’d been more inclined to direct his more… puerile interests towards the Malachite Twins (and wryly amused by their frank rejection.)
Oum, but she missed him so. When she got her hands on that red wearing bitch, either red wearing bitch…

Fox stirred behind her, then sat up a bit, still holding her stomach. “Neo… Just what are you wearing?”

This time she did let the sigh escape her. The thin pullover top she’d pulled out of a locker had been the smallest thing she could find, and it still hung on her more like a dress than anything else, and didn’t mask the fact she’d been able to find anything small enough (yet big enough all at once) to provide her proper support underneath. The embarrassingly drab underwear the hospital had slipped onto her beneath the oh-so-not-right hospital gown remained, though now covered by a pair of jeans that fit her waist. She’d had to roll up multiple times to avoid trodding on the hem. She still lacked shoes or socks. It was, frankly, a very slovenly outfit that she swam in, and Fox’s attention to it frankly embarrassed her.

“Never mind. Just tell me you didn’t steal it.”

Having no answer for that, Neo simply lay still, hearing Fox respond to the silence with a sigh of his own.

“Alright, fine.” He sat up fully, pulling her up with him so that she settled in his lap. “In for a lien… I don’t suppose you could steal me some scrubs or something? I’m tired of wearing something that opens from the back.”

Laughing, Neo activated her semblance and disappeared, leaving Fox briefly holding a replica of herself that shattered the moment he shifted.

Some time later the pair walked along a path outside the hospital, she still wearing her stolen slouchy outfit, he in a slightly loose and not quite long enough pair of slacks with the shirt from a pair of scrubs. The night sky above them was obscured by the blazing lights of the hospital, leaving them unable to appreciate the stars as they walked hand in hand, but giving them a good view of the carefully cultivated garden they were walking through. Neo had wrapped herself around the lower part of Fox’s right arm, her fingers interlaced with his. She was enjoying the moment, only for it to be interrupted. Feeling the presence around the bend, she attempted to tug her Fox a different direction, but his long stride pulled him around before there was proper time to interrupt it.

Neo could see the thick golden mane of their interrogator in front of them. The woman was hunched, kneeling as she stared unmovingly at a wall before her. Fox hesitated at the sight of the woman, then quietly twisted, turning towards a different walking path. The woman twitched in that moment, then rose and turned to face them.

“Fox,” the woman said, her face hard. “Neo. It was Neo, right?”

Frowning, Neo gave a grudging nod in the woman’s direction. The woman gave back a nod of her own, then turned arched an eyebrow. “Those aren’t your clothes, are they?”

Neo felt Fox shrug. “The gown was a bit uncomfortable, and despite her talents Neo hasn’t found our own. I’ll ask her to give them back when we’ve got ours back.”

“Not happening,” the woman replied. “The medical team cut them off the both of you. They’re a complete loss. The only thing they salvaged were your scrolls and your weapons. You still had yours on your wrists, and they managed to get them off intact. And she had as much a death grip on hers as she had on you. It took some serious muscle relaxers to get her to let go.”
Neo growled. It was not easy for someone her size to find decent clothing. That entire outfit had been custom, and had cost Roman a pretty penny. He’d grumbled about needing a partner who could fit stolen finery, but he’d paid anyway, and Neo had known he’d not meant a word of the complaint. With it destroyed, that meant she was now stuck in potato bag land as far as fashion.

She felt Fox pull her a bit closer, his hand giving hers a squeeze. “Well, that’s a problem,” he sighed. “We’ll need something.” Neo tugged at his arm, and he glanced down to her. “Something tailored. Neo’s not exactly off the rack.”

The woman snorted. “Yeah, no kidding. I’ll make some arrangements to get you guys to a tailor in town or something after the big guy… Yatsuhashi?”

Fox nodded. “After Yatsuhashi decides to wake up and join us. Which I hope will be soon. Velvet is hovering over him so much I’m worried she’s not getting enough sleep.”

“Probably,” Fox sighed. “They’re lovers.”

“Like you two?”

Neo felt an annoyed snort escape her. Beside her, Fox patted her on the head. “Something like that,” he said. “We haven’t fully defined what we have yet.”

The woman’s expression held doubts, but she kept them to herself. Instead, she pinched the bridge of her nose before looking Fox in the eyes. “We still haven’t found Coco.”

“Yeah. If you had you’d have let us know.”

“I’m sorry. The odds aren’t very good. If we don’t find something tomorrow we’ll have to call off the search. We simply don’t have the resources, and Mistral’s got a lot of problems right now.”

“I understand.” Neo felt Fox’s grip on her hand tighten, his arm trembling slightly. “Thank you for trying. Once we’re all up and about, we’ll go look for ourselves. We have to.”

The woman nodded, and an awkward silence fell over the little niche. Neo did not know what the others were thinking, but she knew what she herself was feeling. Strangely, the possibility that Coco, a woman on the opposite side from herself, was dead left Neo feeling a bit at a loss, almost as though something had been removed from inside her chest and not replaced. It was an unpleasant hollowness, and she did not like it.

After a moment, Fox shrugged, his eyes turning to the wall the woman had been sitting in front of. He reached out and touched it with his free hand, and Neo followed the movement with her eyes. “What’s this?”

Quietly, the blond turned to face it. “The Wall of Remembrance. The hospital adds the names of everyone they couldn’t save to it.” The woman’s hand reached out and brushed a freshly carven brick in the wall, her fingers tracing the three names on it.

Neo felt a bit of a chill of recognition. She tightened her grip on Fox, clinging to his arm, looking up towards his face. He glanced down toward her, giving a small nod before he turned back to the taller woman. “What happened, if I may ask.”

“It was our first mission post graduation. It seemed a simple enough job. Just a simple grimm extermination. Nothing too serious. But when we arrived on site, there were no grimm. Just a group of bandits. They were waiting for us.”
Neo’s eyes narrowed. Bandits did not deliberately set up and bait traps for huntsmen. Doing so was far too high risk, with little to know payoff. At the heart of it, bandits were about doing what it took to survive, and killing huntsmen wasn’t very survivable.

The woman noticed Neo’s expression and nodded. “Yeah. It was a setup. I don’t know who, or why, but someone wanted my team dead. The bandits had a couple of heavy hitters with them. By the time we realized they weren’t bandits and had real skill…” The woman closed her eyes and shook her head. “I was able to kill those two, but I was also the only one that made it back.” The woman pulled her hand back from the bricks, balling it into a fist.

“I’m sorry.”

“I checked out your story as best I could. It all hangs together with the other evidence I collected.” She turned back to face them. “You’re off the hook for what happened out there.”

“Arslan. You said you were set up. I know it’s insensitive of me to ask this but are you absolutely sure of that?”

“Yes.”

Neo eyed the woman with curiosity, something of Fox’s own inquisitiveness getting her attention.

“Because in the past six months, every other huntress in this part of Mistral has gone missing after taking on missions that should have been simple.” Arslan’s face took on a frightening visage. “I’m the only one left.”
Alright! Happy Sunday, and it's time I stop stringing everyone along. At least in one way. XD

But first, your comments!

darkvampirekisses writes:

*sends a second care package of cookies and cocoa, this time making sure to mark it For The Author*

*I hope they find Coco.... Also, the image of Neo dressed in too-big clothes sounds scarly adorable... Like a kid playing dress up in their parent's clothes adorable.... Please don't hurt me, Neo!*

Bookah replies:

*Cookies!*

Alright, for cookies I give you Coco. Thank you!

Also, I now want fanart of Neo in too-big clothing... This is all your fault! XD

GrimmKaiju writes:

*I'm glad to see these chapters from Neo's point of view again. The thought of Neo trying to find something that fits her is amusing but probably not so amusing to Neo. While team CFVY may be broken for now I have a feeling that when they put themselves back together that they should be called CFVYN.*

Bookah replies:

*Hmm... How would you pronounce that? "Caffeine?" That might work...*

CoopBro writes:

*I guess Neo has some large shoes to fill...*

Also, cue dramatic music after that last line. Oh man this is interesting.

Bookah replies:

*Drama drama drama!*

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**Guicun**

The truck came to a halt in a dust billowing slide that left the occupants of the cab coughing and trying to wave the dust away. Cursing lightly, the driver stuck his head out the side window to
glower at the gate barring further progress. His eyes sharpened and he winced, then slowly opened the door of the truck. “Nice and easy,” he muttered. “The welcoming committee is armed.”

Coco nodded and slipped out the passenger door. Like the driver, she carefully kept her hands in sight, away from her body, and squinted up towards the wall, keeping her eyes well away from the cheap rifle laying on the seat where she had been sitting. “This usual?” she asked.

“Nope.”

“Wonderful.”

Atop the rather decorative but still defensively valuable wall, one of the people pointing various doubtless lethal weapons at the pair relaxed her aim. She stood up straight from her slight crouch and cleared her throat. “Who are you?”

“I’m Thahn, from Taebaek. And this is”

“Coco Adel,” the tall brunette interrupted. “I’m a huntress from Vale.”

“Huntress?” The woman on the wall looked surprised. She stared a moment, then turned and shouted to someone on the ground beyond the wall. “Go check the truck.”

A moment later the gate opened enough to let several people out before closing behind them quickly. Most of the group were clearly armed, the weapons not pointed at Coco or Thahn, but clearly readied. They took up a perimeter around the truck as two of their members continued up to the truck. Coco and Thahn slowly stepped aside, letting them examine the truck and its contents.

“Two rifles, a handgun, and a whole lot of fish on ice,” one called to the people on the wall.

“Fish?”

“I figured I could try selling some since I was coming this way anyway,” Thahn hollered.

The woman barked something to the others on the wall, and they rose, pointing their weapons away. “Alright,” she shouted back. “Let them in. Take them to the elder.”

The man who had led the small team out the gate nodded, then turned toward Coco and Thahn. “You heard the lady. Hop in.” He walked around to the passenger side and slid in next to Coco. “I’ll tell you how to get there.”

“Kind of an awkward reception,” Coco commented, though she was careful to keep her voice friendly and her hands away from the rifle the guards had kindly left untouched. “Trouble?”

“You could say that. I really do hope you are a huntress.” The man beside her gave Coco a frank looking over that left her feeling undressed. “You don’t look the part.”

Coco gave the ill-fitting tunic she was wearing a tug. “I had a bad week.”

The man snorted as Thahn fired up the truck and the gate opened. “Who hasn’t?”

The elder was a tall, grey man. The laugh lines in his face showed that he was a man prone to smiling, his eyes held a hint of kindness in them. His body language, however, was the tight, hunched appearance of worry, and his voice was a bit gruff.

“Unfortunately, times are tough. Hunters and huntresses are scarce, these days. We had a group come through last month and take care of a geist that was plaguing the village, but before that we
hadn’t seen one in months and we couldn’t convince them to stay. And now that the geist is gone we have bandits threatening the village. So far they’ve only been raiding outlying farms for food, but it’s only a matter of time before they have bolder desires and come knocking."

Coco frowned. “You don’t have any local teams?”

The man frowned, looking uncomfortable. “They were sent on a mission by the Council in Mistral five months ago. We haven’t seen them since.”

“I thought you were independent of the Kingdom,” Thahn commented.

The elder nodded. “We are. But they knew someone on the Council who asked for them personally. I fear the worst.”

An uncomfortable silence filled the air, and Coco coughed quietly. “Well, I’d love to help out, but I’m only one person, and I don’t have a proper weapon. Just a loaner the people of Taebaek were kind enough to give me. For that matter, I don’t even have clothes that fit right. Not that I’m ungrateful,” she turned and smiled to Thahn.

“Don’t worry. We understand,” he reassured her. “It’s why I brought you here. It’s the closest place to have proper shops.”

“I’m also broke,” Coco commented wryly. Everything I had went down with the ship. I was hoping to hook up with the rest of my team, but…”

“Do you know where they might be?” the elder asked.

“Coco watched a bullhead fish survivors out of the water, but they missed her in the chaos and darkness. She couldn’t tell if any of her team were among them.” Thahn frowned. “Luckily I was out fishing nearby and came to investigate when I heard the distress call from her ship. I was able to fish her out of the water. One of my luckier catches,” Thahn laughed. “My original plan was to bring her here, sell my catch, and get back home. We thought she could hitch a ride down to Song Be from here and start looking for them there.”

“You weren’t going to take her the rest of the way?” The village elder looked thoughtful.

“I’ve already been driving two days, and my wife is due soon.”

“Ah,” the Elder nodded. “That’s quite reasonable. The grocer is two blocks east from here. I’m sure she’ll welcome a fresh catch.”

“Thank you!” Thahn gave a friendly bow, then turned to the door. He paused beside Coco, patting her on the shoulder. “Hope you find them soon.”

Coco nodded with genuine gratitude. He hadn’t had to bring her at all, but could have made her walk. After all, any time spent inland was time he wasn’t at his livelihood. But she’d been desperate to start looking for the rest of Team CFVY the moment her injuries had healed enough (barely enough, but enough) for her to travel, and he’d caught her worry.

“Thank you for everything, Thahn.”

“Think nothing of it. It’s pretty rare that a normal person saves a huntress instead of the other way around. That story will be great for impressing my children once they’re born.”

Coco laughed. “Tell Cam good luck.”
“I will.”

After Thahn left, the elder focused his attention back onto Coco. “I understand you are eager to look for your missing team, but that you are also in a bit of a desperate situation yourself. Perhaps we can help one another out with that.”

“I’m listening.”

Though he was referred to simply as a blacksmith, Shyam’s profession was nothing so simple. The horned faunus was surrounded by machinery far more complicated than a hammer and anvil, and his skills allowed him to make far more than horseshoes and nails. The elder had sent Coco straight to him after she’d agreed to his proposal. He now stood grinning, stroking his black beard as he took in her request.

“I’ll do you one better,” he laughed. “Help me make your new weapon, and I’ll put you up in the spare room upstairs. I’m not much of a cook, but it’s something.”

“I’d be grateful,” Coco admitted. “The Elder and I hadn’t discussed where I would actually sleep. Only my helping defend the village in exchange for a weapon and some clothes.”

“I think we're getting the better part of the deal.”

“I don’t know about that,” Coco sighed. “I feel naked without a proper weapon. And in these clothes, I’d almost rather be naked. Fishermen have no sense of fashion.”

Shyam laughed. “Well, on that note, I’ll be closing up in an hour and a half. There’s really not much point on getting started on your weapon now. We’d manage to get everything out just in time to have to put it back away. We’ll start in the morning. For now, go get those clothes you are so keen on.”

“Thanks. I think I will.”

“Altansarnai’s shop is three blocks east and two south of here. She has the best selection in town.”

“Perfect.” Coco couldn’t help but let a husky little purr enter her voice.

An hour and a half later she re-entered Thahn’s shop, a smile on her face. The blacksmith held the door open for her, then locked it behind himself before turning toward her, giving Coco a once over. She rotated just a bit to the side, striking a bit of a pose.

She was very pleased. Altansarnai, herself surprisingly tall, had been able to provide a good selection for Coco that fit without any real need for modification, a luxury Coco hadn’t often found even in Vale, though the style had certainly been a bit of a change from her usual expectations. Mistral, it seemed, was not big on sweaters and slacks. So instead she had set about to create a new statement for herself.

The main piece of her new outfit was a knee length cheongsam of silk colored in a rich brown similar to the pants she’d previously owned. It was decorated with a almost rust-red motif of twisting Sea Feilong. Against the brown background, the Feilong’s rust color caused them to fade in and out of view depending on the light, causing every movement to create an illusion of phantom grimm to play about on Coco’s torso and thighs.

Over this, as a replacement for her lost cincher, she’d selected a brocaded black underbust corset that laced up the back, but had elaborate brass hooks to open it from the front. She’d been uncertain of the idea at first, and Altansarnai hadn’t quite felt right about put anything over a cheongsam. All concerns had faded away the moment Coco had stepped out of the changing room and in front of a
mirror. She’d gone from tall and willowy to an hourglass that had legs that went of forever.

Said legs were, themselves, a significant piece of the look. The cheongsam had splits in the side that ran far enough up to disappear beneath the corset. She had ruthlessly taken full advantage of this, despite a paucity of options in this area. Most of the pants Altansarnai had available that Coco could fit had been loose, flowy things that her legs would have been lost in. She had found one of the few pairs of form fitting leggings capable of fitting her, allowing the splits to reveal every shapely inch of legs that could have belonged to a competitive runner. She’d tucked the bottom of these in a pair of brass fitted boots that came half way up her shins.

To top the look off, she’d applied a black choker from which dangled a brass medallion in the shape of Coco’s crosshairs crest. Her bare arms revealed an unbroken expanse of skin, save for the twin bracers of dark brown leather at her wrists. And to crown the bob-cut that Coco considered her best feature, Altansarnai had introduced her to an odd import that shouldn’t have worked with the Mistrali theme Coco had otherwise selected. Somehow, however, the black glengarry, decorated with a brass pin and a pair of rich red feathers and rakishly tilted to the right managed to add a little bit of devilment to an otherwise exotic outfit.

“Well, someone cleans up nice,” Trahn muttered.


Trahn gave a hearty laugh. “He’s a lucky man. Or a lucky woman.”

“They both are.”

The faunus gaped for a second, then guffawed good naturedly. “You’ll have to tell me about it during dinner. Kitchen’s this way Miss Adel.”

“Gladly.”

Two hours later, dressed in kimono-like silk pajamas, Coco stared at the dark ceiling of Thahn’s spare room from the guest bed. Angrily she wiped away tears with hands desperate to be holding a shot glass, erasing thoughts that part, or perhaps even all of the members of her team were dead.
Hooooboy. I managed to finish this chapter at the last minute! But I couldn't just leave you guys hanging, even with as crazy as this week has been! So, sparing no expense and highly caffeinated, I present to you the next chapter of our story!

But first, your comments!

darkvampirekisses writes:

Yay! I knew she was alive!! *Starts making another care package to send to the Author*

Bookah replies:

Coco is entirely too ornery to drown. Besides, if I kill her off now, how is Arslan supposed to rekindle their one night stand?

*goes to camp out by the mailbox for the care package*

CooBro writes:

Glad Coco is okay... and not okay. This new weapon has me curious.

Bookah replies:

Me too. *laughs* I haven't quite figured out all of the details yet, and I really need to! Time is running out!

Incursio5991 writes:

Good to see coco is still alive, and curious what her plans for her weapon are, and of course would not be coco if she wasn't almost immediately super fashionable. I like the design of her new outfit, now she just needs to hold onto that hope that the rest of FVY made it out and find them again. Great chapter, can't wait for next one

Bookah replies:

I have to admit, I had way more fun trying to figure out a new outfit for her that had a good, Mistrali twist to it. I'd love to see an actual picture of what I came up with, but I'm no artist. *sigh* And I also need to do the same with the rest of CFVY as well. That's the problem with sinking your ship right after sexing it up, you end up in the water stark naked! Awkward...

GrimmKaiju writes:

well now i have to think about what possible weapon designs for the next week. Thinking about it i can see something like her previous weapon but maybe smaller in design. altho i myself am more of a longer ranged rifle person or possibly a blade of Yautja design.
Bookah replies:

*It has been a challenge trying to determine what best to do with a new weapon for Coco. (And for Yatsuhashi as well.) I mean, it has to still play into what I have determined to be their semblances as far as this story concerns, and be similar enough to what they are used to they can immediately go into the fray with them without being a liability. But at the same time, Coco's new weapon should reflect the things she has learned throughout the previous chapters and not simply be a carbon copy of what she has lost. I've got some definite ideas, and look forward to trying them out!*

**OKAY! So here we go! Enjoy!**

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**Song Be**

“So someone has to have been setting hunters and huntresses up.”

Yatsuhashi winced slightly as an unknown voice intruded on the strange, mist filled dreams that he’d been lost within for what seemed like an eternity. The voice was female, a bit low, and with a certain predatory husk to it. The words she was using were a bit confusing, though he was sure if he had context they might make more sense.

“You’re positive it couldn’t have simply been someone scanning the job boards and trying to take advantage of the opportunities it afforded?”

Yatsuhashi head Fox speak, and felt some relief, even as he was working to become fully aware of his surroundings. If Fox was present, then that meant at least a few things were known quantities. He lay quietly, getting his bearings.

“There were no grimm when we arrived at ours. It was a prepared ambush. This was a deliberate setup. And it all happened at once. This wasn’t a pickup. The attacks all happened within a few days of one another, from what I’ve been able to gather. This was planned in advance.”

“So who’s behind it?” Fox sounded less like he genuinely wondered, than like he was playing sounding board for the unknown woman he was speaking with.

“You said the White Fang were targeting Mistral, right? Haven Academy?”

“They didn’t try to wipe out all the hunters of Vale ahead of time, though. They were willing to attack with them all intact. More than that, they were willing to do it with the best students of every academy visiting as well as the many guest hunters and huntresses that had come to view the Vytal Festival.”

“Pretty cocky. But we also didn’t know they were coming that time. Now we do.”

“Now you just found out,” Fox countered. “Do they know in Mistral?”

There was a pause. “You think there’s more to this than that?”

“I think someone has been playing everyone for a fool. Someone that is willing and able to use the White Fang, but they’re after something more than just Faunus rights.”

“Cinder,” Yatsuhashi croaked.
“Yatsu!”

He hadn’t even opened his eyes before he felt a solid thump against him that he immediately recognized as Velvet. The woman pressed herself against him, her arms digging under his shoulders to hug him tightly. Carefully he brought his arms up to return the embrace. “Hello to you too.”

Lips pressed to his cheek, and he smiled, opening his eyes to get a blurry look at Velvet.

“Welcome back to the land of the living.” Fox reached over and pat him on the shoulder. “It’s good to have you back. There’s been a few developments while you were out.”

“I gathered,” Yatsu grunted, rubbing Velvet’s back with one hand. “Where’s Coco?”

Fox sighed. “That would be one of those developments...”

Some time later, Fox had, in no uncertain terms, kicked everyone but Velvet out of the room. The faunus woman wasted no time in climbing onto the narrow hospital bed beside him, squeezing her slender form against his large frame despite the lack of adequate space to do so. Her arms wrapped around him, and Yatsuhashi gladly wrapped her up in turn, wiggling as far to the side as he could, helping her to avoid falling off the bed.

“So,” he murmured into her hair. “How are you?”

Velvet didn’t say a word. Instead she shook her head, her ears brushing against first one cheek, then the other.

Yatsuhashi pulled her a bit tighter. “Yeah.”

“What if…”

“Shh…” He kissed the top of her head. “She’s tough. We’ll find her.”

“But what if…”

Yatsuhashi further tightened his grip on the frightened woman. “Then we’ll figure it out when that time comes. But for now…” He took a deep breath, keeping himself calm and steady for Velvet. “For now we keep hoping, and we go looking for her.”

There was a moment of silence before Velvet spoke again. “I’m not sure I remember what hope is, anymore.”

“So I’ll hope for both of us.” He patted her shoulder gently. “When’s the last time you slept?”

Again, there was a pause, before Velvet stirred. “I’m not sure. I tried last night, but I’m not sure how much sleep I actually got.”

“Have you talked to anyone about it?”

“I don’t want to.”

“I know. But when you’re ready to, I’ll be right by your side, if that’s what you want.”

“Okay…”

He lay there for a while, holding Velvet as the woman’s breathing slowed, growing deep and gentle. Idly he played his fingers along her back, a soothing stroke rather than a sexual one, though no less
intimate for that. He enjoyed the warmth of her in the air conditioned room, and hoped that his own body heat was equally comforting to her.

Inside, however, he was in turmoil. He wasn’t certain what to do next, or where to go next. With Coco missing he had no idea what to do as a hunter, or as a member of the team. He wasn’t even sure what he was supposed to be doing with Velvet without Coco also there. It was like attempting a bear hug with a missing arm. Without Coco, things felt terribly incomplete.

It worried him that he wondered if Velvet would feel like she was just a replacement for Coco, if they didn’t find her. He worried that she might just be right to.

“Dammit, Coco…” he quietly muttered.

Fox, Neo, and the woman he had been talking to came back after around an hour. They had attempted to be fairly quiet so as to not wake Velvet, but that had proven to be a forlorn hope. The faunus woman had woken almost instantly after they had struck up a conversation, and sat wedged tightly against Yatsuhashi’s shoulder in the bed.

“So you think Cinder might be behind setting up hunters in Mistral?” Arslan asked, her expression dubious.

“I don’t know, but I can’t discount the idea,” Yatsuhashi responded. “She’s evidently human. I doubt anyone would knowingly work with the White Fang to set up hunters, but they might work with a fairly unknown, behind the scenes human woman.” He felt Velvet tense up a little at the base admission of the gap that remained between humans and faunus even in Mistral. He reached over and patted her thigh.

“So, if we try to trace her…”

Neo shook her head, then began making gestures toward Fox. Yatsuhashi watched Fox concentrate on the diminutive woman before turning back to Arslan. “No one has seen any sign of Cinder or either of her minions since the attack on Beacon. Neo’s been asking around.” The man then eyed Arslan with a certain amount of caution. “She lost someone to Cinder’s plans after the woman had coerced the two into working for her for a time.”

Arslan gave Fox an evaluating look, then frowned as all she got for her effort was a stony mask that gave away nothing. Yatsuhashi felt a small bit of surprise at how skilled Fox had become at being inscrutable, something he’d thought he held the monopoly on in Team CFVY.

“Well,” Arslan finally breathed, running fingers through her hair with a small amount of frustration, “I guess that would make her a less likely suspect. Back to square one.”

“It’s not that bad a square to be on,” Yatsuhashi rumbled gently. “You knew someone was setting hunters up, but had no explanation for why. Now you know that, whether it was Cinder or not, it has something to do with the White Fang and their preparations to attack Haven Academy.” He watched as Arslan nodded. “Now, ask yourself, how widespread has this attack become? Are the disappearances all local to the city of Mistral, or spread out across the continent?”

Arslan looked down a moment before turning back to Yatsuhashi. “I can’t say for certain, but it seems pretty widespread. My team was sent out in part because the local teams had been killed.”

“The local hunters wouldn’t have ever been in a position to do anything if there was a surprise attack on Haven,” Yatsuhashi mused. “So they were taken out specifically to draw hunters away from Mistral, and to ensure those hunters would have no local support when the various individual traps
were sprung.”

Fox frowned, turning towards him. “But wouldn’t that be a bit of a giveaway? If that many local teams were destroyed in a short period of time, wouldn’t that be a warning sign?”

“Not necessarily.” Yatsuhashi sighed. “Think about the times we are living in. Beacon was basically destroyed while the world was watching, and then immediately afterwards long distance communication pretty much came to a halt. The last collective experience of the entire planet was a collective horror and fear. A planet wide terror would trigger every grimm in the world. Attacks would have happened everywhere, and no one could have coordinated a response in a place as large as Mistral.” Yatsuhashi frowned, and turned to stare out the hospital room window. “It wouldn’t surprise me if entire towns were wiped out, and people still aren’t aware of it.”

He heard Arslan shift uncomfortably from the other side of the bed, where she sat next to Fox. “Under those circumstances, all you would need is one well placed person who could control how widely these disappearances were heard about, and who could also explain those that are known as being unsurprising given the circumstances…”

“It could take a while for someone to put it all together. And by then…”

“By then Haven has no defenses. Mistral has no defenses.”

Fox growled. “The largest kingdom in the world could get hit so hard it set them back a hundred years.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “They could easily lose half the kingdom before it’s all done.”

Beside him Velvet stirred. “If all you cared about was revenge on the humans, and had no long term plan for a better future…”

Yatsuhashi squeezed her knee, then turned back to the others in the room. Fox and Arslan looked deeply disturbed by Yatsuhashi’s conclusions. Even Neo looked shocked by the scope of it.

“That’s sickening,” Arslan muttered.

“It is, but…” Yatsuhashi held up a finger. “It also tells you where to look. How many people would be in a position to destroy an entire kingdom’s defenses without anyone noticing until it’s too late?”

“Maybe a few dozen high up. They’d have to be in the Council, or at least immediately privy to it.”

“And they’d have to be able to directly be able to control both the movements of and information about the Kingdom’s hunters.”

“I could probably count how many people could be doing that using the fingers of one hand.”

Yatsuhashi nodded as Arslan’s face wrinkled with deep thought and an obvious anger. “And where would they be?”

“Mistral. Every last one of them.”

“So now you know where to go and who to investigate.”

Arslan nodded. “Excuse me. I need to start making some arrangements.” The woman immediately rose from her chair and stomped from the room.

The room remained silent until she closed the door behind her. After the soft snick of the latch, Fox
cleared his throat. “Well, there goes a complication.”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “She’s going to try to ask us to come with her.”

Velvet stirred. “Really?”

“Absolutely.”

“But what about Coco?”

Fox frowned. “That’s part of the complication. She wants to find her too. Neo was watching her earlier. The woman is pissed at herself for not rescuing Coco. She seems to think she’s now managed to lose her team and a lover both.”

“Lover?” Yatsuhashi felt his eyebrow rise in surprise, and felt Velvet stir beside him as well.

“They had a fling once and, if Neo understood her quiet mutterings at all, seems to have some thoughts of rekindling that flame if she finds Coco.”

Yatsuhashi frowned, uncertain what to say. Beside him, however, Velvet had no such difficulty.

“Not a fucking chance,” she snarled.

“Down, bunny,” Fox admonished. “We have to find Coco before that’s even an issue. And if she asks us to help her save an entire kingdom instead of hunting for Coco…”

Yatsuhashi felt Velvet deflate beside him, the energy taken out of her by the implications.

“Could we live with saying no?” Yatsuhashi asked, not wanting to know what the answer might be.
Summer Hunt: Chapter 6: Neo

Chapter Notes

SUMMER HUNT UPDATES SUNDAYS.

This chapter was a lot of fun to write. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did! Go! Go read it!

After I respond to your comments, of course.

GrimmKaiju writes:

The plot thickens with this new chapter. Yatsuhashi being awake should bring Velvet some comfort but until Coco is back I doubt Velvet will get much sleep. Seeing Velvet get defensive about Coco was a little amusing but maybe that’s cus it reminds me of someone I know but that’s beside the point. Another great chapter and I can’t wait until next week.

Bookah replies:

You think that is amusing, wait until Velvet's back around Coco. Muwahahahaha!

darkvampirekisses writes:

*sends an extra large care package* that one should be enough for everyone, right? I hope so....

Do I detect a hint of jealousy in our lil badass bunny?

Bookah replies:

Oh my god, yes! Velvet is VERY possessive. XD

Song Be

Neo was practically salivating as she led Fox down the High Street in town. While nowhere near as fashion conscious as some, Neo appreciated knowing her clothes and curves complimented one another. The rolled up legs of her stolen pants were anything but flattering. The oversized shirt felt like she was wearing a shapeless sack, and it was just barely thick enough to avoid a certain amount of… perk. Worse, her feet were getting a bit tender in spite of her aura, the results of walking on summer-hot sidewalks in bare feet. She’d kill for a comfortable pair of spats and one inch heels.

Fox seemed to have the exact opposite problem, a fact which bothered her almost as much as her own sartorial disaster. While she’d had to roll and tuck and tie things to begin fitting things on her frame, he tall man’s legs stuck almost six inches out of the bottom of his stolen pants. The scrubs top were a better fit, but no one would ever accuse hospital scrubs of being sensual. Fox pretty much looked like he’d been wrapped in a plastic bag. At least his feet were protected, as he’d managed to get a pair of flipflops at the hospital. She could have done the same, but refused. She hated the feeling of anything being between her toes.
Well, anything but Fox’s fingers. She could definitely make an exception there. There, and several other places beside.

Her thoughts were suddenly drawn from the other places Fox’s touch would be welcome by a shop window. She froze, Fox jerked to a halt a step ahead by where their fingers were interlaced. He turned back to look at her, and she lifted a finger to point to the display.

“Hmm.” Fox mused. He contemplated the same thing that had brought her to a halt, then nodded his head. “I see what you mean. The lining color is wrong, but that’s a lot like your old jacket.”

Frowning, Neo reached her free hand over to the one that clasped Fox’s. Turning his hand palm up she began writing letters on it with her finger.

“Bollero. Right.” Fox grinned. He glanced up to the marquee above the stores door. “Oh, even better. It’s a petite shop. It might be in your size. I was afraid we’d have to shop for you in the children’s section somewhere.” He gave her a laughing smile.

Elbowing him in the ribs with a snort, Neo let go of Fox’ hand and walked through the open door.

“I’d apologize,” Fox said, “but admit it. You were worried about that to.”

Neo gave a gallic shrug, refusing to admit to anything of the sort. Even if it was true.

Inside her eyes were immediately drawn to the various shelves and racks filling the floorspace, quickly evaluating the offerings. She could tell at a glance that despite the store being exclusively for petites, she’d still require some tailoring work. Even amongst petites she was on the considerably small size. It would still be better than shopping at a store designed for “normal” women. The fewer the modifications needed, the quicker things would go, but with her proportions something off the rack that fit was a pipe dream.

Her eyes strayed towards the back of the store, and she found herself fighting back a snicker. Strolling back to the wall at the rear she reached up as far as she could, and then gave herself a private smile before schooling her face to look annoyed. She turned back around and clapped her hands once, getting Fox’ attention. When he turned to look, she stretched up on tiptoes and mimed attempting to reach something far above her.

Fox laughed quietly. “You’d think a petite store wouldn’t hang things up that high.” He strolled over and reached up, pulling down the hanger she was pointing to. As the filmy cloth waved from the light breeze created by motion alone, he arched an eyebrow. “Really? That’s even thinner than it looks at first glance.”

Neo snatched the barely there nighty and held it up in front of herself. She batted her eyes demurely, her lips coquettish.

Fox sighed. “That still doesn’t do anything for me, sorry.” Neo caught something flicker behind his eyes, though it flashed past so fast she couldn’t make it out. “I wish it did, I really do.”

Neo responded with a sigh of her own, then handed the nighty back for Fox to hang. She gently patted his arm as he put it back.

“Sorry.”

She patted again, a little harder, telling him not to apologize. She understood. She got it. It didn’t keep it from being frustrating in more ways than one, and occasionally doubt her own looks, but she knew it was no more his fault than the odd color (or lack thereof) of his eyes. It was simply who he
Dammit.

“Pardon me.”

The pair turned toward the woman standing behind them. Neo gave the woman a careful evaluation. Hearing the woman approach had given her ample warning of the woman’s presence, but had not informed her about the woman’s looks. Though larger than Neo, it was clear why the woman had opened a store for petite fashion. Compared to anyone else, she would have been tiny. Her eyes had slit pupils, though the dark openings lacked the smooth curves of a cat’s eyes. She appeared human in every other aspect, there could be no doubt about her Faunus origins.

“Can I help you with anything?”

“How in the world can you hang things up that high?” Fox blurted.

Neo immediately jabbed him in the gut with an elbow, surprising him enough for the wind to blow right out of him in a loud gust. He hunched over a little, his arm protectively across his stomach. “Sorry,” he rasped.

“It’s alright,” the woman replied, her expression neutral. “The question does get a bit old, but the results made it worth it this time.” She cracked her mask to give Neo a warm smile, one she found herself returning.

The woman then stepped around the couple and, without warning, climbed the wall as though her fingers and toes stuck to it. Neo blinked in surprise, realizing that it really was fingers and toes. The saleswoman wasn’t wearing any shoes.

“Lizard?” Fox asked politely, his voice still a bit strained from Neo’s elbow.

“Gecko.” The small woman unhooked the negligee and held it out. “Were you two interested in this?”

“Less than we should,” Fox admitted, and Neo frowned at his statement’s reflection of her own inner regrets. “We were more interested in the ja- in the bollero in the front display.”

“Ah.” With a quick motion the woman rehung the hanger and dropped with practiced ease back to the floor. She strolled past Neo, leading them to the store’s front before tapping her finger on the garment that had first caught Neo’s eye. “This one?”

“That’s it.”

The woman turned and eyed the two of them. The expression wasn’t the most pleasant, leaving Neo to arch an eyebrow.

“Does he always speak for you?” the woman asked.

“’Fraid so,” Fox responded. “She’s mute.”

“Oh!” The woman was clearly taken aback. She looked over to Neo, who nodded. “Um, sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Fox laughed. “The question does get a bit old, but the results made it worth it this time.”

Neo slapped his arm as the woman blinked, then gave a wry smile. “I suppose I had that coming.”
“Don’t worry about it.”

The woman turned back to Neo, eyeing her critically, then eyeing the jacket. “Well, I’m afraid that’s the smallest size we have that in, and I can tell already that it’s going to be too big. We can tailor it if you’d like it anyway.”

Neo smiled and nodded, then tapped Fox’s upper arm. He turned to look down at her and she ran her finger over the light green lining of the white bolero. She looked up at him, and he nodded.

“Any chance you could exchange the green for pink?”

“It’d add a couple hours to the tailoring, but that’s easy enough to do. The bollero is stock from a company in Vale, but I do have some nice pink satin in the back that I could replace the green with.” The shopkeeper pulled the jacket off the mannequin and began strolling towards the back of the store. “The name is Aqua, by the way.”

“Fox. And she’s Neo.”

“A pleasure. Come on back and let’s get you measured Neo.”

A few quick sweeps and wraps of a measuring tape (accompanied by an appreciative whistle as the bust measurement was taken) and Neo found herself disgorged from the back out into the showroom once more. Aqua had immediately taken to undoing the seams on the bollero, advising Neo continue looking for any additional clothes she might need. “I’m the only petite store in town. If I don’t have it, you’ll have to settle for something with cute pink ponies or rhinestone princess motifs from the kiddies section of a big box store.” The woman had frankly eyed Neo’s chest then. “Good luck getting anything there to fit that rack.”

Neo had taken the advice. She quickly dropped a pair of nice slacks over Fox’ arm after checking that the waist matched the measurements Aqua had just taken. Shortly thereafter she’d found a couple of deep plunging bras with matching panties, which similarly wound up dangling from Fox. She glanced back to the man, who now wore a bit of a long suffering look, then crooked her finger for him to follow before heading to the dressing rooms.

The dressing room area was partitioned from the rest of the store, a wall with an open doorway separating it, though no door was hung to complete the isolation. Inside, several stalls existed, a curtain across the openings there to provide a pleasant minimum of privacy. Neo strolled into the one at the far end, while Fox trailed along behind. He gently but quickly divested himself of the garments, particularly the intimates, then slid the curtain closed behind her, separating them.

Neo found herself chuckling, endeared by his discomfort at being a self mobile clothing rack for women’s frillies. She quickly hooked her fingers into the hem of her t-shirt and pulled the disreputable, oversized thing off, dropping it to the floor with disgust. Her fingers then dropped down to unbutton and unzip her stolen pants, tugging them down. A blast of AC on her backside reminded her that she hadn’t found a thing to wear beneath her jeans.

*Good thing I picked out a pair of bras that came in sets. Commando in slacks chafes after a while.*

She tugged the pants down, attempting to free herself from the overlength legs of them. Her right leg free, she shifted her weight to it to pull her left up, only for her knee to catch in the waist, hooking it. As she unbalanced she realized that she was standing on the excess length of the left pant leg, keeping it from rising with her leg and hooking the rolled up extra around her toes. An undignified squeal escaped her as she tumbled, feeling cheap curtain cloth rub against her bare skin for the briefest of moments, and then she slapped down onto the carpeted floor.
She placed her hands on the floor, sitting up from where she fell, and her eyes rose to realize Fox was staring at her in surprise. In her fall, she’d tumbled completely out of the changing stall and was now presenting everything for Fox’s perusal. She froze a moment in shock, then felt another blast of cool air conditioned air blow across her skin, and her hands flew to cover herself. She bit her lip, feeling her face heat up, and then used her semblance to flash back inside the curtained changing room. There, she curled up on the floor, hugging her knees to herself in deep, deep embarrassment.

“You… okay in there?”

Neo nodded against her knees, then remembered Fox couldn’t see her. She lifted a shaking hand, sticking it past the curtain to give a thumbs up.

“Okay,” Fox muttered, his voice awkward, and then he gave a wry laugh. “Well, at least that answers a question I’ve had.”

Neo arched an eyebrow, unsure where Fox might be going with his comment.

“The carpet does match the drapes.”

With a squeal, Neo flashed back out of the room, swatting Fox on the ass with a strength enriched by a strong sense of outraged embarrassment before bamfing right back into the stall, her hand scrabbling for the underthings she had selected with a sudden, earth-shaking need to be anything but naked. Outside, Fox gave an awkward laugh, then sighed.

“Someday…” he spoke quietly. “I may not feel that sort of want myself but…”

Neo paused, surprised.

“Someday I want to give you what you want.”

The underwear fell from Neo’s fingers as she stared at the curtain, her mind shocked beyond thought.
Summer Hunt: Chapter 7: Coco

Chapter Notes

SUMMER HUNT UPDATES SUNDAYS

Well, everyone, it's Sunday, and just like the little note right above this says, that means it's update day! I know some of you have been anticipating this chapter, so here it is! I hope you enjoy it, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Speaking of hearing from you, you all left so many awesome comments there's not enough space in the notes to cover them all! So instead, I'm having to include them at the head of the chapter itself!

WOW!

So...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

darkvampirekisses wrote:

*ships out the weekly care package, with an extra cupcake in Neo's colors for the poor petit ice cream girl*

The dubious joy of being a size that isn't standard... Finding clothes that fit is difficult.

Bookah replies

COOKIES! YAY!

I really should feel guilty for the terrible things I do to poor Neo. I'm mean to characters. *cries*

I always had a terrible time with clothes myself for a while, though not quite in the same way. Despite having a petite mother, I came out having average height. But I was also very very thin, so anything that fit my waist was too short in the leg, and anything with sufficient leg just floated on my hips and needed a belt.

And then I got old and fat. *laughs*

CoopBro writes:

I'm excited Neo showed up in last week's RWBY chapter! And I get her again here! Score!
Fox always has the perfect lines (°_3°) I wonder where this will go next.

Poor Neo. Being tall and lanky myself, I can imagine the struggles of finding clothes that fit. Putting anything on too small makes me feel like being constricted and hard to take off.

Bookah replies:

I know, right? When I saw that hat flying by in the opening credits I squeed out loud. Then the episode where she returns came and I just about made a mess of myself in excitement!

And yes, Fox is far too clever with words for his own good. Or the good of others. But it was just too good of a line to pass up!

Apparently Neo's ordeal with clothes has hit a chord with everyone, because the amount of comments I got on this last chapter was just insane! Maybe my next fanfic should be 200k about fashion or something...

Just kidding!

GrimmKaiju writes:

Well I can tell you have fun writing Neo's character and just had fun with this chapter in general. Another great chapter and good show of Fox's and Neo's relationship. I see other people share in Neo's trouble of finding clothes that fit and I can relate somewhat. If it doesn't fit it doesn't make a huge difference to me tho cus I wear a loosely fitting military surplus jacket over everything. I look forward to the next chapter.

Bookah replies:

I am having so much fun with Neo and Fox' relationship. It was never meant to happen, but it's just too darn enjoyable now that it has!

Neo's clothing troubles are something I can relate to, though only second hand. My own mother is petite, and the town we lived in when I was a teen didn't have any petite stores. Once I was old enough to drive, she'd stuff me in the car and we'd tag team a four hour drive one way just to get to the closest known petite store so she could stop having to try to find non-childish clothes in the kiddo sections of the stores local to us...

PeteLills writes:
I'm jumping ahead from chapter 17 damn this story has twists and turns.

Just wondering is there anywhere else I can find this story?

Definitely want to boost your ratings across the board this story is so good ;)

Bookah replies

Thank you Pete!

I'm a twisty little thing, so my stories have to be as well. *smiles*

The first two volumes of this are also over on Fanfiction.net, but I discontinued it there as of the final volume. It was getting far too labor intensive to maintain it on both sites, so this is the only place that will have the full version. I do appreciate the offer though, and am glad you're working through this already lengthy story!

Rone writes (on Chapter 60):

Welp! It seems RWBY Season 6 has thrown a big wrench into your beautifully crafted machine here, lol. It's probably not to be, but I'm holding out hope that it's just a misdirect with Neo or that Ruby can talk her to the good side. Then again, you haven't made a definitive point yet whether Neo still wants revenge or is willing to let it go. I will assume that that is by design : )

Bookah replies

So... Much... Design...

When I first began writing this story it was definitely my intention to keep this as canon compliant as I could manage. I also fully acknowledged and hoped that Rooster Teeth would blow my plans right out of the water, because that would mean bringing Team CFVY and Neo back into the limelight. I am so very glad to be completely blown out of the water! Between Neo being back in Season 6 and the announced plans for a YA novel featuring CFVY, I couldn't be more excited to be sunk!

But trust me... I have designs on how to work within that. Muwahahahahaha!

Incursio5991 writes:

This was a great not a lot of action but that’s not a bad thing, it was cute seeing them shop for clothing together, also DAM fox with one sentence you broke Neo and coming from him that’s a
massive statement and him thinking of Neos needs even thought he may not have those same ones is really thoughtful of him and shows how much he cares, again as I stated before I just love the dynamic you gave them, can’t wait for more, keep up the amazing work

Bookah replies:

I am so glad you left this comment. I really have been working hard on trying to capture and portray Fox well. Asexuality is still a fairly hidden thing in our society that so few people know much about, and I wanted to really get it right. So much so I even consulted with a few professionals on how to treat Fox right. I could go on and on about it, but the fact you noticed just how big Fox’s final statement was means that I managed it, somehow. Thank you thank you thank you!

Hoooooo boy that was a lot of comments you all left! KEEP IT UP! I crave the attention! LOL

Anyway... here we go!

Guicun

Coco carefully slid the pin into place, rubbing her thumb over the end checking to see if there were any burrs sticking up that might catch or reduce the smooth operation of the mechanism. Satisfied, she set the piece down before stretching her arms over her head and arching backward. Five more copies remained to be assembled next to where she’d set the piece down, and she reached for the next in line.

The sound of the town’s alarms going off forestalled the motion. Almost before she realized she was in motion she’d raced out of the workshop and was hurrying toward the town gate. She arrived almost a full minute before the town elder arrived, despite her being on foot and his having a car.

The guards had closed the gate and now stood, atop it, the tension obvious from a distance. Coco climbed up alongside of them to stare out at the road beyond and the surrounding farm fields. A group of trucks had just come to stop, disgorging a coterie of bandits from inside.

One approached the gate with a swager, stopping within earshot and propping his hands on his hips. He seemed completely unconcerned as the gate swung open far enough to allow the town elder to step out and approach without haste.

“No need to mince words,” the man declared. “We all know the score. Bring out enough food to fill the trucks, and we go away. Don’t and…” The man gestured to the fields and the growing crops within them. “It’s a hot summer. It’d be a pity if there was a wildfire.”

“Won’t you come inside,” the elder asked. “You could load directly from the stores.”

“No dice. We ain’t stupid, old man.” The bandit leader looked smug. “We come inside, you could have snipers on every rooftop just waiting for us to enter a kill zone. You bring everything we want right out here.”

The elder nodded, then turned back to the gate. “I will inform the city council of your demands.”
“Don’t take too long,” the bandit replied. “We’re hungry, and we all know there won’t be any hunters coming to help. So don’t waste time getting to the inevitable.”

The elder paused, then nodded once more before reentering the town.

“Well,” he muttered to the gathered crowd, “They’re not amateurs.”

The gathered townsfolk whispered to one another. “So much for that hope,” one frowned.

Coco hopped down beside the group. “So, as an outsider here, what happens if you give them what they want?”

“They’ll come back again for more later.”

Coco arched an eyebrow. “Are you certain? The man did say they’d go away.”

A few of the townsfolk looked annoyed by Coco’s question, but the elder held up a hand. He turned to face Coco directly.

“During the war, an army from Vale invaded. Led by General Dane Bronson, they supplemented their supplies by scavenging from the lands they occupied. When that army came here, Bronson promised that, should we provide his army with supplies, he would not attack and occupy the town, but would move on. So our ancestors did it. They handed over food, clothing, even gold Mistrali coins to pay his soldiers. After that, he left.”

“He came back a month later,” one of the women in the crowd took over. “He said the same thing he did before. Give him what he needed, and he wouldn’t sack the town. So once again the villagers paid.”

The elder nodded. “In time the Mistrali army was able to get rid of General Bronson and his army, but not before the town had been bled dry. He’d come, we’d pay, he’d return again later. That winter many in the town starved or died of preventable illnesses. And we learned, at the hands of Vale, an important lesson.”

“If once you have paid Dane gold, you never get rid of Dane.”

Coco looked back and forth between the older man and younger woman, feeling uncomfortably aware of the fact she was from Vale. The war had been quite some time ago, but it’s legacy could still cause hard feelings, particularly among more isolated communities. She scratched the back of her head awkwardly for a moment, then shrugged. “So what happens if you say no?”

“That depends. They could do as they threatened and burn the fields. Mistral could probably get relief supplies to us if that happens so we won’t starve.”

“This time,” someone in the crowd muttered.

“Or they could basically lay some form of siege to the town.” The elder frowned. “If they knew huntsmen were coming they’d need something quick and dirty to ‘teach us a lesson’ before escaping. But with all the Huntsmen and Huntresses missing? They have time to sit and really muck things up.” The man thought a moment. “They could ambush farmers who are out tending crops. Attack and raid convoys bringing in supplies and goods. They could destroy outlying infrastructure. They could basically raise three different kinds of hell, and potentially cost us a lot of lives.”

Coco joined the gathered villagers in a moment of quiet thought. It wasn’t her town. She wouldn’t have to suffer from the long term consequences of the decision they made one way or the other. As a
huntress it was simply her duty to eliminate Bandits. But she was only one huntress, one who’d lost her team, possibly permanently, and whose only previous experience eliminating bandits had been, frankly, inhumane.

Even if she could repeat that horrible success, she didn’t want to inflict such a legacy on the village. Coco took a deep breath, and let it out. “Whatever you decide, I’ll support you with what little I can provide as a Huntress.”

The comment broke the still contemplation, and the villagers began looking around at one another. The elder contemplated her a moment, then nodded. “Thank you, Coco Adel.” He turned to face the rest. “Then we will do what we must.” He turned to one of the men at his side. “Run on out there and tell that fellow I said ‘nuts’.”

Coco arched an eyebrow, which was noted by the elder. With a wry smile the man turned back to her. “Mistral’s military history is full of interesting stories. Some time I may have to tell you that one. For now, it’s time we plan.”

In the pre-dawn dark the following morning, Coco carefully watched the trees in the distance. The wind was causing the tops of them to shift and sway, the sound of their rustling a constant backdrop to the chirping of waking birds. She gauged the direction the wind was blowing and nodded to herself.

“Nailed it,” she muttered quietly.

She’d spent a bit of the previous evening thinking about the town’s situation. While the locals had spent their time debating how best to defend the town, Coco had sat in the back thinking from a very different angle. She’d spent her time thinking about how best to attack it.

An outright assault would not work out in the bandits favor. Even with the fact that they had to be better combatants simply by nature of how they lived their lives, they were still substantially outnumbered while on ground that favored the townsfolk. The town council had been correct to suggest the bandits would look at destroying external infrastructure and attack crops. Coco had turned her mind to that.

If the bandit’s leader was anything like her, any chance at attacking both at once would be best. He’s want to perform a massive hammer blow if he could achieve it. And the best way to do that, in her opinion, would be to start a fire upwind of the town, ensuring any flames would spread as widely as possible, taking any outbuildings along its path with it.

A movement at the edge of the field caught her eye and interrupted her thoughts. She focused on a spot slightly to the side of where the motion had taken place, making it a bit easier for her eyes to make out the details on the still dark ground in spite of the lightening of the sky. Four figures emerged from the gloom, acting furtive.

“Bingo.”

Coco hefted her new handbag and gave it a shake. It was a bit heavier than the old one, a deliberate choice on her part. She had the strength for that, after all, and the weight actually increased stability, given her preferred fighting methods. And then there were the improvements she’d added since she had to replace her weapon anyway. With a flip of a finger, the bag transformed itself.

In style the rotary cannon appeared little different than her old one. It was still a multi-barrelled behemoth with a drum magazine decked out in yellow and black. She’d added a shoulder strap to
this design in order to better distribute the increased weight, and the drum was now twice as thick, but otherwise it was the same basic instrument of destruction.

But it was going to be oh so much more effective.

Coco had reflected on all that had gone wrong during the journey that Team CFVY had undertaken back during the winter. Every fight that had left her frustrated. Every time she had found herself unable to effectively deal with the fight at hand. It had all boiled down to one thing. Her weapon had been designed to fight off hordes of Grimm. It had never been designed to fight individual, agile humans.

With merciless, emotionless precision, Coco had redesigned her weapon with the intent to kill her fellow human beings.

A simple squeeze, and the barrels began their spiral of death. Ammunition selected the night before with intentional malice spat out, ice dust ensuring no fires would be started by Coco. A spray of bullets sped outward, to impact on and around the unwelcome visitors.

As the dust rounds struck, they exploded into energy. Crystals of ice expanded instantly, enveloping some things, stabbing into others. Two of the bandits suddenly became grotesque artworks, their bodies stabbed and shredded, then frozen in place in the midst of their gory destruction.

With cries of horror, the other two bandits dove into a nearby ditch for cover. An arm stuck over the top, firing shots out at random, never threatening Coco.

With a sneer, Coco evaluated the ditch for a second. She rotated in place a bit, then flipped a switch on the side of her newly baptized gatling gun. With a whir and a click the drum magazine slid forward and locked into place. Coco hefted the gun a couple of times, double checking the new balance to her weapon, then smiled. She squeezed the trigger once again.

Rounds flung forth from the spinning barrels once more. These were different from the previous ammunition, however. Drawn from the division she had installed into the magazine, these were not laced with ice dust, but air instead. Rather than the aggressive, penetrative path taken by her fire in the past, these exited the barrel and immediately began to curve and twist, their paths errant and seemingly erratic.

Their was method to their seeming madness. As they approached the ditch at supersonic speeds they suddenly curved, their paths no longer a drunken wobble but a purposeful banking. Laced with air dust they changed their course like a gust of wind, seeking out their targets in spite of the bank of dirt that should have been a shelter.

Cries rang out into the predawn gloom, rapidly changing to shrieks that cut short, and Coco let up on the trigger.

In the new silence Coco drew a deep breath, releasing it slowly, then carefully skirted the field, taking a roundabout path to the four bandits. The sight that greeted her when she arrived was gruesome, a mixture of equal parts gore and horror. Coco eyed it, then gave a grim smile as she collapsed the gun back into its bag form and patted it.

“Perfect.”
Okay, I never leave end notes, but I wanted to drop a couple of fast comments about a couple of things in this chapter just for the lols.

The “If once you have paid Dane gold, you never get rid of Dane” line (and preceeding story) is a reference to Rudyard Kipling's poem "Dane-geld". The poem itself is a reference to King Æthelred the Unready paying raiding Vikings to stop raiding England, only for more Vikings to come back a year later demanding the same thing. England would ultimately pay the Dane-geld for 25 years straight, the practice only ending when the Danish Viking Canute the Great decided to simply conquer England outright.

Here's the full text of the poem:

It is always a temptation to an armed and agile nation
To call upon a neighbour and to say: --
"We invaded you last night--we are quite prepared to fight,
Unless you pay us cash to go away."

And that is called asking for Dane-geld,
And the people who ask it explain
That you've only to pay 'em the Dane-geld
And then you'll get rid of the Dane!

It is always a temptation for a rich and lazy nation,
To puff and look important and to say: --
"Though we know we should defeat you, we have not the time to meet you.
We will therefore pay you cash to go away."

And that is called paying the Dane-geld;
But we've proved it again and again,
That if once you have paid him the Dane-geld
You never get rid of the Dane.

It is wrong to put temptation in the path of any nation,
For fear they should succumb and go astray;
So when you are requested to pay up or be molested,
You will find it better policy to say: --

"We never pay any-one Dane-geld,
No matter how trifling the cost;
For the end of that game is oppression and shame,
And the nation that pays it is lost!"

The other reference in here, the village elder's reply to the bandit chief of "Nuts!" is a reference to Brig. Gen. McAuliffe and the 101st Airborne during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. During the battle the 101st had been cut off and surrounded in Bastogne by Germany's last offensive of WWII. The commander of the German forces called for a two hour cease fire around Bastogne and had a message sent to McAuliffe. To summarize, the message praised the 101st's actions to that point, but pointed out that, surrounded, the Americans would soon run out of food, ammunition, and other supplies. Further resistance would only serve to result in a massive loss of life amongst the encircled Americans and the civilians trapped in Bastogne with them. He suggested that the only humane and honorable thing to do would be to prevent the casualties through an honorable surrender.
McAuliffe's entire reply to this very reasonable suggestion was as follows:

"December 22, 1944

To the German Commander,

N U T S!

The American Commander"

In the end the 101st would hold out for seven days before being rescued by Patton's Third Army.
Happy holidays to everyone! Here's my present to you, another chapter of Summer Hunt!

Okay, okay, so I would have given you one today even without the holidays.

Anyway! Your comments!

darkvampirekisses writes:

*hums as I ship out the weekly c.p.*

And so we see Coco's new handbag hehe! Very nice work, I approve!

Bookah replies

I look forward to the weekly care packages! Awesome cookies are awesome!

And yes, I like her new handbag. One could say that it's to die for *dadump dump tshh!*

CoopBro writes:

I learned about the nuts story last year! It was great to read that! Also, Coco is back and armed and ready.

Bookah replies:

History can be fun sometimes. XD

GrimmKaiju writes:

I like the weapon idea and now have many ideas for weapon designs of my own. I like that you gave the story’s to the references you made. Now I think about possible defense and attack tactics that Coco could use. I've always been fascinated with defense warfare and can’t wait to see how this turns out.

Bookah replies:

Oh, yes. Weapons design can be fun. I wanted her new weapon to be fairly close to her old one, but to still reflect the lessons she'd been forced to learn through the previous two volumes of the story. The idea of using dust rounds able to basically seek out their targets was just too nasty to pass up.

Incursio5991 writes:

And they said I would never something new from reading fanfics, on the other hand Coco got an upgrade, a mix of old and new and oh is it so beautifully violent, love the concept, I have a feeling the bandits will be less ecstatic about it though, keep up the amazing work.
Bookah replies:

I is ejucashunal. ^_^

And yes, I doubt the bandits will be thrilled by this.

And with all that said, on to the chapter!

Song Be

Velvet watched as Yatsuhashi put his replacement blade through its paces. Like his previous blade it was a simple thing. No moving parts, no variable magazines, just a big-ass blade and a spot to put gravity dust in. Yatsuhashi’s strategy in a fight was simple, but effective. Hit things until they stop moving.

She patted the case by her side. Unlike Yatsuhashi, she’d been able to keep her weapon. She didn’t need to have the camera in her hand to use the weapons stored in it. Just a punch of a button on the case, and hard light appeared, ready to use. As such she’d been fished out of the water with the case, camera and all, still strapped to her barely clad body. All she’d had to do was dry it out and make sure the water hadn’t done any damage. (It hadn’t.)

The object of her observation had braced himself in a fighting stance, his body taught and firm beneath his new clothing. His outfit bore a close resemblance to the one he’d left in the ship’s hold. Once again he wore a light green Mistrali style tunic that covered only one shoulder and arm. Like before a simple tank top was worn beneath it, though this one was an olive color rather than the previous black. The belt was thinner than the old one, pouches festooning it in a slightly different arrangement than before, but still filled with dust capsules. Covering his legs was a simple pair of olive pants, tucked into knee high leather boots covered in various belts and buckles. The shoulder armor he’d lost had been replaced with an entire sleeve-length piece, running from collar bone to wrist, and consisted of tightly woven metal rings rather than the previous plates.

Velvet felt the new armor suited him, making him look slightly less lopsided. She couldn’t help but smile, enjoying the way she could see previously hidden curves of muscle on his arm.

Of course, she also had a new outfit, paid for with a collection taken up by the hospital staff that had been supplemented by Fox, who had been the only member of the team to have his wallet when he was fished out of the water. The moment Yatsuhashi had been released from the hospital she had gone with him to get clothes better than hospital gowns and scrubs, even though it had been hard to be around strangers again. It had been worth it, however, as her new outfit felt like a million lien.

The foundation of the outfit was a skin-tight brown catsuit that came up to just below her collar bones, spaghetti straps being the only part to cover her shoulders. Around her waist was a garment that couldn’t quite seem to decide if it was a skirt or a pair of shorts. Coming down her right leg was a muscle-hugging pair of shorts that ended only a couple of inches down her thigh, and which was of a simply black in color. The other leg, however, lacked any partner to this, and instead bore a dark brown and black tartan colored skirt that ended at the knee and which wrapped around, stopping roughly fore and aft of her right leg rather than completing a full circuit of the woman’s hips. The two halves formed a single unit, the skirt portion and the shorts portion sewn together at the waist. Over this, wrapped around her waist, Velvet wore two black leather belts, each sporting multiple buckles and grommets, her camera case modified to hook into both. Up top she wore a form fitting black single shoulder crop top. Her right arm was fully encased in a solid sleeve, while her right arm
and shoulder remained completely bare save for the spaghetti strap from her catsuit. She’d had her stitched heart symbol embroidered onto the top above her left breast, but otherwise left the top free of any adornment. Completing the outfit was a pair of boots that, like the crop top, were deliberately imbalanced. The right boot came up and over her knee, the flared top ending only a couple of inches below the hem of the shorts-leg, while the left barely reached the middle of her calf. Covered in black crushed velvet, only the zippers on the sides broke up their lack of decoration.

The look made Velvet feel bold. Confident. Perhaps even a bit sexy.

Velvet broke her moment of musing on the effects of her new outfit and returned to contemplating Yatsuhashi. The big man spun, his speed and grace surprising for someone of his size and the blade struck down on an upright log. The chunk of wood split lengthwise, both halves spinning away violently, and the blade stopped just before it would have dug into the ground, a sign of Yatsuhashi’s total control with his new toy. He grunted in satisfaction, then whipped about to slice another log in half with a swing.

A sudden impulse came over Velvet, and as he continued his practice she rose from where she sat. She eyed Yatsuhashi critically, then suddenly thrust herself off the ground, powerful leg muscles launching her through the air. Just as Yatsuhashi’s blade stopped at the end of a thrust, Velvet lightly touched down, standing atop the flat of the blade. Yatsuhashi began to tip forward, not expecting the weight of the faunus woman.

Velvet kicked him in the face.

Yatsuhashi rocked back from the force of the blow, and Velvet leaped backwards to land in a fighting stance facing him. She watched as he quickly shook off the shock of the strike, then eyed Velvet with a growing smile. She smiled back, then brought up her hand, waggling her fingers in a come-get-me taunt.

His charge was sudden, and might have surprised someone else, but not Velvet. She met his charge with a leap to the side, launching herself to land and spin to get at his retreating back. It was her turn to be surprised, however. Yatsuhashi had apparently anticipated her move and was spinning around just as quickly, forcing Velvet to duck to get under the swinging blade. She felt the wind it kicked up ruffle the fur on her ears and felt a sudden gratitude that she had chosen to drop low enough to put her chin almost to the ground. Any less and only her aura would have saved her ears from a sudden amputation.

Growling, she sprung upwards from her deep crouch, her fist aiming for the already abused chin above her. She struck nothing but air as Yatsuhashi backpeddled. His swing ended with the blade behind him, and he shifted directions, bringing the blade up over his head rather than back around the way it had come. The blade smashed down, the tip striking the earth three feet short of where Velvet stood.

Velvet had not been the intended target. At least, she hadn’t been directly targeted. The blade struck the ground and she felt the earth ripple beneath her feet. She stumbled, attempting to stay upright, then watched with alarm as Yatsuhashi took forward of her staggering dance to charge in at her.

She let herself overbalance sideways a bit, avoiding the blade thrusting forward toward her middle, but then grunted as Yatsuhashi’s arm swung out to catch her across the midriff. Breath exploded out of her and she felt herself swept off her feet, riding Yatsuhashi’s rock hard forearm before being slammed down to the ground.

Velvet didn’t let a lack of air take the fight out of her. The moment her back struck the ground painfully she rolled, her leg sweeping out as she went. Despite the poor leverage she was able to
sweep Yatsuhashi’s own legs out from under him and he crashed to the ground beside her, hard, causing the ground to shake a second time.

Yatsuhashi was no slower on the uptake than she, and immediately rolled toward her, attempting to pin her to the ground beneath his bulk. Velvet rolled as well, fighting to regain her breath as she went, then whipped her feet beneath her to flip into the air and back into a fighting stance.

Clearly realising the pin wasn’t happening, Yatsuhashi pulled himself upright as well, and the two eyed one another. She could see his chest heaving, his breathing heavy and deep with the exertion that Velvet had pushed him to. Her own lungs began to work once more and she gulped down air. She slowly began circling Yatsuhashi, who matched her step for step, his eyes wary.

She took one more sideways step, then leapt backwards. Yatsuhashi’s eyes widened, clearly surprised by her opening the space between them, but then he whipped the sword down and into the ground again. Behind her, she heard trees groan as his gravity dust enhanced strike rocked them from the roots upwards, and she risked a glance behind her. Smiling, she planted her feet high up on a trunk just as it finished rocking backwards, the tree began a forward swing, and she used it, pushing off with every ounce of strength she could put into her leap, the tree providing a nice slingshot effect.

Velvet rocketed forwards, faster than usual, and watched as Yatsuhashi jerked his blade up in a swing. His reaction was mistimed, however, clearly thrown off by her increased speed, and she sailed over the rising blade. Her shoulders slammed into his chest, her arms going around him, and Yatsuhashi blew off his feet to crash to the ground. His breath exploded out of him with a grunt as he landed on the ground, Velvet crashing down on top of him.

He lay there with a groan, and Velvet sat up on his chest. She grinned at him. “I win.”

Yatsuhashi flopped an arm over his eyes and groaned a second time. “I yield. Nice use of the tree.”

“Thank you.” Velvet sighed happily. The fight had done something for her. Her doubts and fears were in temporary abeyance. There were no hateful voices. She felt flush with victory. It felt… good. She leaned forward and sprawled on top of Yatsuhashi, and his arms came up around her, pulling her into an embrace as they lay there.

Her head dropped, and she nuzzled into his neck. A gentle inhale brought his scent to her, a mild musk that combined the fresh sweat of his workout with the natural things that were his ever-present odor. It was a comfortable, welcoming thing and she felt herself melting against him.

Hands began gently rubbing her back, and she felt Yatsuhashi shift beneath her, settling her more comfortably against him. The fingers explored her back, touching her gently and knowingly, and she felt pleasurable goosebumps forming beneath her catsuit. She heard a small sound escape her throat, and lifted her head, pressing her lips to Yatsuhashi’s.

It felt good. She could feel him responding to the kiss, feel his hands pressing down on her more strongly with a possessive hunger. She felt herself warming, a hunger of her own awakening, and she parted her lips against his, inviting, and trembled as he responded with a probing tongue. It felt right, like the first time he had touched her, their first embrace, the first time he had entered her, parting her sodden folds to intimately touch her from the inside, as Coco growled approval.

Velvet twitched, feeling her throat tighten up and her lips suddenly go dry. She pulled away from the kiss as her fingers curled into fists around the hem of Yatsuhashi’s outer layer as she fought a sudden moistening in her eyes.

“Velvet?” Yatsuhashi’s voice was soft, but also sounded alarmed.
“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I want… I mean…” She swallowed. “It’s just we still don’t know, and not knowing it just doesn’t feel…” Velvet fought to articulate all the painful emotions that were suddenly crushing her heart. “I know she’d want us to… but I just can’t. Not yet. Not until we’re sure.”

She felt Yatsuhashi laying still beneath her, and then his fingers slid from her back to be replaced by his arms. She felt him almost crushing the air out of her as he hugged her tightly, his chin coming up to rest between her ears. “It’s alright. I know what you mean.”

“Hey.”

Velvet jerked atop Yatsuhashi, feeling him similarly twitch beneath her as a female voice intruded. They scrambled apart, hands going to weapons as they got their feet beneath them and turned toward the new presence.

Velvet watched as Arslan looked at them, the blond woman’s face stern. “Sorry to break up your moment,” she spoke, her expression and voice not seeming very sorry at all. “Something’s happened. Your team needs to get its shit together now. We just got news of a village in need of some huntsmen and huntresses and you are all we’ve got available.”

Velvet felt tension flood through her at the news, and her eyes slid over to Yatsuhashi. She could see his muscles bunched, his reaction clearly similar to hers, and she nodded as he glanced at her.

“Alright,” Yatsuhashi said, and he strapped his sword to his back.

“Besides,” Arslan’s voice sounded a bit disapproving. “A city park is a bit public for that sort of thing, don’t you think?” Arslan turned and began walking towards the street.

Velvet felt a burst of irrational anger wash through her, white hot, and tamped it down as her eyes shot daggers into the woman’s back.
SUMMER HUNT UPDATES SUNDAYS

Well, it's Sunday, and that means it's time for another update. Last of the year! Woo!

I kind of struggled with this chapter, I'm afraid. I hope it's okay enough anyway. Just let me know your thoughts, okay? I'd appreciate it!

But before that, we have your comments!

Burn_It_totheground writes:

Yes, character development, this pleases me. I can't wait to see how Velvet's new possessesiveness (is that the right word?) turns out.

Bookah replies:

Oh yes. Velvet is VERY possessive. You have definitely nailed that. And believe you me, we are going to seeeeeee iiiiiiiiiiiit. I recommend you stand back when it happens. Just saying.

darkvampirekisses writes:

*Care Package Inbound*

Oooh, that village wouldn't happen to be the one Coco is at, would it? *Grins*

Bookah replies:

Would I do that?

*noms the cookies!*

GrimmKaiju writes:

An interesting sparing match between Velvet and Yatsuhashi. It's always interesting to hear the new designs and think about how they look. Now I'm wondering if that village is the same one Coco is trying to protect. I can't wait to see the next chapter.

Bookah replies:

It was a lot of fun to write. Fight sequences in prose are always tricky. You need to provide enough detail for people to be able to easily picture what is going on, while at the same time not spend so much time on it that it starts to just drag. RWBY being heavy in combat that means it's important to get it right. Your comment makes me think I am doing alright. Thank you! Now, on to that next chapter you mentioned. ^_^

CoopBro writes:

I wish I could better imagin these wonderful descrptions of clothes. Sadly, I have no fashion sense and only hav a vague idea of colors.
It was a fun match to ingest and a caring moment for Velv and Yatsu.

A village in trouble, eh? Wonder if that is Coco’s.

Bookah replies

I know it's too much to hope for when it comes to a small timer like me, but I would love it if a fan artist came along and did these. *Nora Voice* Neeeeeeever happen
*/Nora Voice*

I just love having the characters interact in more intimate moments (which a fight could be considered to be). It's these moments, and not times battling the grimm or bandits, when you truly see them, I think. And Velve and Yatsu are just so... intense together!

And now... On with the story!

Guicun

The bullhead was racing through the air, the engines redlined. Arslan had arranged the transportation, and was now so intent on arriving as fast as possible she was pushing the pilot to the limit. Yatsuhashi had heard the man object, but one glare from Arslan and the man had pushed the engine controls all the way forward and merely tossed Arslan a worried glance as the bullhead began to shiver and shake with the stress.

Yatsuhashi found himself sympathizing with the pilot. The vibrations the bullhead was making were a bit disconcerting. He’d been on more than one vomit comet during his time in Beacon, but even then the thing hadn’t shaken quite like this. Even his normal placid nature couldn’t compete with the need of his eyes to check the cockpit gauges to see if anything was about to explode.

Velvet leaned into him, her muscles tense. While he normally wouldn’t have objected to her desire to be close, the circumstances were such that he really couldn’t appreciate the moment that well. Velvet tended to be tense enough without the threat of her transport falling out of the sky.

Sighing, Yatsuhashi pulled his eyes away from the controls, turning them to Arslan. He gave a polite cough, capturing the woman’s attention. “I realize that this may come across as callous, but why are we pushing the equipment this hard?”

Arslan scowled, then made a clear effort to neutralize the expression. “The messenger said there was a huntress already there.”

“Ah.” Yatsuhashi nodded. “You’re worried it’s another setup then?”

Arslan said nothing, her eyes unfocused as her thoughts clearly turned inward, and Yatsuhashi sighed. He couldn’t fault Arslan’s burning need to keep what happened to the rest of her team from happening to anyone else, but recklessness wasn’t going to help anyone. If anything…

Yatsuhashi leaned toward the cockpit. “Slow down a bit.”

“Uh...” The pilot’s head turned away from the windscreen a moment to contemplate his passengers.

“We can’t help anyone if our haste causes us to fall out of the sky.”
The pilot eyed Arslan a moment and, receiving a very reluctant nod, eased the engines back below the red emergency power line. The transport immediately ceased most of its vibrations and everyone aboard heaved a collective sigh of relief.

“So, what do we know?”

Arslan gave Yatsuhashi a sidelong glance. “Apparently these bandits know about the fact there are pretty much no huntsmen or huntresses left in this half of Mistral. They’re taking advantage of it by trying to extort the entire town.”

“And the town can’t fight back?”

Arslan frowned, thinking. “It can. It probably even has the advantage, and not just in numbers. But with the CCT down any damage the bandits do will seriously endanger the long term survival of the town. The bandits, however, can come and go as they will, and as long as they haven’t taken any fatalities what have they lost?”

Yatsuhashi nodded. “ Makes sense. So what’s the plan?”

“We don’t know what the conditions are on the ground. So that’s the first step. We can make decisions after we get briefed by the locals.”

“Right.”

The rest of the flight was conducted in silence. Yatsuhashi had to repress a sigh. Arslan was a considerably less interactive leader than Coco. He found himself wondering if that had always been Arslan’s style, or if this was the result of the loss of her team.

CFVY really needed Coco back.

He wondered if that was even possible. It had been long enough with no sign of her that any expectations of her survival felt less like hope and more like desperation.

Velvet was suddenly gripping his arm tightly. He turned to look at her, and she pointed outward. His eyes followed outward, then widened.

“Smoke.”

Fox and Arslan immediately crossed the Bullhead and looked outward. Several columns of smoke immediately caught their eye. Arslan had barely seen when she moved behind the pilot. “Take us down low and slow.”

The Bullhead immediately dipped, skimming barely above the treetops. Yatsuhashi found himself leaning out the side, scanning the ground as they approached the first of the columns of smoke rising into the air. It was not long before he could see flames moving their way across a field of crops, a pumphouse in their path already beginning to smolder. The next column of smoke was similar, as was the third.

At the fourth column, however, Yatsuhashi found himself leaping out of the Bullhead before he realized what it was he had seen. He struck the ground in a three point landing, both feet braced and his new sword immediately taking advantage of his semblance and gravity dust to shake the ground like a giant had just stamped. Trees waved and whipped, threatening to snap half way up in response to the sudden whiplash, rocks leapt into the air, and several bandits were thrown from their feet, their hideout disintegrated around them.
Yatsuhashi lay his sword back across his shoulder and rose to his full height. “Surrender, and I won’t harm you.”

The bandits scrambled to their feet and bolted. In an instant two streaks, one brown one red, flashed past him. Surprised cries rang out, and in a trice three bandits were face down in the dirt, one with Fox’ knee between his shoulder blades, a second being sat on by Velvet, while a third was attempting to kick Velvet’s grip free of his ankle. This third bandit, unable to shake her free rolled, beginning to raise his weapon, only to stop when he found the tip of Yatsuhashi’s sword an inch from his nose.

Yatsuhashi gave a fast flick of his wrist and the flat of the blade smacked the man on the top of his head hard enough to make the bandit’s eyes to water and cross.

“Don’t surrender and I might rough you up a bit.”

The woman beneath Velvet groaned. “I surrender.”

Velvet patted the woman on the head. “Good choice.”

Arslan quickly walked over, nodding approval. “Alright. I have some zip ties. Lets zip ’em up and toss them in the Bullhead, then head to the next column of smoke.”

In a moment the trio were back aboard the Bullhead, their captives sitting strapped against the rear bulkhead. With a quick jerk upward, the Bullhead was airborne once again. Seconds later streaks of light shot up from the ground, a couple of them bouncing off the side without doing any real damage. Vociferous swearing came from the pilot, and the Bullhead suddenly went on its side.

Yatsuhashi, surprised, felt himself suddenly falling towards the door. His free hand scrabbled for something, anything to keep him inside, and found nothing. His feet left the floor and he came to the conclusion that he was leaving the vehicle no matter what he did.

The ground came up and slammed into his back, driving his breath from him. Beside him Velvet suddenly landed as well. She waggled a finger at him. “That was a bad landing strategy.”

“Sorry,” he rasped.

Velvet smiled. “Are you alright?”

Yatsuhashi nodded, then forced himself to sit up. “Just bruised my pride.”

A figure suddenly flew out of the woods, a curved sword in her hand. Yatsuhashi began to move, attempting to knock Velvet out of the way. Before he could even touch her, however, Velvet was in the air. He found himself diving into the dirt before hearing a hard blow behind him.

The attacker smashed against the tree beside him, then flopped bonelessly to the ground. He heard a thumping of feet, and then quiet.

Yatsuhashi forced himself back up and drug air into his lungs through force of will. He grasped his sword and began turning, attempting to detect Velvet, or anyone else out in the trees. Silence filled the darkening air, giving him no clues to work with.

He threw himself aside when a motion suddenly occurred at the corner of his vision. Shots peppered the tree that had been beside him, and then a pair of loud thumps echoed out. A large man staggered out of some bushes, the rifle he was holding dropping from twisted fingers. Yatsuhashi swung hard, twisting his wrist, and the man dropped like a sack, rendered unconscious by the flat of Yatsuhashi’s
blade.

Overhead the Bullhead was hovering. Fox leaned out of the side, looking down toward him. “Everything alright?”

“We got two…”

With a shriek a woman came flying out of the bushes and slammed down onto the ground. Yatsuhashi quickly put his foot on the back of her head and the woman froze. Velvet came out of the bushes, her expression angry.

“Sorry, three more to pick up!”

Fox looked around. “Can’t land here. Can you get them about 200 yards that way? The man pointed toward where the sun was just beginning to set.

“No problem.” Yatsuhashi quickly ziptied the new captives, then knotted his fingers into the collars of two of them, beginning to drag them in the direction of the clearing. Behind him Velvet hoisted the third over her shoulder. He glanced back at her, attentive.

Velvet was a picture. Far from the clearly troubled woman she usually was these days, currently she was in her own element. Her ears, always erect anyway, seemed even stiffer, twitching as she picked up every sound. Her eyes were slightly narrowed, her brows above them the picture of attentiveness. He could even see the flare of her nostrils as she took in every scent.

What caught his attention about her most, during that look back, was the way she walked. Even with a limp woman thrown over her shoulder, Velvet prowled. Yatsuhashi found himself reminded that, while many might think of a hare as a mere prey species, an enraged hare could prove a very dangerous creature when cornered. Velvet was truly dangerous.

Velvet noticed his attention and gave him a frankly predatory look, and he suddenly found himself fighting back some very inappropriate thoughts. He allowed himself to give her a smile of promise, one she returned, then turned back his attention to the path ahead.

Bullets began flying, a blue stream of death seeking out targets in the trees. Dropping their burdens, Yatsuhashi and Velvet both threw themselves to the ground.

A second later, Yatsuhashi popped his head back up. “The rounds aren’t coming near us. Someones shooting into the bushes over there.”

Velvet nodded to him. “And someone is shooting back.”

“So which ones are the good guys, and which ones the bad guys?”

Velvet was suddenly on her feet, running at the bushes.

“Velvet!”

As suddenly as they started, the stream of fire from the other side of the clearing stopped. The firing from the bushes continued, but only until Velvet streaked into them. The sound of violence replaced the firing, and then there was silence.

“Velvet?”

Yatsuhashi’s head jerked up, and then he froze in place. A figure had emerged from the bushes. The
cheongsam and leggings were unfamiliar to him, but the long bang of brown, with its flame toned tip, and the massive rotary cannon were very familiar.

“Coco?” he rasped, struggling to find his voice.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Velvet pop out of the bushes. The faunus was staring, clearly unsure if she believed what she was seeing.

And then they both were running. Running towards the woman they had both begun to believe lost. The fight was forgotten. The fear and stress and mourning that Yatsuhashi had been denying since the sinking were forgotten. The only thing was Coco. A living, breathing Coco.

He watched Coco’s mouth open in shock as the gun dropped from her fingers. She stood there, watching her two lovers approaching, just as frozen as they had been a moment before.

And then a yellow blur arrived first and Yatsuhashi found himself sliding to a halt, stunned, as Arslan wrapped her arms around Coco and captured the stunned woman’s lips with her own.
Oh my goodness, we're just rolling along. And it's Sunday, so that means we roll a little further!

I am having so much fun with this...

But before I give you what you are all waiting for, first let's get to your comments!

CoopBro writes:

*UH OH SPAGHETTI O's!!*

I am relieved CFVY is back together, but now I am concerned for Arslan's safety next chapter.

Also, where was Neo?

Bookah replies:

Laughing into Fox's rib cage.

darkvampirekisses writes:

*Care Package Inbound*

Dammit Arslan, are you trying to start a fight? She's taken, dammit!

Velvet is not gonna react well to this, I just know it....

Have I mentioned that I love how deviously evil you can be? *Grins*

Bookah replies:

I take evil pills every morning just for you. XD

GrimmKaiju writes:

Good chapter with good action. I have a feeling that Velvet is about to get very angry and that probably won’t end well. I can also just imagine Fox seeing this and going “oh nooo”. I can’t wait for the next chapter.

Bookah replies

Me neither! And that's a good thing, because here it is!

Guicun

Fox was in motion before he even realized he was moving. The moment he had seen Arslan wrap
herself around Coco, he’d thrown himself forward from where he had been following the Mistrali woman. His arms came up and he tackled his target before he was even fully aware of his actions.

“LET ME GO, FOX! I’M GOING TO KILL HER!”

Velvet was a writhing mass of fury, and it was all he could do to hold on. A detached part of himself marvelled at the fact he’d never truly realized just how strong Velvet was when she got serious, her legs powerful enough to lift the taller man clean off the ground with every thrust attempting to drive forward toward the object of her wrath.

“Velvet, you need to calm down,” he urged.

“FUCK YOU!”

Powerful arms wrapped around the both of them, and Fox realized that Yatsuhashi had added his own impressive bulk to slowing down the enraged faunus. Velvet continued to struggle, her body squirming in the sandwich which the two men had created around her, but even her powerful thighs weren’t enough to drive the entire mass forward. Her breath grew ragged, and the struggles slowed.

An additional pair of arms slipped into the mass, the bare skin and brown bracers quickly wrapping around Velvet’s head, and Fox carefully eased himself back to make room as Coco pulled Velvet’s face to her chest. The faunus woman immediately ceased all struggling and gave a wailing cry as she twisted in Yatsuhashi’s arms to mold herself to CFVY’s errant team leader.

“Shh, shh… It’s okay, Velve. I’m here…”

Fox stepped back from the reunion, then twisted toward Arslan. The yellow clad woman was sitting on the ground, one hand on a cheek that was quite red with a handprint, her eyes watering and her lips pursed in a snarl. He stepped over and curled his fingers into Arslan’s collar, pulling her roughly to her feet.

“Not cool, Arslan,” he rasped.

The woman’s eyes jerked over to him and shot daggers his way. Arslan slapped his hand away then spun, stomping back towards where the Bullhead now sat in the center of the clearing.

A small hand slipped into his, and Fox turned from the retreating huntress to glance down at Neo. The diminutive candy themed woman was watching Arslan go, her face half amused, half surprised. She looked up to Fox, then made a hand gesture towards Arslan, followed by her forming a V with two fingers of her free hand. She brought these up to her forehead, palm outward.

“Yeah, not the brightest move she could have made,” Fox nodded, then turned back to watch as Arslan climbed back up into the Bullhead without a glance back. He shrugged, then turned around, walking around Neo as he did so to avoid dragging her across himself. “Well, those three may be a moment or two. Wanna help go dig up their captives and get them back to the Bullhead?”

Neo nodded and the two moved off into the woods from where Yatsuhashi and Velvet had emerged. It took no time to locate the three still unconscious bandits and haul them back to the Bullhead, though Neo had been forced to drag one of them behind her owing to her lacking the height to throw the woman over her shoulder. The pair threw their captives up into the Bullhead, then slipped aboard themselves, zip tying their limbs before hooking them into the bulkhead next to the others.

“And,” Fox commented, turning to look at the clearly sulking Arslan. “I suggest our next step be dropping these six off with the town and checking up on the situation. This thing’s going to be getting crowded real fast otherwise.”
Arslan grunted, but then turned and nodded. Her eyes still looked angry, but Fox could see her mentally forcing her way past whatever current inner thoughts had been stewing. “Yeah. That’s a good idea. Just as soon as we can break the love birds up,” she said, her voice clearly bitter.

“I’ll take care of that.”

Fox slipped off of the Bullhead and walked over to where the rest of his team were still tightly wrapped around one another. He stopped a couple of paces short, then politely coughed. “I realize it is completely unfair, but unfortunately we probably really need to get moving. We need to do something with our captives and get an update on the situation.”

Cheeks wet, Coco lifted her head and gave a nod. “Right. Yes.” With clear reluctance she let go of Velvet and slipped back, fingers trailing along the smaller woman’s back and side. “You’re right.”

Together CFVY walked over to the Bullhead, climbing aboard. Coco immediately sat, her back against the forward bulkhead near the pilot’s seat. Velvet wasted no time in settling back between Coco’s legs, her head coming to rest beneath Coco’s chin. Coco wasted no time in reaching up to begin scratching at the base of Velvet’s ears, leading the teary eyed woman to smile.

Fox watched Arslan scowl towards the pair, and sat, not surprised at all when Neo imitated Velvet and settled back against his chest. He shook his head and let the tiny woman take his arm and wrap it around her waist, though he admitted to himself that the motion did bring a smile to his own face. He pressed a fast kiss to Neo’s pink and brown hair, then turned his attention to Arslan.

“By my count, we’ve captured six of the bandits.”

“I left one dead in the bushes,” Velvet added. “There was no point in bringing her out. Her neck was snapped.”

Fox gave Velvet a quick evaluating look. He could tell it would likely trouble her a bit later, but at the moment she seemed as fine as she could be, given the whipsaw of events that had just taken place.

Arslan stirred herself, forcing a professional mien over herself. “So that’s seven we’ve accounted for.”

“I can’t be sure how many I’ve taken care of,” Coco spoke, her voice a touch hoarse. “I killed four of them yesterday when they tried to torch a single field. The bandit’s leader decided to launch a widespread reprisal today, and I’ve been running around ever since.” Coco reflected a moment. “It could easily be a couple dozen, by now.”

“Enough to break them?” Arslan asked, her expression all business now.

“Probably.” Yatsuhashi slipped to the floor as the Bullhead rose into the air and twisted, it’s nose aiming toward the distant village. “Bandits aren’t exactly soldiers who are willing to risk and lose their lives for something bigger than them. They just want to loot and pillage to survive. Kill a couple of them, they’ll want revenge. Kill a bunch…”

“And it’s not worth it to them.” Fox nodded.

“Alright,” Arslan agreed. She kicked one of the unconscious bandits in the leg. “We’ll drop these off in the village, then fly cover as the villagers attempt to put out the fires and save what they can from the fields. If any more bandits pop up, we take them down.”

“Agreed,” Coco nodded.
“And then?” Yatsuhashi asked.

“Then we grab a bite to eat, and catch one another up on events.”

Two hours later six people were sitting around Shyam’s table, the faunus smith bustling about the kitchen working up a feast fit for seven. Coco had asked for space at an inn, and a meal there, but Shyam had insisted that the collected huntsmen and huntresses would not be a burden but welcome guests. Coco had finally yielded when he’d grinned from behind his dark beard and quipped about wanting to meet her two lovers himself. The two lovers had both flushed, but Fox had been more attentive to the dark scowl on Arslan’s face at this moment. Coco, evidently oblivious, had finally agreed.

The Faunus came out of the kitchen, setting several large dishes at the center of the table before hustling back into the kitchen to return with additional food. He slipped into the only empty chair around the table, next to Yatsuhashi, and grinned. “Well, don’t just sit there, dig in! Eat as much as you want.” He elbowed Yatsuhashi. “Even you, big fellow.”

Yatsuhashi smiled and reached for a large bowl full of some sort of red curry. “Thank you, sir.”

“Shyam is fine.”

Coco grinned at Yatsuhashi. “Are you sure you trust the shrimp? We’re a day from the ocean, you know.”

“You wound me,” Shyam laughed. “It’s as fresh as it can be.”

Yatsuhashi popped a piece of shrimp in his mouth, chewing. “Tastes fine,” he commented around the crustacean. “The spices create a delightful compliment to the…”

Fox watched, amused, as the man’s face began turning red, sweat breaking out on his forehead. “To the heat?” Fox quipped as Yatsuhashi reached over for a glass of merlot.

Yatsuhashi downed a big gulp, then grinned. “Yeah. It’s delicious.”

Arslan eyed Yatsuhashi. “I thought you were a Mistrali like me?”

“Yeah, but we don’t make it quite that hot back east.” Yatsuhashi scooped up more of the shrimp. “Still delicious, though.”

Fox found himself chuckling, but then returned to the discussion that had been ongoing before Shyam’s welcome interruption. As he filled his plate with some sort of chicken and cashew dish, he glanced over to Coco. “So, what are your thoughts?”

“About Arslan’s theory?” The tall woman frowned, “It makes a rather unpleasant bit of sense. The elders were almost desperately thrilled when they found out who I was. They hadn’t expected any huntresses to be around. Their own were…”

Fox nodded. “Yeah.”

“When we look at how much preparation the White Fang had to have for what happened at Beacon, it wouldn’t surprise me if they were orchestrating the complete eradication of anyone who could stop them here. These are people who somehow got their hands on advanced Atlas military tech before it even deployed and somehow compromised the security and communications systems of both Beacon and Atlas’s expeditionary force. Why not something similar here?”
Arslan looked thoughtful, the earlier incident clearly forgotten in the face of professional considerations. “Are you suggesting that their traps are being set up through some sort of hack instead of someone on the inside?”

“It’s possible,” Coco nodded. “But that depends a great deal on how much Mistral knows about the events at Beacon. If they’ve been given the inside data about how the hack went down and worked they could probably take steps to prevent it. That implies someone on the inside, since that person would still be able to work within any new security measures implemented.”

Fox nodded, but then frowned. “Assuming Mistral is decently informed on the inner workings of Beacon and Atlas’ security. I wouldn’t count on that. Last thing the world saw was Atlas and Vale duking it out. We all know better, but with the CCT still down, how much official communication has taken place to counteract those images?”

“So,” Coco mused. “How can we figure out which is more likely?”

“I don’t know about the how. Not yet at least,” Arslan commented. “But I do know where.”

“Mistral?”

“Mistral.”

In the end the group agreed to give it a day. Any smart group of bandits would be completely convinced it was time to cut their losses. Fox, however, knew that sometimes smart didn’t always come into it. If they had been hurt badly enough, the bandits might lose any sense of intelligent thought in the face of overwhelming grief and anger. “Back the desperate into sufficient enough of a corner and they might decide to go out swinging,” he’d stated.

Now the various combatants were scattered about Shyam’s house. He’d admitted an inn would have been more comfortable than makeshift beds in his place, but the man was eager to have them stay. He’d been so welcoming, enjoying everyone’s stories after they’d agreed to stay that they felt happy to oblige.

From upstairs he heard some laughter, Coco clearly delighted with whatever her two lovers were doing. He found himself smiling, feeling glad to hear it. He felt a wiggle from the weight upon him and looked down to see Neo smiling up at him, seemingly pleased as well.

The woman reached up past him and retrieved her scroll, typing away. “It’s good to have them together again.”

“Hadn’t thought you particularly cared.” It wasn’t an accusation, just a statement, and Neo clearly took it that way. She shrugged and tapped him on the chest.

“I do?”

Neo nodded, then smiled before stirring her finger on his chest with a giggle.

“I suppose I do feel better than I have in weeks. But don’t get carried away here. We are in someone else’s living room, after all.”

Neo laughed and snuggled up.
Hello everyone. I hope you're doing well. I just wanted to thank everyone who has been reading this. It continues to surprise me that people actually like this story! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

So it's time for this week's chapter. I hope you all enjoy it.

As usual, though, first let's respond to your ever-so-welcome comments!

**Burn It totheground writes:**

I wonder if the phrase "hell hath no fury like a woman's scorn" applies right now. Arslan is clearly jealous of the lover trio and throw that against Velvet's protective nature (to put it mildly) of her lovers; Fox and Yatsu are going to have their hands full making sure those two don't kill each other.

**Bookah replies:**

You really do have to feel sorry for Fox and Yatsu. They do have a handful when it comes to herding the cats in their lives...

**CoopBro writes:**

I can just imagine Velvet dreaming about ripping Arslan apart. These two are going to be trouble. Good thing the quick red fox jumped on the angry brown bunny.

**Bookah replies:**

Oh, you clever, clever man. You had me laughing at the "quick brown fox" reference.

**darkvampirekisses**

*care package inbound with added cocoa*

Arslan is lucky that Velvet got held back...

**Bookah replies:**

I think I am becoming addicted to your care packages. XD

I really don't want to know what might happen if those two ever actually came to blows. Which is probably a bad thing, since I'm the author...

**GrimmKaiju writes:**

I have one word for the love, whatever shape it would be now, and that word is WELP. Anyways now the team is back together again and everyone on team CFVYN is happy. The relationship between Fox and Neo just seems so natural. Those two have come a long way from when Neo first tried to fight him.
Bookah replies:

You know, it never occurred to me that I accidentally converted "Coffee" into "Caffeine".

I am completely surprised at how well Fox and Neo seem to work, given this was never intended to be part of the story. The fact that, long before I every thought it would even be possible, I already established Fox as Ace has made things even more complicated. And yet, somehow, even I find the relationship compelling. When I write it their relationship just feels right somehow.

Of course, I write this just before posting the next chapter, and, as you put it in regards to the OTHER relationship, "WELP..."

Thank you all again for your comments! I live for these things. Please keep them coming!

Now, on with the story!

Guicun

Neo flashed her hands around and about, fingers dancing. She felt the laughter in her eyes as Fox stared at the movements with significant intensity, clearly attempting to keep up and interpret the meanings. His lips formed an unhappy frown, an he held his hand up.

“Hold up. I didn’t catch that last bit.”

Neo felt herself grin, and she repeated the motions, more slowly this time. She watched as Fox’s eyes narrowed.

“Wait, does that last one mean what I think it means?”

Neo gave a quiet laugh.

“I don’t think that’s any of our business.”

Neo shrugged, feeling no repentance about what she had asked, then turned back to paying attention to the woods around them. Fox and Neo were out checking the various farm fields and assorted hedges and wood lots amidst them for bandit activity to the south of Guicun. Coco and Velvet had hit the northwest, and Arslan had been stuck with Yatsuhashi to tackle the northeast. The idea had been Coco’s, and had left several people frowning in displeasure. Neo han’t minded. The troubles the rest of the party were negotiating didn’t bother her at all. As long as she got to stay with Fox, the rest could fight it out to their heart’s content. She’d even pop popcorn.

Her eyes did a sweep of a nearby treeline, finding nothing there, and then she turned back to Fox. She made a few more hand signs in his direction, then smiled when he rolled his eyes.

“No, Neo. I don’t think Coco and Velvet are shirking their duties to go play in the bushes.”

Neo thought a second, then made a couple more gestures.

“No, I don’t think we should either.”
Neo laughed, and caught a little bit of a smirk out of the corner of her eye as she returned to scanning. Fox certainly had a sense of humor, a fact that delighted her to no end. It was clear that, even if he wasn’t really designed to desire sex, he certainly didn’t mind being teased about the subject. It entertained her a great deal to watch his mock-acerbic reactions to her teasing.

Of course, if he ever actually took her up on the offer…

Her mind drifted back to a moment only a few days before. Fox teasing her after catching her completely naked, joking about the colors of the thatch that grew upon her venesian mound. His words had left her hot and bothered, both in terms of embarrassment and shock, and in terms of wanting him to look more, with that certain glint in his eye that men often got, and she’d been uncertain what, exactly, to do with all that. But then the infuriatingly desirable man had turned serious, his words drifting through the curtain to fall upon blood red ears.

“Someday I want to give you what you want.”

She still wasn’t sure quite what to do with that. There had been no question, none at all, about what he was saying. And no question at all about what it had done to her. She ached every time she thought about it, and not metaphorically.

Neo tried hard to ignore the sensations she was feeling down in her slacks. The warm dampness was a bit annoying, honestly, but it was far from the worst of it. The tingling she felt, the pressure, the fluttering of butterflies in parts of her that were not the stomach, those were the bits that were truly frustrating.

And then there was the need to be touched. Somewhere. Anywhere. Especially THERE.

Neo fought back a sigh and reached over to take Fox’ hand in hers. She felt him pause slightly, then gently clasp her fingers between his. It was not the touch she really wanted, but at least it was something. And it was all she was likely going to get until the damnable, frustrating, sexy man finally Did Something.

“Something on your mind?”

Neo let go of his hand long enough to bang out a quick sign, then captured it again. Fox watched the motion, then smirked as though he thought Neo was joking. She stuck her tongue out at him, feeling a moment of actual irritation at him.

Sudden movement surprised her. Before she knew what was happening Fox had pulled her against him, both arms wrapped around her tightly. She looked up, bemused, to see him looking down at her, his smirk gentled into something warmer, and before she quite knew what was happening his lips were on hers.

She had no idea how long they stood like that. She only knew that her arms were tightening around him, her ankles rising as she slid up on tiptoes as he arched over her. His hands lowered and, before the height difference made things truly uncomfortable, hands cupped the back of her thighs and she was lifted, her feet dangling, into a kiss that could have lasted forever and still left her believing it was too short.

Eventually the kiss did end, however. Fox pulled his face away, and Neo found herself working to catch her breath, her neediness not reduced in the least by the contact. Fox gave her a sweet smile, still holding her against his chest.

“I know, I shouldn’t tease.” He bumped his forehead to hers gently. “I promise to make it up to you.”
He set her down, her body’s reluctant to bear its own weight going straight to her thighs, and then turned away from her as she wobbled a bit. He took a few steps away, then glanced back at her over his shoulder. “After dinner.”

Neo felt her mouth pop open in an O of surprise, and then she was suddenly scrambling as fast as she could to catch up.

Dinner was a simple affair. Shyam hadn’t created a meal quite as elaborate as the previous dinner they had all enjoyed together. The main dish had been a simple tofu and pork dish that had been as mouth-destroyingly hot as the shrimp curry the day before. Neo had gone sparingly on both of the spicy dishes, filling up on the far less powerful rice and noodle dishes. She’d watched Fox with amusement, his own selection more adventurous in nature as he attempted to keep up with Yatsuhashi bite for bite. She was convinced the two males of their eclectic group were suffering far more than they let on.

Over the meal they discussed their findings. Thorough patrols had found no signs of the remaining bandits being present. There had been no further attacks, no indications of anyone lurking in the bushes spying out new opportunities. Even the unmarked graves holding the bodies of the dead bandits had gone unvisited as far as they could tell.

“I’m pretty sure they’ve packed up and moved on to safer pastures.” Coco took a sip of a local wine Shyam had referred to as huangjiu, then continued. “We can probably move on.”

“Seems so..” Arslan frowned, seeming almost disappointed. “If we head back to Song Be we can catch a flight to Mistral. I want to see if we can start tracking down our traitor.”

Coco nodded. “I’ll talk to the town elder, see if someone is willing to give us a ride.”

“After you eat,” Shyam interjected. He gestured to Coco’s plate. You’re a bit too skinny, so dig in.”

“She looks just fine to me,” Arslan objected.

A loud clunk of silverware on a plate drew Neo’s eye over to Velvet. The faunus woman was shooting daggers out of the side of her eye towards Arslan as she aggressively loaded a fork with tofu and pork. She watched as Yatsuhashi rested a hand on her shoulder, and Velvet shook her head, her eyes going back down to her plate.

Neo’s eyes slid over to Fox, and she made a few quick hand gestures.

“What was that?” Coco was watching her hands.

Fox grunted. “She says she has five lien on Velvet.”

Arslan shot up out of her chair, pushing her half-finished plate away. “Thank you for dinner,” she barked before stomping out of the room. A second later the front door slammed.

Neo popped her thumb up, then twisted her wrist.

“Make that ten.”

Coco sighed, staring toward the doorway Arslan had disappeared through. “I think I need a drink.”

Yatsuhashi placed his hand over the top of Coco’s glass, then slid the huangjiu-laden glass away. “Just give her some time to get used to it.”
“If you say so.”

Neo shook her head wryly and dug into her noodles.

The dinner had ended quietly, with little more conversation, meaningful or casual, to be had. Neo had slipped out onto the rear porch once she had finished, content to let Shyam clear away the dishes as he had insisted. Moments later Fox had joined her, slipping the fingers of one hand between hers and gently tugging her down off the porch.

The town was quiet as they walked, the inhabitants doubtless recovering from the troubles of the past few days. Neo and Fox were able to walk unhindered, perhaps even wholly unobserved, until they came to a small park. She allowed herself to be pulled along on one of its paths until they came upon a small, natural amphitheater surrounded by a circular hedge. Fox guided her down inside of it as the evening began giving in to the approach of night.

Neo turned an inquisitive look towards the man who had brought her down the grassy slope that led to a small stage. He turned back and smiled to her, his teeth catching the last of the sunlight. “I saw it from the air when we first landed. I thought…” He shrugged.

Neo felt herself smile as a fluttering sensation rippled through her heart, her stomach, and settled beneath. She let go of his hand and leaned in, wrapping both arms around the limb she had just been holding, clinging to it with her full body. She gazed up at him, knowing he would see just what she was asking him with her eyes.

Fox leaned down to her, capturing her lips with his, and she melted around the arm she clung to. She could taste his lips, the spice of the meal they had only just recently completed adding a tingle to where their mouths formed a heated connection between them. She shivered a bit, though the night was warm, and knew he felt it.

He broke away from her then, the kiss parting too soon and his arm pulling gently but firmly away from her. Her eyes widened and she looked up to him, surprised, but then she watched as he slipped around behind her. Hands settled on her hips, and then his arms came around her, crossing across her stomach, and he pulled her back into his embrace. Her hands came up to wrap around his lower arms, hugging them against her, and she leaned back into him.

She felt him curl downward a bit, conforming his height to her small size a bit better, and his breath ruffled her hair gently. She tipped her head back, turning it to the side so that her cheek rested against his chest. She nuzzled him, enjoying the slight musk of the sweat the day’s explorations had produced, and listened to the steady beating of his heart as his lips began gently nibbling her hair.

She softly stroked his arm with one hand, sinking herself into the simple sensation of feeling him, his chest behind her, his skin under her hand, his nose brushing the crown of her head. It was an accumulation of sensations that only made the butterflies in her womb flutter all the more, and she trembled a bit as a tell tale sigh escaped her throat, betraying what the moment was doing to her.

An arm tightened around her, pulling her even more firmly against him even as the other slipped free. Fingers began trailing up her side, tickling slowly upward, and she felt her legs shake a bit at the touch. She felt herself warming under his ministrations, felt things tightening in an almost painful way, as a sensation almost like queasiness signalled the desperation with which the butterflies were attempting to escape, spreading downward, and she knew her underthings were becoming a bit of a mess.

Her mind, too, was becoming somewhat of a disaster. She could no longer quite think straight, her attention to the sights and sounds beyond the amphitheater quickly melting away to be replaced with
a jumble of half-coherent snippets. She felt safe, she felt satisfied, she felt unfulfilled, she felt dangerous… She felt it all and wanted more.

When his fingers crossed her breast before gently clamping down and squeezing she shocked herself with a moan. He paused then, nothing moving for a moment, and she felt herself nearly explode with frustration at his sudden hesitation. But then the hand began twisting, the fingers exploring, gently at first, then with more confidence, and her own hand squeezed the wrist she clung to as she experienced a growing loss of control over her reactions.

A single button held her bolero closed over her breasts. It proved to be no obstacle to Fox. His fingers drifted from her too-tight breast for only a moment, and then the bolero was open, his hand beneath it. Fingers returned to massaging her breast, the feeling even more intense, and she groaned in sheer need, cursing Fox for wrecking her so quickly, and worshipping him for the same thing.

As he continued to knead her breast, kisses continued to press down upon her hair, and she desperately twisted her head further, bringing her lips upward, hunting for his, hungering for his, begging for them.

He let her go then, and she nearly collapsed. She was trembling, shaking, and her legs could barely hold her up. His sudden release of her was a near betrayal that had her almost flash into tears of frustration, but then his arms were scooping her up, his hands cupping her thighs to scoop them against his chest, and he was dropping to the ground, bringing her to rest atop him.

She wiggled atop him, walking her shoulder blades across his chest until she could curl her chin up to nibble at his jaw. Her hand curled up and pressed to his cheek, and she shivered uncontrollably. With her other hand she captured his, pulling it up onto her stomach and then gently urging it down, luxuriating in the feel of his fingers slipping down past her navel, down to the top of her trousers, the nails guided under the waistband by her fingers, and then she was fumbling the button free.

He took over, then. The invading fingers she’d first guided began moving on their own and she found herself holding her breath, the shaking of her body growing into tremors of heated, unrelenting anticipation. The zipper of her trousers slowly parted as his hand slipped further down, soft digits spreading. A finger slipped onto bare skin, and then began pressing cloth inward, aside. The path the tip of his finger blazed burned brightly in her mind, all of her focus, every one of her senses zeroed into that one point as it began pressing through curls, slipped over soft flesh, and began to slip into the molten river that flowed.

The sound of breaking glass caused her to buck in surprise, and Fox’s finger raked right past its goal. She yipped at the sudden roughness on frustration-sensitive flesh and jerked upright, curling around herself as Fox yanked his hand free of her pants. Eyes watering, Neo felt her lips form into a snarl as she turned a half-closed eye towards the sound of the broken glass.

Arslan stood at the end of the stage, a shattered wine bottle at her feet. The dark skinned woman’s hands were knotted into white knuckled fists, and her teeth were bared in anger. Wordlessly she glared at the pair, then turned and marched away, her back stiff.

Neo jumped up, roughly jerking the zipper up on her pants and fixing the button in place. The moment she felt it slip through the loop she started up the slope after the woman, her mind filled with the need to vent a very different sort of frustration on the interloper.

A hand on her shoulder stopped her.

“Neo…”
She turned her head towards Fox, seeing the sorrow on his face, and she felt her shoulders slump. Turning away, she began walking back towards Shyam’s home, not wanting Fox to see the frustrated tears on her face.
Chapter Notes

Summer Hunt updates on Sundays

Oh my god. I watched the latest episode of Season 6 yesterday. No spoilers but OMG!

ANYWAY, you don't come here to listen to me squee. Let's get on with your comments, and then the chapter!

darkvampirekisses writes:

*Care Package Inbound*

_Hmm, maybe I should start adding different sweets to them so they don't end up getting monotonous XD_

_I kinda feel bad for Arslan, but at the same time she was told that Coco is taken now, she needs to learn to accept that and stop antagonizing the possessive rabbit_

_And poor Neo, she finally gets some loving from Fox and it gets interrupted.... Blocked again_

Bookah replies:

_Sometimes I feel very, very guilty about the hell I put my characters through... Sometimes._

Feenah writes:

_A very, very long comment that was oh, so amazing. But I don't have room to copy it here, so you'll just have to look for yourself._

Bookah replies

_Oh my god. You made me ugly cry with this comment. Thank you, thank you so much for this comment. I had no idea that I was touching anyone in this way and it just makes it all so worth it. Thank you so very very much! ILU!_

CoopBro writes:

_Arslan probably feels like Neo; full of desire and her chances of satisfaction are being teased or ripped away from her._

_Now we have Velvet and Neo angry at her. I doubt things are going to end well soon._

Bookah replies:

_Really, Arslan is going through hell. I actually feel worse for her than I do for anyone else at this point in the story. Everyone else at least has someone to messily cry all over. But her? She's on her own. I'm surprised she's not perma-drunk._

GrimmKaiju writes:
Is this what's called the not so calm before the storm? I see a fight in the near future that I doubt will end well. On the bright side people will get to take their anger out. Neo was so close to getting what she wanted but she strikes me as the type of person who will get what she wants one way or another. Even tho it might take some time now.

Bookah replies:

Oh, believe me, we have not "heard" the last from Neo.

Thank you so much for your comments, everyone! They really keep me going! I love seeing them, so please, keep them coming!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Song Be

The truck drifted easily to a stop in front of a hotel along the main street of Song Be. Coco was grateful for the gentle way in which the driver had slowed the vehicle. Aura or no, sitting in the back of a truck going over potholes was not easy on one’s ass. She stood, ruefully rubbing the rust-brown colored silk that hung over her backside, and hopped out of the truck bed.

The rest of Team CFVY (Team CFVYN? she mused, eyeing Neo) lit to the ground beside her, and she turned as the sound of the rusty hinges of the passenger opened to spit out Arslan. From the far side of the truck’s cab the driver, one of the farmers of Guicun, eased his way out into the street, careful not to catch the frame with his antlers.

“I really can’t thank you enough for all you did for us,” the farmer stated. “Without you we probably would have lost people trying to stop those bandits. I just wish we could do more for you.”

Coco laughed and patted her handbag. “This beauty is plenty thanks. Thank Shyam again for me when you get back.”

“Will do.”

The niceties observed, Coco turned toward the hotel. Arslan was already leading the way in, her approach to the counter a predatory prowl. Coco shook her head as she watched the woman, still somewhat bemused by her reappearance in her life. The brother gods, it seemed, had a wicked sense of humor.

Coco waited with the others in the lobby, content to let Arslan take point on this one. The elders of Guicun had insisted in paying all six of their rescuers, even though Coco had insisted that her new weapon was payment enough. The lien in their pockets had gone a long way towards making up for the loss of three of their wallets, but if Arslan wanted to settle the bill for the entire group, Coco wasn’t going to complain.

So long as Arslan didn’t demand certain forms of compensation, that is.

Coco gave a sigh, but stifled it when she caught a sharp glance from Velvet. Coco had no words to describe the relief she had felt upon discovering that both her lovers lived, and their tripart celebration had been vigorous enough to earn some less than subtle grins from Shyam at breakfast the next morning. Outside of the bedroom, however, Coco had discovered Velvet had some hard edges Coco hadn’t seen before.
Any time that Arslan was anywhere nearby, Velvet bristled in a way Coco found outright alien. Since leaving Vale, Velvet had shown herself to have a spine of steel and a knack for violence, but she’d still remained a soft-edged, somewhat submissive supporter of the team. During the last two days, however, all it took was a glance in Arslan’s direction, or a comment from the Mistrali woman, and Velvet’s eyes could have cut a Death Stalker in two with a glance.

On the one hand, it was flattering to know that Velvet felt that protective of their relationship, both as a couple and as a triad. On the other hand, it was a bit exhausting. Maintaining that level of fierce jealousy could not be healthy for the hare, and Coco definitely felt her own body knotting up with tension whenever she thought about it.

Footsteps broke Coco out of her thoughts, and she looked up to see Arslan approaching the group. The ocre skinned woman gave her a smile that appeared quite genuine, but which congealed as a stiff-spined Velvet slid protectively in front of Coco. Coco gave an affectionate (but worried) swat to Velvet’s butt as she stepped to the side, but felt herself frown as Velvet didn’t so much as twitch and Arslan’s frown turned into a full on scowl.

“I booked us three rooms. Two beds each.” Arslan handed Coco five key cards. “I’m in 203.” She gave Yatsuhashi and Velvet a quick look, that was hard to read, then turned away. “I’m going to arrange a flight to Mistral.”

Coco watched the woman’s retreating back, but quickly broke it off when Yatsuhashi politely coughed. She turned back to the CFVY(N). “Well it’s early afternoon. I guess while she’s doing that everyone’s free to do whatever.”

“How very leaderly of you,” Fox intoned, and beside him Neo gave a small, almost soundless laugh.

“I know,” Coco grinned back at him and buffed her fingernails on her chest. “It’s a gift.” She then gave the pair matching keycards. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t.”

Neo waggled her hands, and Fox smirked.

“What?”

“She said that’s a pretty small list.”

“Lies and calumny,” Coco exclaimed. She waggled a finger at the diminutive woman. “Don’t listen to Fox’ stories. He exaggerates my wanton ways greatly.”

This time Neo smirked, watching Coco as she gave more of her hand gestures. Coco glance briefly over to Fox for a translation.

“She wants me to remind you that it wasn’t her that fought the White Fang naked and smelling like Velvet.”

Coco blinked, completely taken aback by Neo’s brashness, but then she laughed. “Okay, true.” She tapped her finger to her glengarry, miming tipping a hat. “Points to the lady in the jacket. Now shoo. Go have fun.”

As the two left the lobby headed who knows where, Coco turned to Yatsuhashi and Velvet. The big man reached over and plucked the key cards from her hand without a word and studied them for a moment. “Thought so,” he rumbled, then handed all three to Velvet. “Hey, can you get the desk clerk to swap the key for 203 for one that will open 207?”

Velvet nodded. “Yeah,” she replied, her eyes a bit narrowed, and she strolled over toward the
Coco watched her go, then turned to Yatsuhashi, arching her eyebrow. “Okay?”

Yatsuhashi frowned, and glanced towards Velvet. “Arslan’s really gotten under her skin.”


“She feels threatened.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Coco muttered. “Arslan’s not in the picture.”

“You know that. And I know that,” Yatsuhashi spoke quietly. “And I’m sure that intellectually, Velvet knows that as well. But it’s pretty clear that Arslan does not know that, and that has Velvet incredibly tense.”

“No kidding.” Coco eyed Velvet as she spoke with the clerk, her body stiff. “I swear, you could cut a car in half with her ears, they’re so rigid.”

“Yeah. So remind her, in no uncertain terms, who you belong to.”

“We already did that. Two days in a row.”

Yatsuhashi shook his head. “No, not who we belong to. Who you belong to. One on one.”

She suddenly realized exactly what Yatsuhashi meant, and she felt her cheeks grow heated. “You mean, without you?”

“Yep.”

“That won’t bother you?”

Yatsuhashi laughed quietly. “Nope. It doesn’t have to be all three of us every time. We’re in love with one another as a group, yes, but also as individuals. I bet she’d just love some Coco time.”

Coco grinned as certain images popped into her head, and she nodded. “Just so long as you’ll be okay.”

“I will.” He smiled. “Besides, I’m kicking you out in the morning.”

Coco laughed at that one. “Alright, fine.” She wagged her finger at Yatsuhashi. “Just don’t break her.”

“You either.”

“No promises.”

Yatsuhashi grinned, then walked over to the counter where Velvet was just picking up the replacement keycard. He snatched one from her fingers and leaned down to give her a kiss on the cheek, then walked out into the street.

Velvet watched him leave, surprise evident on her face, and then she turned and walked over to Coco. “Where’s he going?”

“I really don’t know,” Coco replied, her eyes focused on Velvet.
“Huh.” Velvet turned her head, her eyes suddenly locking with Coco’s. “Um…” Coco watched the girl swallow, her eyes suddenly growing wide. “Is something… Coco?”

Coco leaned in, taking both of Velvet’s hands in her own. She pulled Velvet in close, then pressed her lips to the faunus woman’s, not caring who might see. She only let the kiss linger for a few seconds before she drew back, her smile a hungry one. “Let’s go to the room, shall we?”

She watched as Velvet blinked, her lips slightly parted. “A… Absolutely.”

Coco lead Velvet up the stairs and down the hall to room 207, holding her hand the entire time. Once inside she immediately headed for the bathroom, reaching past the curtain to turn the water on, then began shucking clothing, aware that Velvet was completely captured by the sight. As she stepped out of her panties, she turned and gave Velvet a smile. “Come on, you too. Let’s get cleaned up.”

Soon she was standing in the shower, enjoying the hot water running down her body as she carefully rubbed conditioner into Velvet’s hair. The faunus woman was making soft crooning sounds, clearly enjoying the massaging of her scalp. Coco smiled, enjoying the moment, but then gave a soft sigh.

“I am a creature of bad habits, Velve.”

She felt the change in Velvet’s attention, the slight alteration of her posture, the vague tension and stiffness that meant she was no longer simply indulging. Coco felt a bit bad at breaking off the moment of comfortable pleasure, but she knew she needed to say this. She continued.

“I’ve had the habit of basically trying to erase my failures in pleasure. Make the shame and embarrassment go away through seizing the day, and damn all who would criticise me for it.” She took a hand away from Velvet’s scalp to briefly run a finger over the tattoo on her breast. “I took what I wanted, made conquests. During the tournament in Vale, Arslan was just such a conquest.”

Velvet tensed up further, and Coco turned to rinsing the girl’s hair. “I won’t lie. It was a lot of fun. But it was just a one time thing. I never thought anything more about it. It wasn’t supposed to come back and haunt me. Karma’s a bitch, I guess.” Coco carefully squeezed the water out of Velvet’s hair, then turned the woman to face her so she could look down into her eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

“Coco?” Velvet’s voice wavered. “What are you…”

Coco pulled Velvet into a tight embrace. “You don’t deserve to suffer from my bad decisions. I’m sorry.”

She felt Velvet’s arms wrap around her and the shorter woman lay her head against Coco’s shoulder.

“It’s okay.”

Coco shook her head, but smiled as she did so, then kissed one of Velvet’s ears.

“Alright. Let’s get out of the shower.”

Velvet’s arms tightened a bit. “Just another minute, please.”

Coco nuzzled Velvet’s wet hair. “Okay. Whatever you want. This afternoon’s all about you.”

The hotel restaurant was busy when Coco walked in. She’d left a sleeping Velvet in the bed, though not before admiring the very content look on her lover’s face, and come down to the restaurant
during the dinner rush. She’d waved the server away when the man asked how many seats she would need and walked over to the bar, catching the eye of the barkeep.

“What can I get you?”

“Two burgers, medium rare, fries with both, and two matcha espressos.”

“You got it.”

“Make those to go, please.”

“Can do. Anything to drink while you wait?”

“How about a grasshopper?”

“Coming right up.”

The man wandered over to a screen and began pressing buttons on it, and Coco settled onto one of the stools. She turned as a motion caught her eye, and frowned as Arslan settled onto the stool next to her.

The flaxen haired woman turned sharp eyes on Coco and rested her chin on a fist. “I don’t get it.”

Coco sighed. “Get what?”

“You. Me. Them…” Arslan hoist a drink up to her lips and took a small swallow of it. “I mean, I knew you were into casual sex when we met. But now you won’t give me the time of day.”

“Arslan…” Coco took a deep breath. “Things were different then. A lot has changed over the past year.”

“Obviously.” The woman’s voice was withering. “But you haven’t changed that much. You still love a good fuck.”

Coco felt a flare of irritation. “Do you think that’s all that this is?”

“Well, why not?” Arslan tossed her drink back, finishing it off before slamming the empty glass to the bar top and waggling a finger for another. “I mean, you have two you’re banging right now.”

Coco’s irritation went cold. “Don’t talk about them like they’re just toys.”

The look of confusion on Arslan’s face struck Coco as genuine. The woman’s jaw dropped a moment, and then she cocked her head to the side a bit, contemplating Coco. “But you’re sleeping with both of them. At the same time. Doesn’t that mean you like to play the field? So why… why not me too?”

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Coco’s anger washed away as she looked at the clear pain and confusion on Arslan’s face. She sighed as the barkeep walked over and set a glass of green, creamy liquid next to her and one of clear amber beside Arslan. She looked down and took a deep breath. “Arslan, that’s not how it is. They aren’t just something casual. I love them. Both of them. And they love me. And each other. It’s complicated, I know. But that’s how it is.”

“But that’s just not how it works…” Arslan rasped. Coco turned away as she noticed the suspicious moisture of Arslan’s eyes.

“And yet it does.” Coco reached over and placed a hand on Arslan’s arm. “I’m sorry, Arslan, but
you have to give up on me.”

Arslan jerked her arm away, her face suddenly ugly with anger. “Don’t touch me!” She snatched up her drink, slamming back the entire thing, then lurched off the barstool and away. “Fucking whore,” she shot, not looking back.

Coco winced at the broken crack to Arslan’s voice, and at the way the retreating woman’s shoulders twitched in the tell tale signs of shuddering breaths. She looked down at her hand, then swept up her own drink, knocking it back.

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick little note: This chapter was originally supposed to include an explicit scene between Coco and Velvet. But things got so busy I didn't have the time to write it out. Let me know if you want to see it anyway, and if there's enough interest I'll write it and go back to edit it in!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!