Symphony of Souls
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Symphony of Souls
by Texan_Red_Rose

Summary

Millennia ago, she was a deity of immense power. Then, she fell, and lost those most precious to her. Now sustaining herself by any means necessary, Weiss walks through time with a single purpose in mind: to find those she lost, reborn. A chance meeting begins the cycle all over again but perhaps this isn't chance at all. Perhaps this is destiny.

Notes

Disclaimer: Due to the set-up of this universe, I am going to warn for ‘dub-con’ or dubious consent here. Have I tried my damnedest to make sure that isn’t the case? Yes. However, this AU does set Weiss up as something of a siren, with the power to influence perception. This ability is extremely limited and it’s acknowledged in story when it is and isn’t active, and consent is always clearly stated, but she does possess the ability, so if that puts you off, totally get that, no worries.
Keen Hunger

The night wind brought with it the sounds of a city coming alive with movement, the symphony’s composition changing over the millennia but the song remaining largely the same. Weiss stood on her balcony, drinking in the traces of powerful mortal sentiment that managed to reach her from so far away, made all the more discernible thanks to her keen hunger. Through a mixture of apathy and boredom, she’d gone far too long without properly nourishing herself again; it came along once every few centuries but never put her existence at risk. Either her hunger would get the better of her, someone would catch her eye, or she’d find one of the precious souls she sought, and she’d be back to her new status quo, ancient power pounding through her veins.

Weiss sighed, dull blue eyes raking over the bright lights below. Her last meal had consisted of a wealthy business man whose fortune had dwindled considerably after she’d collected enough to sustain herself, leaving him as a delirious fool, none the wiser to her intentions. She longed for the days when creatures like her were revered, when adoration flowed freely from thousands of lips to give her life and power, and when she didn’t need to secure her own well being by plying her powers on practical targets rather than desirable ones.

Yet, longing for the halcyon days of old did nothing to erase the revolution, when the mortals cast down those they once called gods. After that, she’d become this- this ghoul forced to think of mortals as meals. Leaving the allure of her balcony, Weiss went to the wardrobe in her bedroom and picked out an outfit to match both the quarry she desired and the season. In the very back, she kept her divine robes and accouterments as a reminder of all she’d gained and lost since the fall of her pantheon. She took a moment to run her fingers along the fabric and allow the memories to flash through her mind’s eye. Laughter and voices calling out to her, familiar silhouettes framed by a setting sun bringing a smile to her lips and her heart…

“One day, soon.” She promised.

With that, she returned to her task and prepared for the hunt.

Her prey dictated her hunting grounds. If she required physical and monetary assets, she found the places where all but the wait staff had more money than sense, like the over priced restaurants skating on reputations they’d bought and paid for, art galleries that had dress codes, and charity events with a cover charge involving three zeroes. Tonight, though, she craved something more satisfying, a connection she could truly enjoy rather than one forged out of necessity. For the souls who possessed the traits she found most desirable, she went to the quiet parks and bookstores, coffee shops and bakeries, or gyms and tracks- places where quiet conversation or a well timed display would let her charm and physique shine through. Of course, these places also meant taking the long route to her goal, but the effort was well worth it in the end.

As she found a bench along one side of a nearby park, Weiss could already tell she wouldn’t have the patience for the full, slow method, despite how badly she preferred it. The ambient emotions flitting through the air were enough to whet her appetite but not offer the satisfaction she craved, her gaze sweeping over the various mortals enjoying their night as the moon began to rise in the evening sky. Couples, mostly, though she noted the occasional triad or friendly outing in the park, some just passing through while others stayed a while to chat and enjoy the brisk weather. Those who walked alone came few and far between- just her luck- and those who caught her interest numbered fewer still. She didn’t even consider lowering her standards, more than aware that her eagerness for a meal was affecting her perception. Patience remained a hard won virtue that she owned in its entirety,
having waded through entire centuries without so much as a taste of that which sustained her, so a mere ten minutes on the bench seemed paltry in comparison. When the right one came along, she wouldn’t be able to resist, so she continued her hunt with a pleasant little smile on her lips, appearing to all the world like any normal twenty-something young woman enjoying her evening. More than once, a child or a dog would wander close and she’d coo appropriately, trading small talk with whoever came up to lead the distraction away. And then, of course, there were those who thought of her prey themselves, trying to strike up a conversation with her in the hopes of winning more, but dismissing them without a fuss came to her as naturally as breathing.

Poor mortals, she thought, so unaware of who they approached, but no matter. She had her own hunt to attend to and their little interruptions were merely a means of marking the passing minutes.

After about two hours of waiting, Weiss felt the prickle at the base of her spine that traveled up to the nape of her neck, setting her on high alert. Blue eyes scanned around, seeking out the one who called to her ancient senses, standing apart from the crowd; in the old days, she would become a priestess of sorts, living in the deity’s temple and attending to her duties alongside the others, part of a collection of special souls she’d amassed over many, many years. They served a two fold purpose: to achieve their own happiness and provide the essence Weiss needed to maintain her vast strength.

Bereft of her temple and her status as a god, the person her gaze fell upon would never be recognized as the exceptional icon she was, but Weiss could do everything in her now limited power to give her a taste of the life she could’ve had.

The first thing she noticed, as always, was the eyes- a tawny brown shimmering with warmth but focused on the ground just ahead of her feet, apparently deep in thought. Hair just a few shades darker fell to her waist, over her shoulders and down her back in straight strands that stood out against her jean jacket, the battered garment worn over a work uniform of some sort, and she lightly gripped the messenger bag strap that cut across her chest. She had a soft, round face, a sort of innocence that belied her age reflected in the way she carried herself, but Weiss knew better. The relaxed slope of her shoulders, the seemingly low guard- these were not the signs of one oblivious to the world around her, not with those tall rabbit ears atop her head twitching in small, hardly noticeable movements that would be missed by all except those who were intimately familiar with Faunus traits.

Initially, it brought a pain to her chest, a frown tugging at her lips as she remembered another Faunus- one of her beloved chosen, the progenitor of a tradition, and one she’d lost so many times- but she pushed that to the side for the time being. She’d spent so much time wallowing in agony over the losses she’d sustained over the past few millennia, and she would have many years yet to indulge in those pains again, but now she needed to regain some strength before wasting it on slogging through bittersweet memories.

The rabbit Faunus continued down the path towards Weiss, unaware she’d been chosen to pay a tribute long overdue, and the fallen deity prepared to spring her trap. Mentally, she acknowledged that there existed an inherent shame she couldn’t go about this the old fashioned way, but her hunger had grown too sharp to be ignored much longer. Just as her target approached, perhaps thirty feet separating them, Weiss opened her mouth and began to use the one gift that somehow hadn’t left her over the years.

She sang.

Just a few notes with no words, a baited lure that hung in the air, and she didn’t need to look around to confirm how many sets of eyes were upon her. She’d started soft, so only the humans exceptionally close- ten to fifteen feet- could hear, but Faunus could typically hear twice that
distance, and those with an extra set of ears usually had even sharper hearing than that. Once, she possessed the sort of pinpoint control that allowed her songs, no matter how loud, to only affect her chosen target, but she’d given that up along with so much else in an unbalanced trade that she would never regret. It just meant she had to be more clever in her actions, waiting a few moments for the passing humans to move out of earshot while her target drew closer before singing a few more notes.

She’d gotten lucky this time around. Rather than being forced to track down her next meal like she’d done too many times to count, the ebb and flow of people walking through the park worked in her favor, so that she could continue singing with brief pauses so the humans would lose interest while the rabbit Faunus drew ever closer. Before she could start to pass Weiss’ bench, she sang a little louder, the notes spilling from her lips like sweet ambrosia for the ears, and it had the desired effect of slowing her target’s gait, calling to senses that had no name but existed all the same. For most, the song would call to simple emotions- love, lust, appreciation, desire, they were typically rather concentrated on the ideas of want and need- but the rabbit Faunus possessed one of those special souls for whom the song called to something else entirely. A sort of compatibility woven deep into the very fabric of her being, resonating with the ancient power in the deity’s voice. Once, it would be a sign that she’d found her calling, but now it only stirred a complex network of emotions, calling them out from the depths to be felt but not named.

A few steps past the bench, the Faunus stopped, one ear twisted around to listen as Weiss continued her soft song. By this point, she was likely waging an internal debate and the deity had to smile, for the battle of wills always ended the same way but the novelty never wore off.

“Uh, excuse me?”

And just like that, Weiss thought with a grin curling her lips, she had the stranger’s attention. She opened her eyes and looked at the rabbit Faunus, noting the adorable, awkward, hesitant posture and demure smile. But she also saw the spark of something a bit sharper lurking in tawny eyes, a question and a challenge. “Yes?”

“I just… wanted to say you have a beautiful singing voice.” A light flush rose in her cheeks as the ears atop her head twitched nervously. Although a different color and shape, again the gesture reminded her of another- one of her beloveds, whose ears would never remain still when it came time for worship, and a pang struck her heart briefly.

Brushing aside bittersweet memories, Weiss offered a pleasant smile. “Why thank you, Miss…?”

“Scarlatina, Velvet Scarlatina,” she said, reaching forward to shake her hand, the nervous energy from before waxing and waning in turn. “And you are?”

“Call me Weiss, please.” For a moment, she considered bringing the Faunus further into the park, just behind some trees, and taking her fill there, but it wouldn’t be a true meal and she had better control over her hunger than to fall prey to her own impatience. “I like to sing to clear my mind but I didn’t mean to intrude upon your evening. I’d hate to make you late to work.”

“No, no, I just got off, actually.” She tucked a few errant locks of hair behind one of her human ears. “I was heading home. I live just a few blocks over.”

“Walking home alone? That won’t do.” Finally, Weiss stood up, smoothing out her skirt. “Please, allow me to keep you company on your trip.” Some manner of apprehension flashed in light brown eyes, warning against the idea of allowing some stranger to walk home with her. At the same time, the Faunus stood almost a full foot taller than her and who could be intimidated by someone so small anyway? The curl of her lips also hinted that, perhaps, she might like the thrill of the danger presented, and the ancient deity liked to hedge her bets. “I’ll sing on the way, if you’d like.”
Internally, she flushed with pride as all doubts were swept away when Velvet smiled. “That sounds great.”

“Lead the way.” She swept an arm out before falling into step beside the Faunus, beginning a soft, gentle melody as they walked. With every step, they drifted closer, and her song lulled Velvet into a light trance, easing her mortal concerns as the ancient wisps of power curled through the air. The Faunus’ long ears drooped, canted towards the sound of Weiss’ voice as she drank it in, and her arm reached out and slowly wrapped around the deity’s waist, seemingly without her conscious decision. Noting that her companion didn’t seem alarmed when Weiss returned the gesture, she opted to halt her song long enough to learn a little more. Something about this soul as opposed to the others she’d had in recent decades called to her, begged her to pay just a bit more attention. “Do you live in a house?”

“No,” Velvet replied, a pout coming to her lips at being denied the song. “An apartment, two more blocks up.”

“Any roommates?”

She nodded, following up her answer with another for the anticipated question to follow. “One, but she won’t be back until the morning.”

“Someone as beautiful as you, all alone for a night?” Weiss leaned closer, gently coaxing the Faunus to tilt her head as the words were set right against her lower ear. “Whatever will you do to pass your time?”

Velvet shivered, her eyes falling half lidded as she distractedly hummed. “I can think of a few things. Would you… like to come inside for a bit? To talk? Or…”

Already, she could feel a little of her strength returning simply from the gentle pleading in the Faunus’ tone- an appetizer to whet her appetite. Soon, those lips would be begging and moaning, singing praises throughout the night. The arm she had wrapped around Velvet’s waist shifted, slipping her hand into Velvet’s back pocket and squeezing. Weiss watched her posture, seeking out any sign that the Faunus was uncomfortable or fighting against the impulses running just beneath her skin. She found nothing except a deep seated yearning, something that had smoldered for a long while, yet had only just tonight begun to burn bright. After so many times, she understood exactly what she’d stumbled upon, a chuckle caught between amused and bitter slipping from her lips.

Then, she smiled. “Absolutely.”

The apartment itself seemed homey, original paintings and photographs on the walls adding a rather nice touch, but it would never compare to the temples of yore. Had she the choice, she would take Velvet on a small mountain of the softest pillows in the land by torchlight, the flames throwing shadows across tanned skin as she writhed in pleasure. Still, she supposed, the modern inventions of mattresses and bed springs could be rather convenient and comfortable, and the twin sized one the Faunus owned would only limit their movements slightly. The moment the lock slid home on the front door, Weiss started her amorous assault, stepping up behind Velvet and allowing her lips and tongue to trace ancient words across her companion’s flesh, hands slipping beneath fabric to brush the skin of her hips and belly. The difference in their height seemed inconsequential, the fallen deity not above popping up on her tip toes to place kisses and nips in vulnerable places. That earned her a gasping moan as she pressed against the Faunus’ backside, pinning her against the door briefly before relenting just enough to be guided to the bedroom. Once there, she made quick work of Velvet’s clothing, nimble fingers sped along by hunger and desire.
By the time her companion for the night fell back onto her bed, Weiss had striped her bare- not a necessity, mind, but she rather liked the visual, plus, Velvet was special- and a litany of love bites already adorned her shoulders, faint scratch marks along her hips from nails and the scrape of teeth, and in the moonlight streaming in from the window, she looked like the perfect offering. The Faunus hadn’t been idle, either, with at least one button missing from Weiss’ shirt and deliciously burning marks left on her hips just above the waistband of her skirt. Here, despite the gnawing hunger and rampant desire, the look in those light brown eyes that beckoned her forward, she would honor her longest held tradition. She stood at the foot of the bed, listening to the Faunus’ ragged breathing for a moment before she spoke.

“Is this what you want?” In old times, the question stood as a formality; the ones she took would travel from all over the world to pay her tribute. They came willingly and offered themselves- some seeking redemption, some seeking a new purpose, some just looking for a new home- and those with whom she resonated with were offered a spot at her side, within her temple, elevated above those who worshiped her.

Bereft of that- and forced to walk among mortals as something barely more- she still gave those she found the choice, as clearly as possible. She harbored no illusions; most would consent, because they wanted to spend at least one night with a beautiful woman, either to spite a former lover or for bragging rights. But, sometimes, she would come across someone who had doubts, second thoughts, a moment’s hesitation, and she wouldn’t push. It was enough to garner their attention, taking the edge off her hunger until she could hunt again. She’d stopped her song long ago and any sway she might’ve held had been relinquished in turn. Even now, though she could feel the fire burning low in her belly, their flirtatious banter on the walk to the apartment had given a little shine to her eyes, some of the ancient power flowing through her once more. She could walk away.

She just hoped she wouldn’t have to.

“Isn’t that supposed to be my line?” The Faunus tilted her head, a sly smile on her lips. A blush rose in her cheeks and her ears twitched a little but she seemed comfortable, laying on her bed without a stitch of clothing.

Weiss admired that sort of confidence but repeated her question regardless. “Is this what you want, Velvet?”

“Yeah,” she replied, voice breathless with anticipation. “I want this, Weiss.”

“Very well.” A smile came to her lips as she shrugged out of her jacket. “I have one rule, a single requirement. Fulfill it, and I will give you pleasure beyond imagination.”

“What’s the rule?” Velvet pushed herself up, ears now straining forward to catch her every word as fingers itched to do the honor of undressing her.

“For the rest of the night, only one word may pass your lips.” She unbuttoned her shirt the rest of the way and slid it down her shoulders, putting one knee on the bed. “Every plea, every sigh, every moan- one word.” She unclasped her bra and rossed it away but didn’t bother undressing further. Tonight, her pleasure would come solely from a brief return to her former glory and the sating of her hunger. “My name- Weiss.”

One brow rose, obviously finding the request bizarre.

“It’s the only rule I possess,” she said, reaching up to release the tie holding her hair off to the side, allowing it to spill over her shoulders. “Comply, and I will fulfill your every wish tonight.”
Negotiating terms like this—she’d been told before she sounded like the oddest sort of prostitute, and she found it highly amusing. The mortals called it the oldest profession and were they wrong? The deliverance of euphoria in exchange for a simple price— is that not life itself?

“Weiss,” her companion for the evening replied, with only a hint of amused confusion in her tone. Despite that, the deity found her requirement met and immediately crawled onto the bed, ducking her head down to lightly nip and lick at Velvet’s belly, working her way up as the Faunus began to writhe and grab for her, beckoning her to hurry. “Weiss.” No questioning this time, just appreciation and anticipation, and she fed off it, slipping one hand to cup Velvet’s core while her lips wrapped around the stiffened bud of one breast. “Weiss.”

Fingers threaded through pure white locks, lightly gripping to pull her close, and she abided the request. Their skin pressed together as the fallen deity worked Velvet into a writhing, gasping mess, centuries of experience serving her well. Fingers slid through slick folds when a particular cry of her name seemed to demand more, drawing patterns around the Faunus’ clitoris before diving into her clenching core, all while her mouth lavished cool, wet attention on whatever patch of skin caught her fancy, the blunt edge of her teeth appearing in flashes. Her companion showed her thorough appreciation in a multitude of ways—nails raking across marble shoulders, hands leaving deliciously bruising holds as she was moved to where the Faunus desired, muscles pulling taunt and relaxing as she relished every touch—but none were as satisfying as her voice, crying out Weiss’ name in unrestrained pleasure. It surprised her, to some extent. She imagined Velvet would be softer, quieter in her pleasure, and less demanding, but she had no complaints even as the Faunus’ tone shifted from one of unabashed pleasure to shameless, forceful begging. With every utterance of her name, falling freely from her companion’s lips, Weiss grew stronger and more generous, releasing the nipple in her mouth with a wet pop before kissing her way down the plane of her stomach, making a show of withdrawing her fingers from between Velvet’s thighs and licking the digits clean.

“Weiss,” she said, sweat beginning to plaster umber bangs to her forehead as rabbit ears laid back, twitching restlessly as she tried to catch her breath. A slight furrow in her brow hinted at the objection she could only pack into a single word.

Weiss paused for a moment, recognizing half a dozen facets of the view before her worn by others—feline ears, blonde bangs, emerald eyes—and felt the keen sting of bittersweet goodbyes once more. Then, she set those memories aside and smiled, scooting back on the bed so she could lay herself between spread thighs, setting them her shoulders before leaning forward, pressing a gentle kiss to moistened lips, the prickling of coarse hairs scratching at her face.

A light growl left Velvet’s lips as she arched her back, pushing closer, and the fallen deity drank in the sound just as easily as the arousal drenching her companion’s core. “Weiss!”

She wrapped her arms around the Faunus’ thighs, flicking the pointed tip of her tongue against the sensitive bud of her clitoris before closing her lips around it and sucking lightly, drawing forth a loud moan of her name. At this rate, it might not even take the whole night for her to be back at full strength, each sound Velvet made delicious in its own right. She drank it in, though, as much to slake her hunger as to revel in her prowess, a touch of vanity stoked by her companion’s responsiveness. It never failed to surprise her how addictive another’s pleasure could be, especially one she would’ve happily offered a place at her side had they met in a different time and place.

Weiss hummed, pushing her tongue through soaked folds to find her entrance, sliding in deep and nudging her abandoned clit with her nose. Fingers found their way into her hair and she didn’t mind, continuing with her task while her gaze fixated on Velvet’s face. She could see the way her breasts heaved with every ragged breath, how she turned her head side-to-side as she moaned, how the
muscles in her legs and abdomen tensed with every sweet spot hit, pressing against the sides of her head. Fingers still carded through her hair, providing a secondary form of encouragement, because the companion she’d chosen this night had caught on to at least the very basic concept: she needed to hear her name and responded best to that, even if the reason remained shrouded in mystery to the Faunus. But the view, she had to admit, remained her favorite part of the ritual, watching as her actions slowly unraveled another, all the differences and similarities she’d encountered in centuries and so many partners. The best part came at the end, when a few taps against Velvet’s hip prompted those tawny eyes to look down the length of her own body. Weiss could feel her impending climax quickly approaching and wanted the eye contact, as much to remind the Faunus of her rule as to gauge her reaction. In the middle of the process, she always felt her strongest, but the true measure lay in her eyes. Judging from the shocked gasp that escaped her lips, Weiss’ eyes had to be shining bright.

Perfect.

Weiss withdrew her tongue, going up to swirl around the Faunus’ clit while plunging two fingers into her, opting to do her best to ensure this would be the best orgasm of her life. For a moment, Velvet managed to resist, trying to direct her elsewhere and prolong the first round, but a well timed suckle coupled with curling her fingers to find that special spot deep within her companion pushed her over the edge, her head snapping back as a cry tore from her throat.

“WEISS!” Her inner muscles clenched down on the fingers inside of her as she reached her peak, holding onto Weiss’ hair and head for dear life as her voice echoed in the room.

Thoroughly pleased with herself, the deity eased Velvet through each wave, fingers and tongue working in tandem to prolong her pleasure before pulling away with a last, little kiss that brought forth a little shiver from her companion. Languidly, she lapped up the excess wetness that painted the inside of Faunus’ thighs and crawled up her body, peppered with kisses until she reached her target. Breathing heavily and covered in sweat, Velvet met her sloppily, tongue sneaking out to clean her chin and cheeks from arousal—yet another pleasant surprise she rather liked from her companions. When they parted for air, their eyes met.

“Oh, no, my dear.” She waited until she had her companion’s attention, before reaching down and lightly tugging on the other’s hips, laying back and licking her lips. Although attending to her physical needs would be nice, it didn’t matter to her as much as restoring her power, and she could feel the urge to be a bit greedy and take just a bit more of what the Faunus had to give slinking beneath her skin. Of course, that would be a touch impossible if Velvet’s mouth was otherwise occupied. “I’m not done with you yet.”

Her companion hesitated for a moment, just as she did before, but relented under slim, coaxing digits, placing her knees on either side of Weiss’ head and preparing to ride, as the saying went. Hardly a minute later, her name resounded within the room again, called out in pleasure over and over, until the wee hours of the morning.

One might call her a glutton but she simply couldn’t get enough.
a nearby chair, watching Velvet sleep, the covers pushed down to her hips and leaving her chest exposed to the air. She looked peaceful in her slumber and, considering the long hours of physical exertion, needed her rest, making the deity loathe to rouse her.

However, some things couldn’t be helped.

Deciding to end her vigil, Weiss got up and went to the bedside, reaching out to gently shake the Faunus awake. When that didn’t quite work, she called out, soft but insistent. “Velvet.”

A soft murmur met her originally, a furrow appearing in her brows as she turned her head away. “Five more minutes.”

Weiss smiled gently and tried again. “We need to talk.”

Blearily, Velvet opened her eyes and stretched, seemingly too exhausted to bother covering herself up immediately. The response was expected, especially considering the confusion that splayed across her face as her gaze landed on the woman. “So… last night… none of that was a dream?”

“It can be, if you prefer,” she said, her eyes shining brighter for a moment, perhaps brighter than they had since the last time she’d said goodbye to those she missed more than anything, but once again she set aside her melancholy to focus on the now. “It’s your choice. With a snap of my fingers, you’ll forget I even exist, and I’ll never bother you again.”

Not everyone who possessed the sort of spirit she sought in her companions ended up taking the role. Mortals, with all their desires and aspirations, sometimes didn’t want to be confined by memories, and she understood that. Sometimes, she envied them the choice, but it also made her cherish those who did remain with her, despite their propensity for recklessness.

Velvet looked away for a moment, her gaze trailing down her own body, the evidence of last night’s activities fading quickly. Then, she looked up into dazzling blue eyes and swallowed. “You’re not… human, are you?”

“No, nor Faunus. I’m… something much different,” she said with a reassuring smile, withholding the full explanation for the time being. After all, she did want the Faunus to get some rest and the story ran rather long.

Rabbit ears drooped, a lance of fear flashing through brown eyes. It couldn’t be helped, of course, the realization that your bedmate was something unknown sparking the sort of dread that seemed deeply rooted in all mortals nowadays. Once, it had fed into awe and reverence for the gods, but no longer.

But then her expression hardened into a look Weiss recognized instantly, no matter who wore it. “Yeah… Okay. I think… I’d like to remember.” Velvet’s voice, soft and slow, grew stronger the more she spoke, seemingly coming to her decision as the words left her mouth. “Right. Yeah. We can talk about it, this whole… you not being… who you are, over coffee?”

“I think ‘what’ might be more appropriate.” Her smile grew a little wider. She’d only used enough of her power the night before to catch the Faunus’ interest and stoke her libido, just a tad, but any sway she may have held had broken entirely, despite the resurgence of her strength. Even if it only amounted to another chance at seeing one another- and seemingly precluded sex- it would appear Velvet wanted to learn more about the ancient creature before her, and she’d gone so very long without a true friend. It would be a nice thing to look forward to, at the very least. “I’d love that.”

Weiss reached for the blanket, pulling it up to tuck the Faunus in, receiving minimal protest in response. “You need to recover your energy. Sleep, for now, and trust me when I say I’ll be
available when you’re ready. I’ll leave my number on the kitchen counter.” She stood, letting out a brief chuckle. “If you haven’t changed your mind by the time you’ve woken up, call me, and we can see about getting that coffee. I’ll see myself out.”

Velvet looked at her then, as if weighing her options, before yawning and turning onto her side. “Just don’t forget.”

Although she felt tempted to linger, Weiss forced herself to leave the room, closing the door behind her and heading for the kitchen. It seemed the most logical place for pen and paper- one had to make a grocery list somehow, yes?- and she had spied it on the way into Velvet’s room the night before. It took her a few moments to locate both required items, then a few more to remember which alphabet and numerals would actually be appropriate in this day and age. By the time she’d left her contact information, simply signed with her name at the bottom, Weiss heard the telltale sounds of a door opening and locking, the jingle of keys accompanying the thudding of kicked off boots. Velvet’s roommate had returned, apparently.

Not that it concerned her too much, of course. Weiss had found the modern concept of a ‘walk of shame’ to be amusing in the highest regard. Preparing to offer a flippant greeting and waltz out the door, Weiss instead found herself going stock still when she turned the corner, breath catching in her throat.

Cascading raven hair, feline ears atop her head, the unique quirk of her lips when caught off guard- some things changed every time but others remained the same, distinct and recognizable no matter how much time had passed, but all that paled in comparison to the stunning beauty of amber eyes, the very same ones she adored all those millennia ago when they first met.

“Oh, I didn’t know Velvet had company.” The words made her heart soar and ache; no matter how much time passed, she never forgot the voices of those she’d loved first, the special souls who’d chosen to remain at her side until they were cruelly wretched away. “I’m Blake, her roommate.”

Even the same name. That didn’t always happen, but she felt tears prick at her eyes that it did this time.

Then, the surprise fell away, pushed aside by a nagging feeling, and Weiss watched the slight tilt of the Faunus’ head, the special way her feline ears flicked, the pinch to her cheeks that accompanied her frown as it always did when she spoke while deep in thought. “Actually… now that I think about it, have we met before? You look… really familiar.”

In her mind’s eye, Weiss went back to the days before the gods fell, those memories she’d kept pushing back throughout the night, when she enjoyed the company of her beloved souls through long, languid days and hot, passionate nights, when they’d lay together in sun or shade or torchlight, all of them content, and one would turn to the others and say words that sparked happy laughter. Sometimes, she’d remember them in bitter agony, but she repeated the words now with a smile, the same ones she’d heard so many times spoken in jest.

“Do you believe in destiny?”

After decades of bitter loneliness, she’d found one of them again.

She just hoped the others wouldn’t be far behind.
Weiss sat at the cramped table in the dining area, hiding her rolling emotions behind a smooth, patient, polite mask. It never failed to sting, how she carried so many memories in her heart while those she longed for remained blissfully ignorant. After all this time, she’d turned the entire process into a simple pattern, tailored to the one she found first. Despite the agony of slowly explaining, she took more than a little solace from having found her sweet Nightowl first.

“So… let me get this straight,” the Faunus said, both hands wrapped around her cup of hot tea. Weiss had suggested it the moment her question brought back more suspicion than before, feline ears laying back into midnight hair. Usually, tea helped Blake think and calm down, but modern blends never quite reached the same quality, the same taste, and the slight frown on her lips hinted that she might finally know why something never seemed quite right. “You’re a goddess from over three thousand years ago, forced into immortality that you’ll lose without receiving enough… praise, and I used to be one of your priestesses?”

“That’s the basic gist of it,” Weiss replied, a small sigh slipping past her lips. She’d learned, through trial and error, that too much, too soon, would do her no favors. Forced to rely on vague summaries, she did her best to convey the important details, the ones that stood a chance of jogging memories. “There’s a few more details, but we can cover those later.”

“Assuming there is a later.” Blake bristled, frowning again. She remembered a time when the Faunus smiled and laughed freely, but it seemed time and time again that fate conspired to give her more than enough reasons to be hostile towards the one she’d once trusted with all her heart. Weiss tried not to take it personally. “I mean, this is a lot to buy. You’re basically telling me you’re a succubus and that you used my roommate to ‘recharge’ yourself.” She took a steadying draught of her tea but lowered the cup quickly, apparently not trusting her guest to leave her immediate line of sight. “That doesn’t exactly sound like a benevolent mistress I’d willingly serve.”

The words hurt. They always did. Ancient mortals had whittled away her powers by creating a new myth to vilify her. No longer did she stand as the goddess of creations, mistress of the harvest, patron of childbirth—no, she represented night demons come to lure away the soul and rend the flesh. They turned her into a monster… but her chosen refuted the claims back then and remained loyal to her and she to them. However, before the memories of their past lives took hold, they repeated the myths each time she found them again. Weiss tilted her chin up in defiance of those who’d cast her down so long ago, confident she hadn’t lost the fight quite yet.

“I don’t hurt people and I don’t take unwilling partners. I didn’t use Velvet.”

“She’s not the type of person to jump into bed with someone she just met,” Blake replied, anger creeping into her tone.

“But it’s happened before, hasn’t it?” Already, she could tell her window of opportunity was closing. She hated taking the route rife with conflict, but she had little choice. Even if she lost the battle today, she still had tomorrow; she had the rest of eternity. “She’s met someone and had an instant connection, inexplicably deep despite its brevity, but it always felt like there was something missing between you two.” The Faunus flinched, prompting her to press forward. She had the advantage now and could press it, could prove her claims true. “You likely blamed yourself, broke it off but stayed friends, because conventional wisdom doesn’t apply to the way she made you feel. It scared you, because only a few people can make you feel that way, and you’ve yet to find an answer for any of them. You love her, just like the others, and you feel conflicted about that, like some part of you much older and wiser is calmly weathering the expectations of the world around you while
bemoaning how much has changed, even though you don’t remember it ever being any different.” Weiss leaned forward, staring deep into amber eyes. “But at least when you dream, she’s there with the others, and you feel content lying in the field beneath that ageless tree.”

Blake shot to her feet, anger pinching her expression. “Get out.”

She didn’t feign surprise. This result always seemed the most likely when she crossed paths with her beloved Nightowl first; she’d avoided it twice but had yet to recreate the results.

Rising in one fluid motion, she started for the door but spoke over her shoulder as she went. “Next time you have that dream, try looking behind you.”

As she let herself out, Weiss felt confident in two things: that Blake would take her advice and that she’d hear from neither Faunus for at least two weeks.

Another sigh escaped her lips as she stepped out into the weak morning sunlight. Time meant little to an immortal but the wait would be agonizing all the same.

Weiss spent her days preparing her living space for guests, dragging out the sentimental essentials and arranging the largest room in her penthouse to pay homage to the six souls she stood on the brink of finding again. During the times she found them, the fallen goddess did her best to recreate the temple- their first home together- but when they eventually passed from old age, she would put everything away, store it safely until next she could find them. At first, she tried preserving it, as if leaving a room frozen in time would ease her agony by some small amount. It never did; it merely exacerbated the lack of laughter, the missing warmth, and the decades that would creep by until she had her chance once more.

Blue eyes, still shining bright, scanned over her work, lingering on the spot where she’d set up Blake’s things. If her sweet Nightowl could just see her collection, the memories of her soul would be fully restored, but exposing any of them to their previous lives too early would be a dire mistake. The confusion from her claims would call to those memories where they’d been their most lost and, many times, that included their first death. Without context or a guiding hand to help them make sense of the images and sensations being relived, they would turn against her, and she couldn’t fault them the reaction. So, the process had to be slow, first presenting the idea and allowing them to wrap their minds around the concept before introducing any of those old memories. The phrase she’d repeated- the one linked to some of their happiest moments- could only unlock the door, not open it. The waiting hurt, especially with the harsh dismissal, but Weiss had patience and faith. Blake usually turned her away, rebelled in some way- it was part of her very nature to do so.

Still, the thoughts crept into her mind. Whenever the first meeting went poorly, the immortal considered letting this time be the last- that retreating back to the crumbling remains of her temple to wither and die alone stood as the better option. She wasn’t even sure if she could die; so few had escaped the reckoning and she’d lost touch with them all. Only her sister- the shining edge of a blade, the former master of war- had sought her out during the intervening millennia, and she hardly looked living much less healthy. Dull and dark, a shadow of her former glory, just like Weiss, but she left in higher spirits usually, except for the last time. They stood atop a hill, watching a group of mortals prepare a siege tower- revolutionary technology at the time. They’d just buried her beloveds yet again hardly a week before and the loss always chaffed, always brought out the ugly, vengeful tendencies Weiss thought herself long past, and her sister bid her farewell. For the last time, she’d said, before turning to march into the mountains to wither like a blade left to dull and rust. Did she still linger as a spectre, roaming the mountains during twilight? Did she fade into dust? Weiss didn’t know… but perhaps she should find out firsthand.
She shook her head, turning away from the enshrined room in a bid to dispel her troubling thoughts. It should be old hat by now but the worries gnawed at her. She remembered vividly that night so very long ago, when her beloved Nightowl first walked into her temple. Back then, Weiss expected nothing more than the daily prayers from all over Remnant to sustain herself, but then she had this brave Faunus, who’d traveled so far from home, standing before the altar, seeking something she could hardly articulate and hoping she could make a difference.

Her homeland couldn’t support her people, couldn’t give enough food to keep them from starving or provide shelter from the bitter storms, and while her family exhausted every option available to a mortal’s ingenuity, she put her faith elsewhere. Blake had run as far as she could, seeking the answer to her people’s plight, and found herself at the temple of an ancient goddess, ready to offer portions of a harvest in exchange for the ability to grow the crops in the first place. For her part, Weiss had grown bored with watching mortals plod along, toiling through their lives; it didn’t seem to be anything more than a bleak existence, and she didn’t have much occupying her time either. So she went, crossed the sea to the little island where the Faunus had gathered after being forced from the other lands, a place they could make their own, with a little help. Just like Blake, they had the gleam of defiance in their eyes and looked upon the deity- who appeared to all the world like a human among them- with suspicion.

Honestly, she rather liked the change.

Then she rose her voice in song. The sands receded to the beaches and a few patches dotting the island. Lush fields and dense forests sprouted in their wake. Lakes and ponds swelled up from the ground and rivers descended from mountains that reached high into the sky fed them. She called forth beasts- cows and pigs and sheep- to give the Faunus food and fur, and deer for game and wolves to keep them from becoming lax. Pretty birds to sing them to sleep and rouse them in the mornings, and a few others that they might eventually keep as pets. When her song ended, the Faunus had not an island; they had a utopia to call home.

In turn, they raised their voices in song, beneath the stars of a calm night as they spread out in the field and picked ripe fruit for their feast. Weiss had never felt so powerful, recovering all the energy spent in creating this home for them, and she took it as recompense. She needed nothing more and made the long journey back to her temple with just her constant companion at her side, the creature gifted her by her Mother- the Mother of all things- and she thought fleetingly of the Faunus she left behind, with their bright eyes and their powerful voices.

Hardly a month passed before her precious Nightowl entered the temple again, this time seeking something for herself rather than her people. Somehow, through their talks late into the night during their journey, she’d come to see Weiss as more than a goddess. It constituted the first time the immortal deity realized that the fierce soul dancing in amber eyes called to her differently than any she’d encountered before. That night, Weiss shared herself with another and took what was offered in return. Her power surged, yes, but what would always stick with her was the next morning, opening her eyes to see another body beside her own, light breathing in her ear, and a heartbeat she could listen to for all eternity pounding just beneath supple skin.

Soon, her Nightowl discovered a thirst for the stories of the world- history of humans and Faunus and tales of the pantheon- and together they built a little library in one wing. They spent their long nights among the book stacks, the heavy scent of ink and parchment enveloping them as they poured over words. Weiss fell in love with the mortal, declared her a high priestess, and tied their lives together using the strings of fate themselves. She started a trend.

She caused her own downfall.
The ringtone of her phone snapped her attention away from her memories. Pulling it free, she glanced at the screen- an unnamed number- before answering. “Hello?”

“Weiss?”

Her lips curled into a small smile. “Velvet. It’s good to hear from you.”

“Yeah, I’m- I’m sorry it took so long.” She paused. “I just…”

“You don’t owe me an explanation,” she said, entering her bedroom and taking a seat on the edge of her king sized bed. While she resigned herself to using the contraption more nights than not, she found herself hoping its use would soon diminish until it became a forgotten placeholder altogether. “I believe I owe you one, though.”

Velvet remained silent for a moment. “Blake said you gave her one.”

It wasn’t an accusation, just a simple statement, but Weiss felt a pang of remorse all the same. “Where would you like to start?”

“In person, first. When are you free?”

“All the time,” she said, unable to hide her amusement. “I tried being employed, once. Didn’t work out.”

The Faunus hummed. “Well, how about tomorrow? Noon, the water fountain off Central and First?”

Weiss got up and walked to the window, looking down at the location suggested. “Very well. Tomorrow at noon. I look forward to it.” She waited to see if Velvet would hang up or bid her farewell, but the silence stretched too long. “Is there anything you’d like to discuss now?”

Nothing for a while, and then she spoke softly. “How did I almost forget you? If I hadn’t found your number while going through the junk mail, I’m not sure if I would’ve remembered at all. That’s…”

“After you awoke, Blake confronted you, did she not?”

“We… got into an argument, yeah.” Velvet sighed, shifting her position slightly, the shuffling of fabric and her cheek against the microphone conveying slight discomfort. “She told me you’re crazy.”

“I wouldn’t say she’s wrong.” Turning away from the window, Weiss opted to set her sights on some meaningless task to occupy her hands. “And I’m sure she had some other unflattering things to say.”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“She’s angry; it’s understandable.” Her fingers found their way to a handmade jewelry box from millennia ago, the paint chipped and cracked along the lid. “Painful memories are a burden on the soul. I gave both of you the choice- to remember or to forget. When you sought to forgive and forget your argument, all memories of me followed.” She pulled a necklace from within, a cat’s eye gem set in a flowering replica of deadly nightshade, framed by winds and tinted black. “It’s… probably for the best if you avoid mentioning me. If she wishes to remember, she will in her own time.”

Velvet sighed. “I think she already has. Blake’s been… distant the last few days. I couldn’t get her to tell me why but… she’s the one who usually tidies up. She probably saw your number and put it
with the mail. Now… I just get the feeling that she regrets—"

“It’s not regret; it’s confusion,” she said, a frown touching her lips. “She has memories without context, over a dozen lives lurking behind her eyelids. Give her time.”

“If you say so.” A pause. “I was thinking about making her dinner tonight, see if that might cheer her up.”

“That sounds like a splendid idea.” Weiss smiled, replacing the necklace. “If you’re looking for ideas, there’s a website called ‘Eating for Six’ that has a robust menu. I’d suggest checking the ‘Nightowl’ tab.”

Over the past twenty years, she’d constructed the website, tweaking it here and there to help fill her days. Sometimes, her mouth would water just glancing at some of the recipes, remembering so many meals shared amid light laughter and good company.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Velvet replied. “And I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be there.”

When the line went dead, she pocketed the device and proceeded to beat down the rising tide of sadness welling in her heart. Finding her Nightowl- Blake, she supposed, since that seemed to be her name again- always proved to be the most emotionally arduous of reunions. She knew why, of course, but that didn’t make the process any less painful.

At least she could take solace in knowing that, when she dreamed, Blake enjoyed the peaceful serenity of her slumber.

Weiss sat on the fountain’s ledge wearing a modest, light blue dress, feet crossed at her ankles and hands in her lap. Unlike the other night, she neither wanted attention nor gained it, managing to blend into the dancing water well enough to escape most mortals’ notice. Remaining unseen continued to be a difficult skill to use, requiring her to concentrate; as a deity, she craved acknowledgement, desired attention, fed off adulation, for it would always be godly to be narcissistic, so to remove herself so forcefully from mortals’ perception drained her, but she couldn’t afford the distractions today.

She’d arrived early, at least half an hour prior to their meeting, to ensure she would have the time she needed to organize her thoughts. Ever since Velvet’s call, she found herself facing a bit of a dilemma on what to do at such a critical juncture. On the one hand, she could appeal to the Faunus as she had countless others and secure a reliable source of energy for at least a few years. However, she’d yet to encounter this particular conundrum, where a temporary partner shared both a soul that appealed to her and a living space with one of her chosen. On top of all this, she’d found Blake, who always seemed to be one of the trickier ones when it came to rebuilding their connection. They were all difficult to find at first but winning them over… her beloved Dragon always seemed the most ready, even after all these years, and her sweet Thief remained the most difficult, so she supposed her situation could be much worse.

In the end, there remained no contest between any new connections and those she’d endured almost three thousand years just to spend a few more decades with, her chosen few so dear and precious to her. In the same vein, it would be rude to cut all contact with Velvet sans explanation, so she diligently waited, noting the top of the hour by the oversized clock on an adjacent building chiming out.
“Weiss?”

She allowed herself a small smile. “Had you asked, I would’ve gladly joined you at the cafe.”

She turned her head, watching as the Faunus approached with a cup in her hand. “You saw me, I assume?”

“No. Sensed you would be more accurate.” Weiss watched as she was joined at the fountain’s edge, noting the abundance of signs that her companion was nervous. “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

“I just… don’t understand why your voice sounds so different from the night we met… or how, I suppose.” Her brows furrowed. “It’s obviously your voice but it’s… not at the same time. Somehow.”

“Ah. Well, simply put, neither of us is in the mood for liaisons of that nature.” She smiled wider. “Besides, you are immune to my tricks by this point. Those with souls like yours… I can capture you attention and appeal to you the same as any other, but my sway erodes very quickly.”

Velvet’s expression pinched together, gaze darting up and down the deity’s form. “You look the same but sound different- so your powers lie in your voice?”

“Yes,” she said, letting out a bitter chuckle. “Ironically, my ability to physically appear as the epitome of a mortal’s desires faded when they began claiming I only did so to consume the souls of men.” Her brows furrowed. “Which, frankly, is rather preposterous. I don’t like men, generally speaking.”

At that, the Faunus seemed to relax. “Then, when I first saw you and immediately wanted to introduce myself, before you started singing, that was all me?” She nodded. “Good.”

“I’m glad you find me so attractive.” They both laughed lightly. “All I truly did was encourage your inclinations. Provided additional motivation, one might say.”

“I tried telling Blake that,” Velvet replied, a frown touching her lips. “She seemed convinced you were just using me, that it wasn’t mutual.” Brown eyes turned to her. “She was… extremely adamant.”

“Don’t hold it against her. She has every right to be wary of me.” She reached out, covering the Faunus’ hand with her own- a comforting gesture, she hoped. “Blake and I have a history going back several millennia. In a lot of ways, she’s overwhelmed right now, processing half remembered emotions on her own. In time, she’ll decide to confront me or forget me, and I’ll have to live with that, but it’s her choice. Let her make it.”

“You make it seem so… final.” She looked away for a moment. “I… guess you’ve just gotten used to it after, what, three thousand years?”

“Over three thousand years and six amazing people.” A sigh slipped out as her expression fell, her gaze diverting to watch the dancing water. “I wish I could say it’s gotten easier each time. Unfortunately, it’s only more predictable with every iteration. Despite that, I’ve yet to find a sure fire way to regain those connections. It seems some new challenge arises every time I find one and… I am forced to do the best I can, the same as any mortal, and hope for the best. It’s my eternal punishment.”

Tears sprang to her eyes but she held them back through sheer force of will. In the spray, she could see a time long past, a small waterfall behind her temple where her chosen few would play in the summer. Laughter rang through the air, water splashed, and voices intertwined in mirth and light
admonishments alike—it didn’t matter that she personally preferred colder weather; the warm summer
days were some of her fondest memories.

“Weiss?” She blinked, pushing aside her recollections to focus on her present companion. “Do you
talk about them often?” Velvet shuffled a little closer. “I… don’t mean to pry if you don’t want to
talk about it but you seem like you could use a friend—someone to just listen.”

A wistful smile curled her lips. When necessity forced her to take partners to survive, she never
mentioned those she sought and they never asked. Those she’d chosen had lived through the
memories by her side; recalling them always required a careful approach, for there lurked pain
around every corner if they crashed recklessly down memory lane. Thus, the ancient deity had only
spoken of them aloud with the moon as her audience. She’d forsaken all other connections to her old
life so she could move freely through mortal society and her sister rarely wanted to delve too deep
into their halcyon days.

“I’d rather like that,” she said, standing up and offering a hand to Velvet. “Would you like to see
them as well?”

On the way back to her penthouse, Weiss told their stories. Her fondest memories, their own
explanations of life before coming to her temple, and the moments when she realized they were
special and dear to her, but she never used the names they bore back then. Too confusing, too
difficult for a mortal to keep track of, and she refrained from describing them in great detail for how
often those little traits changed, too. All but the eyes, where their souls sparkled and shone brighter
than the stars, and the names she gave them in her own mind to thread over a dozen lives together.

She spoke of her Nightowl first. Velvet thought it odd that Blake’s nickname had nothing to do with
her Faunus heritage—though that, too, changed from life to life—but, when viewed through a classical
lens, it made more sense. When she became the first of Weiss’ chosen, she would spend hours
composing poetry and chronicling the stories of every member of the pantheon, from Mother down
to the demigods who ran amok until they were crushed by Winter’s sword, and ultimately assembled
a considerable library. Within the temple, she became the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge—
and she burned more candles and oil than the rest of her attendants combined, staying up late and
sleeping in until midday. Apparently, Blake maintained the same sleep schedule on her days off,
something that brought a smile to Weiss’ lips.

Next came the Thief. A lonely orphan, forced to steal for survival—she crept into the temple seeking
valuables and goods one night, hoping to raid the offerings left for the goddess. Red eyes, wide with
terror when confronted by an angry deity trying to protect the only mortal who slept within the
temple’s walls—it made for a poor first impression. But her Nightowl calmed her and her Thief
possessed more than just the skills of her trade, falling to her knees and genuinely begging
forgiveness. She offered her talents in penance and decorated the temple’s walls with artwork, many
of which depicted either Weiss’ fury or her benevolence—warnings to others who might trespass in
her sacred home. After a time, the deity forgave her Thief and watched in slight fascination as the
two mortals inhabiting the temple grew closer. Her Nightowl taught her Thief to read and in return
she drew the scenes from poetry and history, whatever to accompany the library’s contents. When
given food and a proper bed, the woman saw fit to steal bits of their hearts and Weiss eventually took
her as a lover, giving her a permanent place in the temple as the avatar of earnest penance.

“Did they—uh, Nightowl and Thief… were they ever together?” Velvet cocked her head to the side
as they waited for a street light to change.

“Of course,” she replied, a smile on her lips. “None of my beloved chosen had want for company,
carnal or otherwise, by the end. They had me and each other, though each had their preferences, of
course, but they got along very well.” A laugh bubbled up as she shook her head fondly. “Though, it took some time, initially. They might have danced around each other for decades more were it not for my brave little Dragon.”

Her Dragon was a sight to behold, especially that first time she stepped into the temple. Bright and vibrant with smiling lilac eyes, she’d come from far away with all the strength of a warm summer storm crashing on a beach. Louder than the others, her sense of humor and adventure grated on the quieter Nightowl and Thief, but she’d come to the temple seeking something she’d lost: a sense of belonging. Behind her cheer lurked pain and, once she’d settled down some, her fierce loyalty and desire to help and protect won them over. She could build and craft—wood, metal, rock, the material didn’t matter—and constructed whatever was asked of her. Acclimated to her brash personality, the others began to bend as well, and laughter became commonplace. Her earnest devotion won Weiss over and her energy never faltered, enthusiasm only growing as she carved out her own spot within the temple and a place in the deity’s heart.

Then came perhaps the most… troublesome of her chosen, through virtually no fault of her own. Even considering the Thief’s introduction, the fourth to come to the temple seeking her had a difficult time finding her place among the others. With every addition to her temple thus far, Weiss’ popularity grew among mortals. She’d come to represent virtues they prized—wisdom, penance, loyalty—in addition to her longer held duties as keeper of elements and goddess of the harvest. However, taking the three mortals as lovers also gave her a reputation as a beacon of love, for she doted on her Nightowl, Thief, and Dragon often and any pilgrim to her temple could see that. Many tales circulated about how deeply she cared for her chosen, how all should aspire to obtain a love so pure, and the sort of boons she supposedly granted to those who endeavored to love as deeply.

When her sister—a deity of conflict and combat, war incarnate—became enraged at a slight paid her by a mortal tribe, Winter demanded they send their finest warrior to become a servant of the gods. Somehow, the message didn’t get relayed correctly, and Weiss found a woman marching into the temple and falling to her knees one chilly autumn day, swearing her allegiance a few months later. Her Gladiatrix, thinking her life now belonged to the deity of her choosing, had turned away from the combat she’d known all her life for the chance to serve one who encouraged love, something she’d longed for but never truly had during her time on the battlefield. Weiss couldn’t send her away, seeing the open honesty and brilliant hope shining in emerald eyes, and allowed her Gladiatrix to stay. She taught the others to fight and learned just as easily—she drank in their presence and reveled in a type of camaraderie that had been denied her for so long, being held up as a paragon of her people since she was very young. Among Weiss’ chosen, she was just as special as the others, and they crafted their own type of normal amid the scrolls and murals and benches. The deity came to adore her poise, which never seemed to diminish no matter how much she relaxed, and her Nightowl and Dragon took a liking to the warrior themselves, the Thief more content to remain companions rather than become lovers.

When Winter learned of the misunderstanding, however, she was furious.

“What did she do?” Rabbit ears twitched with concern as they stepping into the elevator together.

Weiss couldn’t help but laugh at the old memory. “Oh, I know my sister well enough. When she came to my temple seeking the mortal she’d demanded, I made an excuse of having to go find Gladiatrix in the fields and had Dragon entertain her in the meantime.” She lowered her voice, despite the two of them being the only occupants of the lift. “Two hours later, my sister had completely forgotten her anger. For all her fury, no one can stay mad around Dragon for long. She’s especially adept at lifting the moods of others and her laugh is absolutely infectious.”

“That’s it? She just… forgot?”
“Wars start and stop at the drop of a hat—sometimes, they’ve begun before anyone is even aware, and who you call friend one day could be foe the next, while a foe could be a friend when a greater threat appears. Such is the way of all conflict and my sister embodied that,” she said, sighing. “I let them talk for a few more hours before bringing Gladiatrix in and things worked themselves out from there. Winter couldn’t bear to upset Dragon by taking Gladiatrix away and admitted that her presence at my temple satisfied her demand.” She smiled. “I saw more of her after that—my sister, I mean. She came by to visit Dragon and eventually bedded her as well, which worked out well for the mortals of the time. Content and happy from her visits, my sister saw fit to leash the dogs of war, so to speak, and Remnant enjoyed a period of peace.”

Confusion splashed across Velvet’s face. “Wait, so Dragon… you and your sister, uh, shared her?”

“Yes. She always had so much energy—there were some nights, I don’t think she even tried to sleep, more content to sneak into bed chambers and entice each of us into a few hours of either love making or cuddling. I daresay she’s almost always the most amorous, the most adventurous, with the softest heart and too much love in it.” Weiss noted her companion’s raised brow and eventually remembered; some things struck mortals slightly differently than they did her. “I never intended for her to take my sister as a lover, of course, but it made them both happy. I couldn’t begrudge them that. And it’s not like the three of us were ever together in that sense; when Winter came to visit, we saw less of Dragon for a few days outside of meals and the occasional walk through the fields, but things returned to normal when Winter left. It worked for us.”

“I guess that makes sense.” She blinked as a thought occurred to her. “How long did all this take? I mean, the last time all of Remnant was at peace ended four thousand years ago, but it started… five?”

“Closer to six now, but you’re not wrong. I met Nightowl—Blake for the first time just over seven thousand years ago. Over the course of three thousand years, I met the others, when I and all the members of the pantheon were revered the world over in some form or another, when I had all my strength.” Weiss glanced up at the lights indicating the floors as they ascended. Sometimes, living at the very top had its downsides. “These precious souls— I couldn’t lose them, so I extended their lives so they could remain by my side, tied their souls to mine with the strings of fate. My Thief, Dragon, and Gladiatrix had no families to go back to and my Nightowl watched over hers from afar. Of them, she understood my pain best, the sort of agony immortality places upon the soul—especially a lonely one. Nightowl lived in the temple for almost four hundred years before Thief arrived.”

Velvet’s eyes went wide. “Wow.” She blinked rapidly, likely trying to process the information. “So when you say you two have history… you’re really not joking.”

“I’m really not.”

“And there were two more?”

Weiss smiled, though a touch bittersweet. Of the six, she spent the least time with her last two chosen but they had grown just as dear to her, and their entrances into her existence came with their own special brand of fanfare. She still vividly remembered the commotion caused when the Seamstress arrived.

By then, the deity had come to represent love and the arts, and the mortal traveled far to see the temple for herself. She hailed from some noble lineage but, upon encountering the temple’s inhabitants, forsook her birthright to remain. She saw the artworks on the walls, the craftsmanship in the furniture, the elegance in the written word, and the dedication in their blades—all of which impressed her and spoke to a deep seated desire to create. From the offerings brought by pilgrims who visited the temple, she pulled fabrics from all over the world and wove them outfits fit for every
occasion, each with their own distinctive flair. Chocolate eyes found every small detail and Weiss even procured threads and skins from her fellow deities to give her Seamstress, fascinated by the magic in her fingers and designs. Soon, she found her own place at the temple like all the others, and she combined her talents with theirs to create timeless masterpieces.

For the last of her chosen, though, the road to her temple had been the longest, and to her heart longer still. Another orphan, younger than her Thief, had come to the temple, seeking a home like her Dragon. Hearing the stories of a powerful deity who took mortals as lovers had enticed one abandoned by all others. She’d quite nearly sent the newcomer away on principle but the others begged her to show mercy. It didn’t make sense to her at first but she couldn’t deny them and she eventually came to admire how little her initial coldness seemed to bother him.

“Him?” Velvet’s ears perked, likely at her words and not the ding as they arrived at the penthouse.

“At first, he helped where he could. He organized books with Nightowl, he fetched paint for Thief, he worked the bellows and hauled lumber for Dragon, he cleaned gear and sharpened blades for Gladiatrix, he picked flowers to make into dye for Seamstress- whatever task her lovers gave him, he would comply, always with a smile on his lips, just so happy to have a place to call home. As the years passed, he remained a bright spot at the temple, with just as much energy as Dragon and a mischievous streak a mile long, grey eyes shining as he climbed every surface imaginable and used his tail to startle or tickle whoever passed too close to him. To this day, she believed he never expected anything different; he certainly never pursued any of them or even suggested things should change, even jokingly referring to himself as their big brother and laughing at the misnomer. He could’ve lived out all his days at the temple and died, content he’d lived among those who accepted him without question. But she saw the ways the others looked at him- first Nightowl and Dragon, then Thief and Gladiatrix, and even Seamstress glanced a time or two- and she told them they could do more if they so wished. She loved them, all of them, and wouldn’t begrudge them this; they shared her and each other. What was one more? Her smiling Jester had earned his spot among them, for she did love him as dearly as the others. When she finally took him as a lover as well, she realized that the differences in their anatomies didn’t overpower the light in his soul, the same light that existed in her other lovers.

“We found a balance after that,” she said, leading the way up to the second floor of her penthouse and stopping in front of a locked room. Every security measure known to mortals and enough of her residual strength went into protecting the contents from any and all intruders and she carefully undid each one. “For a millennium, the seven of us lived in the temple together, and our days and nights were filled with joy. Sometimes, my sister would visit, and we’d all sup together- we knew true peace. We were friends, family, and we indulged our passions without restraint.” The door unlocked after she input the last code and slid aside. “They were good times.” Before stepping inside, she paused, a slight frown coming to her lips. “Oh, and there was also Myrtenaster but… I’d rather not speak of him.”

“Bad memories?” The Faunus’ brow pinched in concern but she waved it off, not wanting to delay any longer.

“Yes and no- it’s a much longer story for another time. Right now, I have a question.” Weiss watched her companion’s face, trying not to betray the hope rising in her heart. “With each name, each story… did you suddenly think of someone you know? Someone with the same eyes as I described?”
Velvet’s expression conveyed her surprise. “Well… yeah, now that you mention it. How did you know?”

“There’s no cause for alarm.” She smiled, trying to keep the expression small but feeling the hope bolster all the same. "My chosen are drawn to each other. When I took them as lovers, I bound them to me with strings of fate, prolonging their lives.” Her gaze dropped as the memories began to creep at the edges of her mind. “When I lost them, I bound them to each other instead, fating their lives to be intertwined, that they might find their lost family and have the support they deserved if I couldn’t find them in time. They are drawn to each other because of this and it seems you’ve landed among them.”

Without further ado, she led the way into the room, allowing the Faunus to follow at her own pace. She waited for the shocked gasp to turn into muttered wonder before steeling her nerves and looking around herself. In the years after she lost them, the deity had collected every painting, every sculpture, every depiction of her lovers that remained in the world. Most days, she couldn’t bear to look at them, especially during the lifetimes when their appearances deviated from her memories. It pained her now but she had to know, even as her gaze fell on the painting of Blake in her library, pouring over a stone tablet with a candle softly lighting the scene.- she had to know how close they would be to her memories this time.

“I’ve told you the names I have for them,” she said, pausing briefly to brace herself for the answers. “What do you call them?”

Velvet looked at the portrait of Blake, the spitting image of the Faunus she lived with, and nodded. “Well, that’s Blake.” She looked at the one depicting the Thief, brush in hand as she contemplated a half finished mural- one of the rare times her Nightowl and Seamstress joined forces to produce something truly beautiful. “That’s Emerald.” Next, her Dragon, bent over her work bench with the setting sun catching in her hair. “Yang.” The Gladiatrix, spear in hand and shield raised. “Pyrrha.” The Seamstress at her loom. “Coco.” Finally, her Jester, in the garden with his wide smile. “And Sun.”

“… six for six.” Tears pricked at her eyes. “That’s only happened once before. Do they- do they look like their portraits?”

Velvet nodded slowly. “Exactly like them.”

Her knees nearly buckled as she clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle the sob that burst from her chest, tears slipping out to roll down her cheeks. That hadn’t happened before- the one time they had their old names, they looked different, just enough details off to make the decades bittersweet. She’d waited and hoped for this day to come but could hardly believe it.

“I’ve found them. I’ve finally found them.”
Past and Present

It took her some time to recover, deep breaths helping to ease the turmoil in her chest. Velvet immediately came to her side, offering a comforting touch and soothing words—though they brought with them a bittersweet sort of pain as well. She spoke of the six she knew, friends she’d had for a while now.

They all lived in the city and remained close friends after college, often meeting at one residence or another for a shared meal or movie or just to talk. She’d only been formally inducted into the friend group during their senior year, with the others sharing ties going as far back as kindergarten, but she’d quickly bonded with all of them. They were staunch friends who sometimes felt more like a family, which made things easier for the rabbit Faunus who’d moved to Vale from Menagerie. Sun and Pyrrha understood her plight, hailing from Vacuo and Mistral respectively, while Blake and Emerald seemed to have bounced around before finding Yang and Sun here in Vale. Coco and Yang were somewhat local, with the former having family out west near the border and the latter’s lived just a few miles up the coast.

Weiss honestly couldn’t be happier.

After she regained the ability to speak, calming her tears for the meantime, the deity showed her guest around, allowing her to marvel over art no one except her had seen in thousands of years.

“I studied photography in college but I recognize all these pieces from my art history class.” She frowned, ears falling slightly. “Except…”

“They don’t look exactly the same.” Weiss nodded, reaching out to touch the gilded frame on one of the paintings. It showed Thief’s—Emerald’s, oh, how she’d missed the sound of her name, even in the privacy of her own head—first encounter with the ancient deity. In her fury, a cascade of white light radiated from Weiss’ form, with her precious Nightowl just a few steps behind, watching the groveling mortal with curiosity, ears flicked forward. “I had my Thief recreate them, changing the appearances of my chosen and even myself a time or two. I keep the originals here and have destroyed all copies; a tedious task but… I had time.” She sighed, allowing her arm to drop. “I had to divert suspicions.”

“I don’t think anyone would see a classical painting resemble someone they know and jump to the conclusion of deity aided reincarnation,” Velvet said, lips curled in amusement, but the chuckle died in her throat upon seeing the seriousness in the deity’s expression.

She knew better. “You’d be surprised. I remember when mortals thought physical deformities were the sign of witchcraft; when silver eyes meant terrible power; when freckles were signs of sin. Mortals are funny creatures, when left to tell their own stories.” A frown touched her lips. “I also have to consider there are others like me—fallen deities who could try to harness my power to reclaim their former glory.”

“They can do that?” Any lightheartedness was swiftly replaced by concern, brows pinching together in worry.

Her lips pressed into a tight line. “I don’t know. But I know there are times when I feel almost as powerful as I used to be, like with the six of them by my side I can be as strong as I was before I met Blake that first time. I had many names then and only a handful of consistent depictions—enough to make me a true deity, to bend the world to my whim.” She moved on to another picture, depicting a hunt lead by her Gladiatrix with Dragon not far behind, the others following in various states of
interest. The thrill always appeal to the first two more than the others, though her Thief and Jester rather liked the physical exertion if nothing else. “I’ve little idea what could restore one like me or if it’s even possible… but I wouldn’t put it past half my pantheon to try, so I must protect them.”

Velvet leaned closer to a bust of her beloved Seamstress, muttering something about glasses before sighing. “What about you?”

“Pardon?”

“Could you restore yourself?” She gestured to a few more paintings- these obviously made centuries after the initial batch, cataloging their reunions and individual adventures through history. Her Gladiatrix standing in defense of Haven during the Great War, Nightowl rallying humans and Faunus alike during the Azul City Revolution, Dragon proudly posing with Remnant’s first suspension bridge behind her, Thief’s mugshot on a stylized wanted poster from an exhibition during the resurgence of noir media, Jester leading a caravan across desert dunes, and Seamstress dressing some noble in the fashion of the times. They looked different those times- hair color, skin tone, scars and the like, sometimes taller or shorter, and Weiss recalled each iteration vividly- but they were still her chosen. “If they-”

“No!” She snapped, anger and fear lending power to her voice, before smoothing out her expression a moment later. “No, I- I won’t do that. The cost would be far too high.” Shining blue eyes fell on a painting of them out in the field behind the temple, beneath the shade of the tree that stood at the edge of their garden. “I’d lose them forever… I can’t bear that.”

Silence echoed in the room, only broken by Velvet’s soft footsteps.

“So you… hide their identities in classical works, hide among mortals yourself, and hope you can find them again, thinking they might reject you…” She paused, obviously putting the pieces together. “They have before… haven’t they?”

“More than once,” she said, doing her best to keep her tears in check. “By the time I found them, sometimes… they had lives- happy ones. They’d settled down for love or necessity; sometimes, they clung to each other in pairs, doing what they could to make the best of a cruel world. They didn’t want to risk uncertainty, so they turned me away, and I understood. I watched over them from afar.” Weiss sighed. “Other times… I just… found them too late.”

“Why?” The Faunus shook her head. “Why keep putting yourself through this?”

“I love them, Velvet.” She smiled, a sad and broken thing with her eyes still shining wet with tears. “For all the pain and loneliness I endure, just one moment more with them… it’s worth it.”

She truly believed that. At the end of each day, it’s what motivated her to face the next one, to continue walking down this endless road rife with agony she could hardly articulate. Just one more moment, one more smile, one more laugh, one more kiss from their lips- she would keep going until the sun turned to dust.

Suddenly, she found arms wrapping around her, a light embrace that eased the turmoil within all too easily, loosened her tongue enough for the words to flow.

“There are times though… when I wonder if I should resign.” She closed her eyes and tried with all her might to keep her voice steady. “If I allowed myself to fade away entirely, what remains of my power would strengthen their bonds. They’ll find each other earlier in their lives and, together, they will find the happiness they deserve.” A shuddering breath. “That’s all I want for them.”
“But then they wouldn’t have you.” The Faunus squeezed her a little tighter. “It sounds like you make them happy; they’ve chosen you before and they will again.”

“Maybe.” She muttered, pulling away just enough to look into umber eyes. It still hurt, because she could see the soul shining bright, calling to her, looking to ease her distress as the others had… but she couldn’t indulge more than she had already. “I bring them pain, too. Just look at Blake.”

A sigh slipped past her lips as she turned away, leading Velvet further into the room, to the very last painting at the back of it. Unlike all the others, this one her Thief painted many centuries after the fact, plagued by nightmares of the night the temple fell. Flames burst from between blackened columns, stone crumbled along the foundation, and thick smoke obscured all but the bright red of the soldiers’ eyes as they marched up the steps and desecrated their home.

"Wait, I know this one. I did a paper on it.” The Faunus leaned closer to inspect it, noting every little inconsistency with a keen gaze. “This is ‘Fall of Maiden Temple’ based on the old legends describing the sacking of Tempir. The army of King Sidom swept across Mantle, destroying effigies of ancient gods and ransacking places of worship so he could install himself as a God King. By all accounts…” She paused, the pieces falling together. “That was three thousand years ago.”

Absent of every other recreation were the two figures lying in pools of blood in the courtyard of the temple- partially blurred and obscured by smoke and the boots of soldiers as spears were thrust down into prone bodies, unable to defend themselves. Further up the steps, another lay with a sword imbedded in his gut, and more beyond.

“Yes.” Weiss swallowed thickly. “These are the memories I bring back. I’ll never forget the night I failed them; seeing me reminds them of that. I failed to protect them. I did this.” Thousands of years’ of guilt fell heavily on her shoulders, but she stood tall. She brought this upon them all; the least she could do was own up to her terrible failures. “Each time they choose to stand beside me again, they forgive me this, my greatest transgression… but I’ve yet to forgive myself.”

She turned away in shame, her mind playing tricks on her and lending movement to the flames. Moments like these, she felt her weakest, the agony of being without her lovers compounded by the memories lodged deep in her soul, her final moments with each of them mired in sorrow and regret. She should’ve given her life to protect them, not the other way around.

“Do you tell them this every time?” Velvet kept her voice soft, falling into step behind the deity as she made a hasty retreat from the room.

“No.” She shook her head, closing the door quickly and setting the locks, as if such physical means could ever hide away the memories, the guilt and sorrow, the pain and rage. “When the memories come, I let them vent, let them process in their own time, and let them decide to move on, which they always do. After suffering through the vague memories of their first death, they usually want to focus on happier times. I keep all this to myself… until now.” Blue eyes slid to the Faunus and she could tell by the worry shining in her eyes and evident in her expression that she’d drained herself by dwelling on the night her temple fell. A little rest would recharge her; unlike the wear of weathering centuries alone, this loss of strength came from resisting the inclinations inherent to all her kind, the urge to exact harsh punishments against those who wronged her tempered by the futility of the gesture. Beyond that, Velvet had no recollections to draw upon and no duty to share in the memories, and another pang of regret stabbed at her heart. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have burdened you with this.”

“Weiss, it’s not a burden.” She paused, then shrugged. “Okay, it is a burden, but the sort you’re supposed to share. Everyone needs a friend.” She smiled, ears perking. “And maybe I can help make this right. I could call everyone together for a party, introduce you to them again. I’m sure
I can talk Blake into it."

“That won’t be necessary; in time, Blake will make her decision,” the deity said, drawing herself up and offering a polite smile. “I’ve been through this before. I must merely wait.”

Weiss started for the door, ready to escort her guest out; she couldn’t imagine Velvet would want to stay bear witness to more. Or, perhaps, she didn’t trust herself to keep it all locked away, for it wouldn’t be the first time secrets were coaxed from her lips. She’d always been so weak to those whose souls appealed to her, one of the many failings she possessed. Sometimes, she wondered why Mother stood to make such an imperfect creation, but, then again, weren’t they all?

Halfway down the stairs, she turned back, aware she was no longer being followed and curious as to what had drawn the Faunus’ attention. Instantly, she recognized the glint in Velvet’s eyes, determination coupled with compassion, and she’d seen it in too many shades to mistake it now.

“What were the first words you said to Blake when you were in our apartment?”

A frown touched her lips- yet another bittersweet memory. “I asked her ‘do you believe in destiny’, it’s-”

“Here’s the thing, Weiss,” she said firmly, not wavering in the slightest as she stood at the top of the stairs. “I really didn’t before I met you. But it’s hard to argue with what I’m seeing and I don’t think it’s just a coincidence that you came to the park that night or that I already know everyone you’ve been looking for, that I live with one of them.” Velvet looked around, noting that very little outside the locked room indicated much about the person who dwelt within the penthouse. So instead, she turned to point back down the hall, towards the room they’d just left. “I don’t have, what, seven millennia of memories to sift through, trying to find the right path.” She then pointed down, at the space between her feet. “I only have the here and now. And from where I’m standing?” Her brows pinched together. “There’s an obvious way to approach this and it seems to be the best solution. Let me talk to Blake and the others. Just… see if I can get all of them together to meet you.”

Weiss sighed, sensing already her odds. “I’ll not talk you out of this, will I?”

“You can try.” Velvet crossed her arms over her chest, shifting her weight to one foot. “I mean, you’ll fail, but you can try, if it makes you feel better.”

“Very well,” she said, conceeding the fight a bit too readily. The chance to be among them again-immortal she may be, but she had her weaknesses the same as any mortal. Six of them, to be precise. Then again, were it any other making the offer, she might still be able to resist… but not Velvet, with her bright soul shining in her eyes. “But I would appreciate it if you didn’t bring up what I’ve told you here today or try to push Blake one way or another. It’s her decision and I will respect that. I expect you to do the same.”

After a moment, rabbit ears twitched. “Okay, fair. It’s not my story to tell.” At the deity’s continued stare, she rolled her eyes. “And I won’t twist Blake’s arm.”

“That doesn’t sound very convincing.”

“Look, I think we can both agree she has her… stubborn streaks. All of them do.” The Faunus began descending the stairs, moving her hands in vague gestures. “But I have the benefit of not remembering a damn thing. I’ll ground Blake in the present and presently? You’ve gone through hell and high water to just spend a little time with her where she isn’t figuratively tearing your throat out. The least she can do is humor us both.”
“You’ve certainly come around quickly.” Her lips lifted into a small smile. “I’d imagined telling someone a time or two before- sharing my grief with a mortal. I never imagined they’d believe me, though.”

“Guess I’m different in a few ways, huh?” Velvet smiled, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder. “But, honestly, between what Blake told me of your explanation and what you’ve said thus far, I can at least trust that you’re being honest, and all those paintings are hard to argue with- especially because I’m pretty good at spotting forgeries.” Her expression turned a bit more somber. “I get the feeling there’s more you’re not telling me, though.”

“Much like with the others, too much too soon can overburden even the most accepting soul.” The deity stopped at the landing. “I do hope we can continue talking after everything’s settled with the others.”

“Will you ever tell me the rest of the story? About Myrtenaster and who you were before Blake? The past seven thousand years are pretty well accounted for but what about before that? And-”

“Answers in due time,” she replied with a chuckle, accepting the little, sheepish smile and nodding towards the kitchen. “Would you like some lunch before you go?”

One ear flicked as a smarmy smirk claimed her lips. “I think there’s a legend or two cautioning against sharing a meal with a goddess.”

“Lucky for you, I’m a deposed one, so it’s not nearly so dire a concern.” They both laughed, her offer accepted as they started towards the kitchen. “And thank you, Velvet. For helping me with… all this.”

“Hey, what are friends for?” She smiled, and Weiss could already feel another piece of her heart beginning to break off. “Are we going to have another one of Blake’s favorites?”

She raised a brow, feigning ignorance. “Whatever do you mean?” The look she received, however, encouraged her to drop that act rather quick. “I’d hoped it wasn’t quite that obvious.”

“Well, sure, not to the average person looking for neat recipes,” Velvet said, a smile tugging at her lips. “But aside from the fact you literally named the tabs after them, I’ve known Blake for a while now. When I recognized some of the entries, I kinda figured you’d pointed me at something… special.” Shrugging her shoulders, she let out a little chuckle. “And I mean, it’s exciting, in a way.”

“How so?” They stepped into the kitchen together- an area of the penthouse she rarely entered, unless struck by a particularly strong bout of nostalgia.

“There are times we’ve been out before, like at a restaurant, and she’ll order something.” The Faunus leaned back against one counter, reminiscing with a grin. “She’ll be excited until it comes, and then her expression kinda… drops.” Despite the sour turn of her recounting, Velvet seemed rather giddy about it. “We’ll always ask her if she’s okay and she just brushes it off. Says ‘I thought it would taste different’ or something, because it is good, and now I know why.” Her hands moved with every word as her smile grew. “It’s these memories- the times she’s eaten this stuff before the recipe changed, or a certain ingredient became more popular. She’ll still order them, still eat them, but it’s like she’s always known something’s missing or off. And now? I know!” She shook her head a little. “You even included cooking instructions- no one thinks to prepare suya using the old religious methods anymore!”

Unbidden, the smell of cooking meat and burning wood filled her nose, called forth by a memory, and she could hear laughter in her ears and feel at least one set of arms around her waist. “It certainly
changes the taste, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah.” A brief pause. “Watching Blake’s face light up, having finally found the taste she’s been expecting…” Her ears drooped. “I… kinda feel bad, now that I think about it, depriving you of that.”

“It’s quite alright.” She went to the pantry, possessed by a mission. “Did you enjoy the meal as well?”

“Yeah… are you sure-”

“Velvet,” she said, turning a smile towards her guest. “It’s fine. I’m sure you noticed how long the Nightowl tab is; there’s more opportunities ahead. I make it a point to treat them like the royalty when I find them- I cook all their old favorites, bring back dishes the whole world’s forgotten.”

Weiss tried to focus on assembling the ingredients but felt her resolve weakening, turning to look at her guest. “But I do wonder… when she catches wind of something she particularly likes, sometimes her ears will… do this thing-”

“Oh, you mean this?” Although longer, her rabbit ears twitched in a peculiar pattern. “Yeah, she does that.”

Despite the inherent differences, she found her heart fluttering all the same. “I’m glad.” Shaking her head slightly, she focused on the task at hand, cataloging what she had readily available and mentally going through the recipes to see what she might have to offer. “I look forward to seeing it again myself. But for now, perhaps you’ve noticed the others have similar reactions to certain foods?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it.” Velvet’s brows furrowed very slightly before she laughed. “Coco’s usually the loudest about it.”

“I suspect we both know why, now don’t we?” She motioned to one of the cupboards. “Grab the skillet and saucepan from there. Let me show you what she remembers.”

The kitchen came alive with the sounds of cooking- an activity she didn’t do near as often without her beloveds present. Velvet turned out to not only be a great helper but attentive to the process as well, asking little questions about the benefits of using a mortar and pestle versus store bought ground peppers and the like. All in all, a nice afternoon capped with a meal Velvet enjoyed enthusiastically, proclaiming something along the lines of ‘the universe finally makes sense’ and a promise to ‘cook more things with wine’, though it would likely be difficult for her to find bottles as old as Weiss had readily on hand.

It remained one of those bittersweet things that her existence brought, made all the easier to bear when a smile flashed her way. It wasn’t one of the ones she’d longed for… but that didn’t bother her in the slightest.

Three days.

Weiss tried to not count each second but felt too restless. Never before had she entrusted her secrets in such a manner, not since she’d lost her chosen. The ones she took to pass the centuries rarely called to her the way they had, the familiar thrum of a compatible soul rare enough that she didn’t want to sully the years with her ever present regret. She feigned happiness and that seemed to pacify her temporary partners, if she deigned to care about their opinions at all.

However, after three days, she began to worry. Did they begrudge her using another to bring them together? Velvet promised she wouldn’t mention their previous lives though. Perhaps Blake had?
When her scroll rang, it quite nearly gave her a heart attack, anxiety spiking rather suddenly as she saw the name flashing on the screen.

The Reckoning had come.

"Hello?" She did her best to sound composed as she answered, nervously picking at the hem of her blouse.

"Hey Weiss! Sorry it took so long. Someone wanted to be difficult." Velvet seemed in high spirits, a teasing lilt to her tone.

"There’s a difference between ‘difficult’ and ‘cautious’," Blake said, her voice raised as if yelling from another room.

"Whatever you say, Bookworm!" The rabbit Faunus laughed, bringing a small smile to the deity’s lips. “Anyway, I know it’s short notice, but everyone’s coming over to the apartment tonight. Wanna join us?"

Blue eyes flicked to her bed, where she’d laid out an appropriate outfit after seeing her guest down to the lobby the other day. She’d thought it foolish at the time- wishful thinking and it did nothing to settle her nerves- but perhaps the spontaneity had remained intact, too. Her beloveds were always prone to last minute decisions. “I would love to.”

“Great! Do you remember how to get to my apartment?”

“Yes.”

“Perfect! Swing by, let’s say, around seven?” Velvet lowered her voice. “Everyone else will be here around six thirty; I think it’ll be easier if you only have to go through the whole explanation once.”

“That’s considerate of you. Thank you.” More words sat on her tongue but she refrained, by the barest margins.

“Blake’s looking forward to seeing you again, by the way.” Weiss felt her heart stutter. “I think she’s starting to remember more. She asked me about going to the library the other day. I think she misses the smell of books.”

She couldn’t help but blurt out the first thing that came to mind. “Should I bring one of her old ones? I still have her original collection. Most of it, anyway.”

Silence followed her words and the deity cursed her impatience, more than aware how terribly reckless she became when so close to reuniting with her lovers. The thought occurred to her every time yet she always decided against it, feeling as though it would do more harm than good. She’d just never spoken it aloud before, not to someone capable of responding anyway.

“Actually, I think she’d love that.”

“… you do?”

“Yeah!” Velvet’s smile could be easily heard across the line. “I think something from her past might help make these memories seem more real, more tangible. Bring one from the early days if you have it; it might remind her why she decided to stay with you at the temple.” She paused, humming. “But, if you do bring a book for her, maybe you should bring something for the others as well? It might give them something to focus on while they remember; a grounding rod to a particularly strong memory.”
She blinked. Bringing them something from their past had occurred to her but choosing an item specifically for its importance hadn’t; she usually considered something they especially liked, not something from a shared memory.

“That… actually sounds like a wonderful idea.” Blue eyes darted towards the hallway. “It may take me some time to choose what I’ll bring. There are… so many choices.”

“Do you need any help carrying them over?”

“No.” Her mind raced with possibilities. “Thank you, Velvet, but I’ll keep my physical limitations in mind.”

“I dunno, seeing you waltz through the door with a work bench over one shoulder would be entertaining.” The Faunus chuckled. “But seriously, you can thank me if this all works out. I’ll see you later, okay?”

After bidding Velvet goodbye, Weiss hung up, hardly able to process how quickly things had progressed. Usually, she’d still be working to get the first one she found to remember, to trust her, but now she’d have all six together again.

Quickly, she got to her feet and hurried to the secured room, excitement hastening her steps. She already had ideas for what to bring and only a few hours to be ready.

Music and laughter drifted down from an open window as Weiss waited for seven o’clock to roll around. Her eagerness had gotten the better of her and she’d arrived fifteen minutes early with a bag slung over her shoulder. As people passed, they gave her odd looks and she could hardly fault them; if it bothered her, she could always hide herself away, but she didn’t want that. Weiss wanted all the world to know that tonight, she would have a chance to reclaim those whom she’d lost so long ago, and so many times since. For such an auspicious evening, she would not hide herself away, and would soak up the curiosity just as easily as any other attention paid her.

The ancient deity wore her best silk for the occasion, the white fabric folded and pinned in place by hand crafted broaches bear their marks. When she sat on the throne in her temple to hear the plights of mortals, she wore this very ensemble while surrounded by her lovers. An ivory crown etched with snowflakes pressing against her temples, her Gladiatrix and Dragon at her shoulders, her Seamstress and Jester at her hips, her Thief’s emblem high on her belly and her Nightowl in the center of her chest, a mimicry of the stars that constituted her constellation in the night sky, given new meaning—she truly looked like one befitting her power, the honor and respect conferred upon the pantheon her very birthright. In those days, her eyes never dulled, always shining so bright from the adulation of thousands the world over and multiplied by those she’d chosen to keep beside her through the centuries, and none dared question her divinity.

Now, more often than not, some brave soul would muster the courage to ask if she’d hand made the ‘costume’ or if it was story bought, or snort derisively that she’d be late to her ‘dumb party’ when she deigned to not acknowledge their presence at all.

Weiss checked her scroll, still a minute shy but unable to wait any longer, and ascended the stairs, standing before the door with her heart thudding in her chest. She should give it a few more minutes, to not seem so eager—she’d scared her beloveds quite badly by showing her emotions too quickly in the past and she didn’t want to repeat the mistake.

The test of her resolve came to an abrupt end, however, when the door opened.
“Blake.” The name left her lips like a prayer, confronted with the Faunus giving her a soft smile that melted her heart every single time.

“You’ve always been a stickler for punctuality, if I recall right,” she said, a rueful lilt to her voice. “I think, anyway.” Amber eyes gave her a quick once over, ears twitching slightly. “I… can’t tell if your outfit surprises me or not.”

“I wanted to impress.” Weiss offered a smile, unable to keep herself from drinking in every little detail. Blake and purple dominated Blake’s attire, which seemed rather fitting; the deity had ensured her Nightowl had access to nothing short of the best clothing in her preferred colors, the dark fabrics blending into her midnight hair while the traditionally royal purple affirmed her status at the deity’s side and brought out her eyes all the more. However, she had to admit: black leather with a purple top, while not the most refined ensemble, definitely looked good on her. “I suppose I’m a bit out of date, though.”

Blake flashed her a smile. “Actually, I think you’re rather timeless.” She coughed into her hand, a blush just beginning to rise in her cheeks as the Faunus averted her gaze, missing Weiss’ fond smile entirely. “Anyway, I wanted to be the one to meet you at the door. I… wanted to say… I’m sorry.”

“That’s hardly necessary; this time-”

“No.” She shook her head and waved off the words with a cringe. “I mean, I do feel bad about kicking you out before, but the more I started to… remember…” She glanced at the deity, making eye contact briefly before a sigh escaped her lips, ears laying back atop her head. “For some reason, I kept feeling like I owed you an apology for something but, every time I tried before, you would stop me.” One hand came up to rub at her arm, a long held, self conscious gesture. “I think you know why I want to apologize better than I do. Right now, anyway. Velvet said that everything would make more sense once you talked to us. So. When I remember, I’ll probably try again, but until then, at least I’ve said it.”

Weiss chuckled, ducking her head to buy herself time as she marshaled her thoughts. “I can’t believe I forgot how sneaky you could be, catching me before I’ve even had the chance to raise my guard.”

“If I remember right, it’s one of the things you love about me.”

She paused, looking back up and slowly shaking her head. Although something she would expect in a few years, when her memories were entirely restored and their bond repaired, to hear it so soon, with no hint of insincerity or uncertainty…

“… how?”

Blake looked uncomfortable for a moment before averting her gaze again. “I guess it seems… weird to you. But… it’s weird to me, too.” She raised a hand, rubbing at her temple. “I have… so many images in my head, disjointed from emotions, and I can remember each one, but I can’t… it’s like there’s movies in my head, but the scenes are jumbled.” She looked up, meeting Weiss’ gaze with a pleading expression. “Velvet helped me make sense of some of it. Made some of the pieces fit together- it’s not enough, but it makes me feel like there’s… some truth in your words, in these… memories.” She shrugged, ears lifting slightly- a sign of hope. “I want to hear you out. I want to make sense of it.”

With a nod, the deity smiled. “Thank you.”

“Thank Velvet.” The Faunus puffed out a brief laugh. “She’s… always been scary good at talking some sense into me.” Her shoulders relaxed a little. “She’s… not the only one. But I think you know
that already."

“I do.”

Blake turned, pushing the door open a bit more. “Would you like to come in and meet the others… again?”

“More than anything.” she replied, entering the apartment again and able to hear quiet chatter amid music coming from the living room, voices she hadn’t heard in far too long reaching her ears. “How much did Velvet tell you?”

“It was less ‘telling’ and more ‘confirming’, putting things in order.” The Faunus frowned, brows pinching together. “This is going to be a shock to everyone, isn’t it?”

Weiss reached out, gently laying a hand on Blake’s arm. “It will pass swiftly. I promise.” Her expression turned contrite. “I’m afraid of everyone, your reaction is always the worst. That’s my fault. Theirs will be easier.”

To her relief, a glimmer of her beloved Nightowl returned in the soft smile that answered her. “I trust you. And I get the feeling you’re being too hard on yourself.” She nodded towards the interior of the apartment. “Now, come on; I’ve kept you to myself long enough.”

Deep down, she laughed at that, allowing only a chuckle to break the surface, because she didn’t think Blake understood how vast an understatement that was, but it would come in time. Taking a brief moment to brace themselves, the two stepped beyond the foyer and into the living room, everyone’s attention sliding to them almost immediately. Blue eyes quickly scanned the all too familiar faces, her heart skipping a beat at how happy they all looked, enjoying each other’s company.

Curiously, she didn’t spot Velvet among them, but any question as to the rabbit Faunus’ whereabouts was silenced as the others spoke up.

“Oh, hey! Who’s your friend, Blake?” Yang called out from between Sun and Pyrrha on the couch, leaning forward slightly to get a better look. Then a spark ignited in those lilac eyes as she tilted her head. “Wait, you look familiar- have we met before?”

“Wow, Xiao Long, not even thirty seconds,” Coco said with a drawl, sitting on the adjacent loveseat with Emerald. However, a furrow came to her brows followed by the lowering of her shades prevented further teasing, chocolate orbs flicking over her frame. “But you might be right for once.”

“Maybe we shared a class together?” Emerald offered, glancing at the others before returning her gaze to Weiss, throwing a remote of some sort at Sun, whose mouth was hanging wide open in shock.

He fumbled with it but shut off the music all the same, going right back to staring the moment he’d complied with the unspoken request.

“Sorry!” Pyrrha’s apologetic smile said it all as she made a small gesture with her hands. “It seems we’re all having the same issues. Would you mind jogging our memories?”

“Of course,” she replied, unable to keep from smiling at the phrasing. “Do you believe in destiny?”
Weiss watched as their eyes briefly glazed over, shoulders jumping as the memories began to flood-the same reaction Blake had, at least at first. But they differed from there, for where she had faced the torrent alone, the others could quickly turn to exchange glances with each other, confirming they’d all just relieved the same moments, at least in part. Wordless gestures answered with incredulous nods- where Blake had only the swirling images and emotions whirling through her head, they had the sense of scope that came with their memories, with the fact others could verify them. She’d asked, once, what they saw and each answered the same: their first life, starting at just moments before their death and working backwards to whenever they first met Weiss, with little glimmers of their lives before the temple and the ones in between. It was why Blake and Emerald were the hardest to find first, their earliest memories of the deity steeped in fear and skepticism, while the others met her with a smile and hope in their hearts.

Weiss set her bag down and braced herself while Blake gave her a curious look. Before any question could leave her lips, Yang shot to her feet.

“Weiss!” The blonde barreled forward, sweeping her up in a tight embrace while laughing. “It’s you! It’s really you!” In the next moment, her feet left the floor as she was spun around, and tears pricked at her eyes; her beloved Dragon, as eager and strong, was finally in her arms again- or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say the other way around. “You found us! Just like you said you would!”

Before she could be set down, another pair of strong arms wrapped around her as she was transferred from one blonde to another. “Oh, it’s so good to see you again! Did you miss us?” She looked over her shoulder to see Sun beaming down at her, his tail curling and uncurling behind him in excitement as grey eyes sparkled. “You missed us, didn’t you? It’s okay; you can say it.”

“Would you two give our wonderful goddess some breathing room?” Coco put a hand on the blondes’ shoulders, lightly shoving the two away as Weiss regained her feet. She didn’t have much time to revel in her freedom, though, as the woman quickly embraced her, a small smile on her lips. “I’m glad you found us.”

The words to express her delight hadn’t quite arranged themselves by the time Coco released her, allowing Weiss to be drawn backwards into another embrace, this time from Pyrrha, and everything became jumbled again as she realized even their heights were the same this time and oh how she’d missed the tall redhead’s chin resting atop her head.

“Welcome back.”

The deity could almost lose herself to joy as happy tears began making their way down her cheeks but she just barely refrained, turning her head to seek out her missing lover. Emerald had stood up with the others but didn’t approach- wouldn’t, not without an express invitation, not without something to show she was wanted. Some things never changed and it might’ve broken her heart if she didn’t know how to ease those fears. She held out a hand and beckoned her sweet Thief over, feeling Pyrrha slip away so they could wrap their arms around each other.

“This is real?” She whispered, hardly believing it- as always.

“It is,” Weiss replied, voice thick with emotion as she drew back to see the disbelief slowly leaving crimson eyes. “We’re together again.”
“Good.” Emerald chuckled, squeezing her tighter. “Your heart’s still the best thing I’ve ever stolen.”

The rush of affection froze for a moment as she quirked a brow, lips curling into a smirk. “Usually, you’ve grown out of that by now.”

“No, she still likes stealing shit,” Yang said, a slight edge to her voice as she pouted. “Like my bike keys.”

“Not my fault you make it easy.” She shifted enough to pull a key ring from her pocket and jingled them, prompting a curse from the other woman. “Besides, it’s not stealing if I give them back.”

“You’re actually going to give them back?” Blake raised a brow, crossing her arms over her stomach as her ears twitched- self conscious, worried by how easily the others seemed to accept the torrent of memories in contrast to her experience. “You usually wait an hour, at least.”

“Maybe she can really get Yang to work for them this time,” Coco said, the smooth, low tone of her voice conveying clearly what sort of ‘work’ she expected.

Almost instantly, a shock went through all of them and Weiss sighed, though she still had her smile firmly in place. The emotions always came out strongest, and memories containing strong and fervent ones were easy for them to recall in detail, the most prevalent of which involving all of them gathered like this being the joy, love, and contentment their combined presence granted. Yet, they invariably fell back into old patterns, deep bonds forged by love and expressed in lust, and old jokes rolled off unpracticed tongues far too easily. For a while after their reawakening, everything would be disconnected, emotions and memories and habits all lacking context breaking through, jumbled together.

Mentally, she had to hand it to Velvet. Doing this six times over could be both tedious and exhausting.

Slowly, Yang and Emerald turned away from a bewildered Coco to look at each other, both a little hesitant to make eye contact and breaking it almost immediately, the latter looking down at her feet while the former threw a scowl at the brunette.

“Since when do you make jokes like that?” She snapped out, a blush rising in her cheeks but little heat to her voice- Yang seemed every bit surprised by the words but not at all off put by the idea.

“I… don’t think I was joking,” she replied, confusion coloring her tone as she reached up to rub at her temple. “But I’m not sure why I said that, either.”

“There’s a few reasons,” Weiss said as a means of saving the three from trying to find and fit the pieces together themselves. “Right now, it’s difficult to parse, but easy to slip back into old habits and jokes. Akin to riding a bike, you can do so even though you don’t remember ever learning how; it’s burned deep and only now resurfacing. It’s… going to be a tad common throughout the next few days. Sometimes, it can take up to a year for you to easily explain the things you’ll do.” She smiled, remembering a time or two when that caused a fair bit of amusement, especially right around the time indoor plumbing started being a regular occurrence. “More importantly, I think, is that you’ve always thought Yang looks her prettiest when she begs.” The deity offered a little shrug, noting the way Pyrrha’s brows jumped, how Sun began smiling wide- how each of them, in their own way, intrinsically knew she spoke nothing but the truth. “It’s a sentiment the rest of us share, much to her immortal and insincere disappointment.”

“I’m- I’m not-” Blonde brows furrowed, an old objection trying to make its way out in a different language, because the last time they’d teased her about this particular issue came about seven
hundred years ago, when Remnense was undergoing yet another lexical drift.

Once again, she came to ease her beloved, with a soft smile and a teasing lilt to her voice. “Yang, my precious Dragon, you are most certainly what is now known as a ‘bottom’, though we all do enjoy your aggressive streaks.” Her lips pulled wider. “I believe the modern term is ‘service top’ in those instances, but I could be wrong.”

The woman’s face began heating up even more, lilac eyes darting around to the others. “N-no, I’m pretty sure that’s a ‘past me’ thing, I’m definitely a top, like- like a top, top. I mean, c’mon, I’m Yang Xiao Long. I’m no one’s sub!”

“Is that so?” Recognizing the challenge before her- having been through this particular pattern many times already- the deity wasted no time in tilting her chin up and curling her lips into a seductive smirk, half lidded eyes intently watching the woman fidgeting before her as she spoke. “You truly believe that?” All around her, breathing stopped as Yang couldn’t help but look at her, finding herself entirely entranced by glimmering blue eyes. But she didn’t dare use any portion of her strength to influence the woman’s sensibilities- didn’t want anything tainting this moment. “That if I were to ask, you wouldn’t submit?” She stalked towards the blonde, relishing the way her posture relaxed by degrees, stare unblinking as they fell effortlessly into an old game. “You would resist me?” By the time she stood in front of her Dragon, all the brash confidence had washed away, leaving the honest, yearning, sensitive woman behind, hungry and willing, arms hanging at her sides and awaiting the first command. “Let’s test that, shall we?” Weiss reached up, cupping her lover’s strong jaw and becoming emboldened by the way Yang leaned into her touch, eyes fluttering as she drew in a hissed breath. Putting just a touch of forcefulness into her voice, she pulled her hands back and gave her order. “On your knees.”

And in that moment, she was rewarded with exactly the reaction she anticipated. Without hesitation, her sweet, proud Dragon fell to her knees, their eyes not breaking contact until she landed in the perfect position to inch her head forward and nuzzle into the deity’s belly. Unbidden, strong arms encircled her slim waist, the embrace gentle and capable of being broken with just a word but Weiss had no intentions of doing that just yet. Instead, she laid her hands on Yang’s head, fingers threading through golden strands.

“Tell me, my little Dragon, my beloved Yang,” she said, tilting the woman’s head back until they could see each other’s eyes again, only for lilac to be hidden away in the next moment as she sank fully into Weiss’ touch. “Will you submit to me?”

“Yes,” she instantly replied. “I will.”

A smile curled her lips as she took a moment to sweep her gaze around the room. Blake and Emerald had drifted closer together, Pyrrha, Sun, and Coco doing the same, and all eyes watching with rapt attention, each looking like a sprinter awaiting the start of a race. Satisfied, and knowing all too well the danger of pressing forward, the deity leaned down and gave a soft kiss to Yang’s forehead.

“Good to see that’s settled.” She straightened up with a chuckle. “And, for the record, none of us have ever complained.”

“Maybe it’s time to keep that streak going, then.” Yang flashed her a crooked little grin, fingertips catching the hem of her robes and lifting it up just enough for the air to lightly nip at her ankles. “I do aim to please.”

The inclination to give in to the desire she could see beginning to rise in lilac eyes was tempting, as always, and oh how she’s missed the practiced touch of her lovers. The temptation thrummed through her very being, but she stepped back, breaking all contact between them and offering a small
smile. For a moment, her Dragon looked absolutely destroyed, tears beginning to form in her eyes as she reached out, shuffling forward on her knees.

“Stop, Yang. Trust me,” she said, expression pinching into one of contrition. “I know you feel like we can simply pick up right where we left off but that won’t work out well. We’ve tried.” Weiss looked at the others, catching their mirrored looks of disappointment. “It will only be a matter of time until a word or touch reminds you that, hardly thirty minutes ago, you didn’t even remember I existed.”

That effectively snapped everyone out of their melancholy, cheeks turning red as the memories of their past lives receded, the one they were currently living suddenly brought to the fore. Her gaze fell on Yang last, noting the sheepish hunch to her shoulders.

“Yeah, I, uh… right, you- you have a point. I guess.” She chuckled, scratching at the back of her head. “I’m usually not that, um… gung ho. I- I mean, I am, but not-“

“I know. I remember; you’ve always been affectionate, but liaisons of a more… intimate nature took time.” Weiss smiled sweetly, tilting her precious Dragon’s face up. “It’s completely understandable. When we all reunite for the first time in so long, old habits are difficult to resist. If it wasn’t addressed now…”

She allowed the words to die in her throat, not wanting to dwell on that reunion too much, where once again her own foolish actions had caused them all terrible pain.

“Will we ever be like that again?” Sun’s brows knit together as he tried to discreetly adjust the waistline of his jeans. “I- I mean, not necessarily the sex part, but just…” His shoulders fell a little. “We used to be so… comfortable around each other.”

“It will come in time;” Pyrrha said, setting a hand on his shoulder and offering a reassuring smile. Of them all, she seemed to grasp the order of things quickest, adapting to the strange circumstances with the sort of grace she’d carried onto battlefields and in bedrooms across the ages, though she did have the sweet sort of disposition to blush with how confident she sounded. “We’ll remember, just as we have before. A little patience will serve us well.” Emerald eyes lit up. “But in the meantime, we can ensure we don’t lose touch. Do you have a scroll, Weiss?”

"And by that, we mean the new age ones!” Sun fished out his own device from a pocket, holding it up with a cheeky grin. “Which is good, ’cause my penmanship is awful!”

“Maidens, he’s not kidding.” Coco rolled her eyes and gestured around. “I always needed Velvet to translate his chicken scratch; it was like reading a dead language, I swear.” Suddenly, she blinked and turned her gaze towards the only one of them who actually lived in the apartment. “By the way, is… this why she’s not joining us tonight?”

Blake’s ears twitched, glancing away for a moment before nodding. “She thought it would be best if we handled this without any… distractions.”

“Uh, hold up, she thought?” Emerald raised a brow. “Did Velvet know this was going to happen?”

The deity internally sighed. She supposed the topic would eventually come up but she would’ve preferred at least a night with her beloveds before such things came to light. “I told her enough for her to understand the significance of gathering all of you together, especially meeting me for the first time in so long.” The next part, she paraphrased, half certain they remembered all the other times she’d told them the very same. “Since the Temple fell, maintaining my strength can be… extremely difficult. When I don’t have any of you by my side, I’m forced to take temporary lovers. Velvet was
my latest and, by luck, she shares an apartment with Blake. We… ran into each other the morning after.”

Understanding flashed in their eyes, conflicting emotions playing across half a dozen expressions. For the most part, they typically didn’t think twice about any dalliances she entertained while they weren’t around- it wasn’t like the thought ever crossed her mind to seek other companionship once she’d found even one of them- but never before had she been with someone her chosen knew personally, much less a friend of all six. More than that, the recent coupling would likely spark a little jealousy, but she doubted they would-

“Are you just gonna leave us in suspense?” Though Pyrrha almost immediately elbowed him in his side as a means of curbing the question, Sun shrugged it off. “Oh, come on, we’re all thinking it.” His gaze fell on Weiss. “Is she, ya know. Like us?”

A loaded question, to be sure, and she couldn’t begin to guess their reactions. However, she wouldn’t lie to them. “Yes. She possesses a soul I resonate with and I chose her because of that. But, she understands enough of the situation and we’re on more platonic terms now.”

The six traded looks, ranging from disappointed to pensive to relieved, and the deity would hardly blame them for their complex reactions. In their old days, Weiss taking a new lover would always wait until her chosen had been consulted, and the decisions could take years to reach- it wasn’t like the marching of days mattered much once they’d ascended to stand beside her, after all. The liaisons between the fallen deity and mere mortals hadn’t begun until after the loss of their home, and even then few and far between. Weiss had never kept a partner for more than a few years, never a decade, which hardly constituted a sliver of time compared to her relationship with them.

Yet, as was proving to be the case more and more, this instance remained different and distinct. It couldn’t be lumped in with any previous experience.

Wanting to pull their attention away from thinking too hard on it, Weiss turned towards the bag she’d dropped earlier while handing her scroll off to Coco. “If you want, you can all have my contact details, or input your numbers into mine. The decision to contact me is, as always, yours to make, but I would like to reconnect with all of you again, as individuals and as a group. But I understand your responsibilities may make that difficult, so just know that I’ve literally no other priority than this.” Collecting up the bag, she turned to see her device being passed around and touched to their individual ones- the quickest method of copying information between devices. Half looked eager- Yang, Pyrrha, Sun- while the others seemed a tad apprehensive- Emerald, Coco, and Blake. She tried not to take it personally, suspecting guilt on Blake’s part and a few particular, indistinct memories for the other two clouding their minds, but hopefully, her little gifts would lift their spirits and bolster their confidence. “I’ve also brought some mementos for each of you.”

“Uh oh, didn’t know we were supposed to bring gifts!” Yang teased, passing the scroll to Emerald.

“Well, I would argue these are less ‘gifts’ and more returning to each of you something very special,” Weiss replied, reaching blinding into the bag and smiling as her fingers found that which she sought. “Ah, here’s yours.”

She withdrew a pair of thick, leather work gloves with a metal framework over the wrist and forearm, crafted into the likeness of a dragon’s skull and neck. Even after thousands of years, they still felt warm to the touch and the fingers curled around an invisible hammer.

Her beloved Dragon’s brows furrowed, reaching out to accept them slowly, a bit of confusion flashing in her eyes. “I… I made these?”
“You did indeed,” she said, pulling out the next item—a heavy, carefully maintained book bound by leather straps and written by hand in a language long forgotten except by historians. It chronicled the exploits of her pantheon and the residents of her temple, and she saw the recognition sparking in amber eyes as her sweet Nightowl accepted it.

“I know this book. I… I wrote this book.” She blinked, running her fingers over the cover. It remained unmarked even after all these years, at first a slight oversight while they tried to decide on the design and then intentional. “This one first… and then… five more?”

“You wrote that one in your native language at the time.” The deity smiled, watching as she carefully opened the cover and looked upon a tongue many would claim required a cipher of some sort to understand, the alphabet long lost, but amber eyes roved over the text, her mouth moving silently to words she’d never realized she knew. “It’s just a bit of light reading.”

Yang slipped her hands into her gloves, finding they fit snugly as always, and a fire came to her eyes. “I feel like I could bend iron with my bare hands right now!”

“I don’t doubt you could.” Her fingers curled around the neck of an instrument that had changed so much in modern times, though it still functioned the same, the strings held in place by six tiny figurines while a monkey’s likeness had been carved into the body and her excitable Jester’s eyes lit up immediately. “Do you remember this?”

“Do I!” Sun darted forward, quite nearly snatching the instrument with his hands before stopping himself, offering a sheepish smile as Weiss chuckled, releasing it into the custody of his tail. Marveling over it for a moment, he ran his fingers along the strings and listening to the soft notes. “And still in tune? Ah, oh, not that one.”

“I am not a musician.” Chuckling, she pulled out a long length of fabric. The words never made it out of her mouth as her eager Seamstress quickly took it from her, chocolate eyes alight as her gaze roamed over the threadwork. “And you?”

“Every detail, every stitch,” Coco replied in wonder, glasses pushed down to the tip of her nose. “How have you preserved the cloth for all these years?”

“Very carefully.” It wasn’t a true answer but she’d rather avoid that particular conversation at present, pulling forth a circlet cast in bronze and offering it to her brave Gladiatrix.

Slowly, the redhead reached out for it, then paused. Expression conflicted, she knelt down so that Weiss could properly set the circlet about her temples, fiery locks curling around the metal as emerald eyes lit up. “I remember this- I… can’t believe I’ve been without it all these years.”

“I’m rather pleased to return it to its rightful owner.”

Fingers reached up and traced along the metalwork, the grooves and knicks from battles long past. “I used to regard this with such disdain, my greatest burden… until you gave it new meaning.” Her gaze slid to Yang. “You reforged it for me.”

“I did?” With a slight furrow to her brows, Dragon stepped closer, noting matching markings on the circlet and her gloves. “I… did.” She put a hand to the side of her head. “Why can I remember you wearing it for the first time, but not being the one who helped create it?”

“It takes time,” Weiss said, laying a hand on the blonde’s shoulder to soothe her distress. “Not every memory carries the same weight, not every emotion as strong as the next, and the course of it all is often harder, takes longer. Think of your lives before as a map. Right now, you have a disjointed list
of cities and roads, but you haven’t yet found them on the map. In time, you’ll have even the smallest anthill marked down.” She offered a gentle, reassuring smile. “Don’t try to rush into recalling everything at once.”

“Aww, come on!” Sun laughed. “Why not just bring it all back-”

“NO!” Her voice boomed out suddenly, gaze turning sharp as it fell on him and lessening by degrees as her shoulders fell. “We… I tried that before. It… didn’t end well.” She mustered a small smile, trying to put the bad memories from her mind for the moment. Later, they could torment her, but now, she just wanted to bask in their presence a little longer, have the hope of finding them instilled in her chest burn just a little brighter. “Please, trust me. Slow and steady is better; things will become clearer with time.”

He looked only slightly crestfallen but nodded all the same, eventually smiling when Yang bumped their shoulders together. The temptation to rush ahead always nipped at her heart but she resisted this time- much like every other- by the barest of margins.

“Hey, Blake, can you even read that?” He nodded at the book in her hands, still idly picking at the strings.

“Yes, I c-” She stopped, ears twitching as her eyes glazed over for a moment. “You’ve asked me that before.”

Sun exchanged a confused glance with Yang. “I’m… sure I have?”

“No, I mean- you’ve asked me if I can read this language before; you… never could.” She put a hand to her temple, staring down at the page until realization dawned. “The five other times I wrote this- it was for each of you. We used t-to take turns reading it, from each of our languages.”

“No, I mean- you’ve asked me if I can read this language before; you… never could.” She put a hand to her temple, staring down at the page until realization dawned. “The five other times I wrote this- it was for each of you. We used t-to take turns reading it, from each of our languages.”

“Heh, yeah, I remember now!” He picked a few notes of a long forgotten song- the same one Weiss often hummed to lift her spirits or worsen her agony, depending on which mood took a stronger hold of her heart. “I used to play when it wasn’t my turn!”

“And we would eat.” Pyrrha snapped her fingers. “Sometimes only a single meal, sometimes more- we would sometimes spend all day out there, it just…” Her shoulders fell, though not from disappointment or agony. Merely… acceptance as a piece fell into place, emerald eyes falling on Yang. “It depended on how much we’d cook. I… found out how much I loved cooking- that’s…” She reached up and brushing her fingers along the circlet. “That’s what these markings are- they’re our favorite spices.”

For a moment, her brows furrowed, lilac eyes falling to her leather clad hands, but then it sparked and a smile claimed her lips. “Oh, right! These- they were good for the forge and the oven. I’d carry our favorite hot stews down and… set them-”

“Set them on this.” Coco held up the blanket, snapping her wrists and kneeling down, spreading it over the floor between them. “We took our meals on it, either picnics or even in the dining hall… that’s why these designs- they represent all of us, together.”

“Picnics?” Emerald tilted her head, biting her lip as a memory remained just out of reach.

With a smile, Weiss pulled the last of the items from the bag- a cylindrical, leather canvas case almost half her height. “Here. Perhaps this will help.”

With a quirked brow, her adorable Thief accepted it, undoing the zipper at the top and drawing out the canvas within, unfurling it slowly. Surprise registered in her expression as she looked upon the
scene in her hands, breath catching in her throat. “The tree…”

Curiosity piqued, the others began to gather around, Yang and Pyrrha using their superior wingspan to take each side of the canvas and hold it open.

Each was stunned, speechless, staring at what would amount to a photograph from a time when such technology couldn’t even be conceived. The seven of them, arranged beneath their special tree behind the temple, smiling and enjoying a breezy summer day. Blake with her book- her turn to read it aloud- and Yang holding a bowl with her gloves, Pyrrha offering bread with her circlet on her head and Sun picking at his mandolin, Coco sewing at a tear in their favorite blanket while Emerald sketched. And leaning against the tree sat Weiss, looking upon them with utter adoration- her precious chosen, the ones who gave her existence true meaning.

“I painted this…” Her fingers traced the edges of a stroke, grass bending in the wind. “I- I dream about this almost every night. The field, this tree, people who love me all around me.” Crimson eyes glazed over with tears. “It was real.”

“Wait, you have that dream?” Sun’s brows furrowed, glancing back at the painting. “’Cause, I do, too. And, ya know, you guys are there with me- I just thought it’s because you five are my best friends.”

Coco hummed. “I have the same dream, but it’s… not just us.”

“Oh, thank the Maidens I thought I was the only one.” Yang let out a relieved sigh and chuckled. “I mean, my sis is usually there, too.”

Weiss kept a pleasant smile on her lips but felt a pang in her heart. Another complication she’d have to deal with in time.

“That makes sense; she’s your sister.” Her beloved Seamstress winced, turning her head away. “For me it’s… someone else…”

Blake’s soft voice coupled with her ears falling to the side conveyed contrition. “…is it Velvet?”

Slowly, Coco nodded, accepting the comfort of Pyrrha’s arm around her shoulders after a moment and Sun’s tail around her waist. “…is it Velvet?”

“Wait, wait wait wait.” Lilac eyes grew wide as Yang paled, horror evident in her voice. “But in my dream, Ruby’s there-”

“Hush, my Dragon, listen to me,” Weiss said, reaching up to rub at the woman’s back in soothing motions. She didn’t doubt there’d be more misunderstandings and forgone conclusions in the weeks to come, but she could hopefully curtail a good chunk of them now. “I gave all of you the dream. It’s filled with whoever is close to your heart, whosoever brings you happiness, no matter how that happiness is brought. I wanted each of you to sleep peacefully, knowing at least while you dreamt you could be comforted no matter how difficult the waking world may be.” She then turned towards Emerald, favoring her Thief with a soft smile. “The only constant I gave to each of you was each other, that you might always remember just how much love awaits you in the world. Were you to find each other again, you would have that once more- maybe in a different manner, but just as
strong. I wanted none of you to feel alone.”

Trying to blink away tears, the woman quickly enveloped her in a hug, voice fragile in her ear. “There were mornings when I didn’t want to get out of bed; I just wanted to sleep forever. It was… it was the only place I felt safe, in my dream… now I know it was real.”

“Is, Emerald,” she said, coaxing those bright crimson orbs shining wetly with tears to meet her gaze. “We may not be beneath our tree or in our field, but we’re together again. In time, we will find a new tree and have more picnics, where you will be surrounded by all the love you deserve.” The deity looked up, casting a gaze around at the others, noting how they’d subconsciously drifted closer to each other, small touches of reassurance between them. “I won’t fail you again. Any of you.”

Before she could brace herself, Yang threw an arm around her and Emerald, quickly joined by Blake, Pyrrha, Sun, and Coco, some on the verge of tears while others smiled, but their expressions kept changing until it looked like if just one began to cry, the others would follow suit.

“I know it’s a lot to take in right now.” Weiss kept her voice soft, unable to move from her position in the center of the group hug, relying on her voice to soothe them as best she could. “And this will likely come up again and again in the coming weeks. But if you have any questions, call on me. It doesn’t matter the time; I will answer. I’ll be there for each of you this time.”

She heard a few noises- whimpers, bitten back assurances, distress manifesting itself, because some part of them would always try to comfort her, but by this point they understood. Their memories hadn’t yet given them the context necessary to make sense of the gravity to her words, her heartfelt promises to do right by them this time something they’d have to take at face value for now. In time, they would remember her folly… she could only hope they’d forgive her this time as they had before.

Slowly, they withdrew from the group embrace, each turning their attention to the relics from their first lives, so many memories and emotions attached to the simple objects- though none of them could really be qualified as ‘simple’ at this point, now could they? Surviving thousands of years, holding secrets the modern world had written off as long forgotten mysteries- irreplaceable and priceless. It pained her to part with them, these tangible remnants of her beloveds, but they were where they belonged now.

“You know,” Coco said, running her hands along the blanket as her fingers twitched in the long forgotten motions that had created it. “I really thought we’d just get together and play board games all night but this is so much better.”

“Absolutely.” Pyrrha nodded, reaching up to her neck where yet another piece of her old armor had once sat, though that one carried a fair few memories with it that probably would need more time to come around. “Although, we could still play…”

“Honestly, I’m not sure I could make it through the first round.” Sun yawned, as if accentuating his point, and started picking a slower tune- an old lullaby. “I dunno why I’m so tired.”

“In essence, you did relive a whole life in the span of a few seconds, and even the parts you don’t consciously remember at present can be a burden on your soul,” Weiss said, offering them a comforting smile. “Rest will serve all of you well; in the morning, you’ll be able to parse your memories much easier, sift through them with a bit more control.”

Emerald looked up from the painting, alarm shining in her eyes. “You’re leaving?”

“I wouldn’t want to impose-”
“Weiss,” Blake said, brows pinching together as her ears laid back. “You… really don’t have to leave so soon.”

“Do any of us have to leave? Like, tonight?” Sun raised a brow, shrugging a shoulder. “I mean… maybe it’s just me but I… ya know. I don’t exactly want to crawl into my own bed tonight.” Yang almost immediately shot him a look that had him raising a hand in his defense. “Look, I know she just said that we can’t dive back into old habits, but… seriously… is anyone looking forward to sleeping alone tonight?”

Not a single one of them spoke up to argue with him, most pointedly looking elsewhere, but Blake looked at Weiss.

“Would that be a bad idea? If we all just… stayed here? Just for tonight?”

Another unexpected, unpredictable turn of events, a unique experience that tested her resolve. In times past, she’d given them space to process, time to sift through, but she’d never faced an encounter where they recalled so much at the onset- at least not without an outburst or two to accompany the onslaught of emotions. Blake’s reaction was the norm- pushing her away, throwing her out, wanting distance to make sense of things; this acceptance and the hope shining in everyone’s eyes, all six of them holding their breaths, waiting on her response…

“I don’t think it’s the best idea we’ve ever had,” she said, slowly, trying to muster the courage to tell them no… and ultimately failing. “But we’ve yet to try it so soon after reuniting. If everyone’s comfortable, I have no objections-”

Sun and Yang high-fived, Coco clapped her hands excitedly, Emerald and Blake looked relieved, and Pyrrha quickly cast her gaze around the room.

“Okay, Yang, help me move the furniture.” She walked to one side of the couch, motioning for the blonde to go to the other side. “Sun, Emerald, help Blake collect up all the pillows in the apartment. Coco, do your thing when the pillows get here.”

“Right!” Five voices chorused back, everyone splitting off to fulfill their tasks almost before Weiss could process it. In the back of her mind, she worried she’d just made yet another mistake, but she supposed it was bound to happen and resigned herself to picking up the pieces as best she could when everything eventually came crashing down. She’d become rather adept at it.

“Wait… what, exactly, are you expecting me to do once the others get the pillows?” Coco pushed her glasses down the bridge of her nose, raising a brow. “What’s my ‘thing’, exactly?”

With the couch held aloft, Pyrrha offered a somewhat apologetic smile. “I… honestly hoped you would know that part, because I really don’t.” She shrugged, for the moment shifting the couch, though Yang seemed more than capable of handling it. “Just… do what comes to mind?”

Weiss opted to remain silent. Perhaps they wouldn’t remember, the memories too distorted for those old habits to reappear just yet, because it probably wouldn’t do for them to remember all the specifics of their former day-to-day lives together so soon, when the impulses might run too high. Agreeing to spending the night together already promised to open up a can of worms the following morning, when the six had to invariably return to their current responsibilities.

But the moment Sun returned, carrying an armful of pillows and one in his curled tail, Coco’s eyes lit up.

“A bed of pillows- that’s right, we had individual mattresses in our rooms, but in the… ah. What’s
“The word?” She began snapping her fingers, brow furrowed as the term escaped her.

“Oh! We called it the Altar!” Yang laughed, helping Pyrrha set the couch down gently and moving over to grab the coffee table. “It’s where we worshiped our beloved Goddess, remember?”

“Oh Maidens, you’ve always been like this,” Seamstress replied in a flat tone, though a spark of amusement shone brightly in her eyes before she pushed her glasses up her nose again. “Unfortunately, you’re right. We did call it that.”

“And it was at the center!” Pyrrha picked up a chair, all furniture either being shunted to the side or moved into the dining room for the night as Coco began arranging the pillows. “I mean, once you went past the statue- into the inner sanctum, past the priestess’ quarters, our rooms branched off for it, and the Altar sat at the center.”

“Didn’t you build that?” Emerald tilted her head, unloading her burden of pillows while directing the question at Yang.

“Maybe?” The blonde frowned. “But I think you and Coco did the decorating. Huh. But I also kinda remember having a room down by the stables?”

“I don’t think we did the Altar thing until Pyrrha arrived,” Blake said, glancing at the pillows already arranged and the ones she’d brought as well. “Also… why do I even have this many pillows?”

“Ya know, now that I’m thinking about it?” Sun chuckled, scratching at his jaw. “I… probably have just as many. I… kinda buy them a lot? I never really noticed that before.”

“You should’ve told us; Emerald and I go shopping almost every week. We…” Coco stopped, looking over at the now blushing Thief. “We… usually… buy pillows… it seems odd in retrospect that we did that without ever questioning why.”

“That’s going to keep happening.” Weiss interjected, not wanting them to begin fretting over what other ‘odd’ behaviors they might’ve had all along and never noticed. “My presence opens the door to the memories you have of your past lives, but they are still part of who you are, embedded deep within your soul. Some things… leak through, I suppose is one way of putting it. There are things you’ve done throughout your life that you haven’t realized stem from that first life. Some are habits picked up from other lives in between.”

As Yang and Pyrrha set the loveseat down, they exchanged a somewhat worried look before turning their attention to the deity.

“Weiss… how many times have we done this?” Lilac eyes softened. “How many times have you found us?”

“I thought at first it might only be a handful…” Pyrrha and Yang exchanged a look before the redhead continued. “But I’m beginning to think the number is much higher.”

She nodded, contemplating how best to answer that question. Some things… well, she believed some questions should remain questions for a tad longer.

“It varies for each of you. Not by much, but it does. A conversation better suited for another day.” With a wave of her hand, she indicated the bed of pillows Coco had arranged for them, large enough to fit all seven with some room at the edges. Collecting things that had been prominent or common in their first life seemed to be a trend through every iteration, so she wasn’t entirely surprised, but she did find it rather amusing that the pillows could quite easily be divided into groups. Though not each had the same shade, they could be more or less grouped into six colors- the red for Emerald, the
green for Pyrrha, the purple for Yang, the grey for Sun, the brown for Coco, the black for Blake… and the blue for her. “We should lay down. Sometimes, it takes us a while to get comfortable.”

Within each of them, a small war raged, between the need to know more and the call of sleep, the comfort of answers and that of company they’d only recently realized they sorely missed. Ultimately, the contests settled in her favor, and each shed any extraneous clothing—jackets, belts, shoes—before crawling onto the pillows.

For her part, Weiss simply walked into the very middle and laid down, a content sigh slipping past her lips as she closed her eyes. Without looking, she knew how they’d arrange themselves—Emerald to her immediate left, with Blake curled around her, Coco, Pyrrha, and Yang on her right, and Sun stretched out above her head, with a hand on Blake and his tail on Yang. They’d evolved to this position over years and years, and it still amazed her how something so simple could make her feel so complete.

She opened her eyes as Coco drew the blanket over them—*their* blanket—and looked around to see the myriad of emotions flashing in the beloveds’ eyes. Confusion, surprise, contentment, and joy—they were relieved to be together again but unsure why, trying to work out for themselves if what they felt came from the moment or several thousands of years ago.

“Try to rest,” she said. “And let your dreams show you the answers you seek.”

Usually, Weiss gave them that advice before taking her leave, because in the realms of dreams they could reach much deeper into their own souls, but being among them before they drifted off… she waited, tense, to see if any would object, or flee, or if Blake would kick her out again.

Instead, her words prompted some shuffling, expressions screwing up in thought before Yang rolled her eyes, forgoing trying to grasp for exactly the right words in favor of getting to the point. “Good night, everyone.”

The others muttered their good nights, the shifting persisting until Weiss sighed.

“Good night, my guiding stars,” she said, looking around to see the recognition—the realization that they’d yet to fully remember their customary phrase but knew that to be the response they sought, and all the restlessness died out as they shut their eyes and fell asleep, arranged around her just like so many nights across the millennia.

In the morning, this might blow up in her face just as bad or even worse than some of the *other* ill advised attempts she’d made to reforge their connections. But in the moment, Weiss allowed herself to sink into the sensation of being surrounded by her beloveds once more, tears of happiness slipping from her eyes.

For just this moment, she would undergo another century of loneliness countless times. For just this taste of what she lost, she would subject herself to all the horrors the marching times brought with them.

To be among them again, she would sacrifice everything.

No matter what the morning brought, she fell asleep content, for the first time in at least a century, and she vowed to do whatever it took to cling to every moment she could.

For they were hers—her beloveds, her chosen, her lovers—and she was theirs.
Wounds Uncovered

Chapter Notes

Hey, heads up: some of the memories start to come back this chapter. Some of those memories deal with how their previous lives ended. So, like, proceed with caution, I suppose? It's not terribly graphic but they ARE reliving memories of how they died and it wasn't always pretty. This will be a recurring element until they recover the memories of their first deaths, so brace yourselves.

She didn’t need sleep, not the way mortals did. She could float away from her awareness, though, and tap into the last vestiges of her ageless power, the threads that once tied her to her pantheon, that lead all the way back to the ancient force that spawned her. In those hours, she didn’t dream the way her lovers did, enjoying the shifting and enveloping comfort; she had her memories, clear as crystal even after all these years. Normally, returning to her awareness brought with it agony, trading past joys for her present heartache.

Normally.

Weiss awoke early in the morning, before the sun even rose, to seven hearts beating in time and seven chests filling with one breath. Well, until Yang snored at any rate, having rolled onto her back sometime during the night, and Emerald muttered something while shifting, snuggling closer. Sounds that eased the pain of the past several decades, sounds she drank in deeply after so many nights without, and she passed the hours lying there among them in utter contentment. Even as the sun rose and the city beyond the walls of the apartment awoke, she laid there without complaint, until she heard the jingle of keys and the creak of the front door opening.

She turned her head to watch the foyer while listening to the crinkle of paper bags. When Velvet finally made it past the entryway, she swept her gaze around the room before settling on the deity with a smirk, then disappeared into the kitchen with a little shake of her head. When she returned, arms free, the Faunus stepped softly and crouched down beside the pile of bodies, keeping her voice low.

“Couldn’t help yourself, huh?” Mirth shone brightly in umber eyes as she swept an arm towards the others, as if there could be anything else she meant with that.

“I tried.” It was a weak defense, and they both knew it, but Velvet took pity on her and didn’t say as much aloud.

“I’m gonna make breakfast. I’ll try to be quiet.”

“May I help?” She smiled, excited at the prospect of them sharing a meal again, especially considering the specific memory she’d chosen to revisit.

Velvet’s eyes tracked around the bed of pillows. “Can you even get out?”

Softly, she chuckled, beginning the meticulous process of disentangling limbs and smoothing furrowed brows with soft kisses and bids to return to slumber. When the once powerful deity stood beside the rabbit Faunus, she offered a nonchalant shrug of her shoulders.
It didn’t mitigate the impressed expression she faced. “How did you do that?”

“Millennia of practice,” she replied as they walked towards the kitchen. “And they tend to sleep heavy and deep once reunited... until the nightmares come, anyway.”

“Nightmares?” Velvet spared a glance back to the living room. “I thought that part was over? The bad part, I mean.”

Weiss sighed and shook her head. “I truly wish things were that easy. But, no. More trials lay ahead for all of them. The time between now and when the terrors begin to plague them varies but I won’t be idle. I must do what I can to remind them, to regain their trust, to... to make amends. Sometimes, that helps the nightmares pass quickly.”

“What are you atoning for?”

As they stood in the kitchen, silence filled the room.

She’d relived that moment so many times. The whole night- it was never far from her mind. But, sometimes, she could almost forget, and she clung to those instances fiercely. Knowing she would be forced to face it again, with all of them, likely at the same time... she only had so much strength.

“In time, I will tell you,” she said, voice shaky as she tried to push the memory aside. “For now, let’s cook.”

Avoiding the issue. It felt like just as much part of the process as any other, staving off the part that hurt the worst of all for as long as she could, but never long enough.

At some point, her beloveds would demand answers, and she’d be forced to confront the possibility that they might be too disgusted with her to stay. It didn’t happen often but she remembered the first time each of them walked away from her, turning their backs and denying her forgiveness. She couldn’t begrudge them that- she deserved it- and perhaps it was pure selfishness on her part, not being keen on hurrying the process along.

Because no matter how many times they forgave her, she couldn’t forgive herself, and no matter how many times they turned away from her, it hurt just as bad as the first.

“Here.” Velvet pulled her attention away from her morose thoughts by slapping a piece of paper onto the counter- a rather familiar page. “Just in case you forgot the steps.”

“You printed this off?” A smile curled her lips as she read through it quickly, a bittersweet pang in her chest. “It’s a dinner recipe.”

“Well, I didn’t expect anyone to stay the night and we don’t exactly have enough cereal or eggs for everyone.” The Faunus shrugged. “So why not dinner for breakfast?”

“I suppose you have a point,” she replied, setting the page down and shaking her head slightly. “Where are your knives-”

“Hey.” A hand settled on her shoulder, drawing her attention to concerned umber eyes. “What’s wrong? Did I-”

“You...” A breathy laugh left her lips as she smiled. “You did nothing wrong, Velvet. Fate is funny, sometimes.” She looked down at the paper, picking it up again with reverence. “Before you arrived, I was thinking about a meal from long ago. This is the exact same dish we ate then.”
“Oh.” The touch lingered for a moment before receding as she obviously bit down on the words she wanted to say. “The, uh, knives are over here.”

Cutting boards and knives appeared on the countertop, everything looking only slightly used and the trash can filled with takeout bags probably explained that well enough. Modern times, there simply weren't enough hours in the day for preparing large meals with little assistance and even food for two people could be time consuming. But four hands were better than two and the others wouldn't wake for a while yet, or so she hoped; they had more than enough time now, washing their hands side-by-side in the sink after laying out all the utensils and spices, emptying the bags of its contents and putting everything aside.

"I'll prepare the meat." Weiss offered a smile, nodding towards the recipe. "Can you handle the sauce?"

"Sure." Velvet went about finding a suitable pot, obviously still biting down on her curiosity.

With a small smile, the deity took pity on her, busying her hands with the mutton while the words flowed. "Have you ever heard of the Servants' Feast?"

The Faunus nodded absently while measuring out the vegetable oil. "Yeah. It used to be a big deal. I think it's still a kingdom wide holiday in Atlas."

"Do you know why it was such a big deal?" By this point, she hardly paid attention to how she sliced the meat, the motions burned deep into her memory. Cooking rarely fell to her back in the days of her Temple but in the millennia that followed, she was loath to let her beloveds do all the work, more content to listen as they joked and playfully whined about not being able to help. It brought a smile to her lips and a fullness to her heart to give back just a little to them. And the way they looked at her...

"Uh, according to the old... legends..." She trailed off, probably piecing the picture together well enough on her own. "Oh."

"I never liked the name, for the record," she said, carving away fat with practiced precision. "But I cared little for what my worshipers perceived of my beloveds by the end. As long as they didn't speak ill of them, they didn't spark my ire, and every year they would hold a feast in their towns and send sheep and cattle for sacrifices. We'd keep the best for the Temple, never more than five head, and the hundreds of others brought to us would be prepared and passed out to any pilgrim or traveler who came to offer their prayers." With a shrug of her shoulder, she set about carving up the meat into smaller chunks. "Personally, I preferred sheep. Either way, we'd spend all day cooking, and Yang and Pyrrha would spend the whole week before gathering enough wood and tinder to keep the fires going. Emerald, Coco, and Sun would go to the markets and fields to gather the spices. Blake, well, she never enjoyed cooking as much as the others, but she oversaw the decorations and tables, always made sure we had enough bowls for those who would come seeking food and shelter."

Velvet chuckled, shaking her head. "That part hasn't changed. I've never met someone who'd rather do the dishes than the cooking, except for Blake." The dull thuds of the knife hitting the cutting board and the scrape of a spoon stirring the pot were the only sounds for a moment, a snore and a grumble coming from the living room before they settled again. "What was it like? I mean, living through people making up stories about the things you did?"

"Interesting, I suppose, would be an understatement. Sometimes, it vexed me." Weiss paused in her work for a moment. "I remember the first time I heard the story that people passed around during the feast." Her brows furrowed, an age old annoyance resurfacing after so many years. "How those who heard the whispers of the gods journeyed to my temple to offer up their lives in exchange for peace,
as if my chosen were selected by someone other than myself, as if they didn't seek me out willingly but instead out of some sense of duty, as if the whole thing was an ultimatum instead of a mutual agreement.” Slowly, her expression smoothed out. “I... eventually found the humor in it.”

“What was your initial reaction?”

“Truthfully?” The deity turned her head, catching the Faunus' eyes and offering a shoulder raised in nonchalance. “I was going to unleash a plague.”

Velvet set down the spoon, eyes going wide, though she seemed more amused than horrified. "Weiss!"

"In my defense," she said, holding up a hand. "The first version of the story I actually heard was what cropped up after Pyrrha came to the Temple, and it painted her and the others as little more than... pleasure slaves, to put it lightly." That sparked a bit of empathy for her reaction. “But while I was much kinder than some of the other members of my pantheon, I did still have my periods of divine wrath. I think I ended up causing a drought in the area where that version of the story was most popular. Only for a few months, enough to worry people but not enough to put anyone’s life at risk.” She waved a hand dismissively. “It wasn't until after Sun came that I... well, mellowed out, I believe would be the contemporary phrasing.”

For a moment, it looked as if she was about to be called out, but then the Faunus tilted her head to the side. "Do you think the whole thing with your sister is what got that version popular?"

“What do you mean?”

“Well, your sister did demand a sacrifice of sorts and Pyrrha was reluctant to serve her. Then, it was her becoming enamored with Yang that helped the whole thing blow over.” Velvet lifted one shoulder in a shrug. “I mean, when you play the scroll game, the story can change a lot. Especially during a time when scrolls didn’t exist.”

"For the record, people of that time were much better at relaying verbatim messages than you’re giving them credit for, but I suppose you have a point none the less. Many stories changed and evolved with every telling and my sister and I were confused for each other quite often.” A surprised laugh left her lips. "In some parts of Remnant, we were even revered as a single deity. Maybe that’s where I got my temper from."

Silence descended again and she could feel Velvet's tension, the force of keeping a tight lid on the questions she wanted to ask a tangible thing.

It seemed her only option remained to volunteer the information freely.

"There was one year in particular I look back on more than others," she said, grabbing a pan and coating it in oil before setting it on the heat, lining up the spices before she started coating the meat in them. "My brother's antics had caused a famine and herds suffered all across Remnant. Many villages didn't have the stock to part with even one head; they likely wouldn't have survived the winter if they had. But they feared the wrath of the gods more than starvation and sent them anyway." The meat sizzled as it touched the hot oil. "I had lost touch with the people by then; I didn't notice that something was off. But Pyrrha and Yang did, and Blake and Emerald set about finding out why. It was Sun's idea to do something and Coco provided an elegant solution." Weiss glanced at her audience, noting how the Faunus absently stirred the sauce while paying rapt attention. "We took the herd we’d amassed from feasts prior and used them instead. It took days to cook it all. Then, we sent all the offerings back along with large pots filled to the brim with cooked meat, sauce, and bread. We even begged use of Winter's stables, that the fastest winged horses could take all of it,
even to the furthest reaches of the land without it spoiling.” She smiled fondly. “Despite the potential famine, that feast was the most jovial. I felt so strong- so many offered their thanks, their prayers, their reverence. Honestly, by the end of it, my beloveds were all so exhausted- we only had a little left over, and getting them to sit up long enough to eat it brought with it a different kind of headache... but it was worth it.” Turning back to the cooking meat, she took a deep breath, trying to force back the tears she could feel teasing at her eyes. “That was the first time I helped in the food preparation. After that... I spent more time in the kitchens, to help share the burden. And the joy.”

From the living room, the sounds of movement could be heard, halfhearted pleas to go back to bed met with quiet growls about hunger and the smell beginning to hang heavy in the air. Soon, Sun would be charging in and trying to help before Pyrrha bodily picked him up and removed him from the kitchen, unless he’d somehow managed to drastically improve his cooking skills since the last time. Coco would probably take the pragmatic option and offer to set the table and Blake would leap at the chance to help her while Yang gently bullied her way into helping with the cooking, because Pyrrha always acted like she could handle it all even when she needed the assistance but was too polite to say anything. Weiss would probably then be put on Emerald duty, because that woman would always try to sneak a bite of whatever food they had, even when it involved reaching into a hot oven. How she’d never managed to burn herself remained beyond the deity’s comprehension; she originally thought it was thanks to the power imbued within them when they joined her at the Temple but subsequent iterations had proven that theory false. Emerald was just that good, apparently.

“That was about... four millennia ago, right? Maybe a little less?” Velvet returned her attention to the sauce, a furrow to her brow.

“About that. Why?”

“I remember studying art from that period- in most of Remnant, artistic styles tended to focus on the beauty of the physical form, but Mantle had a huge surge in religious artworks about that time, most of them glorifying artisans or showing them being favored in some way. I remember one of a small village with what looked like a blacksmith of some sort driving a cart with great white stallions pulling it. It was called... ‘Saving Grace’, I think.” A smile was thrown her way. “I guess being saved from starvation by your resident deity might have something to do with that.”

“Strange then, isn’t? When you think about it?” At the raised brow, she elaborated. “After that Servants’ Feast, I was at my strongest. Those who venerated me had unwavering faith. Since the beginning of time itself, none, not one member of my pantheon had such a following... and less than a thousand years later, I had lost it all.” She shook her head, a small, sad smile on her lips. “What’s taken as pure and simple fact for thousands upon thousands of years can be overwritten without a second thought. That’s the power of mortals, you know... I just wish I’d seen it sooner.”

A hand landed on her shoulder and she sighed. Even when she wanted nothing more than to lose herself to pleasant memories, she couldn’t escape the agony of the past three thousand years, wrought by her own hands. How she’d been so foolish-

“What is that smell?” Yang’s voice cut through the relative silence in the apartment, prompting more half mumbled groans of disappointment at being woken up. “Wow, it smells delicious -”

“Could you be a little less loud?” Coco grumbled, followed swiftly by Sun chiming in with considerably more cheer.

“Aw, c’mon, Coco Puff, dinner- uh, breakfast... food smells great!”

“Call me that again, I fucking dare you.”
Without a word, Velvet went to the coffee maker on the counter and quickly filled the filter with fresh grounds. Just next to it sat the sort that dispensed only one cup rather than a whole pot, but the look in chocolate eyes promised the larger quantity would be warranted.

“I see she’s still not a morning person,” Weiss said with a little smile, listening to the gripes and teases coming from the living room. “And I’m willing to bet-”

“Would both of you knock it off? You’re giving me a headache.” Blake chimed in and she couldn’t help but smile wider- her Nightowl, still aptly named even after so long.

“Oh man, guys, I think she’s cooking.” Sun’s words were followed by a thump and a few halfhearted objections- he’d just lept over a few of them, she could see it in her head- and a moment later, he appeared in the doorway wearing the biggest smile. “They both are! Mornin’, Velvet!”

“Morning, Sun.” She immediately flicked her spoon towards him. “But you stay right there. We’ve been over this.”

“Aw, c’mon! That was one time! How was I supposed to know that would happen?”

“Maybe when we told you it would,” Pyrrha said, stepping up behind him and wrapping an arm around his waist before she lifted up and turned, effortlessly displacing him from entry into the kitchen.

“Yeah, Sunny, who uses a microwave to boil an egg, anyway?” Yang slung an arm around his shoulders while the redhead ducked into the kitchen, smiling as wide as ever while she teased him. “It’s better if you just sit this one out. It’s not like there’s going to be a lot of room to move around in here.”

“Before you heathens of the morning begin, let me get my coffee.” Coco shouldered her way past the others, going straight for the pot. “I can smell my lifeblood; don’t you dare deny me.”

“Weren’t you going to cut back on the caffeine?” Velvet raised a brow, passing off the sauce to Pyrrha’s care while she went to block the woman’s path to the coffee mugs, a pointed look rendering Coco compliant as a regular sized mug was retrieved. Weiss couldn’t help but notice another one on the second shelf with the words ‘Coco’s Pissed’ handwritten in what looked to be sharpie on a cup easily twice times the size of the others. “You have a three cup limit.”

“Out of the whole pot? Really?” Putting a hand to her chest, the brunette dramatically sighed. “You wound me, Velvs. How could you say this? How could you be so cruel to me-”

“Three cups, Love,” Weiss said, turning the meat over and inspecting it before reaching for a large dish that would fit in the oven. “That’s your limit.”

“Oh, fine.” She groused, beginning to pour herself a cup. “It’s not fair to gang up on me like this, you know.”

“Yes, yes, how terrible we are to be concerned about your health,” the deity replied, preparing to transfer the meat over to the dish and begin baking it in the sauce. However, before she truly had the chance, large, warm hands landed on her hips and a chin rested atop her head. “Let me guess. You want to take over?”

“Well, I mean, if you’re offerin’,” Yang said, a smile audible in her voice. “I have no idea what you’re cooking but it smells delicious. Why don’t you let me and Pyrrha take over? You can give us directions.”
“You never did like me doing the lion’s share of the work.” Without much fuss, she relinquished control to the blonde, allowing her Dragon to step forward and finish the task. “Is there anything I’m allowed to help with?”

“Well, Velvet, Yang and I can handle the sides while the main course bakes,” Pyrrha said with a thoughtful hum, the spoon she’d picked up quickly moving to the side quick enough to discourage Emerald from taking a premature taste of the sauce. “So, you could set the table.”

“Nah, I’ll do that.” Coco sighed happily after taking her first sip of coffee, a small grin curling her lips. “Blake can help.”

“As long as I’m not the one cooking.” The cat Faunus scrunched her nose, leaning against the doorway and accepted the cup of tea handed to her, passed along a sort of assembly line to reach its destination. Velvet must’ve put it in the single maker while she prepared the coffee and those currently occupying the kitchen had just passed it to each other, somehow acquiring a saucer along the way. Not that Blake was complaining, of course. “I’ll help with the dishes, though.”

“Oh, I can do that, right?” Sun’s tail curled excitedly around him as he popped up onto his toes, leaning into the kitchen but not breaking the boundary. “And can I call dibs on leftovers?”

“Hey, let us cook first before you start planning for future meals.” Velvet fired off, waving her spoon threateningly. “And go back to the living room, you vultures! It’ll be ready when it’s ready!”

Taking it upon herself to bring order before things got out of hand, Weiss reached out and lightly tugged on Emerald’s ear- how or when she’d managed to slip between Pyrrha and Velvet remained a mystery- to encourage her to leave the chefs to their work, grabbing Sun along the way and retreating to the living room while the others set about their tasks.

Keeping these two preoccupied when there was food being cooked, however, remained a trial, but one she could triumph with the use of some... less than fair tactics.

“Sun, would you do me a favor?” She waited for him to look at her, brows raised as he awaited her request. “Would you play us a song?”

“Uh, I can try.” He chuckled, grabbing for his instrument using his tail while running a hand through his hair. “I mean, I... never really learned any songs.”

Emerald furrowed her brows. “But, last night you said-”

“I mean, not in this life.” He pressed his lips together, pulling it into his lap and lightly running his fingers over the strings. “I can remember, like, melodies or something... but I don’t know the notes.”

Crimson eyes flicked over to her for a moment before the woman sat down beside Weiss, offering a small shrug. “Just... try picking at it. What’s the worst that could happen?”

With a nod of his head, the Faunus looked down at the guitar for a moment before pushing a breath out, holding it properly and plucking the same notes from the night before. At first, that’s all he did, the same six or so notes over and over, but the more his fingers moved, the more came back to him, and he started moving through the tune with a pleasant little smile on his lips.

As he started up the second strain of the melody, Weiss added her voice to the song, the words belonging to a language that had long stopped being spoken regularly in Remnant, relegated to the realm of academics. Still, she knew each and every word by heart, and smiled while she sang as Emerald leaned against her, humming along but not adding her own voice to the melody yet. Of her beloveds, she seemed least inclined to sing and much more content to listen.
When Coco and Blake finished setting the table- and replenishing their coffee cups- the two made their way into the living room as well, briefly disrupting the song so that her cranky Seamstress could wiggle her way behind Weiss, resting against the deity’s back while Blake claimed her other side. Emerald seemed tempted to snap off something about being jostled- slight though it was- but opted instead to simply reclaim her spot, stroking along the inside of Weiss’ arm to encourage the song.

Familiar smells filled the apartment as the meal came together, entwining with the melody and filling her with a bittersweet sort of nostalgia. Only three things occurred to her that made this moment slightly better than her memories.

One, it wasn’t a memory; it was happening around her.

Two, Velvet’s presence brought another bit of calm to her, confident that Pyrrha and Yang weren’t working themselves too hard with the extra set of hands.

Three, being a millennia old deity of unimaginable power didn’t make her so immune to the physical world that she couldn’t appreciate the advent of air conditioning.

As the song gently ended, the last note from Sun lingering in the air as Weiss smiled, their three cooks emerged from the kitchen.

“It just needs to bake and simmer a little longer,” Velvet said, claiming a seat on the chair while Yang and Pyrrha settled down on either side of Sun. “It was nice having such a soothing melody to accompany the work.”

“I feel like I know what the words mean but I... can’t really remember.” Yang pursed her lips together and shook her head. “Maybe it’ll come to me later.”

“It might,” Weiss replied softly, tilting her head to rest on Blake’s shoulder. “Give it time.”

“How much time do we need, though?” Crossing his arms over the top of the guitar, Sun rested his chin on them and raised a brow. “I mean, I get it, lots of memories to recover, but is there, like, a baseline? Some sort of sign that it’s all going to come rushing back?”

With a sigh, the deity nodded. “You’ll start getting nightmares. The way a person dies... it leaves a mark on the soul. And all of you have died many times.”

They looked around at each other, shifting uncomfortably for a moment before Blake piped up. “Well, we’re living now. No matter how many times we remember dying, we’re here now, together, and that’s what matters.”

“Wow, look who became the optimist,” Coco said, a teasing lilt to her voice.

But Weiss knew better and lightly stroked the Faunus’ thigh to calm her. “You’ve already started having them, haven’t you?”

“... yeah...” Her ears drooped, gaze fixating on somewhere in the distance. “It’s... just one, I think. There’s... bombs exploding and they keep getting closer-”

“The Great War.” Amber eyes slid to her, a thousand questions swirling but not yet leaving her tongue. She didn’t mind; she’d answered them a few times before. “You fell at the Battle of Forever Fall. You served as part of Menagerie’s joint strike force, assisting the Vale defense against Atlas and Mistral. You died that day but your actions crippled the enemy’s advance and allowed for reinforcements to arrive and drive them back.”
Pyrrha shifted, eyes closing for a moment as her face pinched, hand going to her chest and massaging it briefly while Blake hissed, rubbing at her own throat. “So... that really happened? The... bayonet...”

“Yes.” She swallowed, letting out a breath and squeezing Emerald’s hand as it slipped into hers. “I was there, on the battlefield, but I arrived too late. To help, or hinder.” Weiss drew another unsteady breath. “But I did ease your passing that time.”

“I was there, too.” The redhead said, her voice soft as she continued stroking her side. “I... didn’t want to be, though...”

“You were a conscript, Pyrrha. The unpopularity of the war forced the Mistrali government to start a draft-”

“I know,” she replied, shaking her head slightly. “I know- I know the history. I know... the facts but... knowing I was there is... something else. Knowing I...” A few blinks of emerald eyes before a sharp inhalation. “I died there, too, didn’t I?”

Yang reached over, set a hand on Pyrrha’s thigh while Sun curled an arm around her shoulders, both of them comforting her as best they could while the deity responded.

“Yes.” Coco, with Emerald’s help, set aside her coffee so she could wrap her arms around Weiss’ waist. “Four of you fell during that battle. One had already passed- civilian casualty here in Vale. The last died three weeks later on the shores of Atlas, during the invasion that eventually ended the Great War.”

Her gaze went to Velvet, the only one of them bereft of the images- the memories. In umber eyes, she could see a silent apology and an ironclad resoluteness that spoke of a promise. She hadn’t been exaggerating when she said things would get worse for them; now it was up to the deity and her newfound friend to help them through the phantom pains of a dozen deaths.

“I was the civilian,” Sun said, hand going to his stomach, and it pained her to see her beloved Jester devoid of any mirth as horror shone in his eyes. “I... I remember, airships dropped bombs. I always hated that part in history class and I hate hearing an airship pass overhead.” His hand clenched against an unseen wound. “I thought it was just my imagination...”

“I warned you that some things have stuck with you from those previous lives.” She spoke gently. “I wish they were only the good things but, sometimes, other things slip in, too.”

“Atlas was too damn cold,” Yang said, suddenly, as if she’d surprised herself with the words. “But I liked it for some reason.”

Sun looked at her with furrowed brows. “You’ve never been to- oh.” Slowly, he nodded. “Right, the... the invasion happened in winter.”

“Because who would try to attack Atlas in winter.” Emerald clung to her hand a little tighter. “Is it going to be like this each time? One of us remembers something and then the rest just... falls into place? Like dominos?”

“I hope it’s with happier memories but... essentially, yes, I think so. I’ve honestly not brought all of you together before the memories started to return; this is a bit of a new experience for me as well.” She glanced at Velvet and steeled her nerves. “But it doesn’t have to be that way. If I were to leave-”

“No!” Six voices rang out as one, Pyrrha, Sun, and Yang going so far as to jump to their feet.
In the silence that followed, Weiss waited. She’d learned from her past mistakes—she would continue making the offer when things got hard, when they got painful, when they got miserable.

Because she didn’t want to continue causing them pain.

A scroll ringing broke the silence, Yang quickly patting herself down as some electric guitar riff blared out, eventually handed the scroll by Pyrrha, who happened to be standing next to the pile of them set aside the night before.

“Rubes?” A smile curled her lips as she laughed. “Sorry ‘bout that, forgot to message you— I ended up spending the night at Blake’s. Nah, nothing wrong, just...” lilac eyes flicked over to her “... got to see an old friend. Didn’t want to say goodbye yet. Yeah, I’ll stop by before my shift. I’ll talk to you later. Love you.”

As she hung up, Sun chuckled. “Ya know... I kinda forgot we still have, like, things to do now. Responsibilities and stuff.”

“Oh, this is gonna take some time to adjust.” Coco hummed thoughtfully.

“We can talk about it over breakfast,” Weiss said, chuckling softly. “It’s easy to get swept away in memories but I’m rather interested in hearing how your lives are now. What you do, the places you like to go- whatever you wish to tell me.”

“Can’t we just all call out?” Emerald made a vague motion towards the door. “Go find an abandoned warehouse, turn it into a temple. I’d rather spend my days painting than filling out paperwork.”

She bit her lip, allowing the others to laugh. If they asked it of her, she would find a way to support them. Her voice had more power now than in the decades prior; surely she could ensnare the senses of some wealthy person who wouldn’t mind parting with a few millions, once their greed was removed from the equation. She’d do it without a second thought.

“Well, food should almost be ready,” Pyrrha said, getting to her feet. “We didn’t really catch up like we usually do. I’m sure Weiss will want to listen to all our gripes and complaints about mundane annoyances like bills.”

“I really would.” Although her Seamstress seemed reluctant to let her go, the deity managed to stand as well, turning towards the dining room as everyone else got up.

“Table’s set for eight, right?” Although she probably didn’t notice it, Yang winced, a flicker of sadness flashing in her eyes— a half formed memory she opted to push aside for the moment as she went into the kitchen. “We’ll bring it out to the table.”

A sigh slipped past her lips as the others started chatting about who would sit where and what drinks everyone wanted, allowing Weiss a moment to stop and take it all in, this familiar scene given a brand new backdrop. The way the shadows played on their skin under fluorescent light still hadn’t become as familiar as the sun’s rays or firelight, but she’d learned to relish it just the same.

“It’s going to get harder, isn’t it?” She turned to see Velvet standing beside her, a touch of worry pinching her brow. “For them and for you?”

“Yes, it is.” Weiss tried to offer a smile but the reality kept her expression muted. “What does this look like to you? You have a very different perspective than I do— maybe you see something I don’t.”

For a moment, it looked like the Faunus wouldn’t say anything, but then her shoulders dropped. “You should talk to Yang about her family. From what you said, she didn’t have one the first time,
and maybe not a lot of times since. The Yang I know? She put her heart and soul into keeping her family together, but now it’s down to just her and her sister Ruby. Ruby means a lot to her.” She nodded. “And Emerald just got fired from her job last month; we’ve been helping her look for a new one but she’s kinda ground down by being unemployed. If you give her the option, she’ll stop looking at all. She’s talented but she’s always had a bit of a problem with authority figures.”

“No surprises there.”

“And Sun- he’s really downplaying the airships thing. Just seeing a shadow will make him jump. But a hug and talking a bit can calm him down, so just try to stay away from the docks.” She paused. “The rest... kinda new to me. I mean, Pyrrha’s always been a little sensitive about that spot on her chest-used to say it hurt, but doctors could never figure out why. It bothers her from time to time but she mostly ignores it now. Coco usually isn’t this clingy but she gets that way when she really misses someone, so I guess it’s no surprise.”

“And Blake?”

“She’s not usually this open.” Velvet’s ears twitched at the clinking of silverware and plates as the others started settling into their places. “Even around us, it’s like pulling teeth sometimes. So, it’s good. To see her be so honest with her thoughts like that. But-”

“But, she’s still Blake.” A short chuckle left her lips. “For all that’s changed, some things never do.”

“Hey, would you two come sit down?” Coco snapped her fingers, and pointed to the two open seats, each on either side of Blake. “We’re hungry.”

“Oh, drink your coffee, Coco Puff.”

“I swear to the heavens, Yang-”

“Swear to Weiss; you might actually be heard.”

“You want some of this too, Sun?”

“Would all of you stop bickering like children; there’s food on the table-”

“Pyrrha’s right; someone pass me some bread.”

“Fine, but Emie, if you even think about reaching for the salt-”

Weiss smiled, closing her eyes and inhaling deeply, relishing the sounds, the smells- the sense of comfort hanging heavily over all of them. She couldn’t be certain how long this peace would last but every moment made the decades she’d spent alone worth it. Even when she squeezed into the room, clearly too small for the eight of them to fit around the table comfortably, the deity couldn’t find a single complaint as Yang and Sun continued to tease the others lightly, Blake and Coco becoming moderately more tolerant of their jibes with each sip of coffee, while Pyrrha, Emerald, and Velvet focused on keeping the peace and passing plates and bowls around.

Strictly speaking, she didn’t need to eat as she could neither dehydrate nor starve, for these were mortal afflictions, but Weiss eagerly took a portion of the meal for herself regardless. It may not nourish her in the same sense but tasting the ancient recipe- remade, just a tad, because commercial spices would never compare to those freshly picked- healed some of the heartache inflicted by the passage of time, especially here, among those she missed so dearly. Sharing a meal with them- during her darkest nights, she worried that she would never get the chance to do so again, and it broke her heart anew.
Then, she listened in earnest to the conversation as it turned to mundane concerns—bills, jobs, Emerald’s hunt and Pyrrha’s customers, Sun and Yang complaining about their hours, Blake’s next deadline and Coco’s latest flub, with Velvet’s own updates thrown into the mix. Every detail, she committed to memory, dedicated to working around their schedules so no part of their lives suffered from her presence. She’d done enough in that department to last many more lifetimes. But, then, Pyrrha mentioned having to return home soon to attend to a particular responsibility.

“Who is Akoúo?”

“Oh, he’s my pet snake.” For a moment, the woman looked genuinely chagrined. “I fed him before I came here but he has quite the appetite. I’ll need to go home and feed him again soon.”

Weiss couldn’t help but chuckle low. “May I accompany you?”

That drew everyone’s attention as the redhead blushed slightly. “O-of course. It shouldn’t take long.”

“Then, how about we all go?” Yang offered, always the least inclined to relinquish the company once found. “Make a group trip of it. Velvet can come, too.”

“If Pyrrha’s okay with that,” Coco said, having refilled her cup—the third one, and her last it seemed as she babied it much more than the previous two.

“That’s fine.” A chuckle. “If you’ll forgive the mess.”

The deity smiled, hiding her amusement behind her own mug.

It seemed the surprises of this iteration had not yet ceased.
The Final Piece

Chapter Notes

This is something of a baby chapter- not as long compared with the others- because this scene was originally intended to be in the last chapter. However, last chap was getting too long and the next scene wouldn't fit with this one.

It took a bit of debate to figure out how they should all get to Pyrrha’s house in the suburbs of the city. Yang, of course, offered to take Weiss on the back of her motorcycle while nearly everyone else had a seat in their car for her. Seeing as most had to return to their own homes after the trip to Pyrrha’s they couldn’t very well carpool, either. In the end, Velvet played peacekeeper by having Blake ride with Yang and using their shared car to transport Weiss, encouraging the others to inform the deity of their schedules so they could get their own dates. Not that it occurred to any of her beloveds that she might favor one over the other, of course, but the excitement of reclaiming the barest threads of their bond had each clamoring for a chance to uncover just that little bit more.

On the rare instances when she found more than one at a time, they got like this- playing challenging one another for just a bit more time- but never did it garner ill will. Of that, she was thankful, because she wouldn’t be able to take any of them being angry with each other. She bonded them together with the strings of fate so they could find comfort, not strife.

“How long are they going to be like that?” One rabbit ear turned towards her as they followed the lines of vehicles across the city. “Like, falling over themselves just to get five more minutes with you? Don’t get me wrong- it’s hilarious but also a little… concerning. I thought Yang might actually take Sun and Pyrrha up on their offer to fight for the right.”

“They’re excitable, that’s all. Once we’ve established a suitable routine, they’ll become content with it. To an extent,” she replied, chuckling while her eyes roved over the city around them. She only come to it because of a vague feeling that she might find one of her lost lovers here; to find them all had never crossed her mind. “That, or their memories will return, and they’ll retreat from me for a time before making their decision. Whichever comes first.”

“Which is the best case scenario and is there anything I can do to help?” A quick glance. “I mean, it’s good to see everyone enjoying themselves like this and, as a friend, I kinda have a vested interest in helping this go smoothly. So… help me help you.”

She laughed, genuinely surprised by the offer. “Your concern is appreciated but I’m afraid the only thing to do is have patience.” A frown touched her lips. “I’ve yet to figure out the best method. The one I prefer- what I consider to be the ‘best case scenario’, as you put it- is establishing a routine. Providing them with happy memories in this life makes them less inclined to reclaim the memories of the former ones but… that comes with a price.”

“Which is?”

“That they don’t remember.” Lightly, Weiss brushed her fingertips under her left eye. “To some extent, it feels like a lie, withholding the memories. They’re happier without them… but so am I. Most would probably find that wrong of me.”
Velvet hummed while turning down a street. “They do say ignorance is bliss.”

“Rarely with any positive connotations, though, and for good reason.” The deity sighed. “Part of me feels like I prefer when they don’t remember simply because… I can almost ignore my own failings when they do. Almost.”

“It seems like you’ve been beating yourself up over this for thousands of years, though.” Umber eyes flicked her way again. “Shouldn’t you, well, forgive yourself at some point?”

“No,” she replied, resolute in that answer. “Ignoring it is my selfish indulgence but I’ll never forgive myself. I can’t.”

Her companion remained silent for the moment, though the furrow to her brow hinted at a train of thought similar to a lecture that would come another day. Weiss filed it away in the back of her mind; though she’d never had to justify herself to someone else before, she also doubted the Faunus could sway her in this regard. They rode in silence the rest of the way, stopping in front of a quaint one story house with a garage. Almost picturesque- though some part of her instantly surmised the house had likely been left to Pyrrha after her parents’ passing. Usually, her beloveds preferred living with others, most often each other; they acquired roommates easily though often only those they could view as equals in some regard. One of the subconscious ways they tried to return to a time they could hardly recall.

Exiting the vehicle, she caught up with the others at the door, taking note of the cute little place mat and wind chimes hanging from the porch.

“Again, please excuse the mess,” the redhead said, unlocking the front door with a nervous little smile. “I really wasn’t expecting guests-”

“Oh, come off it, Pyr.” Yang laughed, running a hand through her hair to fluff it after taking off her helmet. “Your definition of ‘messy’ is my definition of ‘clean’!”

“A personal failing we’ve yet to break you of.” Coco offered with a wry smile, earning a laugh from everyone except the blonde- though she did smile, albeit begrudgingly.

The house itself was- as Yang had predicted- rather tidy, save for a coat left out or something of that nature. Not that Weiss could focus on that in the moment, instead distracted by a sensation she hadn’t felt in many, many centuries. It seemed her hunch had proven true.

“Where is Akoúo̱?”

“Oh, we can show you!” Sun piped up, his tail curling behind him as he hiked a thumb towards a hallway just a few feet from the foyer. “He’s got his own little room and everything! He’s really spoiled. We’ll make the introductions while Pyrrha warms up his food.”

“He’s really pretty to look at,” Emerald said, falling into step beside her as they walked, Coco and Velvet following behind, while Yang, Pyrrha, and Blake went to the kitchen. Her beloved Nightowl seemed to be pointing out for the umpteenth time that the creature ate far more than it should be capable of consuming. “I’ve never seen another snake like him; he’s one of a kind.”

“I’m quite certain he is,” she replied, following the Faunus into a room and smiling softly.

The terrarium, bigger than most televisions, had a light over it casting a soft glow into the enclosed space, a smattering of vegetation providing quite the natural habitat for the reptile as it sat on a rock. White scales ran from his nose to the tip of his tail with a faint design flowing along his back, hardly a darker color than the rest of him, and bright blue eyes that regarded the newest occupants of the
room with little surprise. However, he did lift his head as they moved further into the room.

“Oh, she ended up getting the bigger tank, huh?” Coco made a noise. “I thought everyone said it was a bad idea?”

“It’s just inadvisable.” Sun made a gesture towards the snake while Weiss continued forward. “It’s not as easy to keep track of him in a bigger tank and makes it harder to avoid getting bit. At the same time, she didn’t even know he was venomous until, what, six months ago?”

“Still not sure it’s a good idea.” Emerald’s words were tinged by a frown. “Just because he’s never tried to bite her before doesn’t mean he won’t in the future.”

“She’s had him almost twenty years!”

“She’s still not even sure what kind of snake he is and she’s yet to find a vet who can…” Velvet quickly got distracted from her point. “Uh, Weiss? What are you doing?”

“Saying hello to an old friend,” she replied, putting a finger to the lock at the top of the terrarium and focusing, using what little power she’d regained to coax the mechanism into obeying her will. It clicked, allowing her to pry open the top and reach into the enclosure.

“Wait!”

“Weiss, stop!”

“He might bite you!”

For a moment, she paused, turning her head to raise a brow at the four clearly panicked expressions directed her way.

“Did all of you forget I’m literally immortal?” From the way they drew back in surprise, she surmised that they, in fact, had. It greatly amused her, one of these aspects that never changed— they always tried so hard to protect her, even at the height of her power. Her beloveds saw it as their duty, their sacred honor, and her expression softened at the memories. “Besides, I have nothing to fear.” Her gaze returned to the snake. “Now do I?”

Without further prompting, he wound his way around her hand, climbing up her wrist and arm with ease. At present, he measured hardly five feet, and she lightly ran her fingers along the top of his head while cooing softly. He pushed up against her touch, tongue flicking out, and she could tell he desired a chance to truly stretch himself out. She felt more than willing to oblige.

“Hey, what’s everyone- Weiss, what the fuck?” She turned towards the door to find Yang, clearly alarmed, eyeing the snake with more than a little apprehension while Pyrrha and Blake stood behind her, both clearly horrified by the sight.

“Would all of you please calm down?” She started for the door, noting that despite their present understanding of the world motivating them to draw back in order to avoid being bitten, their alarm receded by degrees as she calmly passed them by while heading towards the back of the house. “This isn’t the first time you’ve met. Well, it’s your first time, Velvet, but not theirs.” The snake moved his head, looking at Pyrrha and the freshly warmed meal she’d prepared— a mouse, of course, and Weiss found herself rolling her eyes. “Oh, very well. Even though you don’t need it.”

With a nod, the redhead was encouraged to offer up the food, which the snake she’d owned as a pet for years took carefully, so as not to alarm her. “Wait, are you saying… is he…?”
“You’ll remember him once you can see him in his true form.” With that, she led all of them into the backyard and lightly tossed him into the middle of the space. For a normal snake, it would be a cruel thing, but he was no normal snake, made evident as he began to grow in size. The markings along his back became vivid, bright blue, the same as his eyes, until he measured closer to thirty feet in length, coiling around himself and lowering his head to rest in front of her.

“It’ssss good to see you again, Weissss,” he said, closing his eyes as she laid a hand atop his head, petting him as she hadn’t done in several millennia- since they’d parted ways oh so very long ago.

Bittersweet as it might be, though, she couldn’t help the fondness in her tone. “You as well, Myrtenaster.”

Long ago- before Humans or Faunus- Weiss had only a single companion to keep her company as she sang her song to bring life to an otherwise barren world. Mother created one for each of them- a snake for her, a wolf for Winter, and a falcon for Whitley- to accompany them on their journey to create on the canvas Mother provided. In the times that came after, when people emerged and began to roam, venerating the gods of her pantheon as their stories began to unfold, he served as the gauge by which she could measure her power. The stronger she became, the smaller he did.

The inverse proved true as well, however, hence his immense size now- and she didn’t doubt he could be even larger if he so wished. Perhaps even large enough that he could serve his ultimate purpose.

“Uh, Yang? You remember how you told us about that crazy dream you had once where you wrestled Pyrrha’s snake?” Coco’s voice held more than a bit of wonder. “I’m starting to think that really happened.”

“At least oncce a month.” Myrtenaster flicked the very tip of his tail to show his amusement. “But that wasssss long ago.”

“I recall she won more than she lost.” Weiss pointed out, smiling at the little huff she received in response. “I didn’t expect to find you again.”

“I sssstill believe the path you walk is one of unending pain. Foolish.” He moved his head, obviously looking at Pyrrha. “But when she found me… I could see the merit in it. Being condemned to lonelinessss is no way to live.”

“You… pretended to be my pet so I wouldn’t be lonely?” The redhead furrowed her brow, tilting her head slightly.

Myrtenaster nodded. “You were ssstmall, a mortal child trying to keep a snake dry during a rainstorm. Kind and fearlessss in equal measure, as you’ve alwayssss been… but you didn’t play with the other children. Too strong, too swift, feeling out of place no matter where you went- I couldn’t simply leave you.”

Slowly, Pyrrha took a few steps forward, laying her hand on the tip of his snout as her expression softened. “Thank you. You’ve been an excellent listener all these years.”

“My only regret issss that I couldn’t provide more comfort than I did.” One slitted eye focused on Weiss. “But I knew if I remained, you would eventually find them. And, then, I would find you.”

“A reunion I didn’t expect but welcome nonetheless,” she replied, turning to look at the others. While she could see some manner of understanding dawning in six sets of eyes, one remained cautiously curious and she opted to provide a proper explanation. “Myrtenaster is the physical
embodiment of... not my power but, rather, my lack thereof. The greater he is, the less I am, and vice versa. We are two parts of a whole."

"Wait, so, you’ve- you’ve been watching us this whole time, knowing Weiss was out there?" Sun’s shoulders dropped. "Why couldn’t you tell us?"

"Okay, back up." Coco lightly flicked his ear. "Do you honestly think we would’ve gone ‘oh yes, the talking snake definitely knows what’s up’? Instead of, oh I don’t know, freaking the fuck out and trying to kill him?"

"Wouldn’t we have remembered, though?"

"We’ve all been friends for years without remembering.” Emerald pointed out, walking over and running a hand over smooth white scales, tracing the bright blue patterns along his back. “You’ve been watching over all of us, haven’t you?"

"Aassss much as I could. I tried to help.”

"You did, big guy.” Yang chuckled, moving forward as everyone else seemed to overcome their shock, flashes of memories likely coming back.

When he was small- hardly longer than the palm of her hand- he’d often be carried around by her beloveds while they attended to their tasks. He’d wind through Pyrrha’s hair or around Emerald’s wrist, read with Blake or inspect Yang’s creations in ways she never could, and he helped Sun with his pranks as often as he helped Coco thread her needles. As an extension of herself, he cared for and doted on her chosen just as much as she did.

But the night her pantheon fell, when she’d realized all too late that she’d failed to heed his warnings, they’d diverged. Myrtenaster sought a path of solitude and perhaps redemption but she harbored no such illusions. Weiss sought merely to reclaim what little happiness she’d found in the world, even if it meant suffering through pain as well.

A fitting fate, she thought, brushing her fingers across her left eye.

"I’m going to hazard a guess and say this has never happened before.” Velvet nodded towards the others as they ran their hands along the snake’s scales, rediscovering old jokes and soft spots.

"Never.” Weiss drew in a steadying breath, unable to begrudge them this but worried about what it would bring. “Myrtenaster and I... parted ways when I lost them the first time. The ties to their first life are so strong this time. It won’t be long until they try to remember... and the nightmares will likely be worse because of it.”

"Well, the apartment- it’s not a great commute for Pyrrha, but I don’t think she’d mind if we had a sleepover every night. At least until they remember."

"I appreciate the offer but I don’t think it’s a good idea.” A frown touched her lips as she looked away, finding a startlingly deep well of patience reflecting in umber eyes. With a moment’s more trepidation, she voiced the concerns lingering in the back of her mind. “They have lives now. Lives I am not a part of; if we allow them, they will abandon those lives... and be ruined if they reject me. It’s happened before because I was too careless. I can’t let them throw away all they’ve built in this lifetime. With or without me, they must be happy. That’s... what’s important.”

For a moment, the Faunus sighed, glancing back at the others before her gaze became fixated on something, ears perking up. “I definitely wouldn’t call this unhappy. Unsafe, maybe.”
Her brows furrowed, she turned to see what had caught Velvet’s attention and immediately rolled her eyes. “Would you two get down from there?”

“Oh, come on, this is a great photo op!” Sun called out, feigning to struggle against Myrtenaster’s jaw from inside the snake’s mouth.

“Plus, look at these bad boys!” Yang ran her hands along on fang the measured about as long as she did from the other side of his mouth. “You can regrow these, right Myr? ‘Cause like, imagine these as the backing for a nice, like, armchair. A throne, maybe? Some bear claws for the arms- that’d be metal as fuck.”

“Regardless, you’re both being absolutely ridiculous.”

“They’re fine.” Myrtenaster assured, obviously enjoying all the attention. They always were too alike in that regard.

“We’ve just never seen him this big.” Coco explained, coming over to lightly rub along her back in a soothing manner. “Let them have their fun.”

“Yes we have,” Blake said, surprising herself with the words even as she traced along the patterns on his scales. “We have seen him this big before.” Myrtenaster lowered his head, allowing Sun and Yang to step out as melancholy touched her heart, watching her precious Nightowl stumble through the memory. Her expression pinched together, ears flicking back before she seemed to dismiss it for the time being, turning a small smile to the others. “At least now we know why you ate so much all these years.”

“I suppose frozen mice are no substitute for the offerings you used to receive.” Pyrrha noted, a hint of worry in her tone that the snake immediately tried to soothe away, gently bumping the tip of his nose against her shoulder.

“I have been thankful for your care throughout the yearssss. It’s no small thing, taking care of another creature, showing compassion when otherssss discouraged you.” He closed his eyes, pressing against her hand. “I have sssmissed all of you. Even silent, to be around you was better than without.” When his eyes opened, he looked over at her, a silent concession preceding his apology. “I’m sorry you’ve gone sssso long alone.”

“It’s alright. I think we both learned plenty from our respective journeys.” Weiss paused, weighing her options; she didn’t want to speak too specifically, lest she bring forth things best left sleeping, but neither did she want to dance around the issue too much. “For what it’s worth, I think it benefited both of us in different ways. You, at least, understand why I walk the path I do.”

“Yessss. Foolish as it may be, it’s become clear to me why you’ve done so.” With that, he began to shrink while winding himself around Pyrrha’s arm, reverting to his former size and draping himself across her shoulders. “Honestly, it’s nicccee to be able to speak again, have someone to talk to. I’ve not had a proper conversation with anyone ssssince we lost the temple.”

“Really? Not even Ehre?” The snake shook his head. “Strange. I wonder if she came to the same conclusion you did; I’ve not seen her in millennia myself.”

“I’d wager no; she’s always been the sssstubborn one.”

“Like you’re one to talk,” Pyrrha said, lips curling into a grin. “I remember someone being rather difficult when it came time for a bath.”

“I am a primordial force of unimaginable power; I can bathe myself, thank you.” His tongue flicked
out as he turned away. “Plussss, I don’t like warm water.”

She laughed lightly, trailing a finger along the top of his head. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Hey, you know what?” Velvet pulled out her scroll, gesturing to all of them. “Sun wasn’t wrong about this being a great chance to take a picture. All of you are together again after so long. Definitely worth something to mark the occasion, right?”

Weiss thought about objecting—generally speaking, she tried to keep herself out of pictures and paintings, always a touch too aware of how much attention it might draw, but those doubts were quickly buried as her beloveds wholeheartedly agreed. Without prompting or any direction from her, they arranged themselves around her—Blake and Emerald at her shoulders, Yang and Pyrrha kneeling to either side while Coco and Sun sat at her feet—and it took conscious effort to hold back her tears. If she allowed it, she could close her eyes and almost imagine not a day had gone by, her spirit whole and complete with every piece finally in place.

But then the scroll made a noise akin to the shutter of a camera and umber eyes twinkled, examining the picture.

“Hey, c’mon, lemme see!” Sun tried lunging for the scroll but missed, Velvet pulling it well out of his reach and dodging him with ease. Of course, she had to keep her wits about her as both Yang and Emerald tried to succeed where he’d failed, the latter with far more natural talent in this particular arena. “No fair!”

Coco went to try and sort the mess out while Pyrrha laughed, and Weiss had to wipe at her eyes. The times she managed to get all of them together, they struggled with making sense of their memories, grappling with whether or not to trust her words and the fuzzy recollections at the back of her mind; even when they knew each other, they found it difficult to latch onto this side of themselves, the playfulness, the part of them that had lived and loved and learned beside each other for centuries upon centuries. To see them like this? Laughing and teasing and playing, with herself and Myrtenaster close by, with a new face in the form of Velvet…

Even if they rejected her, this iteration had already brought her so much joy, and when she was finally permitted to see the picture of them, no amount of self restraint kept her tears in check. Adorned in her ancient regalia, surrounded by timeless expressions wearing modern clothes, Myrtenaster’s white and blue scales standing out against red hair… not since the day her temple burned and took with it the mural that once adorned her inner sanctum had a more complete picture been captured.

This time, they didn’t try to soothe her— not one of them, because her tears weren’t born of crushing loneliness or sadness. Just… happiness and peace.

Yet, there still existed a sort of restlessness deep in her heart and fears lingering at the back of her mind. In time, she’d have to confront them… but not now.

“Maybe we should do a silly one,” Weiss said, noting that while far from serious, her beloveds didn’t quite radiate the same energy in the picture as they did in real life. “Just… because.”

After a chorus of affirmations, Yang pulled Sun and Pyrrha close, whispering between them until they nodded. Myrtenaster must’ve been listening as well, as he immediately slid down and resumed his larger size while Coco was filled in on the plan by a whispering Sun.

“What have you started?” Velvet chuckled, watching as everyone seemed to get clued in one by one, mischief shining in their eyes.
“Nothing I won’t thoroughly enjoy,” she replied, allowing for a moment of silence before continuing. “You must have questions.”

“Just one that’s pressing.” Their gazes met as the others began enacting their plot. “There’s a recurring theme in ancient cultures that some creature will destroy the world if the people ever lost faith. Is it Myrtenaster those stories are referring to?”

“Some. If it involves the world being swallowed whole, then it’s Myrtenaster. My sister and brother, they have similar companions- one would drown the world in blood and the other would steal away the sun and leave the world to turn to ice. Together, we were the three strongest deities, aside from Mother… and fell the hardest when it all crumbled to dust.”

“But can he... actually do that?”

She nodded. “The only reason he hasn’t is because I expressly forbid him. If the world was destroyed, I’d lose them, and I couldn’t stand that. A selfish reason, I know, but… perhaps that’s all there is to me.”

Even that cost her a steep price but not one she was unwilling to pay. Not when Yang finally bounded over to them, a wide smile on her lips.

“C’mon, you two! Get the lead out!”

“Yang, what are you- whoa!”

Velvet pinwheeled her arms when the blonde rather abruptly ducked down and scooped the Faunus up, perching her on one shoulder and grabbing one of Weiss’ hands, leading her over to where the others had arranged themselves in a pyramid of sorts, leaning against Myrtenaster’s coils for support. Sun, Pyrrha, and Coco made the base, once Yang slotted herself between the last two. Emerald sat on Sun’s and Pyrrha’s shoulders while Blake used Coco and Yang, leaving the rest of Velvet’s weight to be borne by Pyrrha. The deity laughed, a bright and free sound even as she felt the snake’s tail wrap around her waist, lifting her up and setting her on Velvet’s and Blake’s shoulders, allowing her to lean over and put a hand on Emerald’s.

The whole while, all of them were laughing, teasing and joking about not dropping anyone and various lightly flirtatious remarks on their positions, the whole thing culminating in Mystenaster holding up a scroll with a timer counting down until it began taking pictures. She could hardly hear the snapping sound over everyone’s amusement, the smile on her face so wide it hurt. To have them again, to hear them so genuinely happy, with hardly any blemishes marring the last twenty four hours- she’d thought something like this entirely lost to her. Yet, she found it, here, now.

The combined pain of three thousand years paled in comparison to this moment, and when she was finally returned to the ground, she regarded the photo with a font of fondness filling her chest. Every frame contained such unbridled joy, such pure happiness, and now she had proof.

“I’ll get them developed for you.” The Faunus offered, her twitching slightly to catch the teasing jibes the others traded among themselves, old jokes they shared with the snake that he helped them revive. “Which one’s your favorite?”

“All of them,” she replied, gaze moving from the pictures to her beloveds, her long lost companion, and finally to Velvet. “Every single one.”

No amount of agony could compare to this and she would continue down this road no matter what it brought. Just for one more chance to experience this.
Night descended upon the city and, for the first time in a long while, Weiss found herself content with the night breeze. The sentiments that had called to her hardly a week ago barely registered now, her hunger more than sated by what her beloveds bestowed upon her. Myrtenaster had elected to remain with Pyrrha, not wanting to leave her alone, and she envied him that freedom; though they’d offered- entreated, more like- for her to stay with any of them, she remained steadfast in her initial plan. As much as she wanted to spend every second with them, she couldn’t impose so greatly nor so soon.

Instead, she would bide her time and spend the hours preparing for the best case scenario- that her loves might choose to weave her into their lives. It couldn’t be like before, at least not entirely. She could provide them a home and a means of support, yes, but they couldn’t abandon their careers and social ties to devote themselves to her. Only after watching all the things they’d accomplished in their other lives did she find herself wondering what she prevented them from achieving during that first one- how things might’ve turned out differently had she encouraged them to travel Remnant or pursue whatever caught their fancy. Not that she ever forbade them from leaving, of course, but she didn’t encourage it, and that seemed a failing on her part in hindsight.

It was a mistake she wouldn’t make again, no. She would continue to arrange the penthouse for them if they chose to live with her- nesting, more like, seeing as she’d already made the majority of the preparations- but she wouldn’t sway them, wouldn’t hurry their decision. Only time would tell what they decided, and though it remained her one true obstacle and adversary through the millennia, it could occasionally turn to her favor.

She could only hope this would be one of those times.

“They haven’t stopped talking about you, ya know.” Velvet sounded equal parts amused and vexed, her words conveying more of the former than the latter at present. “It’s starting to annoy Blake. She keeps turning to me, asking me if I remember something, and then remembers that I couldn’t possibly and has to go find her scroll while swearing in old Fauni. It’s kinda funny.”

“You sound a touch frustrated.” Weiss pointed out, taking a sip from her coffee while sitting at her dining room table, having recently returned from a shopping trip to collect the last of the bare essentials. She hadn’t anticipated the Faunus’ call but welcomed it all the same.

“Don’t get me wrong, it’s hilarious.” A brief pause, then a sigh. “But I don’t get why you’re imposing this arbitrary limit. All of them want to see you again. They’re more than willing to make time.”

“As I’ve said before, that’s a road best not travelled.” She leaned back in her chair, glancing towards the living room of her penthouse. After a day’s work, she’d managed to arrange it in a style she liked- for the moment- which meant all she had left to do would be moving the specific items out from their storage in the upstairs room. “If I let them, they’d all take as much vacation time as they could or outright quit to move in with me, and you know I’m right.”

“And I’m not arguing that point, specifically, but a full month of no contact? C’mon, Weiss, that’s a little extreme.”
“It’s not ‘no contact’; they’re free to call.”

“At specific times, for only fifteen minutes.”

“It’s scheduling.”

“It’s painful is what it is. I mean, look at it this way.” She could hear some shuffling on the other end of the line. “I can call you whenever I want, talk for however long I want. Anyone in the world can. Except for the six people you’ve spent the last century looking for? Who want nothing more than to see you again? How is that fair to them?”

Weiss winced. She might be an ancient deity but, in this particular arena, she still had to grasp at straws and hope everything played out the way she wanted, no longer strong enough to influence fate. Perhaps Velvet had a point. “What would you have me do, then?”

“Actually give them a chance to work you into their lives. Go on dates, see movies- start one-on-one and then move into the bigger gatherings. Just give them something other than disjointed memories to sift through on their own.”

That caught her attention and a frown touched her lips. “Blake’s nightmares have gotten worse, haven’t they?”

“Yes and no.” The Faunus sighed again. “She wakes up in the middle of the night now, usually shouting something, but I can’t catch all of it- something about getting back or coming back, I’ve been able to translate that much. She also keeps clutching the back of her neck. She can’t really remember what woke her up and she falls back asleep pretty easy but it scares the shit out of me every time it happens. She won’t remember in the morning, but I sure as hell do, and what she does remember, she never wants to talk about. At least, not to me, and you know how she is when it comes to what’s on her mind.”

Weiss bit her lip. “The last time I tried talking it through with Blake, she became angry with me. I suppose that’s my fault, in part; I used to explain my reasoning, tried to justify myself, but… that never ended well.”

“How about, this time, you just try dealing with things as they come? Yeah, she might be mad, but she misses you, and I know the others do, too. Yang’s been… kinda weird lately, Sun and Pyrrha are distracted, Coco’s buried herself in work, and Emerald’s put in at least a thousand job applications in the past week alone. It’s not healthy for them and their attempts to cope are… not helping. What they need is help sifting through their memories and you’re the only person who can do that. Just… give them the answers they need right now. Let them make their own decisions regarding how to feel about it.”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to do-”

“No, you’ve been keeping them at arm’s length and letting them deal with it on their own- together, but without your help. And taking all the blame, saying you failed them, that’s not doing anyone any favors. You’re telling them things as you see them.” Velvet paused, obviously thinking. “Try answering their questions. Don’t tell them why you did it or explain your point of view, just give them the context, the background, and let them go from there.”

She tapped a finger against the side of her cup. “They might still reject me.”

“You’re running that risk no matter what. At least let them have a chance to make that decision for themselves and to make what happy memories they can, while they can.”
“I suppose you have a point.” Taking a sip from her cup, Weiss weighed her options. “And, I suppose small dates wouldn’t be too much of an imposition into their daily lives. But they can’t be too frequent.”

“There’s six of them; just assign each one a day per week and save Sunday for group activities or to give everyone a breather, yourself included.” Velvet chuckled. “We all had a tabletop phase for a while. They cleared out their weekends for six months once to play a campaign; they can handle date night once a week, I promise.”

She raised a brow. “Were you part of that campaign?”

“Are you kidding? I was the Game Master.” A beat. “Incidentally, that was the last time all of us played.”

“I’m not sure if that bodes well or ill.”

“I mean, when you hit the perfect notes on the first try, are you really gonna put on an encore? Although…” The pause that followed dragged on a touch too long, bringing a frown to her lips. “During that campaign, there was a section towards the end when they had to raid a temple of an evil god. Everyone got kinda… weird about it- not upset but they definitely didn’t like that section of the campaign, and I thought they’d be happier about it considering all the shit that particular god put them through during the campaign’s events. Do you think… it reminded them? Subconsciously?”

“It’s possible, yes.” Weiss leaned forward, resting her elbows on the table. “The memories of their lives before, they’re part of their very souls. Sometimes, fragments bleed through, but it’s usually short lived.”

“Oh, yeah, once we got past that part, they started having fun again, and whenever we bring it up, no one mentions that part of the campaign. I just never knew why they reacted so badly to it. But, I think this strengthens my point; without the necessary context, all they have are conflicting emotions, and they can’t process them. That’s gotta be frustrating for everyone.”

“You’re right, you’re right.” The deity closed her eyes, her shoulders falling slightly. “I’m just… terrified of saying the wrong thing and driving them away. If that’s their choice, I’ll accept it, but… I don’t want to lose them again.”

“You won’t, as long as you try to keep them in the first place. That’s why you did all this, right? So that, even though they were gone, you could find them again? So you’d never really lose them? Right now, you’re pushing them away. Let them get close. That’s where they want to be.”

“I’ll try,” she said, glancing towards the living room.

Perhaps Velvet had the right of it. In the past, she’d never exercised any restraint, too enthused about finding them again to take things slow. However, remaining distant hadn’t done her any favors either. Perhaps, a little bit at a time, they could reforge their bonds… but with a little more interaction than she’d originally planned.

She just had to pace herself. With some, that would be easier said than done.

Weiss smiled softly, watching the Faunus across from her fidget with her tea cup as feline ears tried valiantly not to flick around. They sat in a quaint little bookstore that had a tea shop attached, exactly the sort of place that would appeal to Blake’s tastes and an establishment she frequented whenever she could, or so she’d said. Unfortunately, the conversation stalled there as amber eyes became filled with questions she wouldn’t voice.
Finally, she decided to step in and help her beloved out, speaking in a tongue she almost thought she’d never use again. “What’s on your mind?”

“Nothing,” Blake instantly replied, her ears flicking back as she looked away. She’d replied in kind, easily using a language she couldn’t even remember learning- the same dialect they used in her first life. Velvet’s mention of the old tongue made her think that having a conversation like this might help overall; obviously, Blake had connected to some part of herself from back then, but not completely. Not yet. “I mean… there’s a lot on my mind I just… can’t find the words.”

“That’s not like you.” She lightly laughed, making a motion with her hand. “Speak your mind. I’ll listen.”

“But you won’t answer my questions.” With that, she took a sip of her tea and missed the brief frown that passed over the deity’s face. “I just want to know why I’m still so angry… and why I feel bad for that.”

Weighing her options, Weiss realized she had an opportunity to do exactly as Velvet had said: provide context without framing it from her point of view. It would just need to be worded carefully. “I made you a promise, once. When you died the first time… you thought I broke it- and rightfully so. In a way, I did. But, I think you’ve realized that I’ve also kept it. So, you’re conflicted.” She busied herself with her coffee cup for a moment, watching the dark liquid swirl. “Angry because I failed you; contrite because I was trying to make it right. It’s a difficult position to be in and I don’t blame you.”

“Don’t keep saying that.” Blake’s voice carried a little heat at first before she put up her hands in a placating gesture. “I’m sorry, I didn’t- I shouldn’t have said it like that.” She paused, her shoulders slumping as she ran a hand through her bangs. “I just… so many words are in my head. So many emotions.” Then she looked up, amber eyes pleading. “I am happy to see you again, to have this chance, but… I’m so many other things too.”

“To borrow a phrase…” She spoke slowly, her lips curling into a grin. “I have crossed oceans of time to find you, Blake. Let yourself feel these things; I won’t turn away. I’ve weathered more than a few lectures from you and I welcome any more you have to give.”

For a moment, the Faunus’ nose scrunched up. “The book was better.” Then, a sigh as she took another sip of tea. “I just… wish I understood your patience. Where it comes from, why… well, I know why… but somehow, I don’t.” She looked up. “Is it… because of the promise you broke? Is it tied to that?”

“Yes.” Fear nipped at her heart, bracing herself for the question no doubt coming.

“What promise did you break?”

Weiss regarded her coffee for a long moment, debating on whether or not to deflect again. However, the more persistent they became, the more her reluctance to provide the answers they sought looked like she was covering something up. Which, while not entirely inaccurate, wasn’t the impression she wanted to give them, either. “That I would protect all of you.”

“… what?”

“I promised I would protect all of you.” She looked up, meeting amber eyes while trying to hide the pain she could feel spreading through her chest. “You left behind your family and your people to join me at my temple. It was where you felt you were meant to be… but you missed your loved ones. When the others joined us- Emerald first, then Yang, and so on- you made me promise I would
protect them, this family we’d formed, the bonds we forged. In my moment of failure, you held me responsible.” Her lips twitched and she just barely kept from grimacing at the memory, holding back the tears she could feel pressing at her eyes. “You were right to do so. I killed you.”

Silence stretched between them until Blake reached out, lightly pulling one of her hands from her cup to hold it in hers. “You don’t have to shoulder all the blame, Weiss. You can forgive yourself.”

“Blake-”

“Velvet’s already told me how you refuse to do that.” The Faunus spoke over her, ears flicking as she allowed a bit more of her frustration to come out before it smoothed away. “You said it’s going to take time to process everything. I’m… still trying to do that. But, don’t let me being stuck in the past keep you there, too. You can let go of your guilt, Weiss.”

Her beloved Nightowl, ever watching over her. She didn’t deserve such care. “And as I told Velvet, that’s just not possible, but don’t let it trouble you.” She turned her hand, wrapping her fingers around the Faunus’. “Let’s turn to happier memories. What adventures have you been on in this life?”

To some extent, it felt like she was covering up her own failings yet again, but she’d grown accustomed to the sensation. With time, it might fade… but it would never go away entirely.

“I’m not sure if anything can compare to ‘went on pilgrimage to a goddess’ temple to save an island’ but there was the time I had to break into our apartment because we’d both locked ourselves out.” Her ears perked up, the clouds of confusion pushed away for the time being. Perhaps they’d return when her nightmares did or slip away to harass her in the next life, only time would tell.

Time, as always, remained her most daunting opposing force. “I’d love to hear it. I’ve learned that there’s no story you could tell that I won’t want to hear.”

Blake watched her for a moment, her gaze darting away briefly before returning as she obviously took a gamble. “Okay, but, first… Weiss… how many times have you found me? Specifically?”

Her lips twitched. “Fifteen.”

“And how many times have we done this?” She motioned between them. “Talked, reconnected, became… something close to what we were?”

She feigned a moment to think on it- she kept each tally committed to memory, and reflected on each enough times to recall them, in order, with almost picture perfect clarity. Her silence wasn’t born from a need to think; rather, she needed the time to brace herself. “Nine. Of the rest, three times, I pushed too far and you rejected me. Twice, by the time I found you, it was too late and you were either dead or dying. Once… you already had a family and you were happy, so I watched from afar.”

Blake’s hand curled around hers, thumb brushing over her knuckles. “So, there’s a pretty good chance we can work through this. That this part, the part that hurts… it gets better.”

“Yes,” she replied, pausing, waging a war in her heart before conceding the battle and letting the words out. “Blake… don’t rush yourself.” Weiss felt a small smile curl her lips. “Fifteen times, I found you. Fifteen times, I loved you just as dear. Don’t think it’s necessary to react a certain way or come to a certain conclusion. You won’t lose me, no matter what decision you make.”

For a moment, she hesitated. Then, the Faunus squeezed her hand lightly. “It feels like… we’re losing time, though. We don’t have eternity anymore.”
“You don’t, that’s true.” A sigh - a happy one. “But I still do, and what I’ve learned is that even the longest century pales next to another minute with you - with any of you. The story of this life shouldn’t be counted by the minutes we spend together but by the happiness we find, however it comes. The others - they can bring you happiness, too, and loving them is far easier, isn’t it?”

“You’re not wrong.” Her ears flicked, something unspoken passing through her mind, and Weiss acknowledged she may never know exactly what. “So… if it takes me more time to deal with this… if it takes time for me to trust you again… that’s okay?”

“More than,” she replied, squeezing the hand in hers reassuringly. “I will be here as long as you want me, Blake.” Then, she decided to harken back to something from their shared past, something likely buried deeper than the Faunus realized existed. “Sing your praises and I will make your harvest bountiful; embrace your joy and I will make your rivers flow; rest in the land made for you and I will watch over you.”

Amber eyes lit up, a small smile curling her lips. “Save my people and I will be your priestess.” A short chuckle passed her lips. “I- I just realized we’ve been speaking Fauni this whole time. Do you often switch to our old dialects?”

“The others don’t care for it as much but I think we both know you’ve always held the power of words in higher regard,” she replied, lifting what remained of her drink in a toast. “If you feel possessed of the urge, we can always speak like this. The others may not reply back in like manner but they’ll be able to understand you, too.”

“Good.” Blake lifted her own cup, and they drank together, turning the conversation to lighter topics.

Weiss waited with bated breath. “Well?”

“No nightmares,” Velvet said, the smile in her voice audible. “She slept through the night.”

Relief flooded the deity as she slumped back on her bed. “That’s good. Excellent.”

“And that’s the hard part out of the way, right? Blake’s always the hardest?”

“More or less.” She passed a hand over her face. “There are still challenges ahead but this, this is a good sign. I worried they’d become worse.”

“Well, stop second guessing yourself. Just be as honest as possible with them; they’ll work out the rest on their own.” Velvet chuckled. “Oh, you’re going out with Emerald tonight, right?”

“Yes, there’s a movie she wanted to see, I can’t recall the name of it though.”

“Oh, don’t worry; she has pretty good taste when it comes to watching with other people. She’ll watch the bad ones by herself all the time, though. Just don’t break her suspension of disbelief; she likes buying into the movie, even the bad ones.”

“Of course she does.” A smile curled her lips. “There were nights when Blake would tell the stories people passed around about me and my pantheon. Emerald would listen intently, always a fan of the storyteller’s art. Any time I tried to chime in with corrections, she’d swat my shoulder and chide me about rudeness.” She chuckled. “Some things never change.”

“They really don’t.”
Bolstered by what small victory she could claim with Blake, Weiss looked forward to her time with Emerald.

They walked side-by-side down the sidewalk, one noticeably more nervous than the other. Considering the subject of the movie, Weiss understood what had her beloved so tense, but trying to address it proved tricky.

Ultimately, she defaulted to being blunt.

“Did the movie upset you?”

“No!” Red eyes darted her way, then towards the other side of the street. “I mean, no, it didn’t bother me. But… did it bother you?”

“Not particularly,” she replied, tilting her head as they walked. “I suppose I’m used to it at this point. History… it changes, more than one might think. Facts become muddled when the primary sources are centuries gone and people generally want a story to make sense yet life rarely does.” She shrugged. “I’ve heard countless retellings by this point. I’ll admit, this one at least strayed closer to the truth than usual in some regards.”

“It did?” Emerald raised a brow. Unlike Blake, she hadn’t reconnected with her past life to the same degree, so they spoke in the plain language of modern Remnant. After millennia to learn and practice, it didn’t bother the deity to switch between different dialects and she avoided any concern the woman might’ve had about not understanding it. “Your brother was really like that?”

“That’s not very comforting, is it?” A chuckle. “Not exactly; he didn’t have any designs to take over the world but he rather enjoyed playing tricks whenever and wherever he could, often with little thought as to the consequences. A little less conniving villainous genius and a little more bored immortal dedicated to creating his own amusement.” She inclined her head towards her beloved Thief, lowering her voice slightly. “The part they got right, though, was that he did grow rather jealous of Winter and me.”

“He did?” Green brows pinched together as she bit her lip, looking away. “I’m sorry. It’s… probably bad memories-”

“Emerald,” she said, her voice soft. “You have questions. Feel free to ask them.”

For a moment, she remained silent before stopping in her tracks. Weiss did, too, and waited while she marshalled her thoughts. As the penitent one, her Thief so rarely spoke out for her own sake, though that improved with time; before Yang joined them, she would quietly accept whatever was given to her, never complaining. It worried the deity but the passing years loosened her up, and she slowly reclaimed the freedoms she’d forsaken.

“Is Whitley the reason we’re like this?” Red eyes met hers, so full of questions and hurt. “Is he the reason we died? The reason we keep dying.”

That was bound to be asked by someone, though she didn’t expect it to be Emerald. “Yes and no. Whitley did grow jealous- he loved nothing more than attention and his worship began to fade as mine grew. Combined with my attention shifting to you and the others and Winter never being very… patient with his antics, he sought to play a prank on us to earn our attention. Usually, he could set right anything he changed or destroyed through his jokes, but he’d grown too weak. He couldn’t undo the damage he’d done, and it eventually snowballed into the whole pantheon falling. I
was simply the last to succumb.”

The movie had gotten that right as well. The legend that explained the fall of the gods- or, rather, the story made up to discourage further worship of her pantheon- had been retold many times over the years. In books, plays, movies- the medium changed but the story largely stayed the same. A group of mortals, tired of the uncaring gods above treating them as nothing more than playthings, rose up and, through Whitley’s poorly executed scheming to install himself as leader of the pantheon, the mortals succeeded in overcoming insurmountable odds. Objectively, she could see the appeal of the story from a mortal’s perspective.

But she absolutely despised how she was usually portrayed. It varied on occasion but usually could be summarised by the word ‘glutton’- for food, sex, material things, it didn’t matter, as long as she had all of it. Hence why she was always the one the mortals truly sought to destroy as the source of all their ills. It filled her with fury the first time she heard the tale but, after so many years, it stopped eliciting any response at all.

“Then, he is the reason we’re- we’re trapped in this cycle-”

“No, I did that, alone.” A frown touched her lips. “He did orchestrate the events that allowed it to occur but it was still my neglect that ultimately caused my downfall. If I’d-” She stopped there before she could start assuming the blame again, pausing long enough to gather her bearings. “I could’ve stopped it but I didn’t. The cycle… the lives you’ve lived between then and now is what I did so I wouldn’t lose all of you, and so you could find the others in every life.” She looked away, down the street as her gaze unfocused. “And… weak as I am, I do have the power to release you from it. I can still sever the ties-”

“No!” Emerald grabbed her hand, her expression pleading. “I’m not saying that, I just- sometimes, I blink and I see something else, some where else. I blink again and I’m back, but I have to think because I’m not sure where ‘back’ is, or where I just was, and it’s- it’s been that way all my life! Now I know why and I just…”

She looked away, searching for a word, and they’d had conversations in this vein enough times for Weiss to make a fairly educated guess.

“You just want someone to blame,” she said, her voice soft.

“I just want to know… that I’m not broken.” In that moment, she looked so sad. “It always felt out of reach, the dreams I had sometimes. Surrounded by people I loved, being cared for, doted on- I always felt a little guilty when I woke up because… well, they’re my friends, but I probably don’t mean as much to them as they do to me.” Her expression pinched as she obviously fought not to cry. “Knowing that there was a time… when I knew it was reciprocated… and it’s gone and we all have to fight to get it back every hundred years or so…”

Weiss stepped forward, pulled Emerald to her, and wrapped her up in a soft embrace. The woman clung to her, too strong to let her tears fall but unable to resist the comfort the deity offered.

“I know there’s nothing I can say to turn back time and make this right but, please, believe me when I say it’s always reciprocated. Through every life, through hundreds and thousands of years, they love you just as dearly as you love them.” She closed her eyes and clung a little tighter, her chest aching at how hard the woman fought to keep from breaking down entirely. “And I never stopped, my precious Thief, my beautiful Emerald. From the moment we met, you’ve always had a piece of my heart. That’s never changed.”

They stood like that for a while, as an untold flurry of emotions ran through the woman, and Weiss
wished it got easier with every iteration but it never did. Blake’s hurt and anger were difficult to deal with, yes, but Emerald’s disbelief that continued to plague her, the feeling that she didn’t deserve her friends or the love she received, that was difficult to handle in its own way, too. The first time, a full century of affirmations began to instill the belief within her, and by the time Pyrrha joined them, her beloved Thief took their affections for what they were. In subsequent lives, she still harbored that distrust that others cared for her genuinely, and though it took less time to remind her that they did, it still hurt to fight the battle each time.

Deep in her heart, Weiss understood that her powers had limitations now, a definitive limit, and she couldn’t do anything to make Emerald abandon her guarded nature. Until they were reunited, the years she spent in the company of the others still had a shadow, moments where she doubted they cared about her. It broke Weiss’ heart.

But, she found ways of mending it, carding her fingers through green strands. No matter what—whether or not Emerald accepted her back into her life—Weiss ensured that she at least believed the others cared for her genuinely. Her Thief deserved that unwavering love.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” The deity drew back, a small smile gracing her lips. “You’re allowed to feel these things. I just hope you believe me when I say that you don’t have to continue hurting. Myself, the others— we will help you mend it and make up for the lost time.” A chuckle— perhaps a little more mirthless than she should’ve allowed— slipped past her lips. “Believe me when I say, there’s plenty to make up, and we all look forward to it.”

Silence settled over them, the city paying them no mind as everyone else continued, blissfully unaware of the internal battle waging in red eyes. When she finally spoke, her voice was soft. “What happened to him? Whitley?”

A frown tugged at her lips. “Mother ultimately held him responsible for the whole mess. She was vexed with Winter and me for not stopping him, for not keeping him in check, but it was his actions that brought us all toppling down, so she stripped him of everything. Powerless, he was cast down into a place I can hardly articulate and, as far as I know, there he remains.” She paused, trying to put the concept into words, because while she’d never laid eyes on the place Whitley had been sent, she understood it the same way she intrinsically understood the world around her. Created by Mother’s hand, the same as her, she had a special connection to even that place. “Mortals the world over have their own versions of where he was sent— Hell, Xibalba, Nilfheim, Tartarus. The underworld.” A pause. “I… rather prefer how the various cultures of Remnant interpret it. My understanding is… decidedly less… comforting.”

“You haven’t gone to see him?”

“Only mortals believe such a place can be visited.” A shudder passed through her. “Mother created it with the intention of disposing of things she never wanted to see again; if there’s a way to return, I can’t imagine it.”

She looked away, up the street and trying to hide her emotions as one specific memory returned to the forefront of her mind, forcing her to reach up and pass a hand over her face to assuage the pain. Vivid blue eyes, an imperious gaze, and a promise that it would only be a matter of time until she joined Whitley.

“I didn’t mean to upset you.”

She turned her head, noting how Emerald’s brows knit together, and softened her expression. “You
haven’t, I promise.” Weiss smiled, soft and small. “Being reminded of the past…it hurts, yes. Just as it hurts you to be reminded of what was lost, it hurts me, too. But, I endeavor to remember that, there is nothing I had before that I can’t have again. Nothing important anyway.” Lightly, she brushed the back of her knuckles against the woman’s cheek, prompting her smile to widen. “There. I always cherish your smiles.”

“As if I give them out so rarely,” her beloved Thief replied, though her spirits seemed bolstered all the same. Linking their arms together, she nodded up the street. “How about ice cream to end the night? End on a sweet note?”

The deity hummed. “A perfect end to a perfect night.”

When she saw the way Emerald’s smile danced in her eyes, she felt confident that they’d taken an important step.

But the journey ahead of them remained long.

“You know, I have to hand it to you; I’ve never seen Emerald come back from a movie theater and not immediately text all of us with a critique of the movie.”

“She’s always been especially artistic with visual mediums,” Weiss replied, leaving the scroll sitting on her dresser while sifting through her clothes. Unfortunately, she couldn’t break out her regalia for every occasion and opted for more modern clothing for the previous two dates. Knowing Yang as she did, though, a nice skirt would likely be ill-advised, especially considering the woman’s motorcycle. “Although, I’m not sure if silence bodes well.”

“Back up, I said she didn’t send us a critique; I didn’t say she didn’t text us at all.” Velvet laughed, the sound slightly distorted by the scroll’s speaker. She thought it a shame; the Faunus had such a beautiful laugh. “I don’t know what you said to her but she’s being a lot more…open, I guess would be the word. It’s a nice change of pace. Usually, it’s like pulling teeth to get her to talk about what’s on her mind. It’s helping the others a lot- when the guarded one starts talking about the things going through her head, it makes everyone a bit more talkative, ya know?”

“Really?” The deity raised a brow. Truthfully, the times before rarely provided her much information on their individual- or group- healing processes. She typically only knew whatever they revealed to her, unless Winter happened to be present and especially attuned to the murmurs of discontent. Even then, her sister could only sense their inner turmoil and couldn’t interpret it with any degree of accuracy; her inability to provide anything other than company during the long decades likely factored in her decision to retreat. Having someone help guide her through the process was a unique and refreshing experience. “So, they’re helping each other?”

“I mean, mostly.” The pause that followed made her brows pinch together, turning away from her wardrobe choices for the evening to focus on the thread of concern in Velvet’s voice. “Uh. I don’t want to, like, worry you or anything but… Yang’s been awful quiet recently. Not exactly what would be quiet for a normal person, I guess, but it definitely feels like quiet for her, ya know?”

“I believe I understand.” Blue eyes flicked over to the clock, ensuring she had enough time. It wouldn’t do for her to be late, of course. “Perhaps I can broach the topic tonight.”

“Do you have an idea about what’s causing it? I mean, Yang might be something of a daredevil, but she’s usually the first in line to check up on people when they’re out of it. This whole situation is like
a giant bat signal and she’s kinda just… not doing the whole swoop in to save the day thing.” A small sigh. “I mean, she shouldn’t have to be the one to check up on others but it’s weird that she’s not, and the best any of us can get out of her is that she’s just busy with work.”

“My advice would be to keep in contact with her.” A soft smile came to her lips. Although she suspected she knew the cause of her beloved Dragon’s troubles, it proved to be one of the things that differed with iterations. She wouldn’t know for sure until she asked but that didn’t mean she couldn’t provide Yang a sounding board once the night ended. “She has a habit of keeping her feelings hidden but a little prodding is all that’s needed to get her to open up.”

“I’ll keep my ears open but your guess is as good as mine as to when she might break.”

“Thank you, Velvet.” She looked at the scroll and pictured the look on the Faunus’ face. “I can’t articulate how much I appreciate your help.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Weiss could hear the smile on her lips and it made her feel lighter in response. “I mean, looking back, it makes me wonder how I didn’t see before that they were obviously missing something. Now, they’ve got you back. It can only go up from here!”

Although she couldn’t quite be so optimistic yet… she dearly hoped Velvet was right.

Although she had Velvet’s warning fresh in her mind, Weiss couldn’t help but feel a little… disturbed by Yang’s behavior. Much as she expected, the woman had seen fit to have their date somewhere a bit out of the way- a small festival just outside the city. The ride over had been quiet by necessity, seeing as the roar of Yang’s motorcycle could be heard from a mile away, but since they’d arrived she’d been… distracted would be a good word for it. Lilac eyes met hers often enough that she didn’t doubt the woman was enjoying herself but… when they looked away, they were searching, and they only seemed to stop when guilt chased the thoughts away.

And she suspected she understood what had Yang so distracted.

“It’s okay,” the deity said, drawing a confused look from her beloved. “That feeling you have nagging at your heart. It’s okay.”

“What?” She chuckled, shaking her head and steering them towards one of the little kiosks set up with games that were difficult to win by design, feigning interest in the stuffed animals being offered as prizes. “I’m sorry, Weiss, my head’s just all over the place. Just some… work stuff.”

Lightly, she touched the woman’s arm, bringing them to a halt as they stepped away from the throng of people around them to stand between a ring toss game and a dart one. “Oh, my proud Dragon. Haven’t you learned by now that you can’t hide anything from me?”

For a moment, lilac eyes watched her, Yang’s mouth working as if to formulate another deflection. Then, she sighed, her shoulders falling as she looked away. “Why do I feel like this? Why am I the only one? Everyone else is so happy and I just wanna be- I mean, I am! I’m so happy to have you back, but…”

“But you feel like something’s missing,” she said, pausing just long enough to earn the woman’s gaze. “Or, rather, some one .”

Pain flashed across her expression. “I’m being greedy, aren’t I?”
“No, not at all.” Weiss beckoned her closer, taking both of Yang’s hands in hers. “I anticipated it. You’ve always had a deeper connection to Winter than the others.”

At the mention of her sister’s name, the woman went stock still, her gaze unfocusing as she relived a memory- or perhaps a half dozen, she could never tell- and then gasped, looking around. Upon not finding what she sought, her shoulders dropped. “She’s… she’s not here, is she?”

“No. I’m not sure where she is,” she replied, squeezing her beloved’s hands reassuringly when disappointment flashed in lilac eyes. “She said the last time would be the last time, but she’s said that before-”

“But she really meant it this time, didn’t she?” Yang sighed, shaking her head. “She told me- I remember that. She said it felt like she was stealing time from us and I tried telling her that she wasn’t but… she wouldn’t listen to me.”

“She’s stubborn.” A smile flickered across the deity’s lips. “It’s a trait you’re rather familiar with.”

“It’s one of the things I love about you both,” she replied, lightly pulling Weiss closer- a request, albeit a nonverbal one, and she complied easily. It felt wonderful to be held in those strong arms again, the heat of the woman’s skin always so powerful. If the deity allowed her imagination to run free, she could probably trick herself into smelling the smoke of the forge woven into Yang’s hair. “Am I the only one who remembers her?”

“No, but most of them don’t have the same recollection of her as you do. Pyrrha might, though. It just takes a bit more prodding with them.” Weiss paused. “You’ve been nervous to bring it up, haven’t you?”

“I couldn’t really remember- her name, her face. It was just this… vague feeling like someone was missing, someone I wanted to see again.” Yang hugged her tighter. “But no one else mentioned it so I thought… if I did say something, and they didn’t remember… or didn’t want to remember…”

“Hush. It’s alright.” Reaching up, she hesitated for a moment before threading her fingers through golden locks. While her beloved Dragon loved the feeling of nails against her scalp, she also didn’t easily trust others with her hair. But as lilac eyes fluttered closed, Weiss relished regaining that bit of trust. Of all her beloveds, Yang recovered her memories easiest and processed them most quickly; her challenge came in the one only she could recall. “If you mention her to them, they won’t begrudge you. They have fond memories of her- well, mostly.”

A laugh burst from the woman’s lips. “Sun’s going to bring up the coconut thing again, isn’t he?”

“Does he ever miss an opportunity?” They both chuckled and she revelled in the intimacy of the moment, though she remained mindful of the pain that would now lurk behind lilac eyes. “I’m sorry, Yang. I wish I knew where she’d gone.”

“It’s okay,” she said softly, voice tinged by sorrow. “I mean, I still miss her but… now I know, at least.”

Yang drew in a slow breath and let it out, a deep sigh that released hidden tension- it would strike again, no doubt, and there would be times when her beloved Dragon would grow distant, looking for someone who wasn’t there. Even in the deepest part of her heart, where she harbored the smallest amount of resentment towards her brother for starting this whole mess and Mother for bringing down her judgement, Weiss felt nothing aside from sorrow for her beloved. Every time she found them, the deity did everything in her power to bring them as much happiness as she could, but this remained out of her reach. If anything, she wished Winter would be less stubborn and committed to her guilt
but… that happened to be another trait they shared, though her sister’s was unjustified.

“Hey.” Drawing back slightly, Yang gently put a knuckle beneath her chin, tilting her head up until their eyes met. Gone was the cloud that had hung over her, replaced with a sort of contentment—not peace, not yet, and it would likely elude the woman during this life without that final piece of the puzzle, but they’d been through it before. If anything, it made Yang work even harder to ensure they all found as much joy as possible, to make up for the times when she was consumed by longing.

“How about we go ride a rollercoaster? I’ll hold your hand if you get scared.”

She raised a brow. “I’m immortal, Yang, what could possibly scare me?”

The twinkle that answered her promised she’d find out soon enough.

Weiss didn’t often receive visitors at her penthouse but, upon being assured some things were best experienced in person, she offered no resistance as Velvet stumbled through the door. Although lifting a quizzical brow, the ancient deity opted to remain patiently silent until her guest had recovered enough to speak, currently resting against the wall and trying to wipe away the tears brought on by her extended laughing fit. It… did cause her a touch of concern, though.

“I hope you didn’t drive here like that,” she said, now that the Faunus’ laughing had calmed considerably. “I’d be concerned about your wellbeing in that case.”

“N-no, ha, I was across the plaza, just in the neighborhood.” The words were slightly broken up but sporadic laughs as she produced her scroll, flicking through it a bit. “Just, heh, you have to see this.”

With a fond roll of her eyes, she accepted the scroll and… frankly, she didn’t know what she expected, if she had any expectations to begin with, but even she had to fight a valiant battle to keep from devolving into laughter herself as she read over the group text shared between her beloveds.

Yangarang: Hey. So. Sorry I’ve been kinda weird recently
Coconut: ur gucci
Pyrranha: Anything you want to talk about?
AchyBlakeyHeart: you’re fine but also ^^^
Yangarang: I’ve been thinking about winter.
Emherald: do you wanna build a snowman?
Yangarand: Not that winter
SunGunFun: COCONUT
AchyBlakeyHeart: uh ???
Pyrranha: omg
SunGunFun: DID SHE EVER LEARN WHAT TO DO WITH A COCONUT??
Emherald: WAIT
Yangarand: How would I know?
Coconut: implying therers a wrong way to use a coconut
SunGunFun: WHEN I HAND A WOMAN A COCONUT I DON’T EXPECT HER TO TURN IT INTO A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION
Coconut: WAIT SHIT I JUST REMEMBERED
AchyBlakeyHeart: omg, i remember that
Yangarang: You’re exaggerating
SunGunFun: SHE CREATED A FUCKING VOLCANO WITH IT
Pyrranha: It was just a little one.
SunGunFun: THERE IS. A COCONUT CREATED VOLCANO. ON REMNANT.
Yangarang: In her defense, you should’ve been more specific
SunGunFun: HOW SPECIFIC DO I NEED TO GET?
SunGunFun: IT WAS A COCONUT
Coconut: u handed a literal god a coconut dude what did u expect
SunGunFun: NOT A FUCKING VOLCANO
Velveeta: I honestly can’t tell if this is, like, hyperbole or 100% literal.
SunGunFun: [image]
SunGunFun: DO A SEARCH
AchyBlakeyHeart: holy shit the page on it is hilarious
Pyrranha: “Although researchers can’t pinpoint when, exactly, the volcano breached the surface, they can definitively conclude that it had an abnormal origin.”
SunGunFun: YEAH IT WAS PRETTY ABNORMAL
SunGunFun: IT CAME FROM A FUCKING COCONUT
Yangarand: Well, at least you learned something
Emherald: don’t just hand a GODDESS OF WAR something and say “here, go nuts!”
AchyBlakeyHeart: don’t ever give winter a coconut
Emherald: Lol
AchyBlakeyHeart: damn, beat me to it
Yangarang: I mean in your defense, Sun, it was a good pun
Coconut: only u would defend a pun that nearly roasted us all alive
Yangarang: And I lava good pun
AchyBlakeyHeart: ffs
Velveeta: [image]
Emherald: OMG
Yangarang: lmfao
AchyBlakeyHeart: wow
SunGunFun: WTF
Coconut: ya kno i’d forgotten u 2 stole her phone that one time
Velveeta: I never changed the names back and it’s soooooooo gooooood
SunGunFun: HOW TF DID THE COCONUT THING COME BACK AROUND TO ANOTHER PUN!?
Coconut: yeet me, winter, i’m ready 2 bcome a volcano
SunGunFun: ITS BEEN FIVE THOUSAND YEARS HOW TF?!
Coconut: rmbl rmbl mothrfuckrs
Yangarang: Hi five Em!
Emherald: wtf is rmbl rmbl, why are you allergic to spelling
AchyBlakeyHeart: a question i ask myself every day tbh
Coconut: *I
Coconut: also im a volcano now fuck ur spellin bs
SunGunFun: GREAT NOW WE’LL BE BURNED ALIVE BY COCO
Pyrranha: Roast me, Daddy.
Yangarang: PYRRHA
SunGunFun: DONE
AchyBlakeyHeart: i quit
Emherald: OMGGGGGGGGG
Coconut: i got nothin that fuckin killed me
SunGunFun: RIPPERONNI
Velveeta: I love and hate all of you for making me read this
Yangarang: Kinky Pyrrha is back
Coconut: imlyin she ever left
Pyrranha: I don’t know what you’re talking about.
Emherald: soooooo, anyone remember that time we found that novelty store?
Pyrranha: It was ONE time and I didn’t know it vibrated!

The texts continued but she had to take a break, the force of trying to keep her composure a bit too much for her as Velvet shot her a look.

“You gotta tell me the full story.”

Vividly, she recalled the day her beloved Jester tried to get one over on Winter only for her sister to turn around and play a ‘practical joke’ of her own. It caused quite a panic but, ever since, sometimes Winter would lightly lob a coconut in Sun’s direction just to see his reaction, and he spent hundreds of years trying to get back at her for it. All those carefree memories flashed through her mind and she couldn’t help but laugh- long and hard, for all the times they had together and for the ones ahead of them.

For the first time in far too long, she looked forward to what challenges lay ahead of them and what lengths they’d strive for to find their happiness once more.

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