A Different Shade of RWBY

by ElectronicYarn

Summary

What if Yang was raised by Raven?
What if Blake never left the White Fang?
What if Weiss never decided to become a huntress?
What if Ruby didn’t get into Beacon early?

Welcome to a world of new solutions, where everything is the same except what really matters.
The scent of moss hung heavy in the air over the sleeping forest. The night was crisp and cold as it always was during the springtime in Mistral. Yang was perched up on a tree branch, overlooking a twisting road that cut through the woods around her. Even during the day the road saw little traffic. Now that night had come, there wasn’t another soul to be seen. Yang was alone.

Almost an hour had passed since Yang had taken up her vigil on the tree branch, and boredom was starting to get the better of her. She hated waiting, even when she knew her patience would be rewarded. If something didn’t happen soon she felt like she’d go crazy.

The minutes continued to drag on agonizingly slowly, but just when Yang couldn’t take it anymore, a sound rose up in the distance. Yang perked up immediately. She strained her ears to listen. The sound was still far away, but it steadily grew louder until Yang could clearly hear the unmistakable roar of an engine.

A wicked smile flashed across Yang’s lips. Her prey was almost there. He certainly hadn’t wasted any time making his escape. He’d gotten such a big head start that he probably thought he was safe by now. Ordinarily, he would’ve been right, but unfortunately for him, Yang was anything but ordinary. While he’d been stuck winding his way through the hilly terrain of northern Mistral, Yang had been able to take a more direct route.

Yang took a moment to adjust the bracers she was wearing. There weren’t many things that she could truly call her own, but the unassuming bits of dull-gray metal strapped to her forearms were hers and hers alone. She lovingly called them Ember and Blaze. It hadn’t been easy for her to scrape together all the parts she’d needed to build them, but the effort had been more than worth it. After all, she wasn’t just some common bandit. She deserved better weapons than the mass-produced pieces of junk any wannabe thug could buy in a general store.

Yang reached back for her thick braid of long, blonde hair and wound it loosely around her neck. Then she pulled the hood on her sleeveless vest up over her head. Her clothing’s earthy colors were well suited for blending in with the foliage, but her golden hair was decidedly not. She didn’t want to give herself away prematurely.

The sound of the engine was getting close now, and a moment later, a jet-black motorcycle appeared
from around a bend in the road. Its rider was dressed all in black as well. From his helmet to his long jacket, he was a shadow in the night.

Yang gave the approaching motorcycle an appreciative look as it neared. She’d always wanted one herself, and it looked like tonight was going to be her lucky night. There was no sense in letting a perfectly good bike go to waste, and the rider speeding toward her wouldn’t need his for much longer.

The motorcycle was only a few feet away from Yang now. A look of concentration filled her face. At the last possible moment, she let herself drop. She grabbed the tree branch she’d been perched on as she fell and used it to swing herself feet first toward the speeding motorcycle.

There was a flash of panic in the rider’s eyes a split second before Yang’s hefty boots slammed into his chest. Yang grunted in discomfort at the bone-jarring force of the collision, but her aura sprung to life, protecting her. There had probably been a safer way for her to dismount the rider, but none that she would’ve found so immensely satisfying.

The rider was flung from his bike. He tumbled through the air and slammed into a tree with tremendous force. There was a sharp crack as his helmet took the brunt of the impact. His motorcycle, absent anyone to guide it, swerved off course before tipping over and crashing into the ground. The sound of flapping wings and scampering paws briefly filled the night as the creatures of the forest fled from the sudden ruckus.

Yang let go of the tree branch and landed on her feet. She stalked toward the rider. Amazingly, he was still conscious. His aura, weak as it was, had managed to keep him safe from the worst effects of his impromptu flight. That suited Yang just fine. She wanted him to see this next part coming.

The rider managed to pick himself up. He wobbled on his feet for a moment before he pulled his helmet off and let it drop to the ground. When he’d gathered his wits about himself again, he looked up and saw Yang. “You…” he said. The color drained from his face.

Yang stopped a short distance away from the rider. “That’s right, Kuro,” she said, pushing her hood back. “Me.”

“What do you want!” Kuro demanded.

“You know what,” Yang said. “Mion Village, remember? You betrayed us.”

“I did nothing of the sort!” Kuro said. “Tell Raven that—!”

The words had barely left Kuro's mouth before Yang’s expression twisted into a scowl. She lunged forward and let loose with a wild haymaker. Her fist easily plowed through what was left of Kuro’s aura and sent him sprawling back down to the ground.

“You’re not dealing with my mom!” Yang said, her eyes turning red. “You’re dealing with me!”

Kuro pushed himself back to his feet, dripping blood from a fresh gash on his forehead. Yang caught the glint of something metallic in his hand an instant before he leveled a small pistol at her.

Kuro fired. Yang felt the heat of the bullet as it glanced off her aura. Fortunately for her, Kuro’s tiny pistol didn’t pack much of a punch. It was easily concealed, which was probably why he carried it, but it was far too weak to do any significant damage to someone with a real aura like Yang.

Kuro desperately squeezed his pistol’s trigger a few more times. Yang lifted her arm to block, and the shots ricocheted off of her bracer. She bounded forward, furious that Kuro would dare attack her,
and kicked him savagely in his chest.

Yang heard the sound of Kuro’s ribs snapping as her kick knocked him off his feet again. He collapsed into a heap on the forest floor. His gun slipped loose from his hand. He didn’t make a move to retrieve it.

Yang glared at the man lying at her feet with an ugly expression. Her hair began to glow, more from the raw emotions burning inside of her rather than any damage Kuro had done. Yang clenched her fists. Blades made from solidified yellow Dust shot out of her bracers.

“Three of my tribe are rotting in jail because of you,” Yang said to Kuro. “You know what happens next.”

“Wait…please….” Kuro wheezed. “I swear it wasn’t me….”

Yang pulled her fist back, ready to plunge her blade into Kuro’s chest.

“Please…” Kuro begged.

At the last moment, Yang hesitated. She knew what Kuro had done. She knew what he deserved. But he looked so pathetic lying there, broken and bloodied on the ground. Yang couldn’t imagine finding any satisfaction in finishing him off.

Yang’s eyes turned lilac again, and her hair’s glow subsided. For a long moment the only sounds that filled the forest were Kuro’s labored breaths and the low rumbling of his overturned motorcycle as its engine idled.

Eventually, Yang lowered her fist. She asked, “If it wasn’t you, then how did the cops find us?”

“I…I was followed,” Kuro said.

“Go on,” Yang said.

“The police heard about the Dust I was selling,” Kuro said. “I don’t know how. Maybe they flipped one of my suppliers. The point is, they followed me, and when they saw I was selling to the Branwen Tribe…you know the rest.”

“That’s it?” Yang asked. “We got busted because you were too stupid to notice that you were being followed?”

“Yes…” Kuro said.

“How did you get away?” Yang asked.

“The cops didn’t really care about me once they realized your tribe was there,” Kuro said. “I escaped in the commotion.”

Yang frowned. Kuro hadn’t made much of a case for his life in her eyes. “That’s all you have to say for yourself?” she asked.

“I can make it up to you!” Kuro said. “Please. Don’t kill me.”

Yang sighed heavily. She knew exactly what her mom would want her to do in this situation. Kuro’s incompetence had cost the Tribe, and Raven wasn’t one to suffer fools. However, Yang was long past believing that her mom was always right. She had never seen a man as thoroughly beaten as Kuro was now. He looked so pathetic that killing him seemed pointless.
Yang took a step back. “Get out of here,” she said.

Kuro looked shocked beyond words. He didn’t move.

“Go!” Yang shouted. “Before I change my mind!”

Kuro nodded. He slowly got to his feet, wincing painfully all the way up, but he managed. Then he started limping in the direction of his motorcycle.

“And if you have any sense at all, never show your face in Mistral again!” Yang shouted after him.

Yang turned away. The blades protruding from her bracers hung limply with her arms by her sides. She was not happy. Tonight she’d been expecting to extract some well-deserved revenge, but instead she’d come away empty handed. She wasn’t even going to get a motorcycle out of the deal. And to top it all off, she was going to have to lie to her mom about what had happened. Thinking about it made her guts churn, but lying was a better alternative than letting Raven learn the truth.

Suddenly, a single gunshot rang out, splitting the night in two. Yang spun around, reflexively raising her bladed fists. Her eyes locked onto Kuro, but he hadn’t been the one who had fired.

Kuro was several feet away from Yang now with his back to her. He was standing perfectly still, like he’d been frozen in time, but then his legs buckled beneath him. He collapsed to the ground for the final time.

Yang’s eyes frantically darted around, searching the forest for whoever had fired the fatal shot. Yang needn’t have bothered. A woman stepped out from behind a tree, a woman that Yang recognized. She was dressed similarly to Yang and wielding twin guns with crescent-shaped blades attached to them.

“Vernal,” Yang growled. Her lips peeled back in a sneer. Without a second thought, she charged toward her tribesmate, Ember and Blaze at the ready.

Yang closed the distance in a heartbeat and slashed at Vernal. However, Vernal caught Yang’s blades with her own. Their weapons locked together. Vernal visibly struggled as Yang’s strength pressed in against her, but she managed to hold her ground.

“What did you do!?” Yang demanded to know.

“What you should have done five minutes ago!” Vernal said.

“My mom’s going to rip your head off when she finds out you followed me!” Yang shouted.

“Hardly,” Vernal scoffed. “Raven was the one who sent me after you in the first place!”

Vernal’s words hit Yang harder than any punch. She immediately stopped fighting with Vernal’s blades and took a step back. “Mom sent you?” she asked.

“That’s right,” Vernal said, not bothering to disguise her smug satisfaction.

Yang’s blades retracted back into her bracers. Her lips pressed together as a sense of dread filled her.

Suddenly, the idling motorcycle engine sputtered loudly, drawing Yang’s attention. The engine made a few choking sounds, then died completely. Yang hadn’t noticed before, but a rock had punctured the bike’s gas tank when it had fallen. Even in the gloom of the night, Yang could see the wetted grass where the fuel had leaked out.
“Hmph,” Vernal said. “I bet you were planning on taking that bike. Too bad for you.”

Yang hardly even heard Vernal’s taunt, and surprisingly, she couldn’t bring herself to be disappointed that the motorcycle was effectively worthless now. Her eyes trailed down to where Kuro’s lifeless body lay. She and her tribe survived by taking things that weren’t there’s. It was exactly what Yang had intended to do tonight, but in hindsight, stealing from a dead man seemed like a step too far.

“I think we’re done here,” Vernal said. “Raven told me to bring you back to camp as soon as Kuro was dealt with.”

“Fine,” Yang said weakly. “Let’s go back.”

Yang used to think that her mom was the most awesome person in the world. Some of Yang’s most cherished memories were of when she’d been a little girl, sitting on the furs in Raven’s tent and listening to her mom recount tales of her adventures in exotic lands far beyond the borders of Mistral. Yang was standing in that very same tent now. Little had changed about it over the years, but everything was different. Tonight more than ever, the days of Yang’s childhood felt very far away.

Raven was sitting at a small table in the middle of her tent. A single lamp stood on the table, and the long shadows cast by its light were dancing across Raven’s face. Raven was methodically dragging a whetstone across the cutting edge of her sword. The scraping sound it was making stood in place of conversation; Raven hadn’t uttered so much as a word since she’d summoned Yang.

Several minutes passed before Raven finally laid down her whetstone. She carefully returned her sword to its weighty scabbard and set it on the table. Then she stood and scrutinized Yang.

Yang crossed her arms. She could see the look of disdain on Raven’s face. It was subtle, but Yang recognized it for what it was. No doubt Raven was trying to use her silence to make Yang sweat. Unfortunately for her, that kind of tactic hadn’t worked on Yang since she’d been a teenager.

Eventually, Raven said, “You were sent to kill Kuro. You didn’t. Tell me what happened.”

“It sounds like you already know,” Yang said.

“That doesn’t matter,” Raven said. “I need to hear it from your own mouth.”


“I care,” Raven said. “I didn’t raise you to be weak, Yang.”

Yang uncrossed her arms. “I am not weak,” she said.

“Are you sure about that?” Raven asked. “Then why did Vernal have to do your job for you?”

Yang knew Raven was trying to bait her. She did her best to not fall for it, but it wasn’t easy. She could feel the anger welling up in her.

“Honestly,” Raven said. “Some days I fear there’s too much of your father in you.”

“Don’t you dare say that!” Yang shouted. “If he was here—!”

“He’s not here!” Raven shot back. “He’s never been here! He never will be here!”
Yang’s hands balled into fists as her temper got the better of her. She stomped toward Raven with every intention of giving her what she had coming, but the twinkle in Raven’s eye made Yang stop in her tracks.

Yang bit back her rage. As much as she wanted to punch Raven right in the face, she knew better. She’d only actually fought her mom once. It’d been the toughest fight of her life. Half the camp had been in ruins before it had ended, but when the dust had settled, it was clear to Yang that she’d never stood a chance of winning.

“The world is cruel, Yang,” Raven said. “You have to be crueler if you want to survive.”

“Is that why you sent me out to go murder someone?” Yang asked.

“That is precisely why,” Raven said. “I want what’s best for you. Someday you’ll appreciate that.”

“I wouldn’t bet on it,” Yang muttered. She turned around and started walking away.

“What do you think you’re going?” Raven asked.

“Somewhere that’s not here!” Yang said over her shoulder.

“You stop right there!” Raven shouted.

Yang did stop. But she didn’t look back.

“Are you really going to turn your back on me? After everything I’ve done for you?” Raven asked.

“I raised you. I taught you how to fight. I even gave you a gift more incredible than most people could imagine.”

“Don’t pretend it was a gift,” Yang said. Her eyes crept back toward Raven. “You only did it because you thought it’d made me useful to you.”

Raven was actually taken aback. Had the circumstances been better, Yang might have been impressed with herself.

“That’s all that really matters, right?” Yang asked. “That I’m useful to you?”

“What matters is that you’re my daughter, Yang,” Raven said.

Yang turned away again. “We both know who your real daughter is these days,” she said. Then, without another word, she left.

Outside Raven’s tent, Yang saw Vernal lurking around, much to her great displeasure. No doubt Vernal had been trying to eavesdrop on Yang and Raven’s conversation. Yang knew that trying to escape Vernal would be pointless, so she started walking toward her.

When Yang got close, Vernal opened her mouth to speak, but Yang wasn’t even remotely in the mood to hear whatever she had to say. Yang cocked back her fist and socked Vernal hard across the jaw, all without breaking her stride.

Yang didn’t bother to wait and see what kind of damage her punch had done. She just walked away.

It didn’t take Yang long to reach the camp’s outer wall, a haphazard collection of tall, wooden posts fashioned from tree trunks. Yang scrambled up the nearest one and stood on top of it. She looked out at the forest around her. Here, out from under the canopy of trees, the broken moon was shining brightly. It bathed the forest in its ghostly light, giving the scene an eerie quality.
Yang sighed heavily and sat herself down on the wooden post. She had to admit that Raven had probably been right about how to deal with Kuro, but if that was true then why did it feel so wrong? Things had been so much simpler when Yang had been a kid. The older she got, the less she found herself agreeing with her mom’s way of looking at things. Maybe that wouldn’t have been such a bad thing, but Raven wasn’t just Yang’s mom, she was the bandit queen of her tribe. Going against her wishes was dangerous.

Things hadn’t truly gotten bad between Yang and her mom, at least not in Yang’s estimation, until Raven had inducted Vernal into the tribe. Yang still cursed the day that Vernal had wandered into the Branwen camp. Back then Vernal had been cold, hungry, scared, and helpless. But Raven had taken it upon herself to personally train Vernal. Now Vernal was everything that Raven wanted in a daughter, and the whole tribe knew it. Yang had tried to compete, but she just couldn’t. Vernal had a vicious edge that Yang simply lacked.

Yang had felt increasingly useless to her mom as the years had rolled on. Maybe that was why their relationship kept getting worse. Tonight had been especially bad if Raven mentioning Yang’s dad was anything to go by. Raven only ever talked about him when she really wanted to hurt Yang.

Yang reached into her pocket and pulled out a red bandanna. She’d found it years ago in a chest that Raven kept old mementos in. It had a symbol on it, two stylized shapes that looked like the joined halves of a heart. Yang knew it had belonged to her dad. To this day it was her only connection to him. She’d never met him, and the only thing she really knew about him was his name: Taiyang Xiao Long.

Even though it was dangerous, Yang had kept her dad’s old bandanna. She’d also kept the fact that she had it a secret. She couldn’t make herself believe that he really was the weak, cowardly man that Raven seemed to think he was. He just couldn’t have been. But Yang supposed she would never really know for certain.

Yang glanced back over her shoulder at the Branwen camp. It was always a little different each time the tribe moved it to a new location, but it had still been Yang’s home for all twenty-three years of her life. However, despite the camp’s familiarity, Yang wasn’t convinced that it really was her home anymore. She felt increasingly like a stranger with each passing day. Raven was the only real family she had. Everyone else in the Tribe held her at arm’s length. She was Raven’s daughter, all evidence to the contrary, and that set her apart.

Now that Kuro was dealt with, the Tribe would break camp tomorrow. It wouldn’t be a good idea to stick around now that the authorities had caught their scent. They would pack up and move somewhere else like they had many times before, and Yang would go with them.

Yang turned away from the camp. The forest before her didn’t look like much, but beyond it lay the rest of Remnant. It occurred to her that endless possibilities were staring her in the face. All she had to do to seize them was to leave behind everything she’d ever known.

Yang stood. She looked down at the bandanna in her hand. She’d long since given up on ever finding her dad—Raven had broken her of that dream—but he was only one of literally millions of people. Was it really so hard to believe that there could be someone else who could fill the void that had been gnawing at her? There had to be another place in the world where she could belong.

Yang’s resolve hardened. She bent down and tied her dad’s bandanna on her left leg just below her knee. Then, without looking back, she stepped forward off the wall and slipped silently out of the camp. She fell, but her feet never touched the ground. She went into the night above the leafy treetops, ready to see what was out there waiting for her.
Yes, yes, I know gold doesn’t tarnish, but how could I pass up such, ahem, colorful language. Although now that I think about it, gold can tarnish, but only if it’s really impure. Hmm. I think I’ll take credit for that subtle metaphor that I only just now thought of.

Yang’s weapons in this universe are similar to katars, or maybe punch daggers, except they’re mounted on bracers instead of handheld. Unlike Ember Celica, Ember and Blaze aren’t also guns, but they may still have a surprise or two that they haven’t revealed yet. Time will tell.

In case you missed it in the text of this chapter, Yang is twenty-three here. That isn’t me aging her up per se. This story simply takes place about six years after when canon RWBY started. That isn’t an arbitrary number either. There is a method to my madness. Perhaps.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Torchlight flickered in the small antechamber. It was far too dark for a human to see anything, but the gloom didn’t trouble Blake’s faunus eyes. She could see everything clearly, what little there was to see. One end of the antechamber opened into a hallway, the other ended in a solid door, and the only furnishing in the room was a bench that Blake was quietly waiting on.

A sword sat cradled in Blake’s hands. Its blood-red blade was drawn out about a foot from its scabbard. Blake stared at the weapon, transfixed by its deadly simplicity. Its previous owner had called it Wilt and its companion scabbard Blush. Blake had considered coming up with new names for the weapons, but she’d soon realized that changing their names would be pointless. Wilt would still be Wilt no matter what it was called. It would always be the same sword that Blake knew more intimately than any friend or lover.

The cat ears on top of Blake’s head twitched. Her left ear was missing its tip, but that did nothing to diminish her sensitive hearing. Footsteps were echoing down the hallway that led to the antechamber. Someone was coming.

Blake slid Wilt back into its scabbard. She tucked the sword into the cloth belt around her waist. Then she reached for a mask that was sitting on the bench beside her and slipped it on. The mask was different from the ones that many of Blake’s White Fang compatriots wore. Hers covered her full face, and the red and black lines that decorated it were abstract enough that it wasn’t immediately clear if the mask was meant to resemble a grimm’s visage or not.

The footsteps grew louder until the man they belonged to entered the room. Blake stood. “Fennec,” she said. Her mask concealed her surprise. “What are you doing here?”

“Are we not both trusted lieutenants of the High Leader?” Fennec asked in his gratingly smooth voice. “I have just as much right to be here as you do. More, I would say.”

Blake pointedly ignored Fennec’s last remark. It had been close to a year since she had seen him last, but in that time he hadn’t changed at all. He still had the same inscrutable expression on his face—not even his fox ears gave away what he might be thinking—and he still wore the same style of monk-like robes that he’d donned the day he’d entered into the White Fang’s service. His robes were nearly identical to the ones that Blake was wearing. However, there were a few differences. Blake had on proper boots instead of the open-toed footwear that Fennec preferred. Fennec’s robes also no longer had a hood, whereas Blake’s had an oversized one. She rarely wore her hood in the presence of her fellow White Fang as it had the unfortunate tendency to irritate her ears, but she found it useful when she needed to be less conspicuous in public.

Blake said to Fennec, “I thought you were still in Menagerie.”

“Oh I was,” Fennec said. “I’ve returned to give my report.”

“In person?” Blake asked.

“Of course,” Fennec said. “As was requested of me.”

Blake wasn’t surprised that Fennec had been asked to make the journey from Menagerie to Mistral, but she was surprised that she hadn’t caught wind of his return. She was usually better informed.
Maybe she’d grown accustomed to not having to keep tabs on Fennec while he’d been out of the kingdom. It had been a pleasant reprieve while it had lasted.

Blake was about to sit back down, but she noticed Fennec eyeing her. “What?” she asked.

“Hmm?” Fennec responded with faux innocence. “Oh, was I staring? My apologies. I’m simply amazed is all.”

Even though Blake knew better, she asked. “Amazed by what?”

“That you still have the High Leader’s ear. That you and I are considered equals,” Fennec said. “My loyalty has never been in doubt, whereas yours…well. You should count yourself lucky to still be alive.”

Blake’s hands clenched. She always tried to remain civil around Fennec, but he often made it difficult. “Your so-called loyalty isn’t in question because you’ve managed to hide your scheming,” she said.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Fennec said.

“Oh. I think you do,” Blake said.

Fennec obviously had more to say, but he was interrupted by the antechamber’s door opening. He and Blake turned as a guard, dressed in ceremonial armor but bearing no weapon, stepped through the door. “The High Leader will see you both now,” the guard said. Then he held out his hand. “You know the rules.”

Fennec nodded. He retrieved a dagger from his robes and handed it to the guard. “Come along, Sister,” he said to Blake with a perfect air of politeness. “We wouldn’t want to keep the High Leader waiting.”

Blake withdrew Wilt and Blush from her belt, but she hesitated in giving them to the guard. Old anxieties welled up in her. No matter how many times it was asked of her, she still felt uneasy parting with her weapons.

Fennec had already walked past the guard. Blake knew it would be dangerous to allow him to speak with the High Leader alone, so she handed her weapons over as well and quickly followed.

The chamber on the other side of the door was surprisingly large, although little decorated the space save for a few tapestries and a small number of lit sconces. More guard stood at attention around the edges of the room. They were all armored, but none of them were armed. The new rules regarding weapons applied to everyone, even those who were entrusted with protecting the High Leader’s life.

At the very center of the room was a raised dais. On it was a throne, and sitting upon that throne was Sienna Khan, High Leader of the White Fang. She was not reclined in her seat, but perched on its edge, looking ready to spring up at any moment. Her spear, the only weapon allowed in the room, was resting in her hand.

Fennec stopped a respectful distance away from Sienna’s dais. He bowed and said, “High Leader Khan. We are honored to stand in your presence.”

Blake stopped next to Fennec. She bowed her head as well, but she didn’t say anything. From behind the safety of her mask, she studied Sienna. Blake had known her for a long time, longer even than she’d been the White Fang’s High Leader. When Sienna had first ascended to the position, Blake had been thrilled. Back then Sienna had seemed like an unstoppable force of justice who
would cast aside the bigots that stood in the faunus’s way. But things had changed. These days the passion in Sienna’s eyes had given way to a coldness and sometimes even a terrifying cruelty.

“High Leader,” Fennec said. “If I may—”

Sienna held up her hand to silence Fennec. He didn’t look pleased, but he complied. Sienna stood, gripping her spear. She walked to the edge of her dais, and planted her spear firmly on the floor, making the chamber echo with the sound of its shaft striking stone.

“Blake,” Sienna said. “What do you have to report?”

“All of the recruiters I spoke with had the same story to tell,” Blake said. “Fewer and fewer faunus are willing to join our cause. They see us as…dangerous.”

A dark look flitted across Sienna’s face. “Those fools,” she said. “What’s gotten into their heads that they’re so afraid to fight.”

“It may be more that they’re weary of fighting,” Blake said.

“Oh?” Sienna asked.

“It hasn’t been long since the Maiden War ended,” Blake explained. “Many faunus, especially the kind we would usually recruit, are veterans of that war. They may feel that they’ve done their part already.”

Fennec scoffed. “You truly believe that?”

“Do you have a better explanation?” Blake asked.

“Of course,” Fennec said. “Adam Taurus.”

Blake’s heart skipped a beat at the mention of Adam’s name, especially in Sienna’s presence. Fennec was feeling bold today. Blake was surprised when Sienna didn’t behead him on the spot, although her eyes did narrow as she glared dangerously at him. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Taurus and his followers made no secret of their alliance with Cinder Fall during the Maiden War,” Fennec said. “It’s plain to see why faunus veterans would mistakenly view the White Fang as the enemy.”

“Adam,” Sienna muttered. “Is this what you wanted? Even in death you’re succeeding at destroying everything we’ve worked for. You’re driving good faunus into the arms of their oppressors.”

Blake had more to report, but she hesitated. She knew Sienna would not react well to what she had to say, but unfortunately, she had a duty to fulfill. “High Leader, there is…something else you should be aware of.”

“What?” Sienna asked bluntly.

“I heard talk regarding the Schnee Dust Company many times while I was out gathering information,” Blake said. “They’ve stepped up their campaign of misinformation, making sure everyone sees them as heroic for, ‘providing the tools that defeated Cinder Fall’. And they’re doing an alarmingly effective job of covering up evidence of their mistreatment of their faunus workforce.”

“Interesting,” Fennec said, his curiosity apparently piqued. “We know they profited greatly from the War. Was that not enough for them?”
“It seems not,” Blake said.

“Schnee,” Sienna sneered. “That name has been a curse on the faunus since before the day I was born.”

Blake thought she saw a devious smile flash across Fennec’s face, but it was gone before she could be sure. Fennec said, “Unfortunately, this news explains a great many things.”

Sienna asked, “What do you mean?”

“The situation may be even more dire than Sister Belladonna believes,” Fennec said. “My journey to Menagerie bore little fruit. Even there the people seem to have forgotten the importance of the White Fang and our mission. There was even talk that… I’m not sure how to say this, High Leader. There was talk that the chieftain himself was making overtures of peace toward the Schnee Dust Company. He apparently wants them to supply the island with Dust.”

Shock and alarm filled Sienna’s eyes, only to be replaced a moment later by rage. “You can’t be serious!” she shouted. “Not even Ghira would stoop so low as to make a deal with those slavers!”

“I can only report what I have heard, High Leader,” Fennec said. Then he gave Blake a sly glance. “Although the Belladonnas have often proven to be unwise with their choice of associates.”

Anger simmered deep inside of Blake. She hadn’t spoken to her father for nearly a decade now, but she still didn’t believe what Fennec was saying. It had to be yet another one of his attempts to undermine her in front of Sienna. If he really wanted to break the fragile peace between them, that was fine with her. She knew how to fight back.

“I’d be careful Fennec,” Blake said with an icy calm. “You wouldn’t want to end up like your brother.”

Fennec’s mask of politeness slipped for a moment. “How dare you!” he said.

“SILENCE!” Sienna bellowed. “I will not abide us fighting amongst ourselves! Not in this room!”

Fennec quickly composed himself again. “Apologies, High Leader,” he said. “You are right of course.”

Sienna walked back to her throne and sat down heavily in it. A great weight seemed to settle on her shoulders. She rubbed her temples wearily.

“May I suggest, High Leader,” Fennec said, “that now is the time for patience. The Schnee Dust Company cannot conceal the crimes it commits against the faunus forever.”

“Of course they can,” Blake said. “That’s precisely what they’re doing as we speak. That’s what they’ve been doing since it became less socially acceptable to treat the faunus like slaves.”

“Then what do you say our next course of action should be?” Fennec asked.

Blake didn’t know how to answer Fennec at first, but all of a sudden, an idea came to her. “We need to strike back,” she said. “Quickly, decisively, and soon.”

“How would we do that?” Fennec asked. “Our ranks are depleted thanks to Taurus luring so many of our brothers and sisters along on his fool’s errand. And more to the point, the public trusts the Schnee Dust Company far more than the White Fang. Any attack on our part will only reinforce that opinion.”
“That’s true,” Blake said. “But it wasn’t the Company that turned the public against us. They simply took advantage of...of the circumstances we found ourselves in. What if the company were to suffer a devastating blow of their own? And what if we were there, ready to take advantage of it?”

Sienna sat up on her throne. She fixed Blake with an even stare. “Go on,” she said.

“The Schnee Dust Company is massive,” Blake said. “But its image and power rests on the shoulders of just a few people. What if one of them were to be...compromised?”

Fennec said, “You’re speaking about some of the most well-protected individuals on all of Remnant. Getting to any of them would be impossible.”

“No,” Sienna said. “Not impossible.”

“High Leader?” Fennec asked.

“Beacon Academy was the most prestigious combat school in the world,” Sienna said. “It was impossible that it could ever fall. But it did. For everything he was, Adam saw to it. He proved that nothing is impossible if your will is strong enough.”

Fennec seemed to ponder Sienna’s words. Then he bowed. “As you say, High Leader.”

Sienna turned to Blake. “Do you have a target in mind?”

Blake thought about it for a moment. Jacques Schnee, the proverbial head of the snake, was the obvious choice, but Blake’s instincts told her that going after him, at least directly, would be a mistake. There had to be softer targets who were just as essential to the Company. Blake went over a list of every Schnee of importance in her head. It didn’t take long for her to narrow the list down to one.

Underneath Blake’s mask, a twisted smile crossed her lips. “I have the perfect target in mind,” she said.

Chapter End Notes

Dang it, Blake. Do you really have to wear that mask? Even in literary form, having a character’s face covered makes it very difficult for them to convey their emotions to the audience. I guess I do like setting myself up for a challenge.

I waffled back and forth many times on whether to use Fennec or Corsac for this chapter. This is an AU, so Fennec, the brother who died in canon, was the obvious choice, but that wasn’t necessarily a good enough reason for me to pick him. Ultimately I ended up choosing Fennec because of his difference in attitude from Corsac, slight though it may be.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Weiss’s own face stared back at her from the small mirror sitting on the desk in her office. She was just finishing touching up her makeup. Not that she needed to wear much. Her youthful good looks made keeping up with her appearance a relatively simple task. She didn’t even have so much as a scar or blemish to worry about. She knew that some of her more contentious staff thought of her as vain, but that simply wasn’t the case at all. As the Director of Public Relations for the Schnee Dust Company, Weiss’s job demanded that she look as presentable and professional as possible at all times. She never knew when a reporter, government dignitary, or other person of influence might suddenly want to speak with her.

Weiss took one last look at herself in the mirror. She reached back and readjusted her ponytail that hung down to the middle of her back. Then, finally satisfied, she put her makeup back into the small bag she always kept fully-stocked in her desk drawer.

Weiss’s office in the Schnee Dust Company’s world headquarters was modestly sized for someone in her position, but she made the most of it. All of the furniture and décor had been carefully selected by her. Clean lines, monochromatic colors, and glass surfaces dominated the aesthetic, making the office feel light and open. Weiss’s spent weeks, months even, making sure every last inch of the space was absolutely perfect, and she was in love with the results. The intentionally understated elegance that permeated the entire office never failed to please her.

Weiss called up her schedule for the day on the console that was built into her desk. She had a dozen urgent tasks competing for her attention, but her top priority was the press conference that she’d be holding in less than an hour. She pulled up the materials she’d prepared for the event so she could review them one final time.

As Weiss was going over her presentation, a chime sounded in her office. It indicated that her assistant needed her attention. Weiss pressed a button to activate her office’s intercom. “Yes, Rosalie?” she asked.

“You have a call from your father, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie’s voice answered. “He’d like to have a word with you. He sounded a bit…riled up.”

“I’m sure he did,” Weiss said with a bemused tone. “Put him through.”

“Yes, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said.

Weiss took a moment to smooth the fabric of the white business jacket that she was wearing and make sure it was sitting flawlessly over her ice-blue blouse. She’d been expecting a call from Father. She was surprised it had taken him so long.

A holographic screen appeared in the air above Weiss’s desk. It wavered for a moment before it resolved into the image of Jacques Schnee. “Weiss!” Jacques said. “What’s this I hear about you giving away a dozen cases of Dust at no charge!? What exactly do you think you’re doing, girl!”

“My job, Father,” Weiss said. “I was well within the limits of my authority.”

“The limits of your authority are what I say they are!” Jacques said.
Weiss’s lips crept up into a half smile. Father loved to posture, but it had long stopped concerning Weiss. He would never impose restrictions on her so long as she was successful at her job. She said, “We don’t want the people to forget about our Dust now that the Maiden War is over.”

“The War may be over,” Jacques said. “But no one is harboring any illusions of a lasting peace! People finally understand what kind of monsters are out there lurking in the dark, and they well know that they need our Dust to make themselves feel safe!”

“Very true, Father,” Weiss said. “But people want to believe that they’re doing the right thing at least as much as they want to feel safe.”

“How does that have any bearing on you giving away our product?” Jacques asked.

“The product you’re referring too was generously donated by the Schnee Dust Company to a remote village in Mistral,” Weiss said. “They were very grateful for our charity.”

“Why should we care about some small village’s gratitude?” Jacques asked. “They’ll never be able to afford to buy from us in quantity.”

“Exactly,” Weiss said. “We haven’t given away so much as a gram of Dust to any of our significant customers. But those customers have heard about our kindness, thanks to the press releases I’ve been circulating. Everyone will know that the Company is continuing to do its part to make the world a better place. When people buy from us they’ll feel like they’re supporting a good cause. It’s one thing for someone to purchase our product. It’s quite another for them to do it gladly.”

“Hmph,” Jacques said. “Very well. But I’ll expect a full report from you as to how this little publicity stunt of yours is affecting our sales!”

“Of course, Father. I’ll begin working on it right away,” Weiss said. In truth, she’d anticipated Father’s request. The report in question had already been finished days ago. It was just waiting for Weiss’s review and approval.

“In the meantime…” Jacques said. He trailed off, obviously searching for some parting orders he could give to Weiss. All he came up with was, “Carry on.”

“Yes, Father,” Weiss said. Then the image of Jacques vanished.

A self-satisfied grin crossed Weiss’s face. She always took great pleasure in showing Father how she was right and he was wrong. She begrudgingly respected Father’s business acumen, but his complete disdain for the general public blinded him to the power of popular support. Fortunately, Weiss’s position within the Company perfectly placed her to correct that deficiency. The absolute swell of goodwill that the Schnee Dust Company had garnered during her short tenure was a testament to her success and a source of immense pride for her. Sales were up, litigation directed against the Company was down, and even the White Fang attacks had diminished in frequency and intensity.

Weiss was about to get back to reviewing her presentation when her assistant’s chime sounded again. Weiss hit the intercom button. “Yes?” she asked.

“I’m sorry to bother you again, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said. “But your sister is calling.”

The smile faded from Weiss’s face, and her mood likewise plummeted. If there was one thing that was sure to ruin her day, it was Winter calling unexpectedly.

“Ma’am?” Rosalie asked. “Should I put her through?”
“Did she say what she wanted?” Weiss asked.

“No ma’am,” Rosalie said. “I think she just wants to talk to you.”

Weiss very much doubted that the purpose of Winter’s call was merely to talk. Things were never that simple with her. And even if they were this time, Weiss felt that the gesture had come far too late. It had been several years since she’d exchanged words with Winter, and she was happy to keep it that way for several more.

“Tell Winter…” Weiss said. “Tell General Schnee that I’m not available.”

“Yes ma’am,” Rosalie said. Weiss could hear the disappointment in Rosalie’s voice, but like a good assistant, she didn’t ask any questions.

The intercom clicked off. Weiss swiveled around in her chair and faced away from her desk. She sighed heavily, then stood and walked to her office’s panoramic windows. The heart of downtown Atlas lay before her. Springtime in the northern city was brisk even on a sunny day like today, but that did little to keep the people from going about their business. Weiss could just barely make out the pedestrians filling the sidewalks below her. For a moment, she longed to be outside among them, but the moment quickly passed.

Weiss wondered if she and her sister would still be on speaking terms if she’d rejected her future with the Company like Winter had. To this day it still bitterly disappointed Weiss that the two of them had grown so distant. Winter had been Weiss’s childhood idol, her perfect sister who could do no wrong. Even when Winter had abandoned the family company to serve in the military, Weiss had still looked up to her. Weiss remembered getting into an argument with Father on her sister’s behalf not long after Winter had departed for her first semester at Atlas Academy. Father had banished Weiss to her room for a whole week as punishment for her insolence. At the time, Weiss had considered the hardship worth it.

Weiss wanted to respect Winter still, but Winter’s life away from the Family and the Company had put strange ideas into her head. The Maiden War had only made things worse. Winter had shown up unannounced one day in Weiss’s office, practically ranting about crimes the Company was supposedly committing and demanding that Weiss resign. It was unfortunate, but Weiss wasn’t willing to entertain such foolishness, not even from her once beloved sister.

Weiss turned away from the window. Winter had made her choice, and Weiss had made hers. This was exactly where she wanted to be, right there in her office. It was her palace, her citadel, and her command center from where she was planning her rise to the top. Someday she would take Father’s place. It was her birthright, and more to the point, it was where she knew she belonged. She’d spent her whole life so far in preparation. When her time finally came, she’d be ready.

Weiss walked back to her desk and sat down again with the intention of finishing her review of her presentation. Unfortunately, she wasn’t much in the mood anymore. She already knew the material forward and backward anyway. There was little need for her to prepare further.

Weiss glanced at a clock on the wall. She chided herself when she realized how much time she’d wasted wistfully gazing out her window. In truth, she’d only squandered a handful of minutes, but it had been long enough that all of her other urgent tasks would have to wait until after her press conference. It wasn’t often that she found herself with a free moment—she considered them a failing of her time management skills—but unless she found something else to do, a free moment was exactly what she had.

Weiss’s head turned to one of her desk drawers. In it were files that she’d been pointedly ignoring for
weeks now. She’d specifically requested they be given to her, but she resented their presence nonetheless. A new company policy regarding the safety and security of key members of the Schnee Dust Company had recently been put into place by the board of directors. In short, it required Weiss to hire a personal bodyguard. The files sitting in her desk drawer were applications sent in by people hoping to fill the role.

Had Weiss been on the board, which unfortunately she was not, she would have voted against implementing such a silly rule. The governing councilors of Atlas themselves didn’t have as many layers of security protecting them as Weiss did right now simply by being inside the Schnee Dust Company’s headquarters. And unlike some of her fellow directors, Weiss was perfectly capable of defending herself. More to the point, she was already doing a magnificent job of combating the White Fang and other such threats simply by making the public, faunus included, love the Company and everything that it stood for.

Weiss knew she would have to look at the bodyguard applications sooner or later. She’d masterfully avoided it thus far, but it would only be a matter of time before she’d be forced to comply with the new policy. She reluctantly accepted that now was as good a time as any to start the process. The last thing she wanted was for Father to call her up with a legitimate grievance against her.

Weiss opened her desk drawer with a sigh. She pulled out the file folders inside and set them down on her desk. Then she slid the top one off the stack and opened it up. A photo of the first applicant was paper-clipped to the dossier inside. Weiss glanced at it and saw a woman who looked younger than the date of birth in her file suggested. The woman also looked far too fresh-faced to possess the necessary combat experience that the position required. Weiss very much doubted that this particular applicant would end up becoming her bodyguard, but she dutifully read the file anyway. She was, after all, nothing if not thorough.

Chapter End Notes

So apparently Winter is a general now, and Weiss isn’t on speaking terms with her anymore. Don’t look at me! I didn’t see any of that coming! Weiss has always had a talent for surprising me. And subverting my authorial intent.

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Ruby was lying on top of her bed in her tiny, single-room apartment. None of the lights were on, although the afternoon sun was leaking through the bent slats of the cheap plastic blinds that covered the apartment’s windows. Ruby was listening to music with her headphones on, although she had the volume up so loud that anyone else in the room wouldn’t have had any trouble listening in. Except, there wasn’t anyone else, just her.

The song blaring in Ruby’s headphones finished, but a moment later, it started over again from the beginning. Ruby had been listing to it on repeat for long enough that she’d lost count of how many times she’d heard it today. She idly wondered if she’d set some sort of record yet. It would’ve been nice if she could’ve said that she’d accomplished something today.

The song rolled on through its verses until it reached its end yet again, but this time when the song repeated Ruby had finally had enough. She hit the stop button on the side of her headphones, and just like that, there was silence.

Ruby sat up in bed. She pulled her headphones off, inadvertently mussing her mop of unkempt hair. It seemed she was overdue for a haircut. She made a mental note to get one the next time she left her apartment, whenever that might be. Of course leaving the apartment meant that she’d have to get dressed, and she didn’t see that happening any time soon. She was currently wearing the T-shirt and underwear that she’d gone to bed in the night before, and she had no intentions of subjecting herself to the tyranny of pants, leggings, tights, or any of their ilk today.

Ruby looked around her apartment, desperately searching for something to do. One of the walls in the small living space was nothing more than bare brick, but counting the bricks wouldn’t be much of a distraction. She already knew there were exactly two hundred and sixty-seven of them. Her eyes fell on her messy kitchenette next. Dirty dishes were stacked up in her sink. She supposed she could always wash them, but she still had one or two more clean ones lying around somewhere. Maybe she’d wash the dishes after lunch, although she wasn’t sure if she actually had any food left to eat.

Ruby decided it was official; she had absolutely nothing to do. She wondered if her situation would be any different if she was still living in Vale instead of Atlas. It seemed unbelievable that she’d end up like this. Especially since the past five years of her life had been nothing but absolute chaos. She wanted to call it ironic, except she could never remember if that was the correct use of the word. Although she supposed there wasn’t anyone around to smugly correct her if she was wrong.

Ruby plopped back down on her bed. It had been her hope that she’d find something resembling stability in her life after she’d graduated from Atlas Academy, and in a way her hopes had been fulfilled. Being unemployed was about as steady as things got. No one demanded anything from her. No monsters were out there trying to kill her. Nothing changed at all from day to day. The only uncertainty she faced was what bill might show up next in her mailbox.

Ruby supposed that she should have looked for a job before she’d graduated. But that had been the thing about the Academy; it had distracted her from thinking about her future. It had also distracted her from thinking about her past which had been what she’d liked best about it. For some reason, Ruby had never been able to shake the feeling that adventure, or at least a job, was supposed to find her, not the other way around. Even now she couldn’t help but wonder if someone had somehow flipped the script of her life.
Unfortunately, it turned out that almost everyone in Atlas assumed that a young huntress, freshly graduated from the Academy, would join the military. And because the military in Atlas handled the task of combating the grimm, there weren’t any bounties available to a freelance huntress like there were in Vale. Ruby knew it still wasn’t too late for her to find a local recruiter’s office and enlist, but between that and lying in her bed all day, Ruby would choose her bed every time. The military would never be for her. The military fought wars, and she knew what those did to people.

Ruby had made an effort to find a job—technically she still was—but as the weeks had dragged on, she’d felt less and less enthusiastic about actually getting one. Still, things weren’t all bad. Here in her awful apartment she could at least exist, which was more than she could say about most everyone else she cared about.

As the day agonizingly continued to pass one minute at a time, Ruby began to drift off into a twilight sleep. Her eyes had just closed when a sudden ringing sound disrupted the languid atmosphere of her apartment. It took her a moment to realize that it wasn’t something she was dreaming; her scroll was actually ringing.

Ruby’s head popped up. She couldn’t possibly imagine who might be calling her, and it had been so long since she’d used her scroll that she’d forgotten where it was. She jumped out of bed and started tossing aside dirty clothes and other bits of junk that were littering her floor.

By the time Ruby found her scroll, hiding under an old, ratty shirt, the call was about to go to her message box. She jabbed the button to answer. “Hello?!” she said, trying not to sound too frantic.

“Hello!” said a friendly voice on the other end of the line. “Is a Miss Ruby Rose available?”

“Yes! That’s me!” Ruby said.

“My name is Rosalie,” the voice said. “I’m calling on behalf of Miss Weiss Schnee.”

“Uh…okay?” Ruby said. The name was only vaguely familiar to her.

“Miss Schnee has reviewed your application,” Rosalie said. “She’d like you to come downtown for an interview.”

“Oh. Oh!” Ruby said, finally remembering. “This is for that bodyguard job, right?”

“That’s correct,” Rosalie said.

Ruby had completely forgotten about applying to be a bodyguard. It had been long enough ago that she’d assumed they’d given the job to someone else.

Rosalie asked, “Would you be available for the interview tomorrow?”

“Sure!” Ruby said.

“Excellent,” Rosalie said. “Does ten o’clock work for you?”

“I’m pretty sure I can make that work,” Ruby said, biting back a rueful laugh.

“Then we’ll see you at ten a.m. sharp,” Rosalie said. “Schnee Dust Company headquarters. Tell the guard at the security desk who your appointment is with and he’ll let you right up.”

“Got it,” Ruby said.

“We look forward to seeing you,” Rosalie said. “Until tomorrow.”
There was a click, and the call ended.

Ruby lowered her scroll. “Ten o’clock. Right,” she said to herself. She tossed her scroll back down on the floor and started walking back toward her bed. Only then did it hit her what had just happened. She had a job interview tomorrow. She would have to get dressed! And go outside! And adhere to someone else’s schedule! She knew it would be good for her to get out of her apartment, but she wasn’t sure if she was ready for such a big intrusion on her monotonous existence.

Ruby glanced over to a lonely corner of her apartment. Crescent Rose, her pride and joy, was sitting there gathering dust. Being a bodyguard wasn’t exactly the ideal job for her, but it might give her an excuse to actually use her scythe once in a while. Ruby knew that was something she should be excited about, so she decided to be excited.

Her dilemma solved, Ruby started thinking about what she would need to do to get ready for her interview tomorrow. She would obviously need to wear something more than what she had on at the moment. Out of curiosity, she plucked at the front of her shirt and gave it a sniff. Her nose crinkled at the pungent smell. She would definitely need to take a shower as well, otherwise the guard that Rosalie had mentioned might throw her back out onto the street. In fact, a shower sounded just about perfect right now.

Ruby stepped out of her apartment’s closet of a bathroom about an hour later wearing a red bathrobe. It had been a while since she’d used the robe, and she was having trouble remembering where she’d even gotten it. She had a sneaking suspicion that she’d accidentally stolen it from Sangria, an old teammate of hers at Atlas. It wouldn’t have been the first time she’d mistakenly taken poor Sangria’s clothing. They both mostly wore red. In Ruby’s opinion, there should have been a rule preventing people with the same color preference from being put on a team together.

Ruby walked up to a window and pulled on the cord to open the blinds. Sunlight came rushing into the room. Ruby greeted it with a smile. It was amazing how something as simple as a shower could make her feel so much more human again. She hadn’t thought she’d been neglecting to bathe herself for all that long, but the days had acquired an alarming habit of slipping by unnoticed as of late. Ruby decided it was time to put an end to that. She’d been a lazy bum for long enough.

A faint hint of Ruby’s reflection was coloring the windowpane in front of her. She focused on it for a moment and teased her hanging locks of hair. Her bangs had gotten longer, and her hair was almost down to her shoulders now. It wasn’t her usual style, but she was pleasantly surprised at how good it looked. She didn’t want to let her hair grow much longer than it was now, but she decided to hold off on getting it cut.

Ruby turned away from her window. When she looked over her apartment, a frown crossed her face. She really didn’t own that much stuff, but she’d still somehow managed to make a mess of the place. She would definitely have to fix that sometime soon. She wasn’t the tidiest person, but even she had her standards. Before any of that happened, however, she had an interview to think about.

Ruby walked over to a rickety old nightstand that was next to her bed. A stack of thoroughly-read comic books were sitting on top of it, but Ruby wasn’t interested in any of them right now. She opened the stand’s only drawer and pulled out a bracelet. It was little more than two thin straps of leather that threaded through both sides of a charm made of polished metal.

The bracelet’s charm was in the shape of a crest that looked like two stylized halves of a heart joined together. Ruby had made it herself using Atlas Academy’s weapons forge. It had taken her over a dozen tries, but she’d finally gotten it right. Such personal projects weren’t allowed at Atlas, but
Ruby had told the forgemaster that she’d needed to tune up Crescent Rose. It hadn’t been a complete lie on her part. The bracelet was her good luck charm, and she would swear to anyone who might ask that it helped her fight better.

“Well, Dad,” Ruby said to the bracelet. “This is it. There’s a place that wants to give me a job. It’s not exactly the same thing that you and Mom did, but hey, it’s a start, right?”

Ruby slipped the bracelet on over her right wrist. She’d known that things were going to turn around for her eventually. It had been a long five years, but now all she had to do was show up at the Schnee Dust Company tomorrow and dazzle them with her skills. After that, who knew what kind of endless excitement the future might hold for her. Maybe, just maybe, she’d even wash her dishes.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t assume you’ve gotten the job before you’ve even gone to the interview, Ruby! I’ve made that mistake before.

Okay, I’ve finally finished re-introducing the four main characters. It was a bit agonizing how long it took, but I think it was important to give each of them their own chapter. Especially since none of them know each other yet. I’m incredibly eager to finally get these ladies interacting with each other! I’m sure it will all go perfectly without any conflict of interests at all.

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A crusty bartender had called the drink in Yang’s glass whiskey, but it was so watered down that she was barely getting any kind of buzz from it. She was impressed that he had the stones to charge full price for it. She would have complained, but she felt that it was best for her to avoid the topic of money right now seeing as she had none. Things were certainly going to get exciting when it came time for her to pay off her tab.

Yang’s escape from the Branwen camp had only taken her as far as the first settlement along the road. She honestly couldn’t remember what its name was, and she doubted that it even mattered. The place was small enough and poor enough that the grimm were sure to destroy it sooner or later. But in the meantime, it was somewhere that Yang could drink while feeling sorry for herself.

It hadn’t taken Yang long to realize how incredibly stupid running away from the Tribe had been. In addition to her lack of money, she had no supplies, no connections, and no idea where she even was. All she’d managed to do so far was wander into the worst bar she could find and run up an impressive tab. None of the bar’s unsavory looking patrons had even done her the courtesy of trying to fight her. She supposed she couldn’t really blame them. It was obvious at a glance that she wasn’t some helpless victim. Messing with her would be more trouble than it was worth.

As much as Yang hated to admit it, she would have given up and gone crawling back home by now if it weren’t for the fact that she didn’t have the slightest clue as to where the Branwen camp actually was anymore. Her Tribe didn’t need much time to pull up stakes and move on. They were good at it out of necessity. Fortunately, Yang knew she didn’t really need to worry about how she was going to get back home. Eventually, Raven would decide that enough was enough and come looking for her. Any day now, a portal would open up in front of Yang just out of the blue, and that would be the end of her little half-cocked attempt at starting a new life.

Yang studied what was left of her drink. The bartender had made it very clear that he expected her to pay down her tab before the night was over. That meant it was time for her to skip town. If she followed the road for long enough eventually she’d have to come across another settlement with another bar. Unfortunately, the bartender had been keeping a close eye on her the whole night. There was no way she was going to sneak out without him noticing. What she needed was a distraction. She imagined a barroom brawl would suffice. Even if the people around her weren’t interested in starting a fight that didn’t mean they couldn’t be goaded into one. A few choice words to the right barfly and fists would start flying.

Yang began sizing up the colorful cast of scumbags who were sharing the bar with her, but right away something unusual caught her eye. Over across the room was a lonely table just big enough for one. Sitting at that table was a hooded woman. She didn’t have a drink in her hand, although the full-faced mask she was wearing would’ve made enjoying one difficult. Yang was shocked that she hadn’t noticed the woman earlier, especially since she seemed to be looking directly at her. At least Yang was pretty sure that she was. The mask made it difficult to know for certain.

Suddenly, the woman stood and started walking directly toward Yang. Yang could tell at a glance that this stranger was dangerous, and it wasn’t because of the sword she had tucked into her belt. Yang had fought a lot of people in her short life, and she knew the steady, controlled movements of a seasoned warrior when she saw them.
Yang had no idea why the woman was approaching her. She supposed she should’ve been concerned, but if the woman was looking for a fight it would save Yang the trouble of starting one herself. If the woman didn’t want to fight then Yang had no clue what her intentions might be, but as Yang’s eyes availed themselves of the curves of the stranger’s body, her imagination began to come up with all manner of different scenarios, each more indulgent and implausible than the last. No matter what, Yang was sure that something interesting was about to happen.

The woman sat down at Yang’s table, but she didn’t say a word. Yang waited a moment for her to speak, but it quickly became clear that Yang was going to have to start the conversation herself.

“Hello?” Yang asked.

The woman responded to Yang by reaching up and pulling back her hood. A pair of cat-like ears were sitting on top of her head, one of which was missing its tip.

Yang’s lips curled into a grin. She had no idea what was going on, but she was loving the mysterious vibe the stranger was projecting, even if it was a bit over the top. “So…” Yang said, waggling her eyebrows. “Come here often, cutie?”

“No,” the woman said rather tersely. “And neither do you.”

“Lucky for you then,” Yang said.

“Luck had nothing to do with it,” the woman said. “I’ve been chasing a rumor about a blonde bandit who’s been terrorizing the forest roads in Mistral for years. She takes whatever she wants from travelers and merchants, and then she vanishes into the woods without a trace. No one’s ever been able to follow her trail.”

Yang gave the woman a coy smile. “And you think that’s me?” she asked.

“You do have blonde hair,” the woman said. “It’s not a very common color in Mistral.”

“I know. People get so jealous,” Yang said. “But that doesn’t make me some amazing, untrackable bandit. Although I’m not saying I’m not.”

“According to the local travel advisories, the bandit’s been operating in this area recently,” the woman said. “And you’re the only blonde I’ve seen since I got here who looks like she knows how to fight.”

Yang leaned in closer. “Flattery will get you everywhere,” she said.

Suddenly, a figure loomed over the table. Yang glanced up and saw the bartender standing there looking more irritated than usual. A deep scowl sullied his already disagreeable face, and his hand was resting near where a knife, which was probably also a gun, was hanging from his belt. At first Yang thought that the bartender had come to collect on her tab, but he wasn’t looking at her. He was looking at the woman.

“Didn’t you see the sign out front?” the bartender asked. “No faunus! Now get out of here before something unfortunate happens to you!”

Yang let out an exasperated sigh. Quick as a flash, she tossed what was left of her drink into the bartender’s eyes. He cried out in alarm, but before he could reel back, Yang reached up and slammed his head down into the table.

“Agh!” the bartender shouted as Yang pinned his head in place. He fumbled blindly, trying to free
himself from her iron grip. “Help! Help!”

Yang laughed. “Help? Who’s going to help you?” she mockingly asked. Then she nodded toward
the woman. “Maybe tall, dark, and awesome here is the kind of person to help a stranger, but after
what you just said, I doubt she’s going to do anything.”

Yang eased up a little on the bartender, but as he started to lift his head, she slammed it back down
again. “Now listen up,” she said. “We’re all having a good time here. So you just keep your idiotic
opinions to yourself and everything will be fine. Got it?”

“I got it! I got it!” the bartender said.

“Good,” Yang said. She released the bartender. He scrambled back immediately, trying to wipe the
alcohol out of his eyes.

“And bring me another round!” Yang shouted, shaking her empty glass after the retreating bartender.

Yang quickly looked around to make sure that no one else was planning on causing trouble, but
fortunately, the bar’s other patrons seemed more interested in their drinks than what had just
happened.

“Now,” Yang said, turning back to the woman. “I believe we were in the middle of you telling me
how awesome I am.”

The woman was quiet for a moment or two. Her mask made it impossible for Yang to judge what
she might have been thinking or feeling. Yang chose to interpret the woman’s silence as stunned
awe, although she noticed that in the commotion the woman’s hand had come to rest on her sword’s
hilt.

Eventually, the woman lifted her hand from her weapon and placed it plainly on the table. “Thank
you,” she said.

“For what?” Yang asked.

“For being willing to defend a faunus,” the woman said.

Yang shrugged. “I’ve lived with a few faunus. I’ve robbed some too. I really don’t get what all the
fuss is about. They’re not any different from humans.”

Again the woman was silent. She seemed to look away for a moment if the slight turning of her mask
was any indication. Then she said to Yang, “I have a job for you. If you’re interested.”

“A job?” Yang echoed. “What. You want to hire me like some mercenary?”

“Yes,” the woman said.

Yang suddenly wanted to slap herself in the face. It was so obvious! She didn’t have to go back to
the Tribe; she could be a mercenary! She even had her first job lined up already. She supposed she
didn’t necessarily have to accept the woman’s offer, although if she didn’t she’d probably lose any
opportunity she had to get to know her better. Yang didn’t think she liked that idea.

“Is this job going to involve you and me working together?” Yang asked.

“Yes,” the woman said.

“Closely, I hope,” Yang intimated.
The woman’s mask tilted slightly. “You could…say that,” she responded, sounding confused.

“Will I have to kill anyone?” Yang asked.

“Not if things go right,” the woman answered.

“Then I’ll do it,” Yang said.

The woman was silent yet again. Yang was beginning to suspect that long pauses were a common feature in the woman’s conversations.

The woman asked, “Don’t you want to know what the job is first? Or what it pays?”

“If the pay’s fair and you cover all my expenses then I’m in,” Yang said.

The woman leaned back and crossed her arms. “Do you even know who I represent?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Yang said. “You’re with that faunus group. The, uh, Fang something.”

“The White Fang,” the woman said.

“Yeah. That’s it,” Yang said.

“We’re going to have to travel outside the kingdom,” the woman said.

“Even better,” Yang said. “When do we leave?”

“Tonight,” the woman said.

Suddenly, the bartender reappeared holding a fresh drink in his hand. He lingered just long enough to set it down in front of Yang before hastily retreating again.

Yang grabbed the glass and downed its contents in one go. Even as watered down as it was, she felt a welcome burning sensation in her throat. She set the glass down and said, “Alright, tonight then. But if we’re going to work together, there’s one thing you and I need to settle first.”

“And that is?” the woman asked.

“What’s your name?” Yang asked.

“Blake,” the woman said. “Blake Belladonna.”

“Pleasure to meet you, Blake,” Yang said, sticking out her hand. “I’m Yang Branwen.”

Blake reluctantly took Yang’s hand, but she shook it firmly.

“We should get going,” Yang said. “I’ve got a tab to not pay.”

“I…could cover that for you,” Blake offered.

“Well I was going to make you,” Yang said. “But after what that jerk said? Naw.”

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A minute or two later, Yang and Blake had left the bar and made their way out into the settlement’s dingy streets. The bartender hadn’t even tried to stop them from leaving.
“So where are we headed to?” Yang asked as she followed Blake.

“It’s two days to the closest airdock,” Blake said. “A colleague of mine has a truck waiting for us.”

“Nice. So how—?” Yang cut herself off and stopped in her tracks. For a moment, she’d thought she’d heard the sound of flapping wings.

When Blake realized that Yang wasn’t following her anymore, she stopped as well and turned around. “Is something wrong?” she asked.

Yang didn’t answer. She scanned the rooftops all around her until she spotted a raven perched up on an awning not far away. Her eyes narrowed. She supposed the raven could’ve been just an ordinary bird, but she very much doubted it.

“Yang?” Blake asked.

“Sorry,” Yang said. “Nothing’s wrong.”

“Are you sure?” Blake asked.

“I’m sure,” Yang said. “Let’s get out of here.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t ask me why, but I’m really tickled by Yang having a different last name in this AU. I really wanted to tag this story “Yang Branwen” (or "Yang B." depending on what website you're reading this on), but that wouldn’t have been a good idea for obvious reasons. And hey, I just realized I don’t have to put my usual note about the drinking age in Vale or Mistral or wherever. Even Ruby would be old enough to legally drink pretty much anywhere in the real world. Crazy!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
"You want me to do what?!" Ruby asked incredulously.

Ruby was standing in the lobby of the Schnee Dust Company’s headquarters in the middle of downtown Atlas. She was at the security desk where a tired-looking guard had told her something patently ridiculous.

"Again, ma’am," the guard repeated, "you’ll have to turn over your weapon to us for the duration of your visit here."

"I’m a licensed huntress you know," Ruby said. "I’m allowed to carry a weapon."

"Not in this building," the guard said.

"But I have an interview with Weiss Schnee!" Ruby said. "How am I supposed to show her how great of a bodyguard I can be without my scythe?"

"I see your interview on our schedule, ma’am," the guard said. "That’s the only reason why you haven’t been escorted off the premise. Miss Schnee is well-aware of our regulations regarding weapons. I’m sure she’s taken them into account."

"Fine," Ruby said with a frown. She reached back, unclipped Crescent Rose from its holster on the small of her back, and set it down on the security desk. "But my baby better not have so much as a scratch on her when I get back!"

The guard eyed the obtrusively large weapon that was now sitting on his desk. He let out a resigned sigh. "Don’t worry, ma’am," he said unenthusiastically. "We’ll take good care of…her."

"You’d better," Ruby said.

The guard reached into a drawer and produced a white badge attached to a lanyard. "Wear this visitor pass at all times while you’re in the building," he said as he handed it to Ruby. "Your weapon will be returned to you when you leave. Miss Schnee’s office is on the twenty-ninth floor. Take a left when you get off the elevator. You can’t miss it."

"Thanks," Ruby said. She slipped the visitor badge on and started walking toward the closest bank of elevators.

Now that Ruby had a chance to look around, she had to admit that the lobby of the Schnee headquarters was impressive. It was a wide open space, fastidiously clean with benches and potted plants strategically placed for decoration. A large fountain dominated the center of the area with a holographic projection of the Schnee Family crest floating above it. At least Ruby assumed the giant, spinning snowflake was the Family’s crest.

It took Ruby a moment, but she found an elevator that when to the floor she wanted. She hit the call button. A pair of doors open for her, and she stepped inside. She pushed the button for the twenty-ninth floor, and the elevator immediately began to rise.

Ruby glanced at her reflection in the mirrored doors across from her. She was wearing her fanciest
outfit for her interview today, but after seeing the building’s lobby, she was afraid that it might not be
fancy enough. It was actually just her old Atlas Academy uniform, which she’d dyed red and black
toward the end of her final semester at the school in a successful bid to aggravate her instructors.
Tormenting her teachers at Atlas had been one of her little joys. She’d found that she had a real talent
for it, although the school’s faculty were all so uptight that it hadn’t been much of a challenge. Some
of them had even tried to convince her to get rid of her ever-present red hood, which just went to
show how little they knew. She still wore her hood constantly, and today was no exception. The
bottom of its cape had begun to fray from use, but that hadn’t deterred Ruby in the least.

Ruby’s hand absently patted the empty space on her back where Crescent Rose should’ve been. She
couldn’t believe that she was really expected to go through her interview unarmed, but she supposed
she’d have to make do.

The elevator came to a halt, and the doors opened with a ding. Ruby stepped out and turned left,
following the directions the guard had given her. The hallway she was walking down was almost as
fancy as the lobby downstairs. The corridors were wide, and artwork decorated the walls, some of
which looked quite valuable. Symbols of wealth like designer clothes or fancy scrolls were usually
lost on Ruby, but even she had to notice the opulence on display in this place. She’d already known
about the Schnee Dust Company of course—everyone did—but she was starting to think that she’d
severely underestimated how much money the Company had.

Ruby spotted a door up ahead that was very prominently labeled, “WEISS SCHNEE, DIRECTOR
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS.” It had to be the office she was looking for.

Ruby stopped in front of the office door. She wasn’t sure if she was supposed to knock or just let
herself in. She would’ve thought that the door would’ve been open since she was expected, but
admittedly, she didn’t know anything about how stuff worked at a big company like this. She
decided to play it safe and knocked.

“Come in!” a cheerful voice said from the other side of the door.

Ruby opened up the door and went inside. The office she found herself in was small, but still in
keeping with the style and cleanliness of the rest of the building. A middle-aged woman was sitting
at a desk in the room. She had a head of fading auburn hair that was done up in a bun. Lines had
begun to crease her face, but there was a kindness in her eyes that Ruby found reassuring.

“Weiss?” Ruby asked.

“Oh, no,” the woman said, sounding amused. “I’m Rosalie, her assistant. And you must be Ruby
Rose.”

“That’s me!” Ruby said. She was a bit confused as to why Weiss wasn’t in her own office, but she
decided not to question it.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you in person,” Rosalie said. “I’ll let Miss Schnee know that you’re
here.”

“Great! Thanks,” Ruby said.

Rosalie pushed a button on her desk. There was a pause, and then a voice echoed from a speaker.
“Yes?”

“Miss Rose is here for her interview,” Rosalie said.

“Good. Send her in,” the voice said, followed by a click.
“Was that Weiss?” Ruby asked. “She sounds kind of…serious.”

Rosalie suppressed a laugh. “She does take her job very seriously,” she said. “A word of advice. Be respectful, but don’t try to shake her hand. Oh, and don’t call her by her first name. She prefers to be addressed as ‘Miss Schnee’.”

“Uh…okay,” Ruby said.

“You can go on back,” Rosalie said. “Miss Schnee is waiting for you.”

“Back where?” Ruby asked. Then she noticed the door behind Rosalie. “You mean back through there?”

“Yes, that’s her office,” Rosalie said.

“Weiss…er, Miss Schnee has an office in her office?” Ruby asked.

This time Rosalie really did laugh. “It sounds like you haven’t worked in the corporate world before,” she said.

“Not really,” Ruby admitted.

“You’ll get used to it soon enough,” Rosalie said.

“If you say so,” Ruby muttered as she walked passed Rosalie. She opened up the door in the back and let herself through.

Weiss’s actual office was much larger than her assistant’s. In fact, everything in it seemed to be oversized to Ruby’s eyes. Ruby didn’t have time to take in many of the details however; she quickly found herself preoccupied checking out Weiss herself. Ruby wasn’t sure what she’d expected a director of public relations to look like, but she’d definitely envisioned someone a bit older and a lot uglier than Weiss. Ugly was the last word Ruby would use to describe Weiss. Her face seemed impossibly perfect, and the obvious intelligence in her eyes was more than a little intriguing. The only mark against her that Ruby could see was that she wasn’t smiling.

Weiss was looking down at a file folder on her desk, and consequently, she was putting her slender neck and silky white ponytail on display. Ruby idly wondered if Weiss’s hair was just as smooth to the touch as it looked. Despite her better intentions, Ruby’s eyes started wandering down Weiss’s body. Svelte curves on a petite frame had been one of Ruby’s weaknesses for as long as she’d known she had weaknesses, which admittedly hadn’t been long. She hadn’t been completely convinced that she wanted the job of being Weiss’s bodyguard, but Weiss’s appearance was certainly making a compelling argument.

Weiss lifted her head, finally looking up from the paperwork in front of her. Ruby’s eyes slammed upward. She knew she wasn’t the most socially adept person around, but she was still pretty sure that ogling her future boss wasn’t the best way to make a good first impression. Fortunately, Weiss hadn’t seemed to have noticed.

“Miss Rose,” Weiss said.

“Wei…er, I mean, Miss Schnee,” Ruby said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Please, have a seat,” Weiss said, gesturing to a chair in front of her desk.

Ruby did as she was told. She waited for Weiss to say something, but instead, Weiss turned her
attention back to the file in front of her and flipped a page.  
Silence lingered in the room. Ruby started to worry that she was supposed to say something. She’d never been to a job interview before. It was turning out to be more stressful than she’d imagined.

Finally, Weiss said, “You attended Signal Academy on Patch Island.”

“Yup,” Ruby said.

“And after graduating you then enrolled at Atlas Academy,” Weiss continued.

“I wanted to go to Beacon,” Ruby said. “But...you know. I was about a year too late for that.”

“I see,” Weiss said. “I’m sure you would have been accepted to Beacon if you’d had the opportunity to apply. Your grades at Signal were impressive.”

“Thanks!” Ruby said.

Weiss closed the file folder. She clasped her hands together and set them on her desk. Then she looked at Ruby and said, “It’s unfortunate then, that your grades at Atlas were less than excellent.”

“Oh, uh...” Ruby said, caught off guard.

“Ordinarily, I wouldn’t have even considered your application,” Weiss said. “But your combat rankings did remain consistently high throughout your academic career, and many of your instructors did begrudgingly acknowledge your skill, even if they obviously had little respect for you.”

“What?! I’m sure some of them respected me!” Ruby said.

“Not according to your file,” Weiss said.


“I’ve worked with your type before, Miss Rose,” Weiss said. “I’m sure you’re willing to work extremely hard, but only when properly motivated. If you were to be hired as my bodyguard, would you find that motivation?”

“Yeah, of course!” Ruby said. “Who wouldn’t be motivated to guard your body?”

Weiss raised an eyebrow. It took Ruby a second, but she quickly realized what she’d just said. “Uh, I meant...!”

“I understood what you meant,” Weiss said.

“So...” Ruby said, desperately trying to recover. “Is there an arena or something in the building?”

“No. What would we need an arena for?” Weiss asked.

“So I can show you what I can do!” Ruby said.

“That won’t be necessary,” Weiss said.

“Are you sure?” Ruby asked, scratching her head. “You’ll at least want to see Crescent Rose.”

“Crescent Rose?” Weiss asked. “What’s that?”

“She’s my baby!” Ruby said. “She’s a customizable combat scythe and high-impact sniper rifle. I
built her myself!"

“I’m sure she…your weapon is very impressive,” Weiss said. “But I’ll have to take your word for it. Thank you for your time, Miss Rose.”

“Wait. That was the whole interview?” Ruby asked.

“I’ve gotten what I needed,” Weiss said. “You’ll be contacted if and when I make a hiring decision.”

“Oh. Okay,” Ruby said. She stood and turned to leave, but then and only then did it dawn on her that she might not actually get the job. She had no way of knowing how well her interview had gone, but what she did know was that Weiss did not have enough information to judge her fairly.

Ruby grabbed her wrist where her bracelet was. She squeezed until she could feel its charm biting into her palm. She didn’t know what to do, but she couldn’t leave the interview, not yet. She had to get this job, and she was going to do everything in her power to make sure she did.

Ruby suddenly spun around. She pointed at Weiss and shouted, “Look out!”

“Wha—?” Weiss managed to get out before Ruby used her semblance to zoom over to her with incredible speed. Ruby threw herself on top of Weiss. Her momentum knocked Weiss out of her chair, and they both toppled to the floor.

“Get…get off of me!” Weiss shouted.

Ruby popped up to her feet. “Ta-da!” she said, offering Weiss a hand.

Weiss pointedly did not accept Ruby’s helping hand and got back to her feet on her own. “What do you think you’re doing!?” she demanded.

“Showing you what I can do!” Ruby said. “I’m super fast.”

“I know you are!” Weiss said. “It says so in your file.”

“Then…I was showing you how I can take a bullet for you!” Ruby said, quickly improvising. “I know a lot of people with desk jobs don’t have an active aura, but I’ve got a great one! I can take the hit, and then take out whoever tried to shoot you!”

“I have an active aura, thank you very much,” Weiss said.


“And whoever said that I need you to take out an assailant for me?” Weiss asked indignantly.

“The…job application,” Ruby said. “You know…since I’m going to be your bodyguard?”

“That’s—!” Weiss said, but then she visibly calmed herself. “That is true I suppose.”

“So if you have an aura. And you can fight. Then why do you even need someone to protect you?” Ruby asked.

“I don’t,” Weiss said. “But the board of directors doesn’t see it that way.”

“That’s dumb,” Ruby said.

“I’m glad someone finally agrees with me,” Weiss said.
“So what kind of weapon do you use?” Ruby asked, her eyes brightening. “Is it a sword? Or maybe one of those whip-swords? Those are pretty popular at the Academy right now. Oh! I bet you use lots of Dust! This is a Dust company after all!”

Weiss sighed, although for just a moment a tiny smile crossed her face. “Miss Rose….”

“Just call me Ruby, ‘Miss Rose’ sounds silly,” Ruby said.

“Very well…Ruby,” Weiss said. “As much as I appreciate your enthusiasm, I have other interviews scheduled for today that I need to see to.”

“Oh. Right,” Ruby said. Disappointment had filtered back into her voice. She’d been so excited for a moment that she’d forgotten how she had probably just completely blown her chance at a job.

Ruby walked to the door. But before she opened it, she said, “Hey, Weiss? Thanks for at least giving me a chance. You know. Despite my grades and all.”

“I prefer to be addressed as ‘Miss Schnee’,” Weiss said.

“Oops! I knew that! Sorry!” Ruby said.

“But…” Weiss said. “I suppose it would be okay if you called me Weiss.”

“Sure thing!” Ruby said.

“Good day, Ruby,” Weiss said, nodding.

“I’ll see you around, Weiss,” Ruby said.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who’ve read other stories I’ve written, it’s probably obvious by now that this version of Ruby is different from my usual depiction of her. For starters, she’s twenty one, but more importantly, she’s not demisexual/asexual, at least not in general. More on that in a later chapter. I haven’t changed my mind on loving ace Ruby, but she wouldn’t work well in this story. If anything, this Ruby is similar to her counterpart in my completely unrelated story What Happens When Someone Falls In Love. I’m quite happy about this development actually. I was hoping to get an opportunity to explore that Ruby more in depth.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Blake hated flying. It wasn’t because she was afraid of heights or worried about the airship crashing. Rather it was the idea of being trapped in a confined space with a mob of humans that terrified her. If she ran afoul of a militant bigot, if the authorities caught wind of her, if she found herself in trouble of any kind, she wouldn’t be able to escape. Unfortunately, there was an ocean in between Atlas and Mistral. The only way to get from one to the other was by air or by water, and going by boat would take longer and be no better. So Blake found herself exactly where she didn’t want to be, stuck in an airship with a two-day voyage ahead of her.

Despite Blake’s misgivings, the trip had been a smooth one so far. The weather was cooperating with clear skies predicted all the way to Atlas, and no one had questioned her or Yang’s presence on the airship as of yet. With a little luck, no one would. The two of them were technically stowaways, but their names did appear on the official passenger manifest. A faunus who was sympathetic to the White Fang worked in the ticketing office at the airdock that Blake and Yang had departed from. Blake had availed herself of his assistance many times in the past. He was always reluctant to help out of fear of losing his job, but Blake had been able to convince him to do her yet another favor. She was glad to see that she wasn’t losing her touch. There would be many more people she’d need help from before her mission was over.

Presently, Blake was wandering a corridor down on one of the airship’s lower decks where all of the third-class cabins were crowded in together. She usually tried to avoid public spaces as much as possible during her illicit journeys—the old adage “out of sight, out of mind” still held true—but sometimes staying hidden just wasn’t possible. She felt very exposed out there in the hallway. It had her nerves on edge, but despite that, she was doing a passable job of acting casual. She’d learned over the years that the most effective way to hide in plain sight was to act like she belonged wherever she might be. She’d managed to avoid suspicion countless times in the past simply by faking an air of confidence, even when she’d been wearing her mask and hood and carrying her sword like she was right now.

The reason that Blake had dared to venture out where she might be seen was because of the covered plate she was holding in her hands. It had come straight from the airship’s galley. Blake wasn’t supposed to have it, although it hadn’t been particularly hard for her to come by. She’d managed to endear herself to one of the faunus working on the ship as a cook, and he had been more than happy to get petty, meaningless revenge against his human employers by helping Blake steal some food.

Blake walked up to the door of a cabin and let herself in. The cabin was tiny as it was the cheapest the airship had to offer and only intended for one person. There was a bed along one wall that was more like a shelf, a single chair, and a small table. The carpeting was dreary and the lighting was barely adequate, but Blake knew from experience that the room would be a far more comfortable place to spend the journey to Atlas than the cargo bay.

Blake was relieved to see that Yang was still in the room. She’d half expected her to get bored and wander off, but amazingly, something had captured Yang’s attention long enough to keep her there the whole time Blake had been away. Yang was standing by the room’s circular window with her nose pressed to the glass like a kid gazing into a candy store. She was so engrossed by the sights outside that she hadn’t even notice Blake come in.

Blake quietly shut the door behind her, glad to be back in the relative safety of the cabin. She pushed
her hood back, softly sighing with relief as the pressure from its heavy fabric eased off her ears. Then she stood there for a moment, observing Yang.

Yang’s confrontation with the bartender back in Mistral had been playing over and over again in Blake’s mind. Never in her life had a human ever come to her defense, especially not because they were offended by another human’s racism. She knew, in theory at least, that good and noble humans must exist, but she’d never expected to actually find one. Especially not in so unlikely a person.

Yang was a criminal and a thief. Blake knew the same labels could be applied to her, but she committed her crimes in the hope that they’d someday lead to a better life for her fellow faunus. As near as she could tell, Yang raided the highways of Mistral simply because she could.

In the short time that Blake had known Yang she’d quickly come to the conclusion that Yang was the most perplexing person she’d ever met. Never once while they’d been traveling together had Yang given any indication at all that she was uncomfortable with Blake being a faunus. She didn’t even seem to acknowledge Blake’s heritage at all except for her propensity to stare at Blake’s ears. It was a common reaction from humans, although when Yang looked at Blake, she never had any of the disgust, fear, or mistrust in her eyes that most other humans did.

Blake had been expecting to pay a hefty price to get a human to work with her, but Yang hadn’t once mentioned money since she’d accepted the job. At first, Blake had suspected that Yang had some kind of ulterior motive. She still hadn’t ruled out that possibility, but the longer she and Yang traveled together the more Blake had come to believe that whatever Yang might be hiding, it wasn’t sinister. Maybe that was why she was having such a hard time understanding Yang. She wasn’t sure she liked what that implied about her, and she certainly didn’t like how Yang was casually punching holes in her understanding of how the world worked.

Blake began to feel like a voyeur just staring at Yang like she was, so she cleared her throat to get Yang’s attention.

Yang turned around. When she saw Blake she gave her a big smile. “There you are!” she said. “Have you seen the view? This is awesome!”

“First time flying?” Blake asked.

“First time like this,” Yang said. “We’re really high up!”

Blake took a few steps toward Yang and held out the plate in her hands. “I brought you some food,” she said.

“Great! I’m starving!” Yang said. She pulled herself away from the window and walked up to Blake, taking the plate from her. “This smells great!”

“It’s steak and lobster,” Blake said. “They’re going to be serving it soon, up in the first-class dining hall.”

“No way!” Yang said. She set the plate down on the table and pulled the cover off. Just like Blake had promised, a meal fit for a captain of industry was waiting for her on it. “Whoa! Thanks!”

“Nothing but the best for you,” Blake murmured. She wasn’t exactly sure what had compelled her to say that. Maybe she’d been trying to make a joke.

Yang picked up a fork and knife that were sitting on the plate and began to dig into her food like she hadn’t eaten in days. “You going to want some of this?” she asked in between bites.

“I already ate,” Blake said.
Yang stopped shoving food in her mouth long enough to look up at Blake. She seemed puzzled at first, but as she chewed a smug expression crossed her face like she’d figured something out.

“What?” Blake asked.

“You always seem to eat when I’m not looking. Don’t want to let me sneak a peek at the goods, huh,” Yang said. She tapped her cheek. Blake was fairly certain that the gesture was meant to indicate her mask.

“That’s okay,” Yang said with a shrug. “I like a girl who makes you work for it.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Blake asked. She genuinely had no idea what Yang was talking about, although Yang’s tone of voice was making a strange but not altogether unpleasant feeling settle in her stomach.

“I noticed the cabin only has one bed,” Yang said, not answering Blake’s question at all.

“It was all I could get,” Blake said. “I don’t mind sleeping on the floor.”

“And I don’t mind if you don’t,” Yang said, giving Blake a wink.

Blake’s train of thought momentarily stalled as she tried to figure out what Yang might be implying. “If you really want to sleep on the floor you’re more than welcome,” she said.

Yang laughed. “Playing hard to get, eh?” she said. “I can work with that.”

Blake was more confused now than ever.

“Sooo,” Yang said, turning back to her food. “Why Atlas?”

Blake sighed internally. It was long past time that she filled Yang in on the details of her mission. She still couldn’t believe that Yang had accepted the job without knowing what it was first, although Blake supposed that it wasn’t too late for Yang to change her mind.

Blake crossed her arms and stood up straight, hoping to properly convey the gravity of the situation to Yang. She said, “We’re going to kidnap Weiss Schnee.”

Blake braced herself for whatever Yang’s reaction might be, but Yang didn’t even bat an eye. She calmly took the last bite of her food and finished chewing before she asked, “Who?”


“The what?” Yang asked.

“The Schnee Dust Company!” Blake said. She was practically shouting at this point. “It’s the largest distributor of Dust in the entire world!”

“Oh!” Yang said, snapping her fingers. “The snowflake people!”

“The…” Blake said. “Yes, that is their logo.”

“I see it all the time on the stuff I steal,” Yang said. “Those Schnee people sure love to put their symbol everywhere. They must really have a high opinion of themselves.”

“You’re right about that,” Blake said.
“So this Weiss lady is important?” Yang asked.

“Have you really never heard of her?” Blake asked.

“Well, I have lived out in the woods my whole life,” Yang said.

“That’s…true,” Blake said. She debated for a moment about how much to tell Yang. She didn’t want to scare Yang off, but at the same time, she had the impression that Yang was not the kind of person who took kindly to being lied to.

Eventually, Blake said, “Among other things, Weiss Schnee is the favored daughter of Jacques Schnee. He’s the CEO of the Schnee Dust Company, the patriarch of the Schnee Family, and one of the richest, most powerful men in the world.”

“Whoa-ho-ho!” Yang said. “And you’re planning on kidnapping his daughter?!”

“We’re planning on kidnapping his daughter,” Blake said. “Unless you want to back out now.”

“Oh no way! There’s no way I’m going to miss this!” Yang said. Then she gave Blake a grin. “‘We’, huh? I like the sound of that.”

“There’s no way I could do this by myself,” Blake said.

“So why Weiss and not someone else?” Yang asked.

“Weiss is in charge of the Company’s propaganda machine,” Blake said. “She’s been spreading the Company’s lies for years. Covering up how they exploit their faunus workforce and treat them like slaves.”

“She’s sure going to be sorry when she meets us,” Yang said. “So, uh, have you figured out how exactly we’re going to kidnap her? I assume we can’t just grab a super-rich guy’s daughter off the streets.”

“I have a plan,” Blake said. “First of all, when we get to Atlas we’ll be meeting with a colleague of mine. She’s been gathering information for me that we’ll need.”

“Awesome,” Yang said. “I can’t wait until we get to the good part.”

“You’re really willing to go through with this, Yang?” Blake asked. “It’s not going to be easy.”

“But I bet it’s going to be fun,” Yang said. “I told you, I’m not going to miss this.”

“Thank you, Yang,” Blake said. “I honestly wasn’t expecting for it to be so easy to work with a human.”

“I don’t see why it’d be hard,” Yang said. “I mean the bartender was a jerk, yeah, but I don’t think every human is like that.”

“Maybe not,” Blake said. “But thanks anyway for being someone I can count on.”

An odd expression suddenly crossed Yang’s face, one that Blake hadn’t been expecting. Yang looked like she was caught somewhere in between shock and delight.

“Yang?” Blake asked. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No, no,” Yang said. “It’s just…do you really mean it when you say that you can count on me?”
“Of course,” Blake said. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“No reason,” Yang said. She looked away and glanced out the cabin’s window. A wistful expression crossed her face for a moment, but when she looked back at Blake, her usual cocksure attitude had reasserted itself. “Hey. Does this ship have anywhere we can get a better view?”

“There is the observation deck, but—” Blake said.

“Great!” Yang interrupted. She jumped to her feet and grabbed Blake’s hand. “Let’s go check it out!”

The very second that Yang made physical contact with Blake, pure, unadulterated panic flooded over her. She yanked her hand out of Yang’s like it was on fire and jumped back a few feet. She almost drew Wilt from her belt on reflex, but she managed to restrain herself.

“Uh…” Yang said. “You okay there?”

“Yes!” Blake said before she calmed herself. “Yes.”

Silence started creeping into the cabin. Yang looked like she wanted to say something more but was having trouble finding the words. Blake didn’t blame her. Her reaction to being touched had undoubtedly seemed strange to Yang, but Blake wasn’t going to apologize for it. To the contrary, she felt that Yang should be the one to apologize to her, and the fact that Yang looked like she was ready to do just that somehow infuriated Blake.

“Why?” Blake asked.

“Why what?” Yang asked.

“Why are you treating me like I’m your friend?” Blake asked.

“Because you are,” Yang said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Didn’t you just say you could count on me?”

“That’s not the same thing,” Blake said. “You don’t know me at all.”

“Oh yeah?” Yang asked like Blake had issued her a challenge. “I could tell from the moment I first saw you that you know how to fight, like really fight. You’re not a huntress or anything like that, so I’m guessing you’ve been fighting since you were a kid. That’d be enough to make anyone want revenge, but that’s not what you’re after, is it? If it was, we’d be talking about how we were going to assassinate someone, or we’d at least be kidnapping someone who hurt you personally. No, I think you want justice. And you want it so bad that you’re willing to work with a human to get it, which seems like a big deal for you.”

Blake was completely taken aback. Her mouth opened behind her mask, but no words came out.

“Oh!” Yang added. “And I know you’re willing to go the extra mile for the people you care about. It’s pretty obvious that all you want is to spend this whole flight hiding in the darkest corner you can find, but you still went out of your way to bring me some dinner. A first-class dinner too!”

“How…?” Blake managed to say.

“What. Thought I wasn’t paying attention?” Yang asked, sounding far more amused than offended. Blake had indeed thought exactly that. So far Yang had seemed like she was just along for the ride.
Blake also hadn’t thought that Yang was such a consummate judge of character. Clearly, she’d underestimated her.

“You…” Blake said, fumbling for some kind of rebuttal. “You don’t even know what I look like.”

“Mmm,” Yang said. Her eyes took a leisurely stroll up and down Blake’s body. “Speak for yourself, beautiful.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Blake said, hoping she didn’t sound too flustered. Fortunately, her mask hid her blush.

Yang laughed. “It’s up to you if I get to see what you’re hiding or not,” she said. “But you should know that that whole woman of mystery thing you’ve got going on is really doing it for me.”

“What?” Blake asked.

“You know, it’s okay to admit that you’re slowly falling for my charms,” Yang said.

“I…what?” Blake repeated. If she didn’t know any better she’d say that Yang was flirting with her, but that was preposterous.

“Anyway,” Yang said, not so subtly changing the subject. “I think we should check out that observation deck.”

“That’s not a good idea,” Blake said. “We’re not supposed to be here, remember?”

“What are they going to do if they catch us?” Yang asked. “Throw us overboard?”

“They might,” Blake said.

“Now that’d be funny,” Yang said.

Blake didn’t agree with Yang’s assessment, but she doubted that anything she might say would change Yang’s mind.

Yang held out her hand for Blake. “Come on,” she said. “Even if they do toss us over the side, I’ll be there to catch you. Let’s go have some fun.”

Every instinct that Blake had was telling her not to go along with Yang, but she wasn’t sure that she could refuse her. The idea of doing something for the enjoyment of it had long been absent from her life, and Yang seemed so eager and sure of herself that it was impossible for Blake to tell her no.

Blake reached out and placed her hand in Yang’s. Yang’s fingers gently closed. A soothing warmth seemed to seep up Blake’s arm. Only then did she understand what a terrible mistake she’d just made. She’d completely underestimated how ravenously hungry she was for touch. This simple act of holding hands was stirring up desires in her that she’d thought she’d smothered long ago.

Yang gave Blake a big, friendly smile and pulled her along out of the cabin. Blake moved like she was in a trance. She didn’t understand what was happening at all, but she was frighteningly eager for more.

Chapter End Notes
First of all, a heads up for those of you who are reading this story as it’s being posted: I’m leaving town tomorrow, and I won’t have much time for writing while I’m gone. Basically what this means is that the next chapter will take about a week longer than usual for me to post. So sorry about that!

I now return you to your regularly scheduled author’s note.

Yang in canon is not subtle. This Yang manages to be even less so. It’s kind of amazing actually. It’s just too bad that this Blake has certain…let’s call them hang-ups. I’m sure they will all be resolved with a minimum of emotional duress. Right?

So did you know that the cover you put over a plate to keep food warm is called a cloche? I sure didn’t. The word itself was actually in this chapter at one point, but it didn’t quite make it through all the rounds of proofreading and revising. Maybe I’ll get to use it someday.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
A glass of red wine was poised in Weiss’s hand. She’d poured it nearly half an hour ago, but she had yet to take a single sip of it. She was sitting on her living room sofa in her penthouse, staring down at three file folders that were laid out across the table in front of her. Weiss had one simple rule; she never took work home with her. She gladly put in whatever hours her job required of her and more, but she always did so from the confines of her office. The fact that the three folders had somehow found their way into her home vexed her greatly.

Some days it didn’t feel like it had been all that long since Weiss had moved out of the Schnee Family mansion, but she’d been living on her own for just over five years now. In fact, she’d signed the paperwork to purchase her downtown penthouse the very day she’d turned eighteen and gained full control over her trust fund. It’d been one of the best decisions she’d ever made. She would have gone crazy if she’d had to spend one more minute living under the same roof as her father. Her working relationship with him had improved greatly now that they parted ways at the end of the day. The only thing she missed from the mansion was Klein, but she did manage to catch up with him from time to time.

Weiss’s penthouse was very different from her office. Its furnishings were a postmodernist’s dream come true, standing in stark contrast to her office’s more conventional décor. She’d even commissioned several paintings for her home from a renowned Atlesian artist whose work was deeply abstract. Very little in her penthouse was in keeping with the sensibilities of Atlas’s social elite, but Weiss didn’t deign to care. Her social peers weren’t welcome in her home, so she was in no danger of having to endure their petty criticisms. Even when she entertained, which was often, it was never in her penthouse. The thought of strangers’ feet shuffling over her carpets, their hands carelessly touching things meant only for display, and their clumsy bodies jostling her furniture was enough to make her skin crawl.

Weiss set her glass of wine down on the table next to the file folders, still not having tasted a drop of it. She scowled at the folders as they silently mocked her with their presence. If she’d known the board of director’s new bodyguard policy was going to cause her this much grief, she would have protested more fervently against it.

After Weiss had finished conducting all her interviews, she’d quickly pared her list of potential bodyguards down to three. Their files were the very same ones that had invaded her home. Two of the candidates were unremarkably conventional. In fact, they were so unremarkable that Weiss was having difficulty remembering their names. The third candidate, however, did not suffer from being forgettable. She had the opposite problem. Weiss had been trying very hard to not think about her brief encounter with one Ruby Rose for days now without success.

Weiss couldn’t possibly fathom what had compelled her to give Ruby permission to call her by her first name. It had unquestionably been a mistake, but it was one that was easy enough to correct. All she had to do was not hire Ruby. Yet as Weiss had gone through the process of eliminating candidates, Ruby’s file had never seemed to end up in the pile of rejects. She was a galling little pest, and Weiss just couldn’t seem to get rid of her.

Had Weiss actually drunk any of her wine yet she might have chuckled. In her opinion, “pest” was a very good word to describe Ruby. She was uncultured, obtrusively naïve, and completely lacking in deference. That wasn’t even mentioning those lingering looks that Weiss had noticed Ruby giving
her. Some of them had been borderline inappropriate too. It was very clear that Ruby was not the kind of person that Weiss needed in her life. Which was why she was so utterly flabbergasted that she longed for the opportunity to meet Ruby again.

“This is ridiculous,” Weiss muttered to herself. She reached out, snatched her wineglass off the table, and took a generous swig.

Weiss breathed in deeply and then exhaled slowly. She couldn’t deny that Ruby did have some positive qualities. She’d been canny enough to uncover that Weiss didn’t need a bodyguard, and honest enough to point it out. And maybe, just maybe, it was Ruby’s lack of deference that Weiss had found so inexplicably intriguing. Admittedly, it had been a long time since anyone had spoken to her as if she wasn’t high above them in station, or in Father’s case, a begrudgingly tolerated understudy. Friends were not a luxury afforded to Weiss. Even Rosalie, as much as Weiss valued her, was first and foremost an employee.

Weiss was perfectly content living her solitary life. She had far too much to do to spend the time it took to maintain a friendship. Plus, for her own personal reasons, she didn’t want to run the risk of becoming too attached to any female peers that she might otherwise befriend. And it wasn’t like she was lonely. All the publicity events she attended and hosted fulfilled her need for social interaction quite handily. It was a tidy and efficient arrangement, but unfortunately, Weiss had discovered a flaw. Apparently, it left her unacceptably vulnerable to adorable, energetic huntresses who gave off the impression that they would eagerly become her friend if given half a chance.

Weiss took another long sip of wine. She was drinking it faster than she should, but tonight she didn’t care. She reclined back on her sofa and let her head sink into the cushions. She sat there for a while. It wasn’t often that she indulged in a moment of stillness like this, but right now she felt that she needed one.

Suddenly, Weiss’s head popped up. “The budget!” she said out loud.

During this whole ordeal Weiss hadn’t once stopped to consider what her new bodyguard would do to her immaculately crafted budget. Bodyguards weren’t cheap, not if you wanted them to be loyal. Ordinarily, Weiss would have found a way to hoist the expenses off onto some other department, but she knew she wouldn’t be able to get away with that this time. Several of her fellow directors had already tried to offload the cost of their new bodyguards onto the Company’s security division. Unfortunately for them, the head of security had masterfully avoided adding a single lien to her already considerable employee expenses. Weiss’s own department would have to absorb the cost, whether she wanted it to or not.

Weiss sat up. At long last she had something concrete to base her decision on. Ruby was the least experienced applicant that Weiss had interviewed. Therefore she was the least expensive. Her lack of experience would also work in Weiss’s favor. She hated it when new employees came in with preconceived notions about how their jobs were supposed to work.

Weiss picked up Ruby’s folder from off her table. First thing in the morning she would instruct Rosalie to call Ruby and tell her that she was hired. The day after that, Weiss would have her bodyguard. The board would be satisfied, Weiss’s budget would take as minimal a hit as possible, and the matter would be settled.

“Congratulations, Ruby Rose,” Weiss said. “You’re the Schnee Dust Company’s newest employee.”

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Two days later, Weiss was in her office like usual, and the issue of who she’d decided to hire as her
bodyguard was the furthest thing from her mind. She was deep in thought, concentrating on a mess of conflicting schedules. She was trying to figure out how she was going to get face time with enough members of the Atlas Board of Labor before their upcoming vote next month. Some significant labor laws had recently come under scrutiny, and Weiss needed to ensure that the Company’s interests were given fair consideration.

Rosalie’s buzzer rang, but Weiss didn’t really hear it at first. It wasn’t an uncommon occurrence, and Rosalie knew that if Weiss didn’t respond to her it meant that she was not to be disturbed unless the matter was urgent.

When Rosalie’s buzzer rang a second time, Weiss shook herself out of her trance. She activated her intercom. “Yes?”

“There’s something happening in the lobby that I think you should see,” Rosalie said. “Camera Three.”

Weiss tapped some buttons on her console, pulling up the appropriate security camera. On her screen she saw a view of the main security desk. Ruby was standing there, arguing with the guard on duty. Even without any sound, Weiss could tell that their discussion was becoming heated. It wasn’t hard for her to spot the source of their disagreement. Ruby had a ridiculously-sized weapon strapped to her back.

Weiss found herself amused by the obvious passion with which Ruby was pleading her case. She almost wanted to sit back and watch for a moment, but she knew it would be best for her to go and defuse the situation.

Weiss stood up from her desk and briskly walked toward her office door. When she stepped into her assistant’s office, Rosalie held out a plastic card for her without a word of explanation. Weiss grabbed the card as she passed, not bothering to look and see what it was.

One elevator ride later, Weiss stepped out into the lobby. She could hear Ruby and the guard’s voices echoing clear across the open space. She quickly marched over to the security desk and asked, “What’s going on here?”

The guard turned toward Weiss. “Miss Schnee?” he said, sounding only mildly surprised.

“Weiss!” Ruby said. “This guy is being a real jerk! He’s still not letting me take Crescent Rose in here!”

Weiss winced at Ruby using her first name right in front of the guard. She was definitely regretting giving her permission to do that, although not enough to take it back.

“I told you, ma’am,” the guard said to Ruby. “You need a permit to carry a weapon in here. I don’t care if you really are Miss Schnee’s bodyguard.”

There was a pause. Then the guard looked at Weiss, then at Ruby, then Weiss, and then back to Ruby. “You actually are her bodyguard. Aren’t you,” he said.

“I sure am!” Ruby said.

“She is,” Weiss confirmed. “As of today.”

“See? Told you,” Ruby said smugly.

“However,” Weiss said. She discreetly glanced at the guard’s name badge. “Mr. Braun is correct that
you need a permit. And I’m sure he’s well aware that if he’d let you into the building armed without proper authorization he’d quickly find himself in search of another job.”

“Oh,” Ruby said. She turned to the guard. “Um…sorry?”

“It’s fine,” the guard said tersely.

“Let’s go get…” Weiss started. Then she looked down at her hand. She was still holding the card that Rosalie had given her, and it just so happened to be the weapons permit that Ruby needed. Weiss smiled slightly. Rosalie really was very good at her job.

Weiss handed the card over to Ruby and said, “Here’s your permit. Make sure to keep it with you all the time.”

“Thanks!” Ruby said, taking the card. She held it up for the guard. “Happy now?”

“Thrilled,” the guard said in a tone that indicated he wasn’t. He took Ruby’s card, scanned it at a terminal on his desk, and then handed it back to her.

Weiss eyed Ruby’s weapon and asked, “I don’t suppose you have anything smaller than…Crescent Rose, was it? It would be better if you were less conspicuously armed.”

“Oh! I can fix that!” Ruby said. “Here. Hold this!” She unclipped Crescent Rose from her back and all but threw it into Weiss’s arms.

“Oof!” Weiss grunted as she caught Crescent Rose. The weapon was just as heavy as it looked. Weiss wasn’t sure how Ruby managed to carry it around all day, much less wield it effectively in battle.

Ruby pulled her hood’s cape over the front of her shoulder. Then she fiddled with the straps on the harness she used to holster Crescent Rose. By the time she was done adjusting it, the part her scythe clipped to was higher up on her back and turned sideways. Then Ruby swiped her weapon out of Weiss’s hands like it was as light as a feather and reattached it to her harness. She threw her cape back into place with a flourish. Now that Crescent Rose was stowed vertically on her back, her cape neatly covered up the massive weapon.

“Ta-da!” Ruby said, wiggling her fingers.

“Very…impressive,” Weiss said.

“I know!” Ruby said.

Weiss shook her head, but she couldn’t help but be amused by how obviously pleased Ruby was with herself. She said, “Why don’t we go to my office. We need to discuss your duties. And Rosalie will have paperwork for you to sign. She’ll also help you get set up with the company’s benefit package.”


Weiss knew that she should be happy that Ruby was impressed by only the most basic of compensation—it was why Weiss had hired her after all—but unbelievably, she felt a pang of guilt pass through her. She did her best to ignore it and said, “Come, this way.”

Ruby followed Weiss, and they started walking toward the elevators. Weiss said, “We should go over your schedule, or rather, my schedule. You won’t necessarily need to be here every day, but
you will be expected to be present at any and all press conferences and public gatherings that I attend. To put it succinctly, you will be required to accompany me anytime I attend an event that will expose me to a sizable group of people from outside the Company.”

“Oh. Okay,” Ruby said. “But you don’t need me for day-to-day stuff?”

“There wouldn’t be much point in you hovering over me while I’m working in my office,” Weiss said.

“I guess not,” Ruby said, sounding disappointed.

“Is there a problem with that arrangement?” Weiss asked.

“Well, no,” Ruby said. “I just thought I’d be working close to you more often.”

“I…do attend many public gatherings,” Weiss said, not sure why she felt the need to console Ruby. “And that does include after-hours social events.”

“That’s not so bad then,” Ruby said.

Weiss and Ruby reached the elevators and stepped into one heading back up to the twenty-ninth floor. As the elevator rose, Weiss glanced at Ruby, this time looking her over with a more critical eye. If she was to have a bodyguard, she wanted one that was up to her usual standards. It was time for her to start molding Ruby into shape. She noted that Ruby had on the same outfit that she’d worn to her interview, obviously a repurposed school uniform. The outfit was adequate, Weiss supposed, but she never settled for adequate.

“You will be expected to dress professionally when you’re on duty of course,” Weiss said, easing into the topic.


“And you’ll need a selection of evening wear for those aforementioned social events,” Weiss continued.

“Evening wear!?” Ruby asked.

“Bodyguard or no, you’ll still need to meet the dress code,” Weiss said.

“Yeah, but…uh…I…” Ruby stammered.

Weiss wasn’t sure what had happened, but Ruby suddenly looked like she was on the verge of panicking. Weiss didn’t think that was a desirable trait in a bodyguard, but rather than being worried about Ruby’s potential job performance, she found herself more concerned with Ruby’s well-being.

Weiss hit the stop button on the elevator’s control panel, and the car came to a halt. “What’s wrong, Ruby?” she asked.

“I don’t have any clothes better than this!” Ruby said, gesturing to what she was wearing. “And I guess they’re not good enough! And I don’t have any evening wear! And I don’t have any money to buy some! I-I really need this job! But—!”

Weiss could tell that Ruby was about to have a breakdown right there in front of her, and she had no idea what to do about it. She hesitantly reached out and put a hand on Ruby’s shoulder. “It’s okay,” she said. “I’ll have HR give you an advance on your first paycheck so you can buy the appropriate
attire.”

“Really? You can do that?” Ruby asked. Hope colored her voice.

“Yes,” Weiss said. “Why wouldn’t I be able to?”

“Oh, Weiss! Thank you!” Ruby said. She suddenly threw her arms around Weiss and gave her a big hug.

Weiss’s eyes went as wide as saucers. This was not seemly behavior for an employee to engage in. She knew she should have told Ruby to stop, but she couldn’t seem to find the words. The hug was simply too enjoyable. This was exactly what she’d been afraid of. She cursed herself for daring to believe that she could resist the temptation that Ruby represented.

Eventually, mercifully, Ruby let go. She said. “It’s been a while since I’ve been clothes shopping. Could you…go with me?”

“You want me to go shopping with you?” Weiss asked, not quite understanding.

“Yeah, I…” Ruby trailed off, looking embarrassed. “I don’t really know what’s in style anymore.”

Weiss did not have the time to waste on a shopping adventure, and she just knew that Ruby would somehow turn it into an adventure. She had far, far more important things to do. But then her traitorous mind began imagining Ruby as her willing doll, eager to dress however she pleased. A blush colored Weiss’s cheeks as her fantasy quickly turned inappropriate.

Ruby said, “It’s okay if you don’t want to, but I could really use your help.”

Weiss mentally grasped for the out that Ruby had just given her. There were so many reasons why it would be unwise to indulge Ruby. There were so many reasons why it would be unwise to indulge Ruby. Unfortunately, all of her excuses slipped through her fingers, and she heard herself say, “I’d be happy to help you.”

Chapter End Notes

Ha! Weiss thinks she can control Ruby. That’s funny. I hope you enjoy the taste of your own medicine, Miss Likes-To-Ignore-My-Authorial-Intent. But it’s not all bad news for Weiss. Ruby let her hold Crescent Rose. If that isn’t a sign of respect, I don’t know what is.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Out of Subjugation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yang was still half convinced that her life as of late had been nothing more than a lovely dream. It just didn’t seem possible that she’d meet a mysterious stranger literally days after she’d run away from her tribe and be whisked away on an incredible adventure. Yet there she was with her feet firmly planted on foreign soil for the first time in her life. She didn’t think things could get any better than they were right now, although she’d be more than happy to be proven wrong.

The airship that had carried Yang and Blake to Atlas had landed only a few minutes ago. Blake had pulled Yang away from the airdock’s crowded pedestrian thoroughfares immediately after they’d disembarked. Yang had barely gotten a glimpse of Atlas so far, but she could already tell that it was a very different place from Mistral. The people all moved with a faster pace, sounds that she’d never heard before echoed around her, and even the air seemed to have an unusual quality to it.

Yang was currently following Blake through what looked to be an area reserved for cargo. Large shipping containers were stacked up all around them, and several huge cranes were hanging overhead. Yang was pretty sure that she and Blake weren’t supposed to be wandering around this part of the dock, but she never concerned herself with silly little rules like that. Besides, she trusted Blake not to lead her astray.

Yang’s thoughts had been unusually preoccupied with Blake as of late, and it wasn’t just because they’d been traveling together. Yang could honestly say that she’d never met anyone quite like Blake before, although she wasn’t sure what it was that made her seem so different. The mask was the obvious answer, but Yang didn’t think that was it. Raven frequently wore a mask—one that was even similar to Blake’s—but unlike Raven, Yang didn’t know why Blake wore her mask. Blake was a mystery, and Yang, contrary to her usual impatient nature, found herself willing to wait for each little tidbit of information that Blake revealed about herself so she could savor them as they came. It certainly didn’t hurt Blake’s allure that she had a fantastic body, and Yang thought that Blake’s cat ears were the cutest things ever. She knew “cute” was an odd word to choose when describing a woman who, in all likelihood, could slice a person in half with that sword of hers, but Yang stood by her assessment.

All other considerations aside, Yang suspected that the real reason she found Blake so intriguing was because of how driven she was. Blake wanted something, and she wanted it very, very badly. Yang wasn’t entirely sure what it might be. Justice was a noble enough goal, but in Yang’s experience, no one was actually motivated by something so abstract.

If nothing else, Yang was impressed by how worldly Blake was. Most of Yang’s life experiences were limited to living with her tribe and robbing people on the roads of Mistral. Thankfully, she had managed to get at least a small taste of the greater world beyond. Her tribe had occasionally made camp not far from some of Mistral’s smaller settlements, and when they had, Yang had taken every opportunity to visit. Local bars had been a favorite of hers. Partially she’d been looking for good booze, but it was the people who’d really drawn her there. She’d loved to listen to their stories. She’d loved to dazzle them with how awesome she was. And she’d rarely passed up the chance for some pleasurable company. Thanks to her status as Raven’s daughter, she’d never found anyone in her tribe who was brave enough to scratch that particular itch for her. She considered it their loss. They had no idea what they were missing.

Unfortunately, Yang had discovered that Blake was also resistant to the idea of joining her in bed.
She supposed she hadn’t actually propositioned Blake directly yet, but she was certain that she’d clearly communicated her offer. Despite what Yang had said to Blake when they’d first left Mistral, she wasn’t actually used to the objects of her desire playing so hard to get. She knew she was good looking, and she wasn’t shy about it. That confidence combined with her natural charm usually made it easy for her to get what she wanted and who she wanted. Blake had already obliterated the record for resisting her advances, although Yang knew that she’d come around sooner or later. She couldn’t even conceive of the possibility that Blake didn’t want what she was offering.

Admittedly, many of Yang’s usual strategies had been derailed by Blake’s odd reaction back on the airship when she’d tried to take her hand for the first time. She still had no idea what that had been all about, but ever since she’d made an effort to respect Blake’s personal space. It hadn’t been easy for her though. Observing boundaries was not something her life as a bandit had prepared her for. Yet there was something about Blake that compelled Yang to do right by her, at least to the extent that she was able.

Blake and Yang finally emerged from the maze of shipping containers. Blake stopped at the edge of the large, open area in front of them. It looked a bit like a parking lot, except instead of cars there were forklifts and other cargo-moving equipment scattered about. Blake seemed to be waiting for something, although Yang wasn’t sure what. She readily admitted to herself that at some point she was going to have to get more in-depth information on this job that Blake had hired her for. Now seemed like as good a time as any.

“Sooo…” Yang said. “I’m guessing we’re going to have to actually go somewhere if we want to find Wei—”

Blake’s hand clapped over Yang’s mouth. “Don’t say anything about our mission in public,” she scolded. “Especially not that name.”

Yang gently pushed Blake’s hand aside. “Why not?” she asked. “There’s no one else around.”

“Even if you think you’re alone you never know when someone might be listening in,” Blake said.

“Alright,” Yang said with a shrug. “But what are we standing around here for?”

“An associate of mine is supposed to meet us here,” Blake said. “We need a vehicle and supplies, and he’s going to bring us both.”

“Do you think he could get his hands on a motorcycle for us?” Yang asked hopefully.

“That…wouldn’t be very practical,” Blake said.

“No, I guess not,” Yang said. She must not have been dreaming after all. If she had been there definitely would’ve been a motorcycle. That was okay. She’d settle for her life being only almost perfect right now.

“So another ‘associate’, huh,” Yang said. “You sure seem to have a lot of those. And not just in Mistral either.”

“The Whi…my organization isn’t unlike your tribe, Yang,” Blake said. “We’re just a lot bigger and more spread out.”

“I don’t know,” Yang said. “From what I’ve seen you guys actually take care of each other.”

There was a subtle shift in Blake’s posture. Yang wouldn’t have even noticed it a few days ago, but she was quickly becoming an expert on Blake’s body language. She’d had an oddly powerful desire
to know what Blake was thinking and feeling for some time now, and since Blake’s mask kept her facial expressions hidden, Yang had needed to find some other way to satisfy her curiosity.

Blake’s fingers brushed against the hilt of her sword. “Yeah,” she said bitterly. “We take care of each other.”

Yang resisted the urge to ask Blake what was wrong. She’d already figured out that Blake never answered direct questions like that. Yang was slowly sussing out other methods of getting information from her, but she sensed that she shouldn’t pry into this particular issue just yet.

The minutes ticked by. Yang still didn’t see any sign of whoever they were supposed to be meeting. She could tell that Blake was getting more and more agitated the longer they waited.

Eventually, Blake said, “Something’s wrong. He should have been here by now.”

“How do you think something bad happened?” Yang asked.

“I don’t know,” Blake said. “We need to find out.”

Blake slid her sword free from her belt. She held on to it tightly, although she didn’t draw it just yet. She ventured forward, and Yang followed. Blake seemed to lock onto some sort of trail, although Yang couldn’t see what it might be. She was pretty sure that the faunus couldn’t track by scent like bloodhounds. She thought about asking Blake about it, but based on what she’d learned the past week, Blake would probably be annoyed by her ignorant question.

It wasn’t long before Blake and Yang came to a small, cheap-looking building. It was probably used by the dock’s on-site manager as an office. A car was parked in front of it, and Blake homed in on the vehicle immediately. The driver side door was ajar, but there was no driver to be seen. Yang noted that the back end of the car was riding lower than the front. It was the kind of thing she’d looked for as a bandit, and it usually meant that the car’s trunk was loaded down with stuff to steal.

Yang asked, “Is this supposed to be our ride?”

“I think so,” Blake said. “The keys are missing.”

Yang glanced at the ignition. Blake was right. “So where’s—?” Yang started to ask.

Blake held up her hand to silence Yang. Her head cocked to one side like she was listening to something. Suddenly, Blake took off at a brisk pace. Yang had to jog just to keep up. Blake made a beeline toward the side of the building and headed around for the back.

When Blake and Yang turned the corner, Yang saw what Blake must have heard. A gang of three people, dockworkers from the looks of them, had back a smaller man up against the wall of the building. The man didn’t look like a faunus, at least as far as Yang could tell, but she supposed that didn’t really matter. The fear on his face made it plain to see how much trouble he was in.

Yang automatically began sizing up the three dockworkers. The middle one seemed to be the ringleader of the group. She was tall, taller than Yang even, and she looked buff enough to sling heavy crates around the dockyard all by herself. Yang was actually a little jealous. She knew that impressive muscles didn’t necessarily equate to an impressive aura, but they still counted for a lot.

The woman had a pistol leveled at her victim which looked a bit old fashioned with its boxy magazine in front of the trigger and its broom-handle grip. The two men flanking her were armed with a crowbar and a heavy chain respectively. They were letting the taller woman do the talking, but they still looked ready to chime in with their improvised weapons given the slightest provocation.
Blake dashed toward the brewing altercation. Yang followed with a grin on her face. She knew that there was no way this was going to end peacefully. She couldn’t wait for things to turn violent. It’d been far too long since she’d gotten into a good fight.

As Yang approached, she heard the woman say to her victim, “You think just because you look human you can pretend to be one? Huh?”

Blake skidded to a halt about ten feet shy of the dockworkers. “Leave him alone!” she shouted.

The woman glanced over her shoulder. As soon as she saw Blake, she gave her a nasty sneer. “Go away,” she said. “This is none of your business.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Blake said. She reached up and threw back her hood, exposing her ears.

“Well, well, well,” the woman said, turning to face Blake completely. “Look at what we’ve got here.”

The other two dockworkers turned their attention to Blake as well, brandishing their weapons. The man they’d been harassing took that as his opportunity and quietly slunk away.

Yang walked up to Blake’s side. She cracked her knuckles. “Three on two, eh?” she said. “That hardly seems fair.”

“Then you should have stayed out of it!” the woman said.

“Are you kidding?” Yang asked. “You guys don’t stand a chance.”

“Don’t be stupid!” the woman said. “We’re going to—”

Before the woman could finish, Blake squeezed the trigger on Blush. There was a bang, and Wilt shot out of its sheath like an arrow loosed from a bow. The butt of its hilt smashed into the dockworker wielding the crowbar, catching him completely by surprise. He went staggering back, clutching his chest where he’d been hit. Yang was pleased to see the flash of his aura. She’d been worried that he might not have an active one, and the last thing she wanted was for the fight to end too quickly.

Blake sprinted forward. She snatched her sword out of the air as it ricocheted off its target. She went charging for the chain-wielding dockworker next. He seemed better prepared than his colleague—he already had his chain up, ready to defend him—but as Blake closed in, there was a shimmer, and suddenly there were two Blakes running side-by-side.

Yang knew she should jump into the fight, but she wasn’t about to miss seeing Blake’s semblance in action. She’d been wondering what it might be, and she still didn’t know completely. She was already taking bets with herself if Blake’s duplicate turned out to be solid or just an illusion.

The first of the Blakes reached the dockworker and swung at him. He expertly caught Wilt with his chain. He and Blake briefly struggled for control of the sword, but then the man twisted his chain around Wilt and ripped it out of Blake’s hand. However, before the man could do anything more, the sword and the Blake who had been wielding it vanished like puffs of smoke.

“Oh sh—!” the dockworker managed to say before the real Blake lunged in and struck him hard. His aura held, but it was already visibly struggling.

“Nice,” Yang said to herself, pleased that her assessment of Blake’s combat skills had been accurate.
The tall woman did not look happy. She raised her pistol and pointed it at Blake. Yang decided that was her cue. She ran toward the woman as fast as she could.

Just as the woman took aim, Yang delivered a wild blow to the side of her head. Yang’s fist met a rock-solid aura, but the strong resistance only made Yang grin with excitement. This was going to be an even better fight than she’d hoped.

Yang took advantage of her momentum and leaped up into the air. Then she planted both of her feet on the woman’s back and kicked off as hard as she could. The woman went flailing into the nearby wall, hitting it face first. Yang, on the other hand, somersaulted once over through the air and landed gracefully.

The woman quickly recovered from her standing face plant and looked at Yang with an intense hatred.

Yang beckoned at the woman. “Come on, big girl,” she said. “You’re all mine.”

Quick as a flash, the woman leveled her pistol at Yang and fired off several shots. Yang, however, was having none of that. She raised her arm and deflected the bullets off of one of her bracers.

Undeterred, the woman spun her pistol around on her finger, and it unfolded into the shape of a hand ax.

“Now we’re talking,” Yang said. She squeezed her fists together, and solid Dust blades shot out of Ember and Blaze. Yang dragged them against one another, savoring the scraping sound they made.

The woman and Yang charged headlong toward each other, both ready for the fight of their lives.

Meanwhile, Blake was locked into combat with the other two dockworkers. Her attention was focused on the man with the chain. She’d quickly figured out that he was the more dangerous of the two. His partner with the crowbar kept trying to outflank her, but each time she effortlessly rebuffed him with a quick jab of Wilt or Blush.

The dockworker Blake was fighting swung his chain around and sent it whizzing toward her head. She ducked, avoiding the blow by mere inches. The chain quickly came around again, and this time Blake thrust Blush upward, intentionally letting the chain wrap around it. She stood and pulled hard on her scabbard, trying to use it to yank the chain out of the man’s hands. The man almost lost his grip, but he quickly planted his feet on the ground and pulled back. He and Blake found themselves caught in a deadly game of tug-of-war.

The sound of uncoordinated footsteps thundering on the ground reached Blake’s ears. They were heading in her direction. The man with the crowbar must have been coming for her yet again. She decided that it was time to take him out of the fight completely, but to do that, she knew she’d need to wait for just the right moment. She continued to pull on Blush with all her might, struggling with the man on the other end of the chain. Then, she let go. Blush flew forward, and the man stumbled at the sudden lack of resistance. Then Blush smacked into him, making him lose his balance completely. He fell and landed flat on his back.

Blake spun around, and her sword followed. The crowbar-wielding dockworker was a fraction of a second away from bashing her over the head, but before he could connect, Wilt caught him square in the chest. He was stopped dead in his tracks as Blake’s sword sliced into his aura and forced him to stagger back.

Blake went for the finishing blow, but as she swung, she saw the dockworker’s aura break. There
was nothing left to protect him from the razor-sharp edge flying toward him. For an instant, Blake felt the urge to spill his blood. He was no innocent. He was a human who had already proven his willingness to violently subjugate the faunus. Blake swore she could feel another hand guiding her own, and a voice, Adam’s voice, whispered in her ear, telling her to put the human down like the miserable animal it was.

Almost too late, Blake twisted Wilt in her hand so that the blunt edge of the sword struck the dockworker. It hit him hard in the gut, knocking the air from his lungs. He was bowled off his feet, and he collapsed to the ground. Blake knew that her blow would leave him with a nasty bruise, but he would live.

The other dockworker was getting back up. Losing his comrade hadn’t dampened his will to fight, but Blake wasn’t in the mood to indulge him any longer. She ran for him at full speed and launched a flying kick into his head. The strike sent him soaring backward. He bounced off the ground a few times like a stone skipping over a lake until he tumbled to a halt. He made one attempt to get back up before he hit the ground again and stayed there.

Blake snatched up Blush from where it was lying. Then she turned toward where Yang was still battling the dockworkers’ ringleader.

There could be no doubt about it; Yang was having the time of her life. She was practically euphoric from all the adrenaline pumping in her veins. She wished the fight could last longer, but she could tell that her opponent was running out of steam. The woman’s blows were getting weaker, and her aura was getting softer. It was obvious who was going to win. Fortunately, for Yang at least, the woman was too stubborn to give up.

Suddenly, the woman let out a bestial roar and pulled her ax back. She swung at Yang with everything she had left. Yang saw the sloppy blow coming a mile away, but she didn’t try to dodge or block it.

The woman’s ax struck Yang full-on. There was enough force behind it that Yang had to take a few steps backward. The woman smiled evilly, foolishly assuming that she’d put Yang on the back foot.

Yang heard Blake shout her name in alarm. She grinned wickedly. She’d been hoping that Blake would get to see this part. She could feel her semblance burning deep inside of her. She’d been holding it back, saving it for when the time was right. Now she finally let it loose, allowing it to run free like a frenzied beast.

Yang’s eyes turned red. Her hair began to smolder, and then a brilliant glow burst forth from it. She let out a shout and lunged for her opponent.

The woman raised her ax to block, but it was too little to save her. Yang struck first with Blaze, knocking the woman’s ax aside with its blade. Then she slashed with Ember. For a moment, it looked like the woman’s aura might hold as Yang’s blade dragged across it. But just as Yang finished her swing, the woman’s aura flashed and broke wide open.

Yang lashed out with her foot and kicked the woman in the chin hard enough that her feet left the ground. She arced up through the air and then landed in a crumpled heap, beaten, unconscious, and not likely to get back up any time soon.

“Yang!” Blake called out as she ran up. “That was…! I’m…I’m glad to see you’re okay.”

Yang’s blades retracted back into her bracers. She took a deep breath, trying unsuccessfully to calm herself. Unfortunately, the woman had gone down even quicker than she’d anticipated, and she still
had energy left to burn.

“That’s an impressive semblance. Is there something that triggers it?” Blake asked.

Yang hadn’t really heard a word that Blake had said. Between her semblance, the rush of a good fight, and the thrill of seeing Blake in action, too many powerful sensations were bombarding her all at once. Without stopping to think it through, she hooked her arm around Blake, pulled her in close, and planted a searing kiss on her mask right where her lips would’ve been.

Nothing was actually obstructing Blake’s mouth, but she went dead silent anyway. She offered no resistance as Yang tipped her back, deepening the kiss the only way she could.

All of a sudden, Blake came back to life. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?” she bellowed. She ripped herself out of Yang’s embrace. Then her hand balled into a fist, and she socked Yang across the jaw.

The hit stoked the fires of Yang’s semblance again, exciting her even more, but she knew it was time to regain control of herself. It took an incredible amount of effort, but she forced herself to settle down. Her eyes returned to their normal, lilac color, although her hair continued to softly glow.

“Well, that was a thing,” Yang said, trying to sound nonchalant.

“A thing!?” Blake exclaimed. “You kissed my mask!”

“No. I kissed you,” Yang calmly explained.

“You…” Blake trailed off.

“I’m not saying you don’t have another face under there,” Yang said. “But that mask is the only one I’ve ever seen, and that’s good enough for me.”

“You…” Blake stammered. Yang could hear her angry breaths. “I know what this is about! I am not some kind of toy here for your self-gratification!”

Yang blinked a few times. “What?” she asked, completely confused.

“I know some of you humans get your thrills by…by…taking your pleasure from the faunus,” Blake said.

“What!?” Yang repeated, horrified this time. “Is that what you think this is about?!”

“Isn’t it?” Blake asked.

“No!” Yang said. “I mean your ears are sexy and all, yeah, but that’s not what makes you awesome.”

Blake didn’t say anything more, but her posture told Yang that she was still upset and confused. She wasn’t the only one. Yang could count on one hand the number of times in her life that she’d been offended, but Blake had succeeded in doing just that.

Yang crossed her arms and said, “Maybe I shouldn’t have kissed you just now. But even so, do you really think I’d try to actually force myself on you?”

Blake didn’t answer immediately, and every second that she didn’t, Yang felt a knife slide a little deeper into her heart.

Eventually, Blake muttered, “No.”
“You sure have a low opinion of humans,” Yang said.

“Of course I do!” Blake said. She pointed at the unconscious dockworkers scattered about. “That! That is what humans are like! Not just the bad ones. Almost all of them! People like you are the exception, Yang. Not the rule.”

Yang uncrossed her arms. “Really?” she asked.

“Yes,” Blake said. “And…and you really are an exception. It doesn’t matter to you at all that I’m a faunus, does it?”

“No!” Yang said.

“I guess I knew that,” Blake said. “But I didn’t really believe it. Until now.”

Yang looked over at the defeated dockworkers. She was used to being ostracized by ordinary people—at least once they found out what she was—but she accepted it. In some ways she even reveled in it. However, people hated her because of what she did. She couldn’t comprehend what it must be like to be hated simply because of what you were.

Yang turned back to Blake, and said, “I’m sorry.”

Blake let out a sigh. “It’s okay, Yang,” she said.

“I’m not sure it is,” Yang said.

“You’re right. It’s not,” Blake said. “But…thank you anyway.”

“Um…” a quiet voice suddenly said. “Miss…Belladonna?”

Yang and Blake both turned and saw the man the dockworkers had been harassing standing there. Yang had completely forgotten about him. Blake must have forgotten about him too if her stunned silence was anything to go by. Yang guessed that Blake would’ve preferred the man to not have seen what had just happened.

Blake finally managed to answer. “Yes, that’s me. Did they hurt you?”

“No. Thanks to the two of you,” the man said.

“We found the car,” Blake said. “Did they figure out what it was for? Is that why they attacked you?”

“No, they…” the man looked away, embarrassed. “They found my White Fang mask in my locker.”

Yang asked, “Isn’t that kind of a dumb thing to bring to work with you?”

“Yang,” Blake chided.

Yang lifted her hands in a halfhearted apology.

“Here,” the man said. He pulled a key out of his pocket and pressed it into Blake’s hand.

“We…can’t stay here to protect you,” Blake said, gripping the key she’d been given. “Do you have a safe place you can hide?”

“Don’t worry about me,” the man said. “You need to go. Someone probably heard you fighting.”
“Thank you,” Blake said. She turned and started walking back in the direction of the car. “Come on, Yang. We've got a mission to complete.”

Yang’s eyes wandered after Blake. The determination that she so admired in her was back on full display. However, now that she’d gained a little perspective, Yang was afraid that Blake’s drive might come from a dark place. Blake had been hurt, that much was clear, and Yang suspected that Blake’s pain ran far deeper than simply anger over humanity’s mistreatment of her race.

An emotion Yang had never felt before welled up in her. She didn’t have a name for it, but it made her stomach flutter and the tips of her fingers tingle. Whatever it was, Blake was its source. Yang wanted to protect her. She wanted to heal her. If only she knew how.

“Let’s go, Yang,” Blake called over her shoulder. “We don’t want to be here when the police show up.”

“Right behind you,” Yang said.

Chapter End Notes

Well this chapter got more serious than I originally envisioned. So. Let's talk about racism.

In canon RWBY we’ve heard a lot about the faunus’ plight during the show’s run, but we haven’t really seen it. Maybe I’m misremembering things, but by my count, Team CRDL’s rather generic bullying of Velvet and a “No Faunus” sign in the bar Qrow visits during Volume 5 are the only instances of discrimination that have actually made it to camera. This isn't really a criticism of RWBY. It's more of an observation. Maybe RWBY's not the kind of show to tackle such a heavy issue.

Honestly, I'm really not the writer to give racism an in-depth literary examination, but it's an important factor that informs Blake's character in this story, so I was never going to get away with completely ignoring it.

On a lighter note, I’m very amused by the concept of Yang being so incredibly pansexual that she can’t imagine anyone else not being the same. Sorry to break it to you Yang, but not everyone is going to find you attractive in that way.

Oh, and for you gun nerds out there. The gun the dockworkers’ ringleader uses in this chapter was meant to resemble a Mauser C96.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Mirror, Mirror, What’s Before You?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ruby was standing alone on a sidewalk in Atlas’s sprawling commercial district, looking like a deer caught in the headlights. Weiss had given her specific instructions on when and where to meet, and Ruby had arrived early, brimming with anticipation for their shopping adventure. She’d expected the address that Weiss had provided to lead her to an ordinary clothing outlet, but the place she’d found waiting for her looked more like a palace. It was no wonder that Weiss had described it as a boutique; it was far too fancy to be called a store.

The name “Kerna Caisè” was chiseled proudly into the boutique’s marble entryway. Ruby didn’t know if that was a person’s name or words borrowed from some exotic language that she didn’t speak, but it sounded incredibly pretentious. She suspected that was the point. It clearly wasn’t the name of a place that catered to people like her who needed to take a taxi cab to get downtown.

Ruby had half a mind to go look for the nearest thrift shop, or at least a cheaper store, and pick up some new clothes there. Weiss had been good to her word and gotten Ruby her first paycheck in advance, but Ruby had already spent half of it on overdue bills. And even if she hadn’t, she didn’t think the money she’d received was enough to pay for so much as a pair of socks at a place like Kerna Caisè.

Ruby had Weiss’s number now. Weiss had insisted that she take it in case an emergency ever came up. She could send a message to Weiss’s scroll with some excuse as to why she wouldn’t be able to meet her today. It would probably save her a lot of embarrassment, and it would definitely save her a lot of expense. It was just too bad that it would also keep her from spending a day getting to know Weiss better. She’d really been looking forward to it.

Ruby was considering her options when a car pulled up to the curb. She realized that it was about time for Weiss to show up. The car certainly looked fancy enough to be Weiss’s, and it was the right color, but the windows were so darkly tinted that Ruby couldn’t see inside.

A young man dressed in a driver’s uniform stepped out from the front of the car. He quickly made his way over to the curbside passenger door and opened it up. Weiss was sitting inside. She accepted the driver’s hand and stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Ruby’s mouth hung open a little, and her concerns about money were temporarily forgotten. Maybe it was because Ruby had only ever seen Weiss in her business clothes, but she was struck all over again by how beautiful Weiss was. Weiss was wearing a white dress with a blue floral print pattern on it and a light jacket. Ruby was instantly of the opinion that Weiss should wear skirts more often. Weiss’s hemline wasn’t particularly daring—it went all the way down to her knees—but it was the first time that Ruby had gotten a real chance to check out Weiss’s legs, and the wedges that Weiss was wearing were doing fantastic things to her calves.

Ruby managed to keep herself from drooling, and she even successfully met Weiss’s eyes as she walked up. It just wasn’t fair how incredibly good Weiss looked, especially since Ruby knew that looking was all she’d ever get to do.

“Ruby. I’m glad you could make it,” Weiss said. To Ruby’s surprise, Weiss didn’t sound stoically serious. She wasn’t sure what to make of that. It was very un-Weiss-like.
“You’re glad?” Ruby said. “I’m the one who needs help!”

“Yes, of course,” Weiss said. She turned to her driver and waved dismissively at him. He nodded, got back into the car, and drove off.

Weiss turned back to Ruby. “Shall we get started?” she asked.

“Sure!” Ruby said. She followed Weiss into the boutique, sneaking several more peeks at her legs as they walked.

The boutique was a lot bigger than it had looked from the outside. All of the merchandise was organized by color, creating a vibrant, rainbow pattern across the entire sales floor, and the trendy décor had been cleverly arranged to enhance the effect.

“Wow!” Ruby said. “This place is amazing.”

“It is nice,” Weiss said. “I don’t often shop here, but—”

Weiss was interrupted by an approaching clerk who had spotted her and Ruby walking in. “Hello!” she said. “Welcome to Kerna Caisè! How may I assist you today?”

“We’re fine for now, thank you,” Weiss said.

“Great! Just let me know if you have any questions,” the clerk said.

“We will,” Weiss said, already walking away. “Come along, Ruby.”

“Coming!” Ruby said.

As soon as Weiss had led Ruby out of earshot from the clerk, she said, “But it’s nice to be able to shop in relative anonymity. They always recognize me at the high-end boutiques and make a nuisance of themselves trying to give me the VIP treatment.”

Ruby was stunned that Weiss didn’t consider this store to be high-end. “Yeah, I guess…that could get…annoying,” she said. She counted herself lucky that Weiss hadn’t taken her to one of those places. She probably wouldn’t have been able to even afford walking in the door.

“I’m assuming you want something in red?” Weiss asked.

“Yup!” Ruby said. “It’s in my name!”

Weiss’s eyes slid over to Ruby for a moment. “I suppose it is,” she said. “It’s fortunate that the color looks good on you.”

Ruby had not been prepared to receive a compliment from Weiss. It actually made her feel a little embarrassed, especially since she knew that her looks didn’t hold a candle to Weiss’s. She stopped walking for a moment. “Hey, Weiss?” she said.

“Yes?” Weiss asked, stopping as well.

“Thanks,” Ruby said. “For helping me with this.”

“It’s…not that big of a deal,” Weiss said.

“Yes it is!” Ruby said. “I know you’re really busy being an important director and all. I just want you to know I appreciate it.”
“I…” Weiss trailed off. Ruby thought she saw something odd flash over Weiss’s face, longing maybe. But it vanished too quickly for her to be sure. Weiss suddenly put on a professional air, and said, “It’s important to take the time to invest in your employees.”

Ruby laughed.

“What?” Weiss asked. “Did I say something amusing?”

“Come on, Weiss,” Ruby said. “Do you really expect me to believe you go clothes shopping with all your employees?”

Weiss put a hand on her hip. “Most of my employees don’t need help dressing themselves,” she quipped.

“Oh!” Ruby said. “Touché!”

“Plus you’ll be seen with me in public,” Weiss said. “I can’t have you being an embarrassment, now can I?”

“Okay, okay,” Ruby said, smiling. “But I think once you’ve gone shopping with someone, that at least makes you friends.”

“Friends?” Weiss repeated. She suddenly looked nervous, although Ruby had no idea why.

“Yeah!” Ruby said. “There’s nothing wrong with us being friends is there?”

“I suppose not,” Weiss said. “In fact, I think I’d like that.”

“Friends then!” Ruby said. “Now, friend. I think it’s time for you to make me look good.”

Weiss’s eyes briefly wandered down Ruby’s body. It happened so fast that Ruby almost missed it, but she didn’t miss the smile that Weiss gave her. Weiss said, “That I can do.”

Weiss took Ruby over to the red section. She started sifting through the boutique’s offerings, wandering from rack to rack as she searched. Ruby had to suppress a laugh at the look of concentration on Weiss’s face. It was clear that she was taking her duty as Ruby’s fashion adviser very seriously.

“Do you need to know my size?” Ruby asked.

“As if that number had any meaning,” Weiss said derisively. “I have a good enough idea of what will fit you.”

“Oh. Okay,” Ruby said. She never would have guessed that having an eye for people’s sizes was one of Weiss’s talents. She was beginning to wonder if there was anything she couldn’t do.

Weiss pulled a business jacket from off a rack. She glanced at Ruby. “I suppose you’re going to insist on incorporating your hood into your new wardrobe.”

“My hood? Yeah…I…” Ruby stammered. Her mood suddenly plummeted. “It’s not too unprofessional is it?”

“We can work with it,” Weiss said. “If it’s really that important to you.”

“My dad gave it to me,” Ruby said.
“Oh, I see,” Weiss said. “And you’re close to your father?”

“I was,” Ruby muttered. She braced herself for what was coming next. This was the point in the conversation where Weiss would press her for details. People always did. She wished they wouldn’t. It wasn’t a story she liked to tell.

Much to Ruby’s surprise however, Weiss didn’t say a word. Instead, she put the jacket she was holding back on the rack and flagged down the clerk who had been hovering a polite distance away.

“Yes, ma’am?” the clerk asked as she walked up.

“You have an on-site tailor, correct?” Weiss asked.

“Yes. We can—” the clerk started to say.

“Is he or she available today?” Weiss interrupted.

“Yes. Do you—?” the clerk managed to get out.

“Good,” Weiss said.

Before Ruby even knew what was happening, Weiss was unpinning her hood from around her shoulders. Weiss handed it to the clerk and said, “The hemline on the cape needs to be mended. Please see to it.”

“Of—of course!” the clerk said, trying to keep up with Weiss’s rapid-fire demands.

“And make sure your tailor does a good job,” Weiss said. “That hood is irreplaceable.”

“I’ll make sure he knows,” the clerk said. Then she left, walking toward the back of the sales floor.

Ruby stood there in shock, dizzy from what had just happened. She felt naked without her hood on. She’d been dreading the day that it would inevitably become too ragged to wear. She’d never even considered the possibility that it could be fixed.

When Weiss saw the overwhelmed expression on Ruby’s face, she suddenly looked worried. “I’m sorry! I…! Should I not have done that?”

“You can undress me anytime you want,” Ruby said before she could think better of it.

Weiss’s eyes widened and her cheeks turned red. “What does that mean?!” she asked.

“It means, thank you, Weiss,” Ruby said. She seemed to be saying that a lot today. She had no idea how she was going to make any of this up to Weiss.

“Well,” Weiss said. “Shall we get back to the task at hand?”

“Yeah. That sounds good,” Ruby said.

Over the next few minutes, Weiss picked through hundreds of garments. She pulled out several of them and held each one up to Ruby in turn to give it due consideration. Most were put back, but a pile of items was slowly starting to grow in Ruby’s arms. As they shopped, Ruby noticed Weiss’s eyes start to wander over toward her every few minutes, but Weiss hastily looked away each time, apparently embarrassed. Ruby thought that was a bit strange—they were there to buy her clothes after all—but she chose not to question Weiss’s methods.
Weiss was too busy with what she was doing to make conversation, so Ruby’s thoughts started to wander. Weiss seemed to be different today, and Ruby wasn’t entirely sure why. Maybe it was just because they were out of the office. Maybe it was because today Weiss was her friend and not her boss. Although Ruby couldn’t help but feel there was something more that she was missing. She began mulling over the clues, wondering if there was some pattern that she hadn’t put her finger on yet.

Weiss pulled yet another blouse from off a rack. Ruby had really meant it when she’d told Weiss that she had no idea what was in style at the moment, but she was pretty sure that the blouse Weiss was holding was far, far too low cut to be appropriate for work.

Weiss held the blouse up to Ruby like she had all the others. A little, self-indulgent smile crossed her face, and a dusting of red colored her cheeks. Then she shook her head and put the blouse back.

Everything suddenly came together in Ruby’s head, and a revelation struck her like a bolt out of the blue. Weiss was gay, or at least she was into women. At first, Ruby didn’t believe it. Her knee-jerk reaction told her that she was just deluding herself into seeing what she wanted to see. Although she had to admit that Weiss being gay would certainly explain some of her behavior today.

Ruby had a mission now. However, she didn’t want to let Weiss on to what she was up to. She’d learned pretty quickly in the past that asking people point-blank if they were gay, even with the best of intentions, usually ended badly. Fortunately, Ruby had a cunning plan.

“So, Weiss,” Ruby said, trying her best to sound casual. “What do you do for fun?”

“I don’t often have fun,” Weiss said. She didn’t look up from the pair of blouses she was intensely comparing.

“You must have something you like doing,” Ruby said.

Weiss paused to think about Ruby’s question. “I do enjoy the theater,” she said. “And the Atlas Museum of Fine Art does have an acceptable number of masterpieces in its collection.”

“You know, I’ve never been to an art museum before,” Ruby said.

“Never?” Weiss asked, sounding surprised.


“We should go to one sometime,” Weiss said. She quickly added, “When my schedule permits of course.”

“Yeah! That’d be great!” Ruby said.

Ruby realized she was getting distracted. She needed to focus. “What about your boyfriend?” she asked. “Does he ever go to the museum with you?”

“Boyfriend? I don’t have a boyfriend,” Weiss said.

“Sorry. My mistake,” Ruby said, congratulating herself on her sneakiness. She knew that Weiss not having a boyfriend didn’t necessarily mean anything, but it was a point in her favor.

Weiss gave Ruby an odd look, but then she turned her attention back to the task at hand.

Ruby wasn’t sure what her next step was. She decided that it was time to go for broke. “Hey,
Weiss!” she said. “Summer will be here soon. Do you think you could help me pick out a swimsuit too? I’m thinking I’d look good in a bikini!”

“A bikini!?” Weiss spat out. She almost dropped a vest she’d just picked up. Ruby could practically see Weiss’s imagination working its magic as a luminescent blush lit up her face.

“I…I think it would be best if you picked out your swimwear on your own,” Weiss said.

“Oh, alright,” Ruby said, giving Weiss her best pout. As far as she was concerned the matter was settled. Weiss was gay, or close enough to it. She was pleased with herself for figuring it out, but unfortunately, she knew it didn’t really benefit her in the way she would have liked.

Ruby had never read any trashy romance novels, but a pair of her teammates from way back during her days at Signal had. They’d talked about them constantly, much to Ruby’s consternation. As she understood it, the protagonist sleeping with her boss was a fairly common plot. Back then Ruby hadn’t understood the appeal of that particular fantasy, but she certainly did now. It was too bad that reality was never as neat or tidy as fiction. Ruby was certain that trying to work her way into Weiss’s bed would be a bad idea, even if she didn’t specifically understand why. And to know that it was actually a theoretical possibility was a bit of a bitter pill to swallow. She wasn’t entirely disappointed, however. She’d made a new friend today. She’d even gotten Weiss to agree that they were, in fact, friends. From what Ruby had seen of Weiss so far, she suspected that was quite the accomplishment.

“Okay,” Weiss said, adding two more items to the pile in Ruby’s arms. “We’ve got enough for now. Let’s have you try some of these on.”

Alright!” Ruby said. “I can’t wait!”

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“Wow,” Ruby whispered. She was looking into a dressing room mirror. It had taken several hours, many trips back and forth to the dressing room, and many armfuls of clothing, but she finally had her new outfit.

Ruby did a turn, checking herself out from all sides. She almost didn’t recognize the sharp-dressed professional staring back at her from the mirror. She was wearing a white blouse, a red tie that was tucked into a black suit vest with red trim, and dark slacks with red piping running down the sides of the legs. Weiss had even managed find some flats that look business-like and were easy for Ruby to move in.

Ruby walked to the dressing room’s exit. Weiss had refused to join her for whatever reason, and she was eager to show her the results.

Just as Ruby had hoped, Weiss was waiting for her back on the sales floor. “Well?” she asked. “What do you think?”

Weiss didn’t say anything at first. She swallowed hard, but then she seemed to shake herself out of whatever spell she was under.

Weiss slowly walked around Ruby and looked her over with a critical eye. She stopped occasionally to tug on a bit of the outfit before she finally came back around to Ruby’s front. “We’ll have to get the tailor to make a few adjustments,” Weiss said. “But I think you clean up quite nicely.”

“Aw. Thanks, Weiss!” Ruby said.

“And speaking of the tailor,” Weiss said. She unfolded a bit of red cloth that had been tucked
unobtrusively underneath her arm. “He’s finished with this.”

Ruby’s eyes lit up when she saw her hood. She took it out of Weiss’s hands. Sure enough, the cape was properly hemmed up again. It didn’t even look like the tailor had needed to shorten it by that much.

Ruby looked excitedly at Weiss and said, “Well you’d better put this on me!”

Weiss smiled. She took the hood back from Ruby. Then she threw it around Ruby’s shoulders and fastened the broach into place.

Ruby waved her cape about with a flourish, seeing how it worked with her new outfit. “I look incredible!” she said. “Thanks, Weiss! You’re the best!”

“This has been some of my finer work,” Weiss agreed. “Now. You’ll need some evening wear as well, so let’s select some dresses next.”

“Yeah, uh…” Ruby said. “I think this is going to take all the money I have already. I’ll get some dresses soon, I promise. But they’ll have to wait until later.”

Weiss looked surprised. She was silent for a moment, but then she said, “No.”

“No?” Ruby asked.

“No, I’m afraid that won’t do,” Weiss said. “I’ll simply have to pay for everything today.”

“Weiss! You…you don’t have to do that!” Ruby said.

“I insist,” Weiss said. “And since I’m your friend, I don’t think you can refuse me.”

“Oh, Weiss!” Ruby said. She ran up to Weiss and threw her arms around her. “Thank you!”

Ruby noticed that Weiss didn’t stiffen up like the last time she’d hugged her, back in the elevator at the Schnee Dust Company headquarters. Weiss still didn’t return Ruby’s hug, but she did awkwardly pat her a few times. Ruby resolved that she was going to teach Weiss how to hug properly someday. It was the least she could do for her.

Ruby finally let go of Weiss. “Alright then,” she said. “Let’s go pick out some dresses.”

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By the time Ruby and Weiss had left Kerna Caisè, the sun had begun to set. Ruby was standing next to Weiss out on the sidewalk with a pair of shopping bags in each hand. Weiss’s car had just pulled up, and the driver had already jumped out to open the door for her.

Before Weiss got into her car, she turned to Ruby and said, “Thank you for today.”

“Thank me?” Ruby asked. “What for?”

“This was fun,” Weiss said.

“I had fun too, Weiss,” Ruby said. “But don’t forget we’re going to go to a museum together sometime soon!”

Weiss shook her head, but she was smiling. “I have a feeling that you won’t let me.”
“You got that right!” Ruby said.

“Goodnight, Ruby,” Weiss said. “Oh. And I’m sure I don’t need to remind you about that Q and A I’m chairing tomorrow. I’ll expect to see you there by no later than nine o’clock.”

“I’ll be there,” Ruby said.

“Good. Until then,” Weiss said.

Weiss stepped into her car. The driver shut the door. Ruby couldn’t see Weiss anymore now that she was insulated from the world by a layer of tinted glass, but she set down two of her bags and waved anyway.

As soon as the driver had gotten back into the car, the vehicle pulled away from the curb and faded into the city’s evening traffic.

Ruby reached down and picked up her bags again. She started casually strolling down the sidewalk. She’d have to flag down a taxi sooner or later if she wanted to get home in time to go to bed, but for now she was content to walk. It’d been a long while since she’d felt so happy. She had a job. She had a friend. Life was good.

Ruby glanced at the bracelet around her wrist. “You were right, Dad,” Ruby said. “I’ve finally made it. Just like you knew I would.”

Chapter End Notes

Ruby, you might be jumping to conclusions a little bit about Weiss being gay. I mean, you’re not wrong, but still. Oh, and please stop pointing out the clichés in my story! I’m well aware of them, thank you very much.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Eyes Shut Tight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A raging fire roared in Blake’s ears, and the bitter smell of smoke invaded her nose. She tried to breathe but only ended up coughing and choking on the soot-filled air. Her eyes were closed, but she could tell that she was lying on a hard, unforgiving floor. She didn’t recall how she’d gotten there, but that didn’t seem important at the moment.

Blake’s whole body ached, but she forced herself up into a sitting position. When she tried to open her eyes a sharp, stinging sensation forced her to keep her left one shut. The whole left side of her face was throbbing in pain. She reached up and touched it, only to feel a warm liquid clinging to her skin. When she pulled her fingers back she saw that they were slick with blood.

Suddenly, the clang of metal striking on metal pricked Blake’s ears. She tried to see what was happening, but her vision was too blurry to make anything out. She wiped the blood out of her left eye and blinked a few times. The destruction around her started to come back into focus. She could just barely see two figures locked in combat, silhouetted against the glow of the flames surrounding her.

Memories came flooding back to Blake. Adam had made his move. Blake had begged him not to, but he’d finally gone through with his plan to openly attack Sienna. He and Sienna had to be the two figures Blake could see. There was no mistaking the raw hatred in the savage blows they were raining down upon each other.

Blake still had a hold of Gambol Shroud. She raised it, not knowing who she intended to point it toward, but her dilemma turned out to be moot. All she found in her hand was the broken remains of Gambol Shroud’s hilt.

Blake cast her eyes downward. Pieces of her weapon’s blade and sheath lay scattered about on the floor in front of her, cut with impossible precision. Blake remembered now. When she’d come to Sienna’s defense, Adam hadn’t held back. In the length of a heartbeat, Blake had gone from being his lover to being just another obstacle in his way.

Blake lowered her arm and let what was left of Gambol Shroud slip from her hand. Her head dipped. She was incredibly tired. She wanted nothing more than to close her eyes and go to sleep, but she knew she couldn’t do that. She had to stop Adam.

Blake raised her head again, and something caught her eye. A body was lying on the ground not far from her, dressed in the robes of the White Fang. Blake knew there wasn’t a chance that she could get to her feet, so she slumped forward and started pulling herself inch-by-inch along the floor. Ever so slowly, she dragged herself toward the body.

After what seemed like an eternity, Blake reached her goal. She rolled the body onto its back, revealing the face of Corsac. His expression was still frozen in a mask of pain and horror. Blake shuddered as she recalled the ruthless efficiency with which Sienna had cut him down. He’d never even stood a chance, especially since he’d stood alone. Fennec had been conspicuously absent. It had probably been the first time that Corsac had fought without the support of his brother in years. Blake still didn’t know where Fennec was right now, and she didn’t have the time to care.

Blake began frantically searching for Corsac’s dagger. She found it a moment later, lying on the
ground where it had fallen out of his hand. It was still glowing with the power of the red Dust loaded into it. Blake snatched it up, and she pointed it toward where Adam and Sienna were fighting.

Sienna and Adam both looked near their breaking point. Sweat poured down their faces, their clothes were in tatters, and their blood dripped from fresh wounds. Their auras had long been depleted. Only sheer tenacity was keeping either one of them going at this point.

Blake’s hand shook as her finger brushed against the dagger’s trigger. She was trapped in an impossible struggle between what she had to do and what she couldn’t do. But then time ran out. Adam knocked Sienna’s spear aside with a swift attack. He slid Wilt into Blush in a single, deft motion and stood poised to strike the killing blow.

Blake pulled the trigger.

A blast of fire shot out from Corsac’s dagger. It struck Adam square in the back. He cried out in pain as the searing heat hit him, but an instant later, he was silenced. Sienna thrust her spear forward. Its blade ran Adam through, piercing his chest and erupting out his back.

Adams stood there for a moment like nothing had happened, but then his strength failed. His arms went limp, and he slid off of Sienna’s spear, falling ever so slowly to the floor.

Sienna’s spear drooped. Without the life-or-death struggle to keep her going, she quickly crumbled to the floor as well, completely consumed by exhaustion.

Blake dropped Corsac’s dagger. She wanted to run to Adam, but all she could do was crawl. Adam was still breathing by the time she reached him, but his breath had grown ragged and short. Blake pulled his mask off his face. It seemed like a lifetime had passed since she’d last seen his eyes. They’d been beautiful once, the sensitive eyes of a poet. But hatred had poisoned them. Even before he’d hidden them away from the world, they’d become ugly, soulless things.

Adam looked at Blake. Her chest tightened. For the first time in a very long time, she saw the face of the man she’d loved, not the monster he’d become.

Adam sucked in a raspy breath. “Why…my love…?” he asked.

“This wasn’t the way, Adam!” Blake said. “It wasn’t the way.”

Adam’s eyes closed for good.

Blake’s hands clutched at Adam’s ruined jacket. Tears, mixed with her own blood, dripped onto his lifeless body, but she didn’t cry out or wail in sorrow. There was no such release allowed to her. Adam was dead, but her nightmare was just beginning.

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A sudden jostling shook Blake awake. Her eyes shot open, and she breathed in sharply. She would have shot to her feet, but a seat belt held her in place.

“Whoa!” Yang said. “Easy there.”

Blake’s confusion began to clear. She was in a car with Yang, somewhere in Atlas. Judging by the view outside, they were in a city and it was not long past sunset. Blake lifted her hand to her face. Her fingers met the cold surface of her mask. After a pause, they drifted downward and lingered where Yang had kissed her. At the time Blake had been furious with Yang for doing that, but now that the heat of the moment had passed, she wasn’t sure how she felt about it.
Blake lowered her hand and shook her head clear. “Was I asleep?” she asked.

“Yeah. For about three hours,” Yang said. “Sounds like I woke you up from a nightmare.”

“Something like that,” Blake muttered. It had been a long time since her memories of the day that Adam had died had come to torment her sleep. She didn’t welcome their sudden return.

“Where are we?” Blake asked.

“Almost to where you said we were going,” Yang said. “That’s why I woke you up. One dark alley kind of looks like another around here.”

Blake had been surprised when Yang had offered to drive. She’d assumed that someone who’d lived away from so-called civilized society wouldn’t know how, but Yang continued to defy Blake’s expectations. Not only had she driven without any trouble, she’d managed to get them almost all the way to their destination just by following Blake’s admittedly vague directions.

Blake took a moment to get her bearings. Then she said, “Turn left up here.”

A few minutes later, Yang, under Blake’s guidance, pulled into a small parking lot nestled inside of a rundown-looking industrial park. It sat next to a nondescript warehouse of some kind. There was a row of cab-less semitrailers neatly lined up in the warehouse’s loading bays, but other than that there weren’t any other vehicles or people in sight.

Blake got out of the car, and Yang followed. Only about half of the lights in the parking lot worked, but Blake instinctively avoided them all the same. She’d learned a long time ago to always stick to the shadows, especially at night.

“So,” Yang said. “Who is this we’re meeting again?”

“A friend,” Blake answered. “She’s not fond of humans. So let me do the talking.”

“Oh, come on,” Yang said, smiling at Blake. “Everybody likes me.”

Behind her mask, Blake rolled her eyes. She’d come to accept that Yang tended to overestimate herself, although Blake was continually surprised at how many of Yang’s grandiose claims turned out to be at least somewhat true.

Blake found a secluded spot in between two of the semitrailers and settled down to wait. Her contact was likely already somewhere close by, but Blake knew her friend was especially skittish, even for a White Fang operative. She wouldn’t show herself until she was certain the coast was clear.

Blake kept on the lookout. An old, familiar uneasiness started nibbling at her. Even after all her years in the White Fang, she still felt on edge during these clandestine meetings. However, unlike so many times before, Yang was there with her. Blake could feel her presence even without looking at her. It was surprisingly soothing, given the circumstances.

It wasn’t long before Blake sensed Yang’s hand hovering near hers. She had to give Yang at least some credit. Ever since her first attempt at holding hands back on the airship, she’d been mostly respectful of Blake’s personal space, certain kisses notwithstanding. However, Yang still found ways to get the physical contact she so obviously craved. She would often silently ask Blake for permission, just like she was right now, and Blake was getting worse at refusing her.

Blake finally gave in. She reached out and took a hold of Yang’s hand. A longing well up in her as it always did when she indulged Yang like this. There was no use in denying it. She wanted more from
Yang, a lot more. She almost wished she didn’t know where that path would lead. It might have been fun to lose herself in some meaningless affection for a time, if it weren’t for the inevitable and tragic consequences.

The minutes dragged by, and Blake was starting to worry that maybe her contact really wasn’t there yet after all. She turned to Yang to say something, but her words died on her lips. Yang was staring directly at her, and the expression on her face hit Blake hard. It was a half-lidded, dreamy sort of look. Blake didn’t allow herself to give it a name, but it thrilled and terrified her all the same.

Blake suddenly felt the need to not be standing so close to Yang. She pulled her hand free and took several steps back.

“Something wrong?” Yang asked.

Before Blake could answer, a shadow suddenly slipped down from above and landed directly behind Yang. Blake tried to shout out a warning, but it was too late. A thin strip of metal whipped out and snaked around Yang’s neck.

Yang’s eyes shot open in surprise, but she didn’t try to struggle against her unseen captor just yet. Behind her, colors began to shift until they revealed a face that Blake recognized.

“Ilia!” Blake said.

Ilia ignored Blake. She gave a tug on her whip-sword, which was currently wrapped around Yang’s neck. “What do you think you’re doing here, human?” she demanded.

“Ilia, let her go!” Blake said. She chided herself for not making Yang wait in the car. She knew how Ilia felt about humans, but she hadn’t understood until just now what an unstable situation she’d created.

A cocky expression crossed Yang’s face. Blake suddenly realized that things were about to get worse. Yang’s neck muscles tensed, and she threw her upper body forward, yanking Ilia off her feet. Ilia, completely unprepared for the unorthodox maneuver, sailed over Yang’s head as Yang made a forceful bowing motion. Her sword slipped off of Yang’s neck, and she hit the ground.

Blake blinked in amazement. She didn’t know if she should be impressed or exasperated with Yang.

Yang raised her fists. “Not…” she started to say with a raspy voice, but then she broke into a brief coughing fit. “Not bad,” she said once she’d cleared her throat. “Now let’s see what you’ve really got!”

Ilia sneered at Yang. She jumped to her feet and flicked a switch on her weapon. Electricity began coursing over it.

“Both of you stop!” Blake shouted. She interposed herself in between Ilia and Yang. “Ilia, this is Yang. She’s the human I hired for my mission. And Yang, this is Ilia. She’s the contact we came here to meet.”

Neither Ilia nor Yang made a move at first. But then Ilia turned off the flow of electricity to her sword and lowered it. “I still say it was a mistake to hire a human,” she said.

Yang lowered her fists. She struck a confident pose and said, “Blake just wanted to make sure she got the best.”

Blake sighed internally. She knew that Yang hadn’t meant to imply that humans were better than the
faunus, just like she knew that was exactly how Ilia would interpret Yang’s statement.

Right on cue, Ilia said, “Why you—!”

“Enough!” Blake said. “Ilia, did you get the information we need or not?”

Ilia frowned, clearly not happy that Blake wasn’t taking her side, but she said, “Your target will be hosting a gala at her family’s mansion soon. That’ll be your best bet to get to her.”

“A gala will have a lot of potential witnesses in attendance,” Blake said.

“It’s that or nothing,” Ilia said. “The rest of her social calendar is nothing but months of press conferences, speaking engagements, and the like where she’ll be the center of attention the whole time. Plus, they’ll be serving alcohol at the gala. The longer the evening goes on the more the witnesses will be drunk.”

“You make a good point,” Blake said. “Did you get the exact date and time?”

“I did better than that,” Ilia said. She pulled her scroll out of her pocket. “I got you a pair of invitations. I’ll send them to you.”

“You’re amazing sometimes,” Blake said. “Thank you.”

“Alright!” Yang said, chiming in. “Sounds like we’re crashing a fancy party.”

Ilia gave Yang a nasty look. Then she turned back to Blake and said, “Can we talk? Alone?”

“Now wait a second…” Yang said.

“Yang,” Blake said. “Please.”

Yang obstinately crossed her arms, but she said, “Okay.”

Ilia took Blake across the parking lot. Blake wasn’t sure that they were actually far enough away from Yang to prevent her from overhearing them, but since Ilia only had human ears, Blake decided to trust her judgment on the matter.

Blake asked, “What did you want to talk about?”

“Her!” Ilia said, thrusting a finger over to where Yang was standing.

“I can’t do this alone,” Blake said. “And you know as well as I do that it’ll be much easier to sneak one faunus into the mansion instead of two.”

“That’s not the problem,” Ilia said. “I’m more concerned about the human’s feelings.”

“What do you mean?” Blake asked.

“Are you…!? You mean…!?” Ilia said. Her skin started literally turning red as her frustration grew. “Haven’t you seen the way she looks at you?!”

“Of course I have,” Blake said. “Her…infatuation with me is a little annoying, but—”

“Infatuation!” Ilia interrupted. “She’s in love with you, Blake!”

“She’s—!” Blake said. She tried to think of some way to refute Ilia, but she couldn’t. Now that Ilia
had pointed it out, it made too much sense. Adam had loved her once, and he was a faunus. Blake couldn’t even imagine how dark and twisted a human’s loved might become.

“After all this time how can you still be so clueless!?” Ilia exclaimed.

“Why do you even care?!” Blake asked, sounding angrier than she’d intended.

All of a sudden, the red vanished from Ilia’s skin. It was replaced by her spots turning a bright shade of pink. “Because I care about you, Blake,” she said softly.

“Ilia, I’m sorry,” Blake said, not entirely sure what she’d done wrong. “But you know how badly we need this mission to succeed. And Yang really is the best person for the job.”

“I…. Just…go,” Ilia said. “And make sure you-know-who pays for everything she’s done to us.”

“I will,” Blake said. She turned to leave, but she stopped when she felt Ilia gently place a hand on her shoulder.

“Take care of yourself, Blake,” Ilia said.

“You too, Ilia,” Blake said.

Ilia’s skin turned as black as the night surrounding her. Then with a few quick steps, she disappeared into the dark.

Blake slowly walked back toward Yang. She wasn’t sure she was ready to face her now that she was armed with the insight Ilia had given her, but she didn’t see any way around it.

When Blake got close, Yang said, “I totally could have taken her, you know.”

Despite herself, Blake chuckled. “I know, Yang,” she said, although she wasn’t actually sure who would win that particular matchup. Yang was one of the best brawlers that Blake had ever seen, but Ilia would be smart enough not to fight her head on.

“We get what we need?” Yang asked.

“Yeah,” Blake said.

“What’d she say to you anyway?” Yang asked. “It seemed like she was pretty angry about something.”

Blake looked at Yang, dismayed by the genuine concern she saw in her eyes. It wasn’t fair. After Adam, she’d done everything she could to protect herself. But now a human who hadn’t even seen her face was in love with her. Yang probably didn’t even realize it yet. Blake wondered what Yang might think if she removed her mask and showed her who she was underneath. She suspected that Yang wouldn’t care, but she still wasn’t willing to take that risk. The truth was that deep down she wanted Yang to love her, and that scared her more than anything.

“Blake?” Yang asked.

“Please. Don’t worry about it,” Blake said. “Maybe…maybe I can tell you about it someday. But not today.”

“Alright,” Yang said. “You know you can talk to me about anything, right?”
“Yeah,” Blake said. “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

Poor, poor Ilia. She never seems to get the girl. I’ve seen some Blake/Ilia fanart making the rounds on tumblr, although I’ve also seen a curious amount of Weiss/Ilia fanart, usually involving them commiserating and bonding over Blake rejecting the both of them. I’m not sure where that strangely specific scenario came from, but I kind of like it.

And hey! That new Adam Character Short gave Sienna a canon weapon. It’s cool and all, but I’m keeping her spear in this story. It’s an alternate universe; I can do what I want, right?

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Weiss stood frozen in place with her best fake smile painted on her face. After years of practice, it was almost indistinguishable from the real thing. Flashes from dozens of scrolls were going off like fireworks, immortalizing the moment with hundreds of photographs.

Weiss was in a ballroom in downtown Atlas, holding on to one end of a giant check with an impressively large number on it. The other end was being held by one Mr. Roth, the president of a local advocacy group for underprivileged schools. Today, his organization was the lucky beneficiary of Weiss’s latest charity fundraiser, a fundraiser that was very prominently sponsored by the Schnee Dust Company.

The flashes began to die down, and Weiss handed the check over to Mr. Roth completely. He said, “Thank you again for your support, Miss Schnee. This money will go a long way toward forwarding our cause.”

“I’m just pleased to be able to give back to the community,” Weiss said with practiced graciousness. She’d lost count of how many events like this she’d hosted over the years. She did genuinely enjoy using the Company’s prominence to help charitable causes, but the repetition of these ceremonies had deadened any sense of accomplishment she might have felt.

Mr. Roth looked like he was about to speak again, but Weiss already knew what he was going to say. First he’d lather her up with praise. Then he’d explain how there was so much more good left to do. Finally, he’d finish with a heartfelt plea for Weiss’s continued assistance. It was a point of pride for Weiss how successful her fundraisers were, but they inevitably left her benefactors hungry for more.

“If you’ll excuse me,” Weiss said before Mr. Roth could trap her in a conversation. “The media always wants to interview me whenever I host one of these events. I find it’s best for all concerned to humor them.”

“Yes, of course,” Mr. Roth said. Weiss could tell that he was disappointed he wasn’t going to get the opportunity to ply her for more money just yet. Although he’d undoubtedly make another attempt later if given half a chance.

Weiss quickly extracted herself from Mr. Roth’s presence. She hadn’t lied to him. All of the reporters there would start hounding her any minute now, and she wanted a quick moment to organize her thoughts. There was a fine art to dealing with the media at an event like this. All the right people needed to be thanked, the Schnee Dust Company needed to be given its due, and the reporters needed to be fed a line they could quote in their puff pieces.

Surprisingly, it wasn’t a reporter who found Weiss first. As she walked, Ruby suddenly popped up by her side. Ruby had been in Weiss’s employ for a few weeks now, but Weiss was still amazed by her ability to fade into the background while she was on duty. Weiss would have never believed that Ruby was capable of that, especially not after how she’d behaved during her interview. Not that Weiss was complaining. It was a good quality for a bodyguard to have.

Ruby said, “You sure know how to handle the spotlight. It’s like you were made for it!”
“Well, it is part of my job,” Weiss said. She tried to sound nonchalant, but inside she was secretly preening. She’d never realized how much disingenuous praise she’d received over the years until Ruby had begun showering her with genuine compliments.

“So are we leaving now?” Ruby asked.

“If only,” Weiss said. “I need to dole out the customary platitudes to the media. Why don’t you go make sure the car is ready. I don’t want to stay here any longer than I have to.”

“You can do!” Ruby said. She started walking toward the ballroom’s back entrance.

Weiss’s eyes followed after Ruby. She couldn’t help but admire how incredibly handsome Ruby looked in her new outfit. She’d done far too good a job of picking it out for her. Weiss realized now that what she should have done was find an ensemble that would have looked professional on Ruby but not quite so fetching. Sadly, it was too late for that.

A forlorn sigh escaped Weiss’s lips. Ruby was the perfect example of why she’d decided that she shouldn’t have any female companions. She was still bewildered at how easily Ruby had slipped past her defenses. It had caught her completely off guard when Ruby had declared that they were friends, especially since she hadn’t been able to deny that it was true. It was at least fortunate that most of the time they spent together was in public. The few moments that they’d been alone had seen Weiss racked with torturous longing. She hated it, not in the least because she knew what pathetic desperation was driving her emotions.

Weiss had made peace with the way she was years ago. She’d accepted that she had aberrant desires that would be left forever unfulfilled. She’d told herself that she was strong enough to abstain from them, but one unassuming, young huntress was unwittingly proving her wrong simply by existing.

Weiss cursed herself under her breath. No matter what she might be feeling, she would have to rise above it. She would never violate Ruby’s trust as her employer or her friend. What her heart wanted was, like always, something that she simply couldn’t have.

“Excuse me, Miss Schnee?” a voice asked from behind Weiss.

Weiss realized that she’d been standing there like a statue in the middle of the ballroom for several minutes now. It seemed that it was time for her to face the media, whether she was ready or not.

“Yes?” Weiss said, turning around. She came face-to-face with a man she didn’t recognize. He didn’t look much like a reporter. He had on a business suit, but the jacket was poorly tailored. It hung too loose in some places and too tight in others. His mop of hair looked like it had been viscerally combed into place and was fighting to return to its natural, chaotic state. However, despite his slightly disheveled nature, there was no mistaking the intense look in his eye.

The man said, “It’s such an unexpected opportunity to meet you in person.” He thrust his hand forward.

Weiss eyed the man’s hand. Usually the people who attended her charity events were briefed not to try to shake her hand. Unfortunately, it was all too common that they forgot and fell back on rote social niceties.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Weiss said. She took the man’s hand and shook it for precisely as long as was necessary for politeness’ sake and then promptly let go.

“I was wondering if you had a moment to discuss something,” the man said.
“If you’d like,” Weiss said.

“Excellent, excellent,” the man said. “You see, I was reading an article in *The Atlas Review*. It was about your company and how highly it pays its employees.”

Weiss knew the article the man was referring to. In fact, she’d written it herself under an assumed name. “We do compensate our employees generously,” she said. “And our benefit packages are extremely competitive within the industry.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” the man said. “But, if you don’t mind me asking, how can you afford that? With a company the size of your family’s, surely being…generous is much too expensive.”

“What extra we pay in salaries, we more than make up for with the quality of employees we retain,” Weiss explained. It was the standard response.

“Hmm,” the man said. “Are you sure that’s all there is to it? Maybe some of your workers aren’t paid as well as others.”

“That’s…not exactly a secret,” Weiss said. She was starting to get the impression that something wasn’t quite right, although she wasn’t sure what. “I doubt any company in the world would pay, for example, a new hire the same amount as an experienced employee.”

“That’s, that’s.” The man laughed. “That’s not what I meant. What about all those faunus toiling away in your mines?”

Now Weiss understood what was happening. She sighed exasperatedly. Normally her administrative staff did a better job at screening out any dissenters who would use events like this to make a political statement. She’d have to have a word with them later.

Weiss said, “The world needs Dust, and mining is the only way to acquire it. Yes, many faunus work for the Company in that capacity. Yes, mining is more hazardous than office work. But I assure you that our facilities are as safe as we can make them, and our laborers are fairly compensated.”

The man cocked his head to the side. “That’s not just some line you’re feeding me. You actually believe that,” he said. It wasn’t a question.

“Don’t assume that you’re the first person to bring this concern to my attention,” Weiss said. “I’ve toured our mines myself, and I can say with authority that the Schnee Dust Company does not mistreat any of its faunus workers.”

Weiss still remembered the day that Winter of all people had burst into her office, making claims very similar to the man’s. At first, Weiss had chalked up Winter’s rambling to some trauma she’d suffered during the Maiden War, but she hadn’t felt at ease just dismissing what her sister had said out of hand. After mulling it over, she’d gone to Father and demanded that she see the Company’s mines with her own two eyes. Father had been perplexed, but he’d agreed to her request. A few days later, he’d taken her to a perfectly ordinary mine where she’d spoken with perfectly ordinary laborers. In a strange way, it’d been heartbreaking for Weiss. It seemed she would’ve preferred to discover that her family was responsible for horrendous crimes rather than know her sister had been so grossly mistaken about something so potentially damaging to the Family’s reputation.

“You people,” the man said. “You’re so hopelessly addicted to your lies that you even lie to yourselves.”

Weiss put her hands on her hips. She said, “I don’t think I appreciate your tone, Mr…. I’m sorry. What did you say your name was?”
“You don’t deserve to know my name,” the man said. Then, without any warning, his hand slipped into his suit jacket, and he pulled something out of it.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl as Weiss found herself staring down the twin muzzles of a gun. The man had produced a shotgun from his jacket. The gun’s barrels were sawed off so short that the shells loaded into it were protruding out the front. A cold chill crept up Weiss’s spine as she saw light glinting off of large-gauge slugs ready to punch through her aura like it wasn’t even there.

Weiss knew exactly what she needed to do to save herself. Her mind laid out all the steps for her in a calm, detached manner. A glyph placed in between her and her assailant would block his shot. Then the man’s gun would be empty, and he’d be temporarily vulnerable. But despite Weiss screaming inside her own head, she couldn’t seem to move. Years of learning how to defend herself hadn’t prepared her for actually seeing a gun pointed at her for the first time in her life.

The man squeezed the trigger, but an instant before his gun fired, a red blur zoomed in front of Weiss.

There was an earsplitting boom as the shotgun went off. Ruby had flung herself between the man and Weiss just in time. The slugs slammed into Ruby’s gut, and she was knocked backward by the sheer force of the blast. She collided with Weiss, and the two of them fell to the floor in a heap.

Screams of panic filled the air as the other attendees realized what was happening. Weiss scrambled to get out from under Ruby. She managed to extract herself just in time to hear the man swearing. She looked and saw him fumbling with a fresh pair of shells, trying to shove them into the breech of his shotgun.

Suddenly, everything crystallized for Weiss. She leaped to her feet and thrust her finger toward the man. A red glyph appeared beneath him.

“What…?” the man managed to say.

Weiss flicked her finger upward. Her glyph violently exploded and sent the man flying into the air. His shotgun and the shells he’d been trying to load were jostled loose from his hands. They landed on the floor right about where he’d been standing. The ballroom had a high ceiling, but the man still slammed into it with enough force to crack the plaster. He immediately went plummeting downward.

A quiet groaning sound made Weiss glance toward her feet. She saw Ruby, who was still lying on the floor.

“Ruby!” Weiss shouted. She knelt down and rolled Ruby onto her back. Ruby’s face looked ashen, like she might throw up, but there wasn’t any blood or obvious wounds on her.

“Told you, ugh…” Ruby said. “Told you I have a really good aura.”

Despite the situation, Weiss almost laughed, although more from frantic relief than anything else.

A few feet away, the man howled with frustration. Weiss turned and saw him getting up from the floor. “This isn’t over, Schnee!” he bellowed. Then he flung off his coat, revealing a pair of leathery, bat-like wings. He pulled out a wicked looking knife and said, “You’re going to die today!”

“I’ll pass, thank you,” Weiss said. She swept her arm out sideways, and three small glyphs appeared in the air beside her.

Tiny bolts of light began rapidly shooting out of Weiss’s glyphs. They all pelted the man, forcing him to stumble backward as he tried to defend himself. “Agh! I…! I am…going to…get youou!” he
shouted.

Suddenly, Ruby was back on her feet again. “Nice job, Weiss,” she said. Then she reached behind her cape and pulled out Crescent Rose. It unfolded into its scythe form. “Now it’s my turn!”

Ruby charged headlong toward the man. Weiss let her glyphs disappear for fear that they might hit the wrong target. The man swiped at Ruby as she drew near, but his knife never even came close to connecting. Ruby swung Crescent Rose in a wide arc, effortlessly parrying his dagger. Then she followed through, and her scythe’s blade came whirling around and slashed at the man’s head.

The man recoiled from the blow. He glared at Ruby with a wild look in his eyes. Then he scampered backward and started flapping his wings.

The man’s feet left the floor, but whatever his plan had been, it immediately went awry. Ruby sped forward and hooked Crescent Rose around his body like it was a shepherd’s crook. Then she fired a shot, and her weapon forcefully pulled the man out of the air. He hit the floor hard, letting out a cry of alarm.

Weiss stood there, absolutely mesmerized by the battle unfolding before her. Ordinarily, she detested violence. During her childhood, the White Fang had been at the height of their power. She’d been to the funerals of those they’d assassinated and seen the weeping families left behind to grieve. Violence was an ugly thing, of this she had no doubt, but Ruby was somehow making it look beautiful. The skill and elegance with which she wielded her scythe was simply breathtaking.

The sharp clang of the man’s dagger clashing against Crescent Rose shook Weiss out of her trance. Ruby seemed to have the fight well in hand, but Weiss was still determined to help. Unfortunately, anything she could do with her glyphs would run the risk of hitting Ruby as well.

An idea came to Weiss. She pointed her finger at the floor by her feet. An intricate glyph formed there. It spun and shimmered but otherwise did nothing. Weiss concentrated. Despite all the instruction that Winter had given her before their estrangement, Weiss had never been able to successfully summon. She was resolute that would change today.

Weiss’s eyes narrowed as she focused completely on her glyph. It began to spin faster and faster until it was nothing but a blur. Sweat started to bead on Weiss’s forehead. The glyph grew brighter. Then a small, shapeless form pushed itself out of the glyph. It was little more than a glob of light, barely the size of a human fist, but it was more than Weiss had ever been able to accomplish in the past.

Weiss gave it everything she had trying to get the glob to become something more distinct. It started congealing and growing. For a moment, it almost looked like it was taking on the shape of a hand, but then Weiss’s control slipped away from her. The glob vanished along with the glyph, emitting a sound like discordant bells chiming.

Weiss let out a frustrated breath. Winter had always insisted that the ability to summon was part of her birthright, but it seemed that was yet one more thing that she’d been wrong about.

A high-pitched shout and a less-than-manly yelp drew Weiss’s attention back to Ruby’s duel with the man who had assaulted her. Ruby was very quickly pummeling the man into submission. Crescent Rose swung for him. He blocked, but the hit still sent him skidding back several feet.

With the man and Ruby temporarily separated, Weiss finally saw an opening she could exploit. She extended a finger and conjured up a black glyph underneath the man.

The man tried to lunge for Ruby again, but Weiss’s glyph held his feet firmly in place. He looked
down, obviously perplexed. When he looked up again, there was fear in his eyes.

Ruby grinned. She hefted Crescent Rose and went sprinting for the man at top speed. She spun and slammed her scythe into him with colossal force.

Weiss released her glyph at the exact moment that Ruby’s weapon connected. The man was knocked backward like he’d been launched out of a cannon. His impromptu flight abruptly ended when he smashed into a wall. He slumped to the ground, and his knife fell from his hand.

Ruby ran over to the man. She used Crescent Rose to knock his knife away. Then she folded her weapon up into its rifle configuration and pointed it at him. “Don’t move!” she said.

The man put his hands on the floor and wearily pushed himself to his feet.

“I said don’t move!” Ruby repeated. She took a step back, but her rifle stayed fixed on her target.

“Eeeh,” the man said, waving his hand dismissively. However, he didn’t try to attack again. It appeared that the fight had literally been beaten out of him.

Weiss marched up to the man. Anger and fear were boiling inside of her. “Why!?” she demanded. “Why do this!? What was it even for!?”

“What…? What was…?” the man asked. Then he laughed bitterly. “Weren’t you even listening? This is for my faunus brothers and sisters working as slaves in your mines!”

Ruby asked, “What’s he talking about?”

“The past,” Weiss said. “That’s not what things are like anymore.”

“Lie to her and lie to yourself all you want, Schnee. It’s all you seem to know how to do,” the man said. “But don’t think that this is over! It will never be over! Someday the White Fan—!”

Weiss let her fist fly. She delivered a sharp punch across the man’s jaw. There was a look of complete surprise on his face for a fraction of a second before he fell unconscious to the floor.

“Whoa!” Ruby said. “Nice punch, Weiss.”

Weiss’s hand throbbed. The man’s jaw had been harder than she’d anticipated. She shook her hand out, hoping that she hadn’t broken anything.

The wail of police sirens rose up in the distance. Weiss looked around at the remains of her ruined event. The attendees’ panicked escape had left chairs overturned and all kinds of junk scattered across the floor. Weiss knew that she should wait for the police to arrive, but she didn’t feel like talking to them right now.

“Ruby,” Weiss said. “Get me to the car.”

“Right!” Ruby said. She holstered Crescent Rose and took Weiss by the hand.

Weiss numbly followed as Ruby led her out through the ballroom’s back entrance. Outside, the limo that Weiss had taken there was waiting for her. Her driver was standing next to it. He looked agitated, like he’d been debating with himself if he should go investigate what was happening or stay with his vehicle. The second he saw Weiss and Ruby, he opened the passenger door without a word.

Ruby pulled Weiss into the limo. The driver shut the door behind them. A moment later, he was in the front seat, starting up the engine. “Where to, ma’am?” he asked.
“My penthouse,” Weiss said.

The limo started to move. Weiss reached for the button that closed the privacy screen. She felt a hollow sort of relief as it rolled up and locked into place. The anger that had been fueling her moments before had vanished, leaving only fear in its place. She felt vulnerable in a way that she never had before. Right now she wanted nothing more than to be completely alone.

“Wow, that was crazy!” Ruby suddenly said.

Weiss’s head turned. She’d actually forgotten that Ruby was in the limo with her.

“What was that guy’s problem anyway?” Ruby continued. “I mean, did he think he was going to get away with trying to shoot you? By the way, that’s a really cool semblance you have! How many different kinds of glyphs can you make? I think I counted three or four. Can you…? Uh…Weiss?”

As Ruby trailed off, Weiss became aware that she was openly staring at her. But even now that she’d realized it, she couldn’t seem to stop herself. This could have been the last day of her life, but Ruby, her guardian angel, had saved her.

A nervous half-smile crossed Ruby’s lips, but Weiss saw something more behind it. She saw the longing and desire carefully hidden in Ruby’s eyes.

Weiss lifted her hand. It slowly found its way to the back of Ruby’s neck. Ruby’s smile grew. Weiss pulled her in close and leaned in herself. All thoughts of propriety and consequences had left her mind. Her lips found Ruby’s, and she kissed her as gently as soft falling snow.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That happened.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Past Mistakes Not Repeated

Chapter Notes

I probably should have mentioned in the last chapter’s author’s note that the bat-winged faunus who assaulted Weiss is not Yuma (the bat-winged White Fang assassin from Volume 5). When I first started writing the chapter, he originally was supposed to be Yuma, but he quickly developed his own distinct personality.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The lights of downtown Atlas twinkled beautifully in the night. It was like the stars had come down from the heavens and found a new home on Remnant. Blake could only catch a glimpse of the city’s skyline from the window she was standing next to, but a glimpse was enough.

It had been a long journey, but Blake and Yang had finally arrived in Atlas’s capital earlier that day. They were holed up in a small, rundown house located in one of the city’s poorer districts. The house was one of dozens shoved together on a dirty, forgotten street. There wasn’t anything particularly special about it. Which was precisely why the White Fang had been using it as a safe house for years.

Blake stepped away from the window and started walking down a hallway. Vestiges of old wallpaper clung to the walls around her. It had been a popular decorating trend twenty years ago. Back then the house had probably been a nice place to live. Now it was just as dingy on the inside as it was on the outside.

Blake reached the house’s living room. There wasn’t much in it except for a sofa and a rickety coffee table. There weren’t any decorations or creature comforts except a musky, old throw blanket that some previous White Fang occupant had left neatly draped over the sofa. Blake assumed it was supposed to be their idea of a joke.

Yang was sitting on the sofa. She had a cup of instant noodles in her hand that she’d heated up for dinner, and she was slurping them down as fast and unladylike as possible.

“Mmpf!” Yang said through a full mouth when she saw Blake walk in. She quickly swallowed and pointed at her food. “You want some?”

“No, thank you,” Blake said. “I—”

“Yes,” Blake said.

Blake stood there for a moment. She’d only realized it a few days ago, but it had been years since she’d worked with someone for as long and as closely as she had been with Yang. After Adam, she hadn’t found it in herself to trust anyone not to betray her, not even her fellow White Fang brothers and sisters. Yet Yang, a human, had somehow become a constant in her life, and one that she found it increasingly difficult to imagine living without.

Blake’s eyes wandered over to Yang. It proved to be a mistake. Yang was watching her with the
most innocently sweet expression on her face. It had a much more potent effect on Blake than the lascivious looks she’d come to expect from Yang. She felt her heart absolutely melt. She was very grateful that she was wearing her mask. There was no telling what kind of hopelessly sappy expression was on her face right now.

Yang’s silent adoration quickly became too much for Blake to handle. She turned away.

A minute or two passed. Then Blake heard Yang start slurping at her noodles again. She dared to glance over her shoulder. All she saw was Yang sitting there eating. The moment, it seemed, had passed. Blake didn’t know if she was grateful or disappointed.

“So Blake,” Yang said as she finished off the last of her food and set her now empty cup down on the table. “I know that party Weiss is throwing is happening soon. But what are we going to do in the meantime? You know, besides hang out in our awesome secret hideout.”

Blake shook her head. Yang had been far too excited when Blake had told her that they would be making use of a safe house. Even once they’d arrived, the house’s dilapidated state hadn’t dampened Yang’s enthusiasm for it in the least.

“There’s still plenty to do,” Blake said. “First of all, we’ll need to get our hands on either some evening wear or whatever uniforms the mansion’s staff will be wearing so we can blend in.”

“Blend in, huh,” Yang said. “Won’t your mask make it kind of hard for you to look like you belong?”

“Let me worry about that,” Blake said.

“Alright. If you say so,” Yang said.

“We’ll also need to do some reconnaissance,” Blake said. “I know the mansion’s address, and that it’s located on top of a hill overlooking the city, but that’s about it.”

“I can check the place out,” Yang said. “I’m a pretty good scout. I scoped out targets all the time back with my tribe.”

“Are…you sure?” Blake asked. “This isn’t the woods, and you absolutely cannot afford to be seen. Scouting the mansion is going to require subtlety.”

“I can be subtle!” Yang said.

Blake didn’t respond.

Yang rolled her eyes. “Yeah, yeah. I know what you’re thinking,” she said. “But trust me. I got this.”

Blake was about to protest when she felt a buzzing in her pocket. She reached in and pulled out a scroll. The screen indicated that she had a message.

Yang said, “So you do have a scroll. I was wondering.”

“It’s usually only for emergencies,” Blake said. “I need to check this.”

Blake opened up her scroll. The message popped up on the screen.

Unknown:
The park. Two hours. –F
“What’s it say?” Yang asked.

“It’s from a man named Fennec,” Blake said. “He wants to meet with me tonight.”


“Friend? No,” Blake said. “But if he’s messaging me, it’s important.”

“Alright then. When do we leave?” Yang asked, standing.

Blake looked at Yang. As badly as she wanted Yang’s support, she knew Yang coming along wasn’t a good idea. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I need to meet him alone.”


Blake was worried. Fennec contacting her like this was not normal. Add to that the fact that he was apparently in Atlas, and Blake had many causes for concern. Unfortunately, Yang’s presence would not help things. She said, “You remember Ilia’s reaction to you? Fennec’s would be worse. Please, Yang. I need to do this myself.”

A smile crept its way up Yang’s lips. “What if he didn’t know I was there?” she asked.

“He’ll know, Yang,” Blake said. “His hearing is even sharper than mine. He’d pick out a human breathing from a mile away.”

Yang grinned like she’d just been granted her heart’s desire. “Oh yeah? Watch this,” she said. She grabbed the shabby throw blanket from off the sofa. Then she unfolded it and held it out in front of her. She lifted it up so that it completely hid her from Blake’s view and then lowered it again. “Are you watching?” she asked.

Blake sighed, unsure why Yang was playing such an infantile game of peekaboo with her. “Yes, Yang. I’m watching,” she said.

Yang lifted up the blanket again. Then the blanket suddenly dropped, revealing nothing but empty space where Yang had been standing a moment before. Yang had apparently vanished into thin air.

Blake was taken by complete surprise. She looked around the room, but Yang was nowhere to be seen, or even heard. “How…!?” she said.

On closer examination, Blake noticed that there was a lump of some sort beneath the blanket where it had piled up on the floor. Something was hiding under it, although the lump looked too small for whatever it was to be a person.

“Yang?” Blake asked.

The lump moved slightly.

Blake slowly inched forward. She had no idea what was going on, and it was starting to freak her out. The lump continued to move like it was alive. Blake’s hand hesitantly reached out. She grasped the edge of the blanket and gave it a tug.

There was a screech, and a brown-feathered eagle burst out from under the blanket. Blake actually screamed in alarm and jumped back. The room wasn’t big enough for the bird to fly around in, but it still unfolded its wings and flapped them a few times.

Blake stood there, absolutely stupefied. She didn’t know if she should draw her sword or run away.
The bird squawked. Then its body began to shift and stretch until it transformed into Yang. Yang immediately began laughing so hard that she doubled over and clutched her sides.

“Yang!?!” Blake exclaimed. “What!?”

Yang laughed even harder until tears squeezed out from the corners of her eyes.

Blake’s heart rate slowly started returning to normal. “That…that was not your semblance,” she stammered.

“Nope!” Yang said, her laughter finally subsiding. “That was magic! Like, actual magic!”

“Magic,” Blake repeated incredulously. “You expect me to believe…. You’re not a Maiden are you?”

“Pff. I wish,” Yang said.

“Then how did you learn magic?” Blake asked.

“I don’t know,” Yang said with a shrug.

“Yang!” Blake said.

“No really, I don’t know,” Yang said. “It’s not like I can do anything I want. I just turn into a bird. I’m not the only one either. My mom and her brother can do it too.”

“So it’s some kind of inherited ability?” Blake asked.

“Could be,” Yang said. “Although I remember Mom taking me to some old guy with a cane when I was six years old or so. I never met him again, but Mom said he was a wizard.”

“I guess if the Maidens are real then why not a wizard,” Blake muttered to herself. “When were you planning on telling me you could do that?”

“It never came up,” Yang said. Then she gave Blake a suggestive smile. “Besides. I don’t turn into a bird for just anyone.”

Blake sighed. She had no idea how to feel about this, which seemed par for the course where Yang was concerned. She had just witnessed the most miraculous thing she’d ever seen, but it had been Yang pulling a prank on her. Yang really was something. Blake didn’t understand at all why she liked her so much.

“Anyway,” Yang said. “The point is, I can be at your meeting with Fennec, and he’ll never know I’m there.”

“Okay,” Blake said. “Then let’s get going.”

Two hours later, Blake was standing underneath a canopy of trees in one of Atlas’s public parks. The park was closed this late at night, but that’s what made it an ideal place to meet in secret. Even so, Blake would have preferred a meeting spot that was a bit less dark. The clouds overhead were blotting out what little moonlight would have ordinarily filtered through the leaves above. It was difficult to see anything, even for Blake with her faunus eyes.

Blake looked up toward the tree that she’d seen Yang land in a few moments ago. Now that her
astonishment over Yang’s magical power was wearing off, she was extremely glad that she wasn’t alone. It had been a long time since Fennec had deigned to speak with her outside of their meetings with Sienna. Whatever he had to say, it couldn’t have been good.

Blake’s ears twitched. For a moment, she thought she heard the sound of feet softly traipsing through the woods, but if she had, whoever was out there was incredibly light-footed. There was no way a human could move so stealthily. That should have reassured Blake, but it didn’t.

Blake focused her senses in the direction she thought she’d heard the footsteps coming from, but there was nothing. Not even the creatures of the night seemed to be making much noise.

Suddenly, the quietest whisper of a foot brushing against the grass sounded from behind Blake. A chill went down her spine as she felt a pair of eyes on her. Seconds later, a bird started squawking overhead. It actually took Blake a moment to realize that the bird must be Yang trying to warn her about something.

Blake slowly turned around. A few feet away, Fennec was standing there like he’d just materialized out of nowhere. Blake couldn’t believe that he’d been able to sneak up on her like that. She supposed she should have been grateful that he wasn’t someone intending her harm, although she wasn’t entirely sure if that was true or not.

“Hello, Sister,” Fennec said. “How does the evening find you?”

“I didn’t come here to chat, Fennec,” Blake said, trying to hide her concern. “What are you even doing in Atlas?”

“I’m here at the behest of the High Leader, of course,” Fennec said. “She’ll be undertaking the journey herself soon. I’m making preparations for her arrival.”

“She’s coming here?” Blake asked, mildly alarmed. She couldn’t even remember the last time that Sienna had left Mistral. “Why?”

“It’s not my place to demand explanations from the High Leader,” Fennec said. “But as I understand it, she wants the opportunity to…chat with your target in person.”

Blake’s reaction to Fennec’s statement was immediate and visceral, although she didn’t quite know why. She’d served Sienna loyally for years now, but her gut told her that leaving Weiss Schnee in Sienna’s charge was a bad idea. Unfortunately, that wouldn’t be her decision to make.

“While we’re on the subject of your mission,” Fennec said, “I’m afraid I come bearing bad news.”

Behind her mask, Blake’s eyes narrowed. “What news is that?” she asked.

“There’s been…. I suppose it could be called a setback,” Fennec said. He spoke in his usual even tone, but underneath it Blake thought he sounded almost jovial.

“What are you talking about?” Blake asked.

“An unsuccessful attempt was made on your target’s life earlier today,” Fennec said.

“What!” Blake exclaimed. Fennec had been wrong. This wasn’t a setback; it was a disaster. The security around Weiss was probably being doubled at this very moment. “Who’s responsible for this!”

“A loyal but unfortunately overzealous brother of ours,” Fennec said. “His name is Vesper. I don’t
believe you’ve met him.”

“Actually, I have,” Blake said. “Years ago.”

“Oh?” Fennec said, genuine surprise breaking through his neutral façade. “I wasn’t aware of that.”

“How did Vesper even get close enough to my target to try? He didn’t seem like he was all that… resourceful,” Blake said, trying to be diplomatic. The one time she’d met Vesper, he had given off the impression that he was a crazed loner. Not the type she’d expect to be able to come within ten miles of Weiss without getting himself arrested.

“I couldn’t say how he accomplished it,” Fennec said. “It’s a pity we can’t ask him. He’s in the custody of the authorities now.”

“Wait a minute,” Blake said. “If this just happened today, how do you already know about it?”

“Word gets around,” Fennec said. “I imagine the human media is talking about nothing else right now. The story of a White Fang assassin targeting a prominent member of society is the kind of event they seem to relish recounting.”

Blake was quiet for a moment. Something wasn’t adding up here. She didn’t doubt that Vesper really had tried to kill Weiss, but Fennec was still hiding something.

“What do you want, Fennec?” Blake asked, thinking out loud.

Fennec looked convincingly confused. “Surely my intentions tonight are clear,” he said.

“You know how important my mission is,” Blake said.

Fennec let out a calculated sigh. “What I know is that the High Leader has placed her trust in you.”

“But you haven’t,” Blake said. “Do you doubt the High Leader?”

“Doubt,” Fennec echoed. His entire demeanor suddenly shifted. An odd expression crossed his face. It was ostensibly a smile, yet Blake found it deeply disquieting. “Do you know who never doubted? My brother. How many times did your pleading convince Adam to delay his bid to take the High Leader’s place? Yet even while you were planting the seeds of doubt in Adam’s heart, in my heart, my brother held steadfast in his beliefs. You saw with your own eyes how his conviction was rewarded.”

“Fennec,” Blake said, taken aback. “I—”

“No,” Fennec said with an icy calm. “Do not pity me. Dear. Sister. Do not. And do not question what I am capable of. I will see to it that the White Fang is made strong again. My brother’s death will not have been in vain.”

Blake had never, ever glimpsed this side of Fennec before. She’d always been leery of him, but she’d never considered him an actual threat. That was starting to change.

“Now then,” Fennec said like he was having a perfectly ordinary conversation. “In light of recent events, you will need some additional assistance to complete your mission.”

“And…you have someone in mind?” Blake asked.

“I do,” Fennec said. “Someone who will be able to help you infiltrate the upcoming gala.”
“I don’t remember telling you about any gala,” Blake said.

“Hmm,” Fennec said. “That’s because you didn’t.”

Blake was growing more suspicious by the minute, but if Fennec’s offer was genuine, she and Yang couldn’t afford to ignore it.

“Who is this person?” Blake asked.

“I’m certain it’s no one you know this time. At least not personally,” Fennec said. “It is, after all, a human.”

“A human?” Blake asked, amazed. “You’ve been working with a human?”

“If you are allowed to keep a pet human around, then surely I am as well,” Fennec said. “Where is she, by the way? I was so looking forward to meeting her.”

“Not here,” Blake said, resisting the impulse to glance up toward the treetops.

“Ah well,” Fennec said. “My contact has been told to meet with you tomorrow. I’ll have a runner deliver the location to you. Unless, that is, you think you can infiltrate the gala without my help.”

Blake clenched her jaw, but she said, “I’ll meet with your contact.”

Fennec pressed his palms together and bowed politely. “Best of luck to you, Sister,” he said as if he truly meant it. “Don’t forget. The High Leader is counting on you.”

Blake watched in silence as Fennec walked away. He quickly disappeared into the woods. Blake waited until she couldn’t hear him any longer. Then she waited some more.

When Blake was certain that the coast was clear, she looked up and nodded. An eagle flew out of the foliage. It winged over and dove toward Blake, landing on the ground in front of her.

The eagle’s body began to shift until Yang took its place. Blake had known it was going to happen this time, but she still had trouble believing it.

Yang said, “Wow. That guy’s a real creep.”

“Yeah,” Blake agreed.

“What on Remnant was he talking about?” Yang asked. “With his brother and all that.”

Blake let out a pained sigh. “Years ago, a man named Adam led an insurrection within the White Fang,” she said, trying to keep the anguish out of her voice. “He got himself killed, along with Fennec’s brother and several others. Please. I’ll…I’ll tell you the rest some other time.”

“Blake…” Yang said. She raised her arms like she was going to give Blake a hug, but she stopped herself halfway.

Blake wanted to believe that she’d ordinarily be strong enough to resist Yang’s affection, but tonight had unnerved her more than she would’ve liked to admit. She stepped in close to Yang and put her arms around her.

Yang immediately hugged Blake back, and Blake practically melted into her arms. Yang was so warm and inviting that it was almost surreal.
“Are we, uh, are we actually going to go meet that person Fennec was talking about?” Yang asked, still holding onto Blake.

“We have to,” Blake said. “Just make sure that you’re on your guard.”

“Always,” Yang said. “I’ll protect you, Blake.”

Blake didn’t say anything. She dearly wished that Yang really could protect her. She knew that wasn’t how the world worked, but maybe tonight it would be okay to pretend.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. Cards on the table. This chapter is the reason why this story exists. Literally the second thought I had after “what if Yang was raised by Raven” was “would that mean Yang can turn into a bird too?” After that, I had to write this story. And now here we are.

For the curious, Yang transforms into a golden eagle. I put her wingspan somewhere between five to six feet across. Sadly, she’s too big of a bird to sit comfortably on Blake’s shoulder like a parrot, but I guess if the world were perfect we wouldn’t have anything left to dream about.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
“No! The public is not to know that he was with the White Fang!” Weiss shouted into her scroll. She was pacing back and forth in her penthouse’s kitchen. Ruby was standing nearby, worriedly looking on.

“Ma’am,” an exasperated-sounding police lieutenant said on the other end of the line. “If your assailant was connected to a known terrorist organization then the public has a right to know.”

“The public also has a right to feel safe, not wonder if every faunus they pass on the street is secretly planning on murdering them!” Weiss said. “All they need to know is that my assailant was apprehended, and no one was hurt.”

The lieutenant sighed. “I’ll… run it past my captain,” he said.

“See that you do,” Weiss said. “I’m sure he’ll see the wisdom in not inciting a panic.”

“In the meantime,” the lieutenant said. “There’s still the matter of taking your statement.”

Weiss frowned even deeper than she already was. “I’ll be by your precinct to give you one soon,” she said.

“Ma’am—” the lieutenant said.

Weiss ended the call before the lieutenant could say anything more.

The screen on Weiss’s scroll immediately lit up with a dozen missed call notifications. Her father’s and Rosalie’s names were at the top of the list. Weiss didn’t bother scrolling down to see who else she’d missed. She’d rather not know which of her family members cared and which ones didn’t. She just tossed her scroll onto a nearby counter, eager to be rid of it.

Weiss had made it back to her penthouse with Ruby several hours ago. It felt like no time had passed since she’d been attacked, but it clearly had. It was pitch black outside the penthouse’s windows, although Weiss had no idea if it was very late or very early.

Weiss crossed her arms and tapped her foot restlessly. Nervous energy was buzzing inside of her, and she had no idea what to do with it. She was certain there had been a dozen other things she had planned on doing the afternoon following what was supposed to have been a routine charity event, but she couldn’t for the life of her remember what they were. Her strictly regimented schedule had been cast into the wind, and she felt completely lost without it.

Ruby quietly walked over to Weiss. Her tie and hood were off, and her vest was unbuttoned. She looked entirely too casual in Weiss’s opinion, given recent events. Weiss was envious at how little Ruby seemed to have been affected by the attack, although she supposed that Ruby had already faced far worse in her life than a crazed gunman. She’d no doubt fought against the creatures of grimm regularly during her training at Atlas Academy. An assassin must have seemed laughably mundane by comparison.

“So… ooo…” Ruby said, obviously searching for a topic of conversation. “You sure were arguing with that cop. Would there really be a panic if the public knew that guy was with the White Fang?”
“Most likely not,” Weiss said. “But I doubt the lieutenant would have understood my real reason for keeping the public uninformed.”

“Real reason?” Ruby asked.

“You may not remember,” Weiss said. “But the White Fang used to be a true threat. They hunted my family. Literally hunted us. And yet they somehow still had the sympathy of a significant portion of the population.”

“What happened to change that?” Ruby asked.

“Beacon happened,” Weiss said. “That was what it took for the public to finally see the White Fang for the monsters they are.”

“Oh,” Ruby said, casting her eyes downward. “Yeah, I guess it’s kind of hard to overlook something like that.”

“I’ve worked very hard to destroy the White Fang,” Weiss said. “Not with violence. That’s their method. But with information. Organizations like the White Fang can only thrive if they have an ignorant society’s tacit approval.”

“But wouldn’t letting people know who that guy was with make the White Fang even less popular?” Ruby asked.

“No,” Weiss said. “Beacon did more to hurt the White Fang than I ever could. There’s no more need to sully their reputation. All that mentioning them in the news would do now is inform other malcontents that there’s a place for them to go. If the man who tried to kill me was an agent of the White Fang, then he’s a crusader, a martyr even. Without the White Fang, he’s just a madman who utterly failed.”

“Wow,” Ruby said, looking dazzled by Weiss’s line of reasoning.

“But he only failed because of you,” Weiss said.

“Hey. Don’t worry about it,” Ruby said, offering Weiss a smile. “I was just doing my job.”

Weiss looked at Ruby. There was so much that she wanted to say to her. She wanted to tell her that she’d performed far beyond the call of duty. She wanted to pour out all of the feelings that were bottled up inside of her. But she couldn’t.

“I need a drink,” Weiss declared. She didn’t feel like making a selection from her wine closet, so she walked over to her kitchen’s small liquor cabinet. She pulled out the first thing she found, which happened to be a bottle of brandy.

“Do you want some?” Weiss asked Ruby.

“Naw. I don’t really drink,” Ruby said.

Weiss open another cabinet and started searching through her glassware. She quickly gave up trying to find a snifter and just grabbed a whiskey glass. She poured herself some of the brandy and took a swig.

Weiss grimaced as she swallowed her drink.

“Uh, is it not any good?” Ruby asked.
“The taste has gone off,” Weiss said. She picked up the bottle of brandy and looked at it. “I don’t even remember where I got this. It must have been left out in the sun at some point.”

“Well I guess you can always have something else,” Ruby said.

Weiss thought about it for a moment, but she honestly didn’t care about the taste right now. She just wanted some alcohol in her system to take the edge off her nerves. She lifted her glass to her lips and drained the rest of it.

“Or you could do that,” Ruby said.

Weiss set her empty glass down. Then she took off her suit jacket and tossed it onto the counter instead of properly hanging it up in a closet. It was as sure a sign as any of how out of sorts she was. She knew that tomorrow she’d be aghast at how she’d mistreated the garment, but that was a problem for later.

Suddenly, Weiss’s scroll started ringing, making her jump. Once her heart had started beating again, she walked over to where her scroll was sitting, intending to turn the stupid thing off. However, when she saw that the call was from Rosalie, she decided it would be best for her to answer.

Weiss sighed. She picked up her scroll and accepted the call. “Hello, Rosalie,” she said.

“Oh my goodness, Miss Schnee!” Rosalie said. “We all heard about what happened! I was afraid to try to call you this late but…. Are you alright?!”

“Yes. I’m fine,” Weiss said with a measured tone. “Ruby was there to protect me.”

“She was!?” Rosalie said. “Oh I knew I had a good feeling about her! She’s going to get the biggest hug when I see her next!”

“I’m sure she’ll appreciate that,” Weiss said. “Rosalie, can you please inform the staff that I won’t be available tomorrow? I…I have to go give the police a statement.”

“Of course!” Rosalie said.

“When I return to the office we’ll need to have a discussion with the relevant parties about updating our procedures,” Weiss said.

“I’ve already scheduled a meeting with the head of the security department for you,” Rosalie said.

“Good,” Weiss said.

“Is there anything else I can do for you?” Rosalie asked.

“Actually, there is,” Weiss said. “Please call my father for me.”

“You want me to call your father?” Rosalie asked.

“Yes, if you would,” Weiss said. “Tell him that I’m fine and there’s nothing to worry about.”

“I will,” Rosalie said.

“Thank you,” Weiss said. “You’ll hear from me if anything else comes up. Good night.”

“Good night, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said.
Weiss ended the call. Then she turned her scroll completely off and set it back down on the counter.

Weiss stood there perfectly still for the next several minutes. She’d finally reached her limit, emotionally speaking. There was nothing left she could do but retreat inward until the shock of what had happened finally wore off.

Weiss suddenly felt Ruby take her hand. She hadn’t even been aware that Ruby was standing next to her.

“Hey,” Ruby said. “Why don’t we go sit on your sofa.”

“Alright,” Weiss said numbly.

Weiss barely even registered what was happening as Ruby led her into the living room and sat the both of them down on the sofa, all without letting go.

“Maybe this isn’t the time,” Ruby said. “But there’s something we should probably talk about.”

“What is that?” Weiss asked.

Ruby looked Weiss in the eye with the most heartwarmingly sweet expression on her face. Weiss had not been prepared for it. She felt herself being pulled out of her stupor. Ruby started leaning in closer. It was patently obvious that she was going in for a kiss, but Weiss didn’t believe it until Ruby’s lips met hers.

Weiss’s eyes widened. Everything that had happened since she’d been attacked was nothing more than a confused blur in her head, but she suddenly remembered the kiss that she and Ruby had shared back in the limo with pristine clarity. And it had been her who had kissed Ruby, not the other way around.

Ruby broke the kiss. She looked at Weiss with hope and uncertainty. Weiss was afraid, but it was an entirely new kind of fear. Ruby was beckoning her off the edge of a cliff, and she was powerless to stop herself.

Weiss leaned forward and kissed Ruby again. Her lips lingered. It was a soft and slow kiss. Weiss tried to take in every detail of it like she’d never get the chance to kiss Ruby again.

Eventually, Weiss pulled back. This time when she looked at Ruby, all of the uncertainty was gone from her face. A single tear slipped out from the corner of Weiss’s eye. To kiss Ruby seemed like such a simple thing now, but Weiss was literally trembling with joy. It wasn’t the kiss itself so much but rather her disbelief that the world was still turning. There was no judgment in Ruby’s eyes, just the promise of something that Weiss had spent a lifetime denying herself.

Weiss suddenly lunged forward and slammed her lips into Ruby’s. She heard Ruby giggle before she started kissing her back with equal intensity. One of Weiss’s hands found Ruby’s shoulder, and she desperately held on tight.

Ruby’s tongue tickled Weiss’s lips. Weiss opened up to her, hungrily savoring the sensations as Ruby deepened the kiss. Somewhere in the back of Weiss’s mind she realized that Ruby had done this before. She didn’t know why that surprised her. She supposed she should be grateful that at least one of them knew what they were doing.

Weiss’s other hand groped blindly until it found the front of Ruby’s blouse. She started pulling the buttons open. The only thought in her head was that she wanted more.
Weiss got three buttons open before she suddenly realized what she was doing. She ripped herself away from Ruby and opened her mouth to apologize, but her words died in her throat. The sight of Ruby sitting there with her blouse partially open and her hair disheveled from their furious kissing made an intensely sinful heat fill Weiss.

Ruby looked very amused. She shrugged her vest off and threw it aside. Then she reached out and took Weiss’s hand. She slowly guided it inside her blouse and pressed it against her breast. Weiss could hardly breathe. She was actually worried that she might pass out. She could feel the swell of Ruby’s breast through the thin fabric of her bra. It was easily the most erotic experience of her life, and she wasn’t sure if she should feel proud or embarrassed by that fact.

Weiss slid her hand down, marveling at the warmth and silky smoothness of Ruby’s skin. Her thumb passed over Ruby’s navel, and she traced around it like it was the most fascinating thing in the world.

Ruby unbuttoned her blouse the rest of the way. She slipped it off her shoulders and tossed it to the floor. Weiss thought to protest, but it would have been a blatant lie to say that she wanted Ruby to stop.

Ruby reached back and unhooked her bra, letting it fall off of her. Weiss sat there in open-mouthed wonder, completely entranced. She’d never seen anything so enthralling as the sight of Ruby before her. She wanted so badly to take the next step, but she had no idea what it might be. Fortunately, Ruby seemed to know. She wrapped her arms around Weiss, hugging her tightly, and kissed her again.

Weiss thought she might burst into flames. The feeling of Ruby’s bare skin pressing against her was making her head swim with desire, to say nothing of the hunger that Ruby’s kiss was inspiring.

Ruby’s lips gently parted from Weiss’s, but she still kept her arms around her. She looked at Weiss with eyes that could melt a glacier, asking her a question without saying a single word.

“I…I’ve never…” Weiss stammered.

“Do you want to?” Ruby asked.

“Yes,” Weiss whispered. She’d never been more sure, or more terrified, of anything in her life.

Ruby grinned. Then she let go of Weiss and shoved her onto her back. Weiss was surprised by Ruby’s sudden, aggressive move, and even more surprised by the jolt of pleasure that it gave her.

Ruby kicked off her shoes. Then she pulled Weiss’s off as well. She crawled up until she was hovering over Weiss. Her finger traced along Weiss’s collarbone. Then it hooked into the front of Weiss’s blouse, right where the top button was.

Weiss lay there, quivering with anticipation, but she soon realized that Ruby was waiting for her. If she wanted this to happen, she was going to have to be the one to let the genie out of the bottle.

Weiss’s fingers met Ruby’s. Her hand was shaking so badly that she fumbled for a bit before she managed to unfasten her blouse’s button.

Ruby smiled. She said, “Any time you want me to stop, you just tell me. Okay?”

Weiss nodded.

“You need to say it out loud, Weiss,” Ruby said.
“I will,” Weiss said.

Ruby leaned forward and pressed her lips into Weiss’s. As she did, she plucked open the rest of the buttons on Weiss’s blouse one by one. Weiss was so lost in Ruby’s kiss that she almost didn’t notice when Ruby reached around and unfastened her bra.

The next few moments were a blur for Weiss. She was vaguely aware of Ruby pulling her arms free from her blouse’s sleeves and Ruby’s fingers slipping into her waistband, but her mind was lost, reveling in the sensation of Ruby’s tender hands caressing her skin.

Weiss’s world suddenly came back into focus when she felt Ruby nibble at her neck. She quickly realized that she was completely naked before Ruby, who was half-naked herself, but much to her surprise, she didn’t feel the least bit of shame.

Ruby’s lips kissed their way lower, and her tongue suddenly teased the tip of one of Weiss’s nipples. Weiss let out a loud moan, and her thoughts went scattering about every which way. She hadn’t been expecting quite so intense of a sensation, and it turned out to be only the beginning. Ruby’s tongue began working its magic in earnest, and her thumb found Weiss’s other nipple. Within seconds, Weiss was a whimpering, squirming mess. Her hands clutched at the sofa as she held on for dear life.

Suddenly, Ruby’s mouth left Weiss’s breast, leaving behind a chill. What remained of Weiss’s pride kept her from begging for its return. But then Ruby’s fingers squeezed Weiss’s inner thighs. Weiss’s eyes opened wide, and she sucked in a sharp breath as a new kind of pleasure shot through her.

Ruby’s mouth nipped its way lower. Soon her tongue was dancing around the edge of Weiss’s center, making coherent thought impossible.

“Ruby,” Weiss groaned. She gripped the sofa tighter.

A warm breath blew over where Weiss was aching to be touched, teasing her mercilessly.

“Ruuubyy!” Weiss shouted. She wrapped her legs around Ruby’s body, desperately trying to force Ruby to give her what she needed.

When Ruby’s tongue finally flicked out, Weiss was instantly lost to a flood of raw pleasure. Her hips thrust forward, and her legs squeezed even harder around Ruby’s body. Desperate, wanton screams tore from her lips as Ruby make her feel things that she’d never imagined were possible.

It didn’t take long at all before Weiss was racing toward the edge, but Ruby seemed to sense this and slowed down. Weiss found herself trapped in beautiful, glorious agony. Her breath grew more and more ragged. Her feet kicked against Ruby’s back. And her hips thrust as hard as they could, seeking sweet release.

Ruby tortured Weiss for as long as she dared before suddenly picking up her pace again. Weiss’s screams abruptly stopped. Her back arched, and her whole world exploded. She sucked in one gasping breath, then two, and then her legs uncoiled from around Ruby as every muscle in her body went limp.

Weiss sank into the sofa. She was breathing heavily, and her sweat-soaked bangs were sticking to her forehead. Ruby curled up into Weiss’s side. It was another new sensation for her, and one that was almost as amazing, if not as intense, as the ones she’d been feeling moments before.

“Wow, Weiss,” Ruby said. “That was pretty awesome.”

“But…” Weiss said, still trying to catch her breath. “But I didn’t do anything.”
“Tell that to the bruises I’m going to have,” Ruby said. “I thought your legs were going to squeeze me in half!”

“Should I apologize for that? Or is that…good?” Weiss asked. She readily admitted to herself that she was completely ignorant to the mores of the situation.

“Oh, it was good,” Ruby said with a giggle. “I’d ask you if you liked it, but it was pretty obvious you did. I never would’ve guessed you’re a screamer.”

Weiss’s face turned bright red. “I’d think you’d appreciate the…feedback,” she said. It was the only retort she could think of.

“I sure did,” Ruby said. Then she reached out and circled her finger around Weiss’s nipple, making Weiss gasp. “So, you ready for more?” she asked.

“M-more?” Weiss stammered.

“I mean, we don’t have to, but…” Ruby said, smiling coyly.

“No!” Weiss said, sounding more desperate than she would have liked. “More would be…agreeable.”

Ruby laughed. “More coming right up!” she said.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

The next morning, sunlight was pouring in through the windows of Weiss’s penthouse. Weiss was lying alone on her sofa. She’d spent the entire night there, which was completely out of the ordinary for her, but nothing about last night had been ordinary. Ruby was nowhere to be seen, but Weiss wasn’t worried about that. She was confident that Ruby was nearby, and she had much more troublesome concerns demanding her attention at the moment.

Weiss had never allowed herself to imagine what it might be like to give in to her aberrant desires, but now that she had, she couldn’t help but feel that she’d been a fool for resisting for so long. Everything she’d ever been taught told her that she should regret what she’d done, but for the life of her, she couldn’t see why. Her actions hadn’t hurt anybody, least of all herself, so what was there to apologize for?

Unfortunately, no matter her opinion on the matter, Weiss knew that her encounter with Ruby would have repercussions. And the one at the forefront of her mind right now was not something that she ever could have anticipated. The very first thought that had entered her head when she’d woken up that morning was that she loved Ruby. It was truly a ridiculous notion. She’d only known Ruby for a matter of weeks, a month at best. That couldn’t possibly have been enough time to fall in love.

Weiss was certain that she and Ruby would never have shared such an intimate moment last night if it hadn’t been for the attempt on her life. She had even convinced herself, rightly or otherwise, that the single glass of brandy she’d drunk had been a contributing factor. Given such extraordinary circumstances, Weiss suspected that her newfound love for Ruby was merely a fleeting infatuation brought about by years of sexual frustration finally being relieved. Yet no matter how many times Weiss told herself that, she couldn’t bring herself to dismiss the notion that her love might actually be genuine. It just felt too real.

Ultimately, Weiss supposed the circumstances didn’t matter. What she really needed was to come to an understanding of her feelings and soon. Being in love with Ruby was dangerous for her. Even if Ruby hadn’t been female, Weiss’s family would never accept her as a potential suitor, and bringing
someone deemed unsuitable into the Schnee Family was an unforgivable crime. If Weiss was to walk such a treacherous path, she wanted it to be because she truly loved Ruby, not because Ruby was a source of physical gratification.

Thoughts continued to spin in Weiss’s head, but she realized that she wasn’t going to solve anything by lying there on her sofa all day, so she sat up. Her and Ruby’s clothes were scattered about on the floor. Weiss took a moment to look for her blouse, but she couldn’t find it. She quickly decided that she didn’t care. Ruby had already seen her naked. There was nothing left to hide.

Weiss stood. She spotted Ruby, and her missing blouse, almost immediately. Ruby was standing on the far side of the living room in front of a painting hanging on the wall. She had Weiss’s blouse on and little else. Weiss did her best to ignore how tantalizing the look was on Ruby. She needed to think clearly right now.

Weiss padded over toward Ruby, but the closer she got, the more conflicted she became. She could feel her heart swelling with love, and she could hear her head telling her not to believe it. By the time she actually reached Ruby, she had worked herself into a complete tizzy thinking in circles. She desperately needed an anchor, something she could hold on to, so she hugged Ruby from behind. Her head came to rest on Ruby’s shoulder, and she breathed in deeply, letting Ruby’s scent calm her.

Ruby giggled.

“What?” Weiss asked. She didn’t see anything particularly funny about the situation.

Ruby said, “I promised myself that I was going to teach you how to hug one of these days. But I sure didn’t think that was what it was going to take.”

“I know how to hug,” Weiss said. She’d tried to sound indignant, but she didn’t think she’d succeeded.

“Could have fooled me,” Ruby said.

“Hmph,” Weiss said.

A silence settled over the room. Even clinging to Ruby like she was, Weiss felt like she would explode if she didn’t do something to start sorting out her feelings. She searched and searched for something to say to Ruby, but all she came up with was, “So you’re a homosexual as well.”

Ruby laughed again, longer this time. “You can say ‘gay’, Weiss. Or ‘lesbian’. They’re just words.”

“So you’re a…lesbian…as well,” Weiss forced out. It may have been just a word, but the implications and consequences it represented were all too real.

“No. Not really,” Ruby said.

“Wait. What?” Weiss asked, lifting her head.

“I mean yeah, girls are great. Obviously,” Ruby said. “But boys are nice to look at too. It’d probably be fun to have a boyfriend. I just don’t think I’d want him, you know, going all the way with me.”

“Oh. I see,” Weiss said, although she wasn’t sure that she did.

“You know,” Ruby said, studying the painting in front of her. “I was planning on getting you to take me to an art museum soon. I didn’t realize you had art at home.”
Weiss glanced at the painting. It was one of her favorites. It was a swirl of vibrant colors without any distinct pattern or structure. The artist had cleverly layer the oil paints on the canvas so that it was impossible to tell where one color ended and another began. Looking at it had always made Weiss feel contented somehow.

Weiss said, “I have more paintings here. If you’d like to see them.”

“I sure would!” Ruby said. “This is way better than going to some old museum anyway.”

“Yes,” Weiss said softly. “This is better.”

Weiss still didn’t let go of Ruby. She decided to push aside her inner conflict for now. There were things she needed to figure out, and things she needed to discuss with Ruby, but maybe it was okay to simply enjoy this moment for what it was.

Chapter End Notes

If you’ve read one of my other stories, One Little Secret, you know that I’m far too amused by the idea that Weiss is really loud during sex. Don’t ask me why. I just think it’s funny.

So despite being on tumblr, I’m not really all that adept at applying labels. I think in this story Ruby would best be described as biromantic, homosexual? Does that sound right? What’s more important is that Ruby and Weiss beat Yang and Blake to the punch, which is something I honestly did not see coming. I bet Yang would be proud if she knew. Of course that would also require her to be aware of Ruby’s existence.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
“Several minor injuries were reported, but no fatalities.” Lisa Lavender’s image flickered on the screen of Yang’s scroll. She continued with her news report. “Police have not yet released the gunman’s identity or any information regarding his motive, however, they have stated that they believe he was working alone.”

Yang hit the stop button on the video she was watching. The report itself was a few days old by now, but the media was still talking about the incident. Yang hadn’t even considered that there might be public interest in something bad that had happened to Weiss, but she guessed it made sense. Weiss was rich after all, and that was enough to make someone a celebrity, although Yang had never been able to fully understand why.

Yang supposed that Weiss being kidnapped would make the news as well. She couldn’t wait to hear Lisa Lavender’s report on that. She was already envisioning blurry images of her, hastily captured on a bystander’s scroll, plastered all over people’s televisions and talking heads speculating wildly about who she was and what she wanted. She never thought that she’d be famous one day. But before any of that could happen, she and Blake would need to actually kidnap Weiss.

Yang looked up from her scroll. She was waiting around with Blake where they’d been instructed to meet Fennec’s mysterious contact. It hadn’t been an easy place to find. They hadn’t been given an address, just coordinates. Yang had been confused by that at first, but once they’d arrived, things had become more clear. The coordinates had led her and Blake to the bank of a river that ran through the city of Atlas. There weren’t any buildings in their immediate vicinity, hence the lack of an address, and the only road was an elevated freeway standing tall nearby.

It was nighttime of course. Yang was pretty sure that she’d seen more of Atlas at night now than during the day. She was considering suggesting to Blake that they should hold their next secret meeting when the sun was up. It would be a nice change of pace, and the authorities would never expect it.

Yang glanced at Blake. Blake had seemed especially on edge from the moment they’d left their safe house. Right now she had her hood off, and her ears were flicking about this way and that. Yang wasn’t sure if Blake would be able to hear anyone who might be sneaking up on them—the noise of the cars driving over the freeway was echoing all around them—but she’d learned not to doubt Blake’s ears. Yang couldn’t really blame Blake for being nervous. From what little she’d seen of Fennec, she knew that he was not to be trusted, but if this was a trap, it was an awfully boring one.

Yang asked, “Wasn’t Fennec’s guy supposed to meet us here by now?”

“Yes,” Blake said. “About ten minutes ago.”

“So how long are we going to wait around for someone to show up?” Yang asked.

“A while longer,” Blake said.

Yang sighed impatiently. She glanced at her scroll. She really wished it had some games on it or something, but the person she’d stolen it from years ago apparently didn’t believe in having fun. She supposed she should’ve been grateful that it did anything at all. The only reason she could connect it
to the CCT Network without having an account was because one of her old one-night stands had shown her how. He’d been trying to impress her, and he’d succeeded. Unfortunately for him, he hadn’t impressed her enough to seek out his companionship again. It was one of her few rules. She never, ever slept with someone as compensation, no matter how big of a favor they’d done for her.

Yang slipped her scroll into her pocket. She knew that she should’ve been more on guard, but despite everything, she honestly didn’t feel like she or Blake were in any kind of danger. Even if they were, she was confident that the two of them could handle whatever Fennec might throw their way.

The minutes rolled on, and Yang’s attention drifted. She looked up at the sky. As impressive as Atlas’s cities had been, their night skies were very disappointing. Yang was used to being out in the middle of nowhere and going to sleep under a breathtakingly beautiful expanse of stars. All she could see here in the city were a few lonely points of light.

Suddenly, something small and dark crossed Yang’s field of vision. It had zipped by so quickly that she’d almost missed it. Her eyes instantly started searching for whatever it had been, and they soon locked on to a bird circling overhead. Yang couldn’t really make out enough detail to say what kind of bird it was exactly, but her intuition told her that it was a raven.

Yang’s eyebrows crept their way up her forehead. “Blake,” she said, not looking away from the bird. “Did Fennec say if his contact was a man or a woman?”

“He didn’t specify,” Blake said.

“No way,” Yang whispered. Surely it was impossible for Fennec to know her mom. But then again, Raven had traveled all around the world before she’d returned to Mistral to take her place as leader of the Branwen Tribe. Who was to say what kind of people she’d met during her adventures.

The bird kept circling. Yang felt her anxiety grow. She had no idea what she was going to say to her mom. All she knew was that she absolutely did not want to go back to the Tribe.

Suddenly, Blake said, “Yang, they’re here.”

“I kn—” Yang cut herself off. “Wait. Did you say ‘they’?”

Blake drew Wilt and pointed it at a seemingly empty spot of ground a few feet up the riverbank. “It’s no use hiding,” she said. “I can hear you.”

The air where Blake’s sword was pointed began to shimmer. Two figures appeared out of a haze of prismatic colors. One was a tall man wearing a bowler hat, a white coat, and very overt eyeliner. The other was a short woman with pink and brown hair, matching multicolored eyes, and a parasol in her hand.

“Not bad, Kitty,” the man said, his voice dripping with malicious sarcasm. “I think you’ve earned yourself some tuna.”

Yang looked wide-eyed at the two strangers. She immediately glanced back up at the sky, but the bird had vanished. As much as she hadn’t been expecting her mom to be Fennec’s contact, she was even more surprised now to learn that she wasn’t.

Yang directed her attention back to the newcomers and began sizing them up. She could tell at a glance that they both knew how to fight. The woman seemed to have a perpetual smirk on her face like she knew things that nobody else did. Yang was impressed with the confidence she was silently projecting. She was obviously dangerous, but Yang felt like she understood her. The man, on the
other hand, was an entirely different story. Yang was getting nothing but bad vibes from him. Everything about him gave off the impression that he was looking for any excuse to stick a knife in someone’s back.

Blake kept her sword trained on the pair of intruders. “What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Oh don’t play dumb,” the man said. “You know we’re here because old Big Ears hired me to help you.”

Yang asked, “And who are you exactly?”

“Surely my reputation precedes me,” the man said.

Blake said, “Yang, this is Roman Torchwick. He’s the most wanted man on the planet.”

“Bingo!” Torchwick said. “Two for two, Kitty. You’re clearly the brains of the operation.”


“Oh, that hurts my feelings, Blondie!” Torchwick said as sarcastic as ever. “What, have you been living under a rock your whole life?”

“The woods, actually,” Yang said.

“Well what a relief,” Torchwick said. “I thought I was going to have to hire a publicist.”

“What exactly did you do?” Yang asked.

Blake answered for Torchwick. “He conspired with Cinder Fall during the Maiden War. He’s responsible for the deaths of thousands, and the destruction of Beacon.”

Torchwick said, “You left out the bit where I took one of Atlas’s warships for a joyride. That was the fun part.”

“And what about her?” Yang asked, pointing at the woman who had been quietly standing by Torchwick’s side the whole time.

“Her? She’s my partner in crime!” Torchwick said. “Just call her ‘Neo’.”

Blake slid Wilt back into its scabbard with a very deliberate motion. “It doesn’t matter what either one of you are called,” she said. “We’re not going to work with the likes of you.”

“Oooh, Kitty’s got her panties in a twist,” Torchwick said mockingly. “Let me guess. You think you’re above working with Cinder Fall’s most notorious accomplice. Well guess what. You’re not. You’re with the White Fang, Sweetheart. So before you start acting all high-and-mighty, let’s not forget who was there at Beacon helping the grimm slaughter all those poor, helpless kids.”

Blake’s fists squeezed together so tightly that her knuckles turned white. Yang could actually hear her teeth grinding together.

“And while we’re on the subject,” Torchwick continued. “Do you know why I’m Remnant’s most wanted and not Cinder? It’s because Cinder’s dead. I was smart enough to see which way the wind was blowing and get out while I still could. How is the White Fang doing these days, by the way? Still limping along like a wounded animal?”

Yang could tell that Blake was about to explode. Truth be told, Yang wasn’t feeling all that calm.
herself. She was seriously considering just punching Torchwick in order to shut him up, but the fact that Blake was keeping her aggression in check meant that she didn’t want a fight. Yang reluctantly decided that she should follow Blake’s lead, for now at least.

Yang put her hand on Blake’s shoulder, hoping that it would calm her a bit. She said to Torchwick, “If you really think the White Fang are going down, then why are you working for them?”

“Gee. Let me think about that,” Torchwick said. “Could it be because I’m getting paid?”

Blake reached up and took Yang’s hand off her shoulder. She gripped it tightly and said, “If I know Fennec, you haven’t been paid yet. Not until the job is done. And there won’t be a job for you unless I say so!”

“Now, now. No need to get nasty,” Torchwick said with a tone that only sounded vaguely conciliatory. “Besides. Aren’t you dying to know how we can help you?”

“Fine. Let’s hear it,” Blake said. “What do we get out of working with you?”

“What you get, Kitty, is into a certain gala,” Torchwick said. “But that’s not all! Oh no. Me and Neo always go that extra mile. You get transported to your fairy-tale ball in style. You’d look awfully suspicious if you didn’t show up in a limo after all. You get past security, guaranteed. And most importantly, you get brilliant disguises. Neo? If you would demonstrate.”

Neo took a step forward. Light rippled over her, and suddenly she appeared to be wearing an elegant evening gown. She even picked up the ends of the skirt and did a proper curtsy for good measure.

“And yes, before you ask,” Torchwick said. “She can create the same kind of illusion on you. You can even keep your mask on, Kitty. Just in case you’re ugly under there.”

“Oh that is it!” Yang said, finally losing her temper. She was about to stomp up to Torchwick and give him what he so richly deserved, but a tug of Blake’s hand made her stop.

Blake waited just a moment. Then she let go of Yang and walked forward until she was mere inches from Torchwick. “The gala is in two days. We’ll expect to see you then.”

“Trust me. We wouldn’t miss it for the world. Folks are going to be talking about this one for years,” Torchwick said. Then he turned to Neo and offered her his arm. “Shall we, my dear?”

Neo, still wearing her illusory dress, gave Blake and Yang a coy wink. Then she opened up her parasol and hooked her arm around Torchwick’s. The two of them started walking away like they were a proper lady and gentleman out for an evening stroll.

“Man, that guy’s even worse than Fennec;” Yang said once she and Blake were alone again. “Neo wasn’t so bad though.”

Blake didn’t say anything. Yang turned to her. Blake’s shoulders and ears were drooping, and her head was cast downward. Her body language didn’t leave any doubt about how despondent she was feeling.

“Hey! Don’t let that jerk get to you,” Yang said. “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about anyway.”

“Yes. He does,” Blake said. “Adam, the man I told you about. He was the one who led the White Fang’s attack on Beacon. I didn’t find out about it until afterward. Somehow, he’d hid his involvement with Cinder Fall from me.”
“Then it wasn’t your fault,” Yang said.

“I should have known,” Blake said. “I would have been able to make him see reason.”

“Blake,” Yang said firmly. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Blake’s only response was to turn her head away.

Yang could tell how much Blake was hurting. It made her heart ache so badly that she couldn’t stand it. She walked up to Blake and threw her arms around her, surrounding her with a big hug.

It took a moment, but Blake’s arms curled around Yang as well.

Yang and Blake both stood there. Eventually, Blake’s head lifted, although she didn’t let go. Even if Yang couldn’t see Blake’s face, she was certain that Blake was looking directly into her eyes. Everything about the moment told her to go in for a kiss, but since she wasn’t high on adrenaline or her semblance, she had the wherewithal to realize how Blake’s mask would make that a little weird. It was the first and only time so far that she resented its presence.

Yang gently removed herself from Blake’s arms, but then she took Blake’s hand in her own. She brought it to her lips and kissed it tenderly.

Yang heard Blake gasp, but she didn’t offer any kind of protest. Yang planted more kisses on Blake’s hand. She didn’t stop until she felt Blake’s other hand touch her cheek.

Blake tilted Yang’s chin up. Then her fingers found Yang’s lips and lightly caressed them. Yang grinned. She started playfully nibbling on the tips of Blake’s fingers.

Blake suddenly pulled back. She took a few steps to separate herself from Yang. Then she turned and started walking away, albeit at a slow pace.

Yang’s fingers came up and touched her own lips. A smile crossed her face as her eyes followed Blake. There was just as much to admire about Blake from the back as there was from the front, but the real reason that Yang was smiling was because she didn’t see anything to indicate that Blake was upset about what had just happened.

Blake glanced over her shoulder. “Let’s go, Yang,” she said like nothing was out of the ordinary. “We need to get back to the safe house.”

Yang suppressed a laugh. It was hilarious how hard Blake was trying to pretend that they hadn’t just shared a moment. Yang wondered if it was time to really make a move for Blake, but she quickly decided that she’d have to wait a little bit longer. Things were about to get exciting enough with that gala right around the corner. There would be plenty of time afterward to properly seduce Blake.

Blake looked at Yang again. “Come on, Yang,” she said.

“Coming,” Yang said. She started walking after Blake, brimming with anticipation for what the next few days would bring.

Chapter End Notes

Ah Roman. You’re such a great character. And unlike some of my other favorite
characters (i.e. Sienna and Raven) you’re easy to write. There was no way I wasn’t
going to take this opportunity to correct canon RWBY’s great mistake of killing you off. Yes, I know the reasons why they got rid of him. But still!

I might be taking liberties with how far Neo can project her semblance. But I don’t think there’s anything in canon to say that she couldn’t create illusory evening wear for Yang and Blake. And if there is contradictory evidence…um…it’s an alternate universe? I guess?

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Ruby wondered if she’d ever get used to riding around in a limo. She’d been doing it for weeks now as part of her job, but it still seemed a bit silly that Weiss never drove herself anywhere. If Ruby had access to a car, or a fleet of cars in Weiss’s case, she’d take any excuse she could to drive them.

Ruby and Weiss were on their way to the Schnee Family’s mansion to get ready for some sort of party that Weiss was hosting this evening. Weiss was sitting next to Ruby in the back of the limo. Her finger was resting on the button that controlled the limo’s privacy screen. She’d been intermittently tapping it for the whole length of the ride, even though the screen was already closed. Ruby couldn’t help but wonder if that meant that they were going to kiss before they got to their destination. She certainly hoped so. They hadn’t done nearly enough kissing yet in her opinion.

The evening that Ruby had spent at Weiss’s penthouse was two days past, but to say that it had been a night to remember would’ve been an understatement. Ruby honestly hadn’t intended to take things as far as they’d gone, but she certainly didn’t regret anything that had happened that night. Even given the circumstances, she still couldn’t believe that she’d been given the privilege of making love to someone like Weiss.

Weiss’s finger started tapping the privacy screen’s button again. She let out a frustrated sigh.

“Is something wrong?” Ruby asked.

“No. Yes…” Weiss said. “Ruby, there’s something we need to discuss.”

“Is it about us?” Ruby asked hopefully. Between Weiss making a trip to the police station to give them a statement and her getting back up to speed with her work, they’d had precious little time to talk since their romantic encounter. At the very least, Ruby wanted to know if she could call Weiss her girlfriend or not. She really wanted to be Weiss’s girlfriend. Although if they were to simply remain friends who occasionally indulged in some physical comfort, that was okay with her too.

“Yes. It’s about us,” Weiss said. She hesitated before continuing. “It’s extremely important that what happened between us is kept a secret.”

“What?!” Ruby said. That was not what she’d been expecting.

“I need to be very clear about this,” Weiss said. “No one can know that we’re romantically involved.”

“Weiss…” Ruby said. “If you don’t want us to be together—”

“No!” Weiss said. “I do! But…I have a reputation to uphold. You’re…my employee.”

“Oh. Yeah, that makes sense,” Ruby said. “So no kissing in public?”


Ruby felt like Weiss might as well have asked her to jump off a cliff without a landing strategy. She thought about it for a good minute before she said, “Well then I’ll just have to get a job somewhere else!”
“What? No, Ruby!” Weiss said.

“Why not?” Ruby asked. “You can always find another bodyguard. And I bet you know all kinds of people who’d want to have a huntress working for them. You’ll have a bodyguard. I’ll have a job. And we can kiss in public! It’ll be perfect!”

“Ruby…” Weiss said. “That won’t solve anything.”

“But you said—”

“I know what I said!” Weiss drew in a deep breath. “But I can’t allow the fact that I’m in a relationship with another woman to become public knowledge.”

“Oh,” Ruby said. “But…why?”

“It’s just not proper,” Weiss said.

“How is that?” Ruby asked. Then an unhappy thought entered her head. “Don’t tell me you’re one of those people who thinks that being gay is unnatural or something.”

Weiss didn’t answer, but the ashamed look that crossed her face told Ruby everything.

“Weiss!” Ruby said. “You can’t think that being gay is wrong. You are gay!”

“If only that were true,” Weiss muttered to herself. “Ruby, believe me when I say that I don’t want to think that way. Not anymore.”

“Then don’t!” Ruby said.

“It’s not that simple,” Weiss said.

“Then we’ll work on it!” Ruby said. “One step at a time. Let’s go hold hands in public! People won’t mind. You’ll see!”

“The average person might not,” Weiss said. “But the social circles I occupy are frighteningly unforgiving.”

“Who cares about what some snooty rich people think?” Ruby asked.

“I do,” Weiss said. “And so should you.”

“Why?”

“Let me explain it to you this way,” Weiss said. “My father is the CEO of the company you work for. And a major influencer of the upper echelons of power in this kingdom. If he finds out that you’re in a relationship with his heiress, you’ll be lucky if all he does is fire you.”

“But…” Ruby said. Unfortunately, she couldn’t think of any rebuttal to Weiss’s argument. Even she understood that displeasing a man like Jacques Schnee was not a good idea.

“I’m sorry, Ruby,” Weiss said. “I wish it didn’t have to be this way.”

Ruby crossed her arms. She didn’t know why she was surprised by any of this; nothing with Weiss was ever simple. However, as upset as she was, she did see a silver lining. “So what I’m hearing,” she said, “is that you are, in fact, in a relationship with me.”
“I…I should think that would be obvious,” Weiss said, blushing. “After all, we…you know.”

“Does that make me your secret girlfriend?” Ruby asked.

“I suppose it does,” Weiss said.

“That’s what I was hoping to hear,” Ruby said. She uncrossed her arms. “We’re just going to have to make up for lost time when we’re alone.”

“W-what does that mean?” Weiss blushed even deeper.

Ruby snickered. “Like you need to ask,” she said. Then a devilish smile crossed her face. “You know, we’re alone right now.”

Weiss visibly gulped. “And?”

“And that means it’s a great time for some kissing,” Ruby said.

A half-smile crossed Weiss’s lips. “I’d…like that,” she said softly.

Ruby beckoned Weiss closer. Weiss started to lean in, and Ruby closed her eyes in anticipation of being kissed.

The kiss never came. Before Weiss’s lips could find Ruby’s, the limo came to a halt, and the engine went silent.

“We’re here,” Weiss said regretfully.

Ruby pouted. “Next time,” she said, opening her eyes.

The limo’s driver appeared outside Weiss’s door, and he opened it up for her. Weiss stepped out of the vehicle with Ruby in tow.

Ruby looked up at the mansion in front of her and promptly did a double take. “Whoa…” she said.

Ruby had thought that Weiss’s penthouse had been incredibly fancy. She’d been wrong. The sheer opulence of the Schnee estate was overwhelming. The mansion was at least three stories tall, maybe four, with brilliant classical architecture and even a spire or two. All around it was an immaculate courtyard which Ruby and Weiss were standing in. Everywhere Ruby looked there were marble statues, beautiful water features, fastidiously manicured greenery, and all sorts of other decorations.

“Come along, Ruby,” Weiss said, oblivious to the breathtaking majesty of her family’s home.

“Uh, right,” Ruby said. She jogged to catch up with Weiss. “So this is where you’re throwing that party tonight?”

“It’s a gala, not a party,” Weiss said.

“What’s the difference?” Ruby asked.

“A party is an evening of fun and fellowship,” Weiss said. “A gala is a gathering of pretentious fools, all eager to prove how much better they are than everybody else.”

Ruby snickered. “If that’s the case, why even have one?” she asked.

“Just because I can see the game for what it is doesn’t mean that I don’t enjoy it,” Weiss said.
“Alright,” Ruby said with a shrug. The more she glimpsed into the world of Atlas’s social elite the less she understood them. It was fortunate that she didn’t ever plan on climbing society’s ranks. She didn’t think she’d be very happy at the top.

Weiss and Ruby reached the mansion’s front door. Weiss held it open for Ruby and then followed her inside. The mansion’s main foyer was even more impressive than its courtyard had been. The space ran from the house’s highest floor all the way down to its lowest. Sparkling chandeliers lit the foyer, and fine works of art decorated its walls. A grand staircase rose up in the center of the room, clearly demonstrating the spectacular size of the property.

Weiss said, “I’ve instructed the staff to—Father!”

Weiss abruptly halted in her tracks. Ruby paused as well. She followed Weiss’s gaze up the staircase and saw a man walking down toward the two of them. He was a man that Ruby recognized from photographs as Jacques Schnee.

Ruby hadn’t expected to ever meet Weiss’s father. He’d always been more of a concept in her mind than a real person, a personification of the Schnee Dust Company. Seeing him now reaffirmed that he did actually exist. Unfortunately, Ruby didn’t like what she saw. The air of disdain that he projected was palpable. It was like he resented being forced to share the planet with so many lesser people.

Weiss said, “I wasn’t expecting to see you here, Father.”

“Nor was I expecting to see you,” Mr. Schnee said as he reached the bottom step. “I take this to mean that you’ve decided to still host your gala tonight. Despite recent events.”

“I want the world to know that I’m not afraid, Father,” Weiss said.

“Hmph,” Mr. Schnee said. “I should think that your safety would be more important.”

“My safety is well in hand,” Weiss said. “Every possible precaution has been taken, and Ruby here will be on duty the entire evening.”

Mr. Schnee’s gaze turned to Ruby. She wished it hadn’t. His eyes were uncomfortably piercing. She had to resist the urge to shrink away.

“So you’re the bodyguard that saved my daughter’s life,” Mr. Schnee said.

“That’s me. Uh…sir?” Ruby said. She had no idea what the proper way to address Mr. Schnee was.

Mr. Schnee turned back to Weiss. “I trust she’s been suitably compensated for her services,” he said like Ruby wasn’t even there.

Ruby almost made an insinuating quip, hinting at the very intimate way that she’d been compensated by Weiss. Fortunately, for once in her life, she didn’t just blurt out what she was thinking. She wasn’t even sure why Mr. Schnee was concerned about her compensation. She’d never had any trouble getting her paychecks on time.

Weiss said, “I know how to manage my own personnel, Father.”

“Very well,” Mr. Schnee said. “If you’ll excuse me, I have business to attend to in my study. Do not expect me to make an appearance tonight.”

Without so much as another word, Mr. Schnee marched off down one of the numerous hallways that
connected to the foyer.

“Wow,” Ruby said once Mr. Schnee had left. “Okay, I see what you were talking about. No wonder you didn’t want to call him the other day.”

“I’m glad you understand,” Weiss muttered. She started walking down a different hallway than the one that Mr. Schnee had taken. Ruby followed behind her.

Ruby hadn’t really had an opinion about Mr. Schnee before, but she certainly did now. He did not sound like what a father was supposed to be. Ruby was more than a little concerned that Weiss didn’t seem affected all that much by his callous behavior. She’d hate to think that this was normal for her.

“You sounded surprised to see your dad,” Ruby said as she and Weiss walked. “Is he not usually here?”

“No. Father is ordinarily at the Company headquarters this time of day,” Weiss said. “Knowing my luck, we’ll run into Whitley next.”

“Who’s Whitley?” Ruby asked.

Weiss briefly glanced at Ruby. Then she answered, “My brother.”

“I didn’t know you had a brother,” Ruby said. “You two don’t get along?”

“No,” Weiss said.

“I don’t have any brothers or sisters. Not really anyway,” Ruby said. “I guess it wasn’t all that bad being an only child, but I’ve always wanted a sister.”

“Sisters are more trouble than they’re worth,” Weiss said.

“What does that mean?” Ruby asked.

Weiss’s pace gradually slowed until she came to a stop. A frown darkened her face.

“Whiss?” Ruby asked. It was obvious that Weiss was upset about something, but Ruby wasn’t sure what. She reached out and put a hand on Weiss’s shoulder. She knew that Weiss had cautioned her against such displays of affection, but surely it was an innocent enough gesture.

“I have an older sister,” Weiss said. “Her name is Winter. We haven’t spoken in many years.”

“What happened?” Ruby asked.

“Does it really matter?”

“Of course it does!” Ruby said. “Why would your own sister not want to talk to you anymore?”

A guilty look flashed across Weiss’s face.

“What?” Ruby asked.

Weiss sighed. “Winter makes an effort to contact me every so often,” she said.

“And you…ignore her?” Ruby asked.
Weiss nodded.

“Why?” Ruby asked. “What could it hurt to at least hear what she has to say?”

“Some wounds don’t heal, Ruby,” Weiss said. Then she started walking again, causing Ruby’s hand to slip from her shoulder.

Ruby silently shadowed Weiss. She just didn’t understand how it was possible for Weiss to have so many family members that she didn’t want anything to do with. Ruby wasn’t a stranger to the pain that family could bring, but unlike her, Weiss still had the opportunity to fix things. Ruby didn’t like that there were so many facets to Weiss’s life that she didn’t understand, but she supposed that was something she’d just have to accept for now.

Weiss led Ruby through a seemingly endless maze of corridors and hallways until they emerged into a huge ballroom. Like everything else about the Schnee mansion, it was impressive. Its size alone was enough to amaze Ruby, and that was before she got a good look at the panoramic windows all along one of its walls that offered an unparalleled view of the city. The room was in the process of being prepared for the upcoming gala. Tables had been set up everywhere, and an army of the mansion’s staff was buzzing about decorating them.

A short and stout man with a bald head and a full mustache was directing the staff. When he noticed Weiss and Ruby come in, his eyes suddenly shifted in color from brown to yellow. “Miss Schnee!” he called out excitedly and scampered over to them.

“Hello, Klein,” Weiss said, actually smiling. Ruby was surprised to see Weiss’s mood suddenly improve, but she wasn’t going to question it.

“Oh, Miss Schnee!” Klein said. “We were all very distressed when we heard about what happened!”

“There’s no need to worry,” Weiss said. “I’m perfectly fine.”

Klein turned to Ruby. “And you must be Miss Rose!” He took Ruby’s hand and shook it vigorously. “It’s such a pleasure to meet you! Thank you for keeping Miss Schnee safe!”

Ruby giggled at Klein’s antics. “It’s my job,” she said. “You can just call me ‘Ruby’, by the way.”

“Oh I’m afraid that won’t do at all,” Klein said. He bowed. “Please accept my humblest apologies, Miss Rose.”

Weiss looked out over the ballroom. “I see the preparations are coming along nicely,” she said.

“Oh yes!” Klein said. “Don’t you worry. Everything will be ready and up to spec by tonight. And speaking of such. I was wondering, Miss Schnee, if you had a moment to discuss something not on the docket.”

“Yes, of course,” Weiss said.

Klein’s eyes turned a pink color. He looked around like he wanted to make sure that no one else was watching. Then he produced a dagger in a sheath from inside of his vest. The dagger was thin and elegant, if a bit old-fashioned looking.

“This belonged to your grandmother,” Klein said. “I’d feel much better if you were to carry it.”

“Klein,” Weiss said. “Even if that were necessary, I have no idea how to properly use it.”
“Quite so,” Klein said. “But you are accomplished in the use of Dust.”

Ruby brightened up. “Really?” she asked.

Weiss actually looked a little embarrassed. “I’m sure you’ve noticed that Klein is prone to exaggeration,” she said.

“There’s no need to be modest,” Klein said. Then he tapped the dagger’s hilt. “There’s a compartment for Dust hidden in here. And the dagger is easily concealable. It’s the perfect weapon for a lady of refinement like yourself, Miss Schnee.”

“Klein…” Weiss said.

“Please, Miss Schnee,” Klein said, holding the dagger out to Weiss. “Consider it a keepsake if you must.”

Weiss looked to Ruby for support, but Ruby said, “Go for it!”

“Very well,” Weiss said. She took the dagger from Klein.

“Thank you, Miss Schnee,” Klein said. Then something apparently caught his attention, because he turned to the staff hurrying about the room. His eyes changed to a red color, and he said, “No, no, no! Those flower arrangements are entirely wrong!”

Like that, Klein was off to correct whatever imperfection he’d spotted.

Ruby said, “I like him!”

“Yes,” Weiss agreed. “He’s a good man. He’s worked for my family since before I was born. Some days it felt like he was the only person I could turn to.”

Ruby smiled at Weiss.

“What?” Weiss asked.

“I’m glad you had someone like him growing up,” Ruby said. “And he even gave you a present too! I mean, it doesn’t look like that dagger is also a gun, which is kind of weird, but it’s still really pretty.”

Weiss shook her head, although she smiled. “Klein is obviously overreacting,” she said. “Nothing is going to happen at this gala that will require weapons or Dust.”

“I’m still going to bring Crescent Rose anyway,” Ruby said.

“If that’s the case, then we’ll have to make sure your weapon accessorizes well with your attire,” Weiss said. Her eyes slid over to Ruby. They made a discreet trip down Ruby’s body, but they ended up lingering on her legs. Weiss smiled with a half-lidded look.

“Uh, Weiss?” Ruby said. Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Isn’t ogling each other one of those things we’re not supposed to do in public?”

Weiss’s eyes slammed back up. A luminescent blush lit up her face. “I…!” she stammered.

“Wait…. Were you imagining me in something sexy?” Ruby quietly asked.

Weiss’s face got even redder if that was possible.
“Because, you know,” Ruby said. “I could always model it for you.”

“Ruby!” Weiss hissed. Her eyes flicked over toward all of the staff in the room, but none of them seemed to have noticed anything.

“Sorry! Sorry!” Ruby said.

“This is exactly the kind of thing that we need to be careful about!” Weiss said in a hushed but frantic tone. “Both of us!”

“We will be, Weiss,” Ruby said. “Everything’s going to be okay.”

“Right,” Weiss said. She took in a calming breath and let it out slowly. When she spoke again, it was with a professional tone. “Then it’s time for us to get dressed for the evening, Miss Rose.”

“Sure thing, Miss Schnee,” Ruby said with a big smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Weiss. Since she’s not on speaking terms with Winter in this alternate universe, she really doesn’t have any family left to connect with. Thank goodness for Klein.

Well I think I’ve teased you all long enough. You know what’s coming in the next chapter. I’ve been working hard on it for a while now, and I think you’re going to like it. Or maybe hate it? Possibly both? I guess you’ll just have to read it to find out!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Chapter Notes

I almost got this chapter posted before my self-imposed deadline. I was only a day late. That’s not too bad. I feel it’s fair to warn you all that this chapter is about three times as long as one of my average ones. I was tempted mightily to split it into two, but that would have been more evil than I was prepared to be.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were a lot of things that Yang knew she should have been concerned about at the moment. After all, she was riding in the back of a limo for the first time in her life, on her way to a high-society party to kidnap a woman whose family commanded an unimaginable amount of wealth and power. However, none of that even registered in her mind right now. She was far too busy staring at Blake’s face.

Neo had shown up at a prearranged time and location with the limo that Yang and Blake were presently riding in, just like Torchwick had promised. Neo was apparently to play the part of their driver tonight. Torchwick himself was conspicuously absent. Blake had questioned Neo on his whereabouts, but she’d stayed silent on the issue. Shortly before Neo had started driving Yang and Blake to Weiss’s party, she’d used her semblance to give them their disguises. Blake’s had quite naturally included an illusory face, and Yang had been fixated on it ever since. She just couldn’t seem to tear her eyes away.

Yang didn’t think that Blake’s false face suited her at all, and not just because her cat ears were missing. Nothing about the face was anything like how Yang imagined Blake looked, although Yang supposed that made sense. Neo hadn’t seen Blake’s real face any more than Yang had. There was no way her illusion could resemble Blake’s actual appearance, and Blake not looking like herself was the whole point. Yang just kept trying to remind herself that Blake still had her mask on underneath her disguise.

Yang was glad that Neo had at least done a good job with Blake’s illusory outfit. She appeared to be wearing a bolero jacket over a strapless dress with a skirt that ended just above her knees. The jacket and dress were black, although there was a splash of purple rhinestones decorating the dress’s torso in an asymmetric pattern. Like her ears, Blake’s sword was nowhere to be seen. She was still carrying it, but Neo had rendered it invisible.

Yang forced herself to look away from Blake. If she kept staring at her for too much longer, she’d really creep herself out. She glanced down at the yellow evening dress that she appeared to be wearing. Unlike Blake’s, it had a floor-length skirt. It was sleeveless with a neckline that plunged down to its empire waist. Yang’s bracers were hidden behind Neo’s illusion, and in their place were a pair of thin, silver bracelets. Yang’s hair was hanging loose, but that wasn’t Neo’s doing. Blake had convinced her to take her braid out for the party. She’d insisted it would help her blend in better. Yang hoped it was worth the effort. It had taken forever to brush her hair into relative order. Fortunately, she hadn’t had to do all the work on her own. Blake had been more than willing to help.

Yang ran a finger along her dress. It felt more like glass than fabric, although it could bend in a way that glass most certainly could not. Yang was honestly surprised she could touch her dress at all. She
wasn’t really sure how Neo’s illusions worked, but clearly her faux dress had at least some physical substance to it. Even so, she didn’t feel like she was wearing anything other than her ordinary clothes.

The limo began to climb up a hill. Blake glanced out the window. “We’re almost to the mansion,” she said. “We should go over the plan one more time.”

“It seems simple enough to me,” Yang said, still distracted. “We get in there and grab Weiss.”

“Yang…?” Blake said exasperatedly. “You know there’s more to it than that.”

Yang turned to Blake. She did her best not to think about how the eyes that she saw Blake looking at her with weren’t actually real. A shiver went down Yang’s spine. “Okay, okay,” she said, shaking off her unease. It was well past time for her to get her mind in the game. “First step. We go in and pretend to mingle while we scope out the security.”

“That’s right,” Blake said. “We keep an eye on Weiss throughout the night. If it looks like there’s an opportunity to catch her alone, we take it. Otherwise, we wait for the party to start winding down.”

“And our driver.” Yang nodded toward the front of the limo where Neo was sitting behind the wheel. “Will be waiting for us the whole night, ready for our getaway.”

“Don’t forget about the bodyguard,” Blake said.

“I haven’t,” Yang said. She and Blake had only recently learned about Weiss’s personal bodyguard. There had been a brief mention of her in the news reports covering the attempt on Weiss’s life. They’d even caught a glimpse of her on a video of the incident that someone had captured on their scroll. Unfortunately, the footage had been too shaky to get anything but a vague idea of what the bodyguard looked like.

Yang asked, “Do you really think the bodyguard is going to be at the party?”

“I know she will be,” Blake said. “Remember, it’s been less than a week since somebody tried to shoot Weiss.”

“Alright,” Yang said. “Then it’ll be my job to figure out who she is and be ready to distract her.”

“Right,” Blake said.

Blake’s head tilted down. Ironically, Yang was having a harder time than usual figuring out what Blake was thinking. The expression on Blake’s illusory face didn’t necessarily match her real one, and it was giving Yang a lot of false signals. However, she was pretty sure that Blake was not feeling calm and collected at the moment.

“Hey, Blake,” Yang said. She waited for Blake to look up at her. “We’re going to get Weiss. Even if we have to punch our way out of there.”

“Hopefully it won’t come to that,” Blake said.

The limo rolled to a stop. Up in the front, Neo got out. She walked around to the passenger compartment and opened the door.

Yang gave Blake a confident smile. “Shall we?” she asked.

Blake nodded. The two of them stepped out of the limo and on to the Schnee estate.
Outside, there was a whole mess of fancy-looking cars pulled into the Schnee mansion’s courtyard. People in expensive dresses and fine suits were making their way toward the front of the house.

Blake looked up at the mansion and began staring at it. Yang had expected her to quickly move on, but Blake was apparently captivated by the sight of the Schnee’s home. Yang wasn’t really sure why—all she saw when she looked at the mansion was a house that was way too big to be practical—but she decided to give Blake a moment.

Yang glanced at Neo, who was just closing the limo’s door. Neo was dressed the part of Yang and Blake’s driver, although the uniform she was wearing was no more real than Yang and Blake’s dresses. However, Neo obviously wasn’t one to lose herself in a role. She still had an incredibly smug look on her face.

Yang asked Neo, “So, any last minute advice?”

Neo grinned, like something that Yang had said amused her. She shrugged.

“That’s what I thought you’d say,” Yang quipped.

Neo winked. Yang took that to mean that Neo appreciated the joke.

Blake was still staring at the Schnee mansion. Yang walked up to her side. “Hey,” she said.

Blake finally turned away from the mansion and looked at Yang.

Yang held out her arm, offering it to Blake. She said, “We’re at a party, remember? There’s no reason we can’t have at least a little fun tonight.”

It took Blake a moment, but she accepted Yang’s arm. “I’ll try,” she said.

Yang and Blake started walking in the same direction that everybody else was. Yang felt herself unexpectedly smile. For all her experience in the bedroom, she’d never actually gone on a proper date before. She hadn’t anticipated how great it would be to dress up in fancy clothes, illusory or otherwise, and go to a big social event with Blake. She almost wished they could forget about the plan and just enjoy themselves. Surely there would be other opportunities to kidnap Weiss. However, Yang knew how important it was to Blake that her mission succeed tonight. Therefore it was important to Yang too.

When Yang and Blake got closer to the mansion, they found a line spilling out the front door. Yang felt Blake tense up, and she quickly saw why. There were men in business suits directing the line. Yang could see the radio earpieces they were wearing, and she would’ve bet real money that they were all carrying concealed weapons. They must have been part of Weiss’s heightened security measures.

As sharp and professional as the security guards looked, Yang wasn’t intimidated by them. She knew most of them wouldn’t be able to hold a candle to her. That was just how these things seemed to work. It was the bodyguard that she’d really need to worry about.

“Hey!” Yang called out to the closest guard. “What’s with the line?”

“It’s just a security check, ma’am,” the guard said. “Don’t worry. You’ll be through it shortly.”

Yang and Blake got in the back of the line. Just like the guard had promised, it was moving swiftly, but that didn’t reassure Yang much. For the first time tonight, she was a little worried. She’d been secretly hoping that she and Blake would have to fight their way out of the mansion, but she hadn’t
been counting on them having to fight their way in. Even she wasn’t optimistic about their odds of
snatching Weiss if they couldn’t even get in the front door without tipping their hand. There would
just be too many opportunities for Weiss to escape if she knew they were coming.

The line carried Yang and Blake closer and closer to the front door. Yang began surveying the
courtyard. In addition to all the security personnel in her immediate vicinity, she could see shadows
hovering at the edges of the mansion’s windows.

“They’ve got more guards inside,” Yang whispered to Blake. “I can see them in the windows.”

“On the roof too,” Blake whispered back.

Yang glanced up. The sun had set not long ago. She couldn’t see anything on the mansion’s roof in
the gloom, but she didn’t doubt Blake. Faunus eyes really were amazing.

Now that Yang and Blake were getting close, Yang could see there was a guard manning the
security checkpoint at the front door. He was waving a baton over each guest as they got to the front
of the line. The baton looked a bit like a handheld metal detector, but Yang was guessing it was
something far more sophisticated than that.

Blake let go of Yang’s arm. Her hand came to rest on the hilt of her invisible sword. Neo’s illusion
may have been hiding it from sight, but Yang doubted that would fool the guard’s sensor. She didn’t
think that her bracers would escape its notice either.

Yang was already psyching herself up for a fight. She discreetly looked around, taking note of where
each of the security guards were standing.

There were only a few people ahead of Yang and Blake now. Yang reached down and took Blake’s
hand. Blake didn’t resist her touch. Quite the opposite, she grabbed on to Yang’s hand without
hesitation and held it tight.

Yang and Blake reached the front of the line. The security guard tapped a few buttons on his baton.
“Ladies,” he said with a voice that sounded familiar to Yang.

It took Yang a second to realize that the guard in front of her was none other than Roman
Torchwick. She hadn’t recognized him with his hair slicked back and his eyeliner missing.

Torchwick waved his baton over Yang and Blake. A very noticeable red light silently lit up on it, but
Torchwick said, “Huh. Didn’t find anything. Imagine that.” He gestured for Yang and Blake to
move forward. “Enjoy the party. Make it…a night to remember.”

Yang and Blake quickly hurried on through and into the mansion.

More guards were on hand in the mansion’s foyer, but they were apparently only there to direct
traffic. Yang and Blake followed their directions through the mansion’s hallways. Yang was a bit
stunned by the sudden ease with which they’d bypassed security, and she could only imagine what
Blake was feeling. Poor Blake had a death grip on her hand.

Yang whispered to Blake, “I bet Torchwick didn’t tell us he was going to do that on purpose.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Blake whispered. “We’re in.”

Yang decided that she really was going to punch Torchwick if they ever met face-to-face again.

By the time Yang and Blake were directed into the mansion’s grand ballroom, Yang had calmed
down enough to actually take in the mansion’s interiors. Even she had to admit that the ballroom was impressive. It looked to be about the size of the entire Branwen camp with at least twice as many people in it. The room boasted vaulted ceilings, hardwood floors, and panoramic windows all along one of the walls. Circular tables were set about the space with beautiful floral centerpieces and gleaming silverware that looked like it was made out of real silver.

The room was buzzing with activity as the people in it mingled with each other, but it was something that Yang didn’t see that really caught her attention. “There’s no security guards in here,” she said.

“I was hoping that would be the case,” Blake said.

“Isn’t it kind of dumb to have guards everywhere except where the party’s at?” Yang asked.

“Appearances are more important to the rich than anything else,” Blake said. “They don’t like being reminded that they could be in danger, especially not in a sanctum like this. I’m sure there are guards stationed just outside the room. And the bodyguard is bound to be here as well.”

“Right. Her,” Yang said. She glanced around the room. “I don’t suppose you see Weiss anywhere in this crowd.”

“Over there,” Blake said. She released Yang’s hand and surreptitiously pointed.

Yang followed Blake’s finger. It led her gaze to a white-haired young lady standing near the center of the room.

“That’s Weiss Schnee, huh,” Yang said. “I thought she’d be taller.”

“I think that person with her is the bodyguard,” Blake said.

Yang looked. Weiss was talking with another woman whose back was to Yang and Blake. She was wearing red, and she had black hair with red tips. That matched what little they’d been able to glimpse of the bodyguard from the videos they’d watched.

“Let’s—” Blake started to say.

Blake was interrupted by a short and stout man walking up. He was carrying a tray filled with martinis that were garnished with olives. “Good evening, madams!” he said in a jovial tone. “Would either of you care for a drink?”

“You bet I would,” Yang said. She took two glasses off the tray, one in each hand.

“Please, enjoy the evening,” the man said. Then he walked off to serve other guests.

Yang immediately sucked down most of one of the martinis. She held the other one out to Blake. “Want it?” she asked.

Blake seemed to stare blankly at Yang.

“Oh. Right. The mask,” Yang said, feeling foolish. “More for me then.”

Blake sighed, although Yang detected a hint of amusement in it.

“Let’s split up and work the room,” Blake said. “Maybe we can separate Weiss and her bodyguard.”

Yang finished draining her second martini. She set both of the empty glasses down on a nearby table and grabbed the olives out of them. She pulled them off their toothpicks with her mouth and chewed
them down. Then she flicked the toothpicks away and said, “Let’s do this.”

Over in the center of the ballroom, Ruby was really starting to regret letting Weiss talk her into wearing high heels. It was bad enough that Weiss had convinced her that her hood did not count as formal evening wear. She’d made a lot of concessions for Weiss tonight, but she’d drawn the line at her bracelet. Weiss had offered her a selection of jewelry to take its place during the gala, but Ruby had refused. She wasn’t about to be separated from her good luck charm, even for a second. Weiss may have been Ruby’s boss and secret girlfriend, but there were still some things that she didn’t have a say in.

Despite Ruby’s displeasure with her shoes and her lack of a hood, she thought the rest of the outfit that Weiss had picked out for her was pretty awesome. She had on a red dress with a knee-length skirt. There was a black sash around her waist, and the dress had decorative lacing stitched up the front that made it look like a corset. Most importantly of all, a cape was flowing off of the dress’s shoulders. Crescent Rose was tucked underneath the cape, hidden just out of sight.

Ruby wobbled a bit on her heels. “Do I really have to wear these stupid lady stilts?” she asked Weiss.

Weiss, who had been observing the room, glanced down. Her eyes lingered on Ruby’s legs, but unlike earlier today, she looked up again before her gaze became truly inappropriate. “This is a black-tie event,” she said. “Everyone is wearing heels.”

“Not everyone,” Ruby muttered.

“If it’s any consolation, you look good in them,” Weiss said. “Consider it a fair trade for me letting you select my dress for the evening.”

“I guess if you put it that way, the heels are worth it,” Ruby said.

Ruby knew she was supposed to be cautious in public, but she couldn’t help looking Weiss over. Weiss’s dress went all the way down to her ankles, but the skirt was slit on one side all the way up to her thigh. The sleeves and very top of the dress were made out of a sheer fabric, giving it the appearance of being strapless even though it wasn’t. Ruby had no idea what the rest of the dress was made of, but it was a striking ice-blue color and almost seemed to shimmer in the light. Ruby might not have known fashion, but she knew what she liked. She had gotten the impression that the dress showed off more skin than Weiss was comfortable with, but one pleading look was all it had taken to convince her to wear it.

Guests continued to file into the ballroom at a steady clip. Ruby looked around. “There sure are a lot of people here tonight,” she said.

“I’d say about half of the guests have arrived so far,” Weiss said.

“Only half?!” Ruby exclaimed. “How am I supposed to keep an eye on all of them?”

“Ruby, I told you, nothing is going to happen tonight,” Weiss said.

“Yeah, but isn’t it my job to expect that something will?” Ruby asked.

“I…suppose,” Weiss said. “But even if something does happen, the rest of the security staff are just outside.”

“I’ll still feel better when this is over,” Ruby said.
“Ruby—” Weiss started to say.

Weiss was interrupted by a voice calling out from behind, “Weiss! Darling!”

Weiss grimaced. “So it begins,” she whispered. A fake smile plastered itself on her face, and she turned around to greet an energetic-looking woman. “Dee! How lovely to see you!”

Ruby shook her head. She really didn’t understand why the rich acted like they were friends with people they secretly hated. Weiss had said this gala was like a game, but Ruby sure didn’t see how you were supposed to win.

Weiss and Dee’s conversation continued, and Ruby realized that it was time for her to slink away. She started walking toward where she could be out of the way, hobbling a bit on her heels.

When Ruby got to the edge of the ballroom, she leaned against the wall and prepared to settle in for a long night. It wouldn’t be all bad, however. She’d made a sport of watching Weiss work her magic in a crowded room. Even if Ruby didn’t always understand what was going on, it was still fun to silently cheer for Weiss.

The minutes ticked by as Ruby continued to spectate. Dee’s conversation with Weiss didn’t show any sign of stopping. Ruby couldn’t hear much of it from her vantage point, but what few snippets she did catch sounded absolutely inane. She wondered how Weiss could stand it.

Suddenly, someone said to Ruby, “Is this spot taken? Or is there only room on the wall for one?”

Ruby was actually caught a bit off guard. She’d gone to about a dozen big public events with Weiss by now, but no one had ever tried to talk with her at one of them before. Ruby turned her attention away from Weiss and saw a woman in a yellow dress standing there. The woman had an impressive mane of blonde hair and a dazzling smile.

“There’s always more room on the wall for the socially awkward,” Ruby said.

“Awesome!” the woman said. She took up a spot next to Ruby.

Ruby looked over the stranger next to her. There was something about her that made her stand out from the crowd, and it wasn’t the bright color that she was wearing. She was brimming with confidence, and even though Ruby had barely heard her say anything yet, she seemed so much more genuine than all of Weiss’s other guests. If this gala really was a game, then Ruby was ready to declare this woman the winner by default.

“So, uh,” Ruby said. “Shouldn’t you be out there wowing people instead of standing over here with me?”

“Naw,” the woman said. “This isn’t really my kind of place. I’m only here because someone brought me.”

“Yeah. Me too,” Ruby said. “Where would you rather be right now?”

“Out riding a motorcycle,” the woman said. “But I don’t have one of those, so I guess I’d be in the seediest bar I could find. You know, the type where you can count on a good fight breaking out before the night’s over.”

“Oh there’ll be plenty of fights here,” Ruby said. “But they’ll be the boring kind where everyone’s smiles while they try to get under each other’s skin.”
“Sounds like you know more about what’s going on than me,” the woman said. “I bet you’d do great socializing out there if you tried.”

“You really think so?” Ruby asked.

“Sure!” the woman said. “You seem like the type to make friends easily.”

“Maybe,” Ruby said. She’d never considered herself the friend-making type. But admittedly, it had been years since she’d really tried.

Ruby thought for a moment. Then she turned to the woman and extended her hand.

“What’s this?” the woman asked.

“I’m making my first friend tonight,” Ruby said.

The woman smiled. “See? Told you,” she said. She took Ruby’s hand and shook it. Ruby noticed that the woman had an impressive grip.

“I’m Ruby. What’s your name?” Ruby asked.

“It’s…uh…Sparrow!” the woman said.

Ruby giggled. “Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yup! Sparrow’s the name!” Sparrow said.

“Then it’s a pleasure to meet you, Sparrow,” Ruby said.

Meanwhile, Blake was lurking in front of the windows that ran the length of the ballroom. She imagined that most people standing where she was would be looking out at the spectacular view of the city and its nighttime tableau of lights, but she was looking down. The hill that the Schnee mansion was built on top of dropped off sharply just past the windows. For all intents and purposes it was a sheer cliff, and Blake was staring into that abyss with just a thin sheet of glass separating her from it.

The gala had only just begun, but Blake’s nerves were already frayed. It hadn’t really hit her until she’d gotten out of the limo, but she was standing in a place where no faunus had set foot for over a decade. The Schnee Family had quietly fired all the faunus that they’d employed as domestics a long time ago. It had been during the height of the White Fang’s efforts against them. The Family had been afraid that the White Fang would use their faunus staff as a means to infiltrate the mansion, and they hadn’t been wrong.

Blake couldn’t help but feel that she’d thrown herself into the jaws of the beast. All around her were humans who were celebrating the wealth that they’d gleaned by stepping on the backs of the faunus. It was simply disgusting. Blake was very glad that she wasn’t there alone. Yang might not have been close by, but Blake was still drawing strength from her presence.

Blake shook her head to clear it. This was no time for her to lose her composure. She needed to focus. Standing not far away from her was her target, Weiss Schnee. Blake’s ears might have been hidden behind an illusion, but they were just as sensitive as ever. She’d been listening in on everything that Weiss had been saying. It was just unfortunate that Weiss was trapped in a conversation with the most insipid woman that Blake had ever heard.

Dee, the woman who Weiss was talking to, continued to drivel on. But all of a sudden, she said
something that made Blake perk up. “We heard all about that dreadful thing that happened at your fundraiser, Darling. It must have been simply awful.”

“It…was an unfortunate incident, yes,” Weiss said. It was obvious how much she didn’t want to talk about it, obvious to Blake at least.

“That foolish faunus boy,” Dee said. “What was he even thinking?”

There was a pause. Then Weiss said, “He wasn’t a boy.”

“Excuse me, Darling?” Dee asked.

“He wasn’t a boy,” Weiss repeated.

“It’s only a figure of speech,” Dee said.

“Then it’s one that you shouldn’t use,” Weiss said. “He was a grown man who made a conscious decision to employ violence! Calling him a boy dismisses the fact that there are greater issues at play other than the crimes of one malcontent!”

“I’m surprised you feel so strongly about it,” Dee said, clearly taken aback.

“Having a gun shoved in your face has the tendency to do that,” Weiss said. “If you’ll excuse me. I have other guests I must greet.”

Blake heard Weiss storm off, but her footsteps were getting louder not quieter. Then, just like that, Weiss was standing at the windows not far away from Blake. It was all Blake could do to avoid openly staring at her.

Everything that Blake knew about Weiss came from her appearances in the media where she projected a carefully cultivated image of perfect confidence. To see Weiss not at her empirical best, to hear her speaking without a script, was painting her in a very different light. Blake didn’t quite know how to reconcile the fictitious persona of Weiss with this glimpse she’d been given of the real her, and she wasn’t even sure that it mattered. She’d seen Weiss on the news, denouncing the White Fang and denying the abuses of her Company. Weiss was a woman as guilty as any, and she was finally within Blake’s reach.

Blake’s fingers lightly touched the invisible weapon at her side. Even from that slight contact she could feel its weight; she could sense the deadly potential it held. Had Adam been in her place, she knew that he would have struck without hesitation. Blake wanted to think that she was different, but to see such a hated enemy of the White Fang so close and so vulnerable made the urge difficult to ignore.

Blake turned toward Weiss and took a few steps forward until she was less than a sword’s length away. Her fingers pressed more firmly against Wilt, but then she pulled her hand away. She hadn’t come here to be an assassin.

Blake looked directly at Weiss and asked, “What greater issues?”

“Excuse me?” Weiss asked, glancing at Blake.

“I overheard your conversation,” Blake said. “I was curious what you think the greater issues are that would inspire someone to attack you.”

Weiss pinched the bridge of her nose. “If you’re a White Fang sympathizer—”
“I’m a faunus sympathizer,” Blake said.

“I suppose that is an important distinction,” Weiss said.

“I didn’t expect someone like you to understand there’s a difference,” Blake said.


“What do you mean?” Blake asked.

“Me. My family. My company. We’re seen as symbols of faunus oppression,” Weiss said. “I have spent my entire career trying to change that.”

“Have you considered changing how your family treats the faunus instead?” Blake asked. “It would be far easier than changing people’s perceptions.”

“The fact that you believe that shows how little you know,” Weiss said. “First of all, we have changed how we treat the faunus. And second of all, you overestimate how much influence my family has on society as a whole.”

“Those in power set the tone for the rest of us,” Blake said.

“And once again you’re conflating the entirety of ‘those in power’ with my family,” Weiss said. “No matter what anyone may wish, society either changes slowly or it changes violently. The White Fang and their ilk opt to use violence. I say there’s a better way.”

Blake was silent for a moment. She had not been prepared for Weiss to debate her so expertly on this subject. However, no matter how impressive Weiss’s reasoning was, that didn’t make her right. Blake said, “So you’re really denying that your company still mistreats the faunus.”

Weiss gritted her teeth. “In the past my company has been complicit in the systemic societal abuse of the faunus. But the key word there is ‘systemic’,” she said. “Yes, the faunus still suffer from the results of that societal abuse today. But even if all the discrimination directed toward them ended right this very moment, they would still continue to feel the effects of its legacy for generations. No one and nothing can change that. But the Schnee Dust Company has changed. We treat all our workers fairly, faunus and humans alike.”

Blake had no idea how to emotionally process what she was hearing. She’d never expected Weiss to even acknowledge the existence of the faunus plight, let alone have a somewhat realistic view of it. Yet she was still bold-facedly, unabashedly denying her company’s crimes. It was almost like she legitimately didn’t know, but Blake refused to believe that.

Blake said, “If you’d—”

Blake was interrupted by Weiss gasping loudly as a look of fear shot across her face.

On the other side of the ballroom, Yang was in the middle of telling Ruby a story. “He went crashing right through the window, I swear!” she said.

“No way!” Ruby said. She’d been very animatedly listening to Yang’s tale. “Then what happened?”

“He gets back up and looks around like he can’t figure out what’s going on,” Yang recounted. “Then he turns to all of us and says, ‘Must have been a bird!’”
Ruby laughed. “Really?” she asked.

“I couldn’t make something like that up if I tried,” Yang said.

Ruby was certainly not what Yang had been expecting of Weiss’s bodyguard. She’d been envisioning someone stoic and serious, not fun to be around like Ruby was. Yang was actually a little remorseful that she was about to help kidnap Ruby’s boss, but her life as a bandit had taught her to be pragmatic about that sort of thing. It wasn’t like Ruby would’ve had her job forever anyway. Yang was confident that she’d find another one easily enough.

“So how about you?” Yang asked. “You said you’re a huntress?”

“Yup!” Ruby said proudly. “Just graduated from Atlas last semester.”

“Then how come you’re at this party instead of out there going on awesome adventures?” Yang asked.

“Well—” Ruby started to say, but she was cut off by the sound of a commotion rising up not far away.

Both Yang and Ruby turned to see what all the ruckus was about. Yang immediately spotted Blake over by the windows. She was standing next to Weiss, but not everything was going according to plan. Prismatic-colored light was shimmering over Blake. It quickly vanished, exposing her ears, mask, sword, and White Fang robes for everyone to see.

“Uh oh,” Yang said. She turned back to Ruby, but that was when she caught another glow out of the corner of her eye. A similar display of light was washing over her.

Yang and Ruby simultaneously looked down at Yang’s dress. They were just in time to see it vanish, leaving Yang in her bandit outfit. A single thought passed through Yang’s head. She and Blake had been betrayed. She didn’t know if this had been Fennec’s plan all along, if Torchwick had gotten a better offer, or if Neo was just doing this on her own; but that wasn’t even remotely her biggest concern at that particular moment.

Yang and Ruby both looked up. Their eyes met. Yang knew exactly what was about to happen, and judging by Ruby’s expression, she did too.

It was Yang who acted first. She pulled her fist back and punched Ruby as hard as she could right in the jaw. She didn’t stop to survey her handiwork. She just turned to go help Blake. However, she’d only gone a few steps before something small and light hit her in the back.

A red, high-heeled shoe fell to the floor just behind Yang. She turned around again. Ruby was standing there with a furious look in her eyes and her other shoe in her hand.

“Did you just—?” Yang started to ask, but Ruby threw her shoe at Yang before she could finish.

Yang batted Ruby’s shoe out of the air with the back of her hand. “I hope that’s not all you’ve got!” she said.

“No way! I’m just getting started!” Ruby said. She reached behind her dress’s cape and pulled out a massive rifle. She spun it around, and it unfolded into a wicked-looking combat scythe. The tip of the scythe embedded itself into the floor with an intimidatingly loud thud.

“Whoa. Nice,” Yang said. She squeezed her hands into fists. Blades popped out of her bracers. “Now let’s see if you know how to use it.”
“Bring it on, Sparrow!” Ruby said.

Yang lunged forward and Ruby hefted her scythe. The two of them met, and their blades crashed together.

Away from the unfolding battle between Yang and Ruby, Weiss was staring in wide-eyed disbelief at the intruder in front of her. She refused to believe what was happening. There was just no way the events of her ill-fated fundraiser could be repeating themselves. But no matter how hard Weiss tried to deny what she was seeing, it was painfully clear that she was face-to-face with another agent of the White Fang.

The intruder suddenly yanked her sword, still in its sheath, out from her belt. She whipped it around lightning-fast and struck Weiss across her cheek with the blunt scabbard. Weiss was in so much shock that she almost didn’t feel the hit, but the force of the blow still sent her teetering off balance. The intruder promptly pounced on her, knocking her to the floor.

The intruder drew her sword partway from its scabbard and thrust the exposed edge of its blade toward Weiss’s neck. Weiss finally came to her senses and threw out her hands. One of them found the sword’s hilt, and the other landed on its scabbard. Weiss struggled against the stranger with all her might, trying to keep the sword at bay.

Screams went up as panic started to spread through the partygoers. In her mind, Weiss was thrust back to a different ballroom in downtown Atlas. Things were unfolding exactly as they had before, and Weiss was living that nightmare all over again. Only this time it was worse. She was on the floor, helpless, and Ruby was nowhere to be seen.

The intruder was quickly overpowering Weiss, and her blade was inching closer and closer. Weiss was convinced that she was about to die. She was going to die, and she’d wasted her final moments at an insipid party, talking to someone who she couldn’t stand. There were suddenly so many things that she’d wished she’d done. She’d never even found the courage to tell Ruby that she loved her, and now it was too late.

Weiss stared up at the intruder. Her mask was no doubt intended to inspire fear, but Weiss saw something very different in it. She saw the faces of the monsters that had filled her childhood with grief and torment. She saw the reason she’d stood at so many funerals, not understanding why. She saw the source of Father’s insatiable wrath that had been misdirected toward her.

Weiss’s fear and uncertainty melted away, and a white-hot rage took their place. A massive red glyph appeared in the air behind the intruder, bigger than Weiss had ever conjured before. All of her hate and fury and her desire for revenge poured into it. Then, in a single instant, it exploded.

The colossal blast from Weiss’s glyph swallowed up both her and the intruder. Fortunately, the intruder took the brunt of the explosion. Over the blinding glow, Weiss saw the intruder’s aura flare up brilliantly.

The intruder was tossed aside like a rag doll by the wave of destruction that Weiss had unleashed. The residual force from the blast flipped Weiss onto her belly. It even took a bite out of her aura, but she didn’t care. She’d do whatever it took to destroy this monster that had invaded her family’s home.

Weiss pushed herself to her feet. On her way up, she drew the dagger that Klein had given her from where it had been secretly strapped to her leg.

The stranger was still sprawled out on the floor, recovering from the explosion. Weiss pointed the
dagger at her. The power of the cyan Dust concealed inside of it made its blade glow. Then a bolt of ice leaped off of it.

The intruder must have seen the attack coming because she suddenly jumped up. The ice collided with her, but at the last second, she seemed to split into two duplicates. The ice engulfed one of the twin intruders, but she promptly vanished. The real one remained untouched.

Weiss shot several more blasts of ice, but the intruder dodged them all with the grace of a dancer. Then she drew her sword from its sheath completely and brandished it at Weiss.

Weiss took a step back, still keeping her dagger pointed at the stranger. Unlike the faunus at the fundraiser, this one really knew how to fight. Weiss wasn’t sure what she was going to do. Her eyes swept around the room, desperately searching for help. She spotted Ruby, but her heart immediately sank. It seemed that the intruder had an accomplice. Ruby was furiously battling against a blonde woman, and from what Weiss could tell, the two of them were evenly matched.

The intruder leaned forward like she was about to charge. Weiss held up her dagger as if it could somehow protect her.

Suddenly, an ordinary serving tray came whizzing through the air like a Frisbee. It smacked into the back of the intruder’s head, making a hollow clanging sound. Then it crashed to the floor.

Weiss couldn’t see the intruder’s face underneath her mask, but she still managed to look incredulous. She glanced in the direction that the tray had come from. Weiss looked as well, and she saw Klein standing there with his fists up in a classic boxer’s stance.

“Klein!” Weiss shouted.

Back across the ballroom, Yang was having the absolute time of her life. Whatever Weiss’s faults might have been, being bad at picking bodyguards wasn’t one of them. Despite Ruby’s petite size, she was swinging her huge scythe around like it was the easiest thing in the world. She was even firing off its rifle to put some extra oomph into her attacks, and all without hitting any of the panicking guests with a stray bullet. Yang was really impressed. Ruby was no slouch on defense either. Yang had gotten several good hits in on her, but they hadn’t slowed her down one bit. Ruby had one of the strongest auras that Yang had ever had the privilege of punching. If Yang ever found out who specifically had betrayed her and Blake, she’d thank them for ensuring that she got to fight Ruby. Then she’d beat them to a bloody pulp.

Ruby’s scythe came swinging for Yang’s feet almost too fast to be seen. The brief flash of light reflecting off of its blade was Yang’s only warning. She jumped, letting the weapon pass harmlessly underneath her, but Ruby didn’t miss a beat. Her scythe came spinning back around again. Yang blocked, savoring the impact of the scythe crashing against her bracer.

Ruby swung at Yang again and again until she was attacking faster than Yang could think. Yang’s instincts took over, and the sound of metal clashing against metal rang out at an ever-increasing tempo.

Ruby’s whirlwind of blows finally cracked open Yang’s defenses. Her scythe struck Yang hard, accompanied by the bang of its rifle firing. Yang felt the hit reverberate through her aura. Her semblance greedily gobbled up the energy from Ruby’s attack. It was already begging to be unleashed, but Yang kept it in check. She’d learned over the years that restraint sometimes had its rewards. Plus Ruby seemed smart enough that she might figure out how her semblance worked. Yang wanted to milk Ruby’s attacks for all they were worth before she really cut loose.
Ruby wasn’t backing off. Another powerful swing of her scythe was heading Yang’s way. Yang rushed in and intentionally took the hit, letting her semblance absorb it. Then she slipped inside Ruby’s reach and jabbed one of her blades at Ruby’s gut.

Ruby’s aura held off the attack, but it was finally starting to show signs of softening. Yang pulled her other blade back, ready to start stabbing indiscriminately, but the moment she struck, Ruby suddenly wasn’t there anymore. Yang wobbled as she hit nothing but empty air.

Ruby reappeared in a blur of motion and a puff of rose petals a few feet back from where she’d been standing. A grin worked its way across Yang’s face. It seemed that Ruby semblance was speed. This fight just kept getting more and more interesting.

Ruby stared Yang down, but then her gaze unexpectedly shifted. “Weiss!” she called out.

Yang didn’t need to look behind her to know what was happening. Blake must have been taking on Weiss. It was almost like things were going according to plan after all.

Ruby suddenly zoomed forward, apparently with the intention of helping Weiss out.

“Oh no you don’t!” Yang shouted. She threw herself across Ruby’s path. She wasn’t about to let Ruby get away. It was her job to keep her off of Blake, but more to the point, it might be a decade before she found another opponent as skilled as her. She and Ruby were going to fight, no matter what.

Yang and Ruby’s bodies collided, knocking the both of them to the ground. Yang rolled with her momentum and sprung to her feet. She saw Ruby getting back up as well. She pointed at her and said, “If you want to help Weiss then you’ve got to go through me first.”

Ruby’s eyes narrowed. Yang could tell that she was going to try to make a break for it again. Fortunately, Yang had dealt with a few speedsters over the years. None of them must have ever fought against someone with a plan to counter their semblance before, because when it came to their speed, they had all been predictable to a fault. So far Ruby had shown the exact same tendency, and that gave Yang an advantage.

As Yang had anticipated, Ruby surged forward, taking the most direct path toward Weiss. Yang’s arm was there waiting for her, and Ruby ran straight into it, clotheslining herself.

Yang grunted in discomfort as she felt the impact of the high-speed collision hit her arm, but she fared better than her opponent did. Ruby’s feet left the ground as her momentum carried them forward. She went horizontal in the air, but before she could fall to the floor, Yang grabbed the front of her dress and slammed her down hard.

Yang immediately sent one of her blades zooming for Ruby, but Ruby rolled out of the way. Yang’s blade hit the floor, putting a gash in the hardwood. She was surprised that Ruby had recovered in time to dodge, but then again, she would have been disappointed if she hadn’t.

Ruby hopped to her feet yet again. The frustration in her eyes was exactly what Yang wanted to see. That meant she had a proper fight on her hands again. All that was left to do was to make sure that Ruby was really mad at her. She lifted her hand and beckoned Ruby to attack. “Is that really the best a huntress can do?” she mockingly asked.

Ruby took the bait. She sped forward again. Only this time she was headed straight for Yang. Ruby’s scythe became a blur as it swung. Yang only had an instant to get her bracer up to block in time as Ruby struck with inhuman speed.
Ruby suddenly unleashed a frenzy of blows, and for just a moment, Yang wondered if she’d bitten off more than she could chew. She defended herself as best she could, blocking what few attacks her eyes were able to follow and letting the rest feed her semblance.

Ruby pulled back for the briefest of moments and then sent her scythe plunging straight for Yang’s head. Yang crossed her blades and caught Ruby’s weapon, but there was so much power behind the attack that Ruby’s scythe cut a small notch into the solid Dust that Yang’s blades were made out of.

“Oof!” Yang said as she felt the energy of the blow shoot through her legs and drive her feet hard against the floor. “That’s more like it.”

Yang and Ruby’s weapons locked. They strained with all their might, trying to overpower one another. Ruby had the advantage of leverage, but Yang wasn’t going to let a silly little thing like that stop her. She pitted all of her strength against Ruby and slowly started pushing back.

Suddenly, the glint of something metallic caught Yang’s eye. She’d spent so much time sizing Ruby up as an opponent that she’d completely missed the finer details of what she was wearing. She hadn’t noticed the bracelet around Ruby’s wrist until just now. It wasn’t really anything special, just a metal charm with a thin strip of leather looped through it. But the charm was shaped like two halves of a heart joined together. It was a symbol that Yang would have recognized anywhere.

Yang’s focus slipped, allowing Ruby to pull her scythe free. She swung it around and smashed its hooked end into Yang hard enough that Yang felt her bones rattle. Yang was bowled off her feet. She went tumbling sideways across the floor until she rolled to a stop.

Yang immediately pushed herself up onto her hands. She had no idea why Ruby had a bracelet with her dad’s crest on it. For all she knew it was nothing more than a coincidence. Unfortunately, she doubted that Ruby was in the mood to answer any of her questions at the moment. The only way that Yang could see to figure out what was going on was to give up the fight and surrender in the hope that she’d get a chance to talk to Ruby later. In short, she’d have to betray Blake.

Ruby shouted at Yang. “If you really want to fight me that badly then at least take it seriously!”

Yang’s lips pressed together. Her dilemma wasn’t really a dilemma at all. She’d never betray Blake, not even for the chance of getting answers to questions that she’d had her entire life.

Yang stood. Her enthusiasm for fighting Ruby was gone. It was time to end this. That last hit from Ruby had really pushed her semblance to the point that it was difficult to hold it back, so she stopped trying. Her eyes turned red, and fire erupted from her. But that wasn’t all she had in store. She brought her fists up and smashed them together. The blades protruding from her bracers crashed against one another, and the Dust they were made of was pulverized back into its granular form. It immediately activated, and surging, electric energy enveloped Yang’s bracers and fists, making them literally crackle with power.

Some distance behind Yang, Blake was sizing up the newcomer to her fight. Weiss had called him Klein.

Klein didn’t seem to be making a move; he was just standing there with his fists at the ready. Blake guessed that he was stalling for time. The rest of the mansion’s security staff had been conspicuously absent so far, and Blake knew why. The panic-stricken partygoers were still trying to escape from the ballroom, and they were clogging up all of the room’s exits with their bodies. Unfortunately, Blake knew it wouldn’t be too much longer before some of the security guards managed to push their way through the crowds and come to Weiss’s defense.
Blake slid Wilt into Blush. Klein didn’t appear to be armed, and after taking such a big and unexpected hit from Weiss’s glyph, Blake decided that fighting him at range would be preferable. She’d rather not run afoul of any more nasty surprises. Her finger slid against Blush’s trigger, but before she could take the shot, she heard footsteps thundering against the wooden floor. They were rapidly approaching her. Someone was trying to outflank her.

Blake spun, and her hand went flying to her sword’s hilt. She’d been expecting to see Weiss or Ruby or even a security guard, but to her great shock, there was no one there.

Suddenly, a punch collided with the side of Blake’s head. She went stumbling, but she managed to turn in the direction that she’d been hit from. Klein had somehow silently snuck up on her. He was backing off again, but his fists were still up. If Blake had been in a better mood, she would’ve been impressed with how well Klein had put his weight into his punch. It’d felt like she’d been hit by a truck.

Before Blake could go after Klein, she heard the sound of more footsteps charging for her. She was about to turn to face them again, but this time she noticed that Klein’s eyes had shifted to a blue color at almost the exact same moment that the footsteps had caught her attention.

Blake had to resist every last instinct that she had, but she stood still and kept her attention on Klein. The footsteps reached her, causing her to flinch, but then nothing happened.

Blake let out a breath that she’d been holding in. Now she understood what was happening. She’d heard rumors about people whose semblances allowed them to create auditory illusions, but she’d never actually met one before. She relished fighting Klein even less now that she knew what he could do, but at least she wouldn’t be falling for any more of his tricks.

Blake put her hand on her sword and started marching forward. Klein’s eyes turned pink, and he took a few fearful steps backward. He’d obviously realized that he’d been found out. But all of a sudden his resolve seemed to harden, and he stood his ground again.

Klein’s eyes turned a dark shade of red. Then, without any further warning, a cacophony of noise bombarded Blake from all directions. Trains thundering, whistles blowing, people shouting, screaming, screeching, and dozens of other sounds pounded on Blake’s sensitive cat ears.

“Aagh!” Blake cried out in agony. She slumped to her knee. Her ears pressed flat against her head, but it did little good.

Klein’s eyes flared as his unblinking gaze focused on Blake. The noise intensified. Blake didn’t think she could take it much longer. It felt like her skull was about to explode.

Blake lifted Blush with a trembling hand. She tried to aim at Klein, but she was seeing double. She gave it her best guess and squeezed the trigger.

Wilt blasted out of Blush and flew through the air. By some miracle, it struck Klein square on the chest. Klein’s aura flashed, but it was too weak to offer him much protection. He let out a gasp that almost sounded like a squeak as the air was knocked from his lungs.

The noise assaulting Blake immediately stopped. Relief came crashing down on her almost as hard as Klein’s semblance had. She very much would have liked to pass out right then and there, but she didn’t have that luxury. Operating on willpower more than anything else, Blake pushed off the ground and flung herself toward Klein. She snatched up Wilt just before it hit the floor. Klein was already falling backward. Blake lunged and hit him hard with a big, sweeping strike of her sword.
Klein’s aura failed, and he collapsed in a heap. Not even a second later, Blake’s fist slammed into his solar plexus. His eyes bulged. Then his head flopped over as unconsciousness took him.

Blake was breathing heavily, but there was no time for her to rest. She had to get to Weiss, and she had to get to her now. She stood, but then a mass of bone-chilling ice collided with her back. It was quickly followed by several more blasts that all clumped together. Blake found herself trapped in ice from just below her shoulders all the way down to her feet. She could feel its freezing, jagged edges slowly gnawing at her aura.

Blake turned her head as far as she could. She saw Weiss standing there, pointing her dagger at her.

Weiss said, “This is over.”

“It’s not over,” Blake said.

“Don’t be foolish!” Weiss said. “There’s no way this ends well for you.”

Blake glanced at the ballroom’s entrances. Guests were still trying to trample over each other to get to safety, but the crowd had thinned out considerably. A few of the security guards had almost managed to fight their way in. It would only be a matter of time before they arrived in force. Blake couldn’t see Yang from where she was, but since she wasn’t attacking Weiss, she must have still been fighting the bodyguard. And if the bodyguard had stood up to Yang this long, she was a force to be reckoned with.

Weiss said, “If you surrender now, I might be able to convince the judge to let you out of prison by the time you’re ninety!”

Blake turned back to Weiss. “You think I’m afraid of prison?” she asked. “I’ve been a prisoner my entire life. From the moment I was born, people like you have tried to corral me like I was an animal, beating me down if I dared to step out of line. If it weren’t for the faunus a generation ago who decided that enough was enough, I’d be little more than livestock to you.”

“That’s not—” Weiss started to say.

“Don’t even think about telling me it’s not true!” Blake shouted. “I’ve lived that truth every single day of my life!”

Weiss’s mouth snapped shut.

“Now be honest for once,” Blake said. “If you were in my position, would you surrender?”

Weiss was silent for a moment. Then she said, “No.”

“At least we agree on something,” Blake said. She started struggling against the ice that held her captive. It began to creak under the strain.

“Stop!” Weiss shouted. “Stop this at once!”

Blake ignored Weiss. She kept fighting against her bonds.

Suddenly, a wind began blowing in Blake’s face, and sounds like the ringing of hundreds of tiny bells chimed. Blake glanced over her shoulder again. Weiss had conjured up a new and incredibly intricate glyph. It was spinning and glowing brightly in the air beside her. It must have been the source of the wind as all of the air in the room was blowing toward it.
Blake realized that she had even less time to escape than she’d thought.

While Weiss stood next to her glyph, Ruby took another swing with Crescent Rose at her opponent, Sparrow. But when her scythe collided with Sparrow’s bracer, a jolt of electricity arced down Crescent Rose’s barrel and shocked Ruby.

Ruby gritted her teeth. She swung for Sparrow again, but no matter what angle she tried to attack from, she got zapped for her trouble. It was absolutely killing her momentum, and it wasn’t doing her aura any favors either.

All of that would’ve been bad enough, but Sparrow’s semblance was causing Ruby even more trouble. Ruby was pretty sure she’d figured out how it worked. Any big hits Sparrow took were making her stronger. Unfortunately, she was shrugging off the little hits like they were nothing. Ruby didn’t know what to do. She’d really thought that Sparrow’s semblance would have burned itself out by now. At least that’s what she’d been praying would happen. She’d fought goliaths, nevermores, and beringels during her time at Atlas, but she never fought anything or anyone as implacable as Sparrow.

Sparrow’s fist came flying at Ruby, but she dodged out of the way. She’d managed to avoid several devastating punches already using her semblance, but pouring on the speed like that was taxing. She could feel herself being worn down, but she wouldn’t give up. If she was beaten, then Sparrow would go after Weiss next. Ruby refused to let that happen.

Suddenly, Sparrow lunged forward and grabbed Crescent Rose just below its blade. Ruby cried out as a potent current surged into her. Ruby’s hands were locked into place by her spasming muscles, and pain ripped through her entire body. She tried to pull Crescent Rose free from Sparrow’s grasp, but she just wasn’t strong enough.

Without warning, Sparrow suddenly let go. The pain stopped, but Ruby only had a moment to enjoy her reprieve before an open palm smashed into her nose.

Ruby felt her feet leave the floor. She went flying through the air and slammed straight into a wall.

“Uugh…” Ruby groaned. The whole front of her face hurt. That could only mean that her aura was close to giving out. She tried to push herself back up but only got halfway. Her vision was blurry, but she saw a figure stalking toward her. It was Sparrow, and with her hair ablaze and her eyes glowing red, she looked for all the world to Ruby like a monster.

Ruby slapped her own cheek a few times to clear her head. Then she got to her feet. She wasn’t out of the fight yet. She just needed to stop trying to attack Sparrow head-on. That tactic clearly wasn’t going to work. She was going to have to rely on her speed. She didn’t know how long her endurance would last zipping about super-fast, but it was the only thing left that she could think to try.

Ruby gritted her teeth. She took a firm grip on Crescent Rose, and then she zoomed forward, leaving a trail of rose petals behind her.

Weiss was watching Ruby’s battle intently. The dire nature of Ruby’s struggle was not lost on her. From where she was standing, she had a horribly clear awareness of the situation. It was looking less and less like Ruby could defeat the faunus’s accomplice on her own, and the faunus had called Weiss’s bluff. She’d refused to surrender, and she would break free at any moment.

Weiss had conjured up her summoning glyph out of sheer desperation. She had no idea what else to do. She still had some Dust in her dagger, but it wasn’t much. She didn’t think she had enough left to
imprison the faunus again, and ice was not the element of choice to use against the faunus’s accomplice who had literally set herself on fire.

Weiss could feel her glyph in the air beside her, even without looking at it. It seemed to be completely stable, which was a new accomplishment for her, but every time she’d ever try to actually complete a summon in the past, she’d utterly failed. It was that fear of failure that was causing her to hesitate now. Her glyph was the last shred of hope that she was clinging to. If it didn’t work, she and Ruby were doomed.

A massive crack appeared in the ice imprisoning the faunus. Then it shattered to bits, sending fragments of ice spraying across the floor. Fear flooded Weiss as she watched the faunus turn toward her, sword in hand.

Weiss’s eyes slammed shut. She felt the power of her semblance instinctually flow into her glyph.

Unseen to Weiss, Yang launched her fist toward Ruby. It missed Ruby’s head by a hair’s breadth as she ducked underneath it. Ruby had been zipping around almost too fast for Yang to follow for a minute or two now. She’d turned out not to be so predictable with her semblance after all. Yang had kept swinging anyway. Ruby’s change in tactics had to be out of desperation. There was no way she could keep sprinting around like that forever, although Yang had been certain that Ruby would have run out of steam by now. The fact that Ruby was still going was a bit alarming. Yang had taken a beating courtesy of Ruby’s scythe, but she refused to go down before Ruby did. Unfortunately, it seemed that her opponent was equally stubborn in refusing to quit.

“Ruby!” Weiss suddenly screamed in panic from somewhere behind Yang.

Yang was far too occupied to look and see what was happening, but then Ruby shouted, “Weiss! I’m coming!” She zipped off.

“Got you,” Yang muttered. She finally knew exactly where Ruby was going to be. This was her chance to end things. She crouched down low. Then she jumped, using her semblance-enhanced strength to propel herself as high up as the ballroom’s ceiling would allow.

Yang arced through the air with her lighting-encased fist at the ready. She saw Blake charging for Weiss with Wilt in her hand. Yang, Blake, and Ruby were all converging on the same spot, right where Weiss was standing next to a glyph.

Yang plummeted down, right on target. She saw Blake swing her sword. She knew this was it. Ruby, Weiss, it didn’t matter who she hit so long as she took one of them out of the fight.

The floor rushed up to greet Yang. She threw a punch, putting everything she had behind it. She felt her fist connect, but at that exact moment, there was a massive flash of light.

Yang was temporarily blinded, and she seemed to hang in the air. When her eyes recovered from the flash, she saw that everyone was there, Ruby, Weiss, Blake, and herself. And everyone was perfectly still like someone had hit the pause button on their battle. Ruby had thrown herself in front of Weiss to shield her, but it proved to be unnecessary. A glowing, white scythe made out of pure energy was protruding partially from Weiss’s glyph. It had blocked both Yang’s fist and Blake’s sword.

The scythe suddenly pushed with surprising strength, shoving Yang and Blake away. Then it pulled itself back inside the glyph.

Yang landed on her feet. A moment passed. Then a feminine figure, also composed of glowing
energy, stepped out of the glyph with the scythe in its hands. Yang blinked. She found herself looking at a summoned duplicate of Ruby.

For scant seconds everything was quiet as everyone present tried to reassess the situation. Then absolute pandemonium broke loose.

Yang tried to go for Ruby, but Ruby’s summoned duplicate intercepted her. Ruby lunged for Blake and their weapons began striking against each other. Yang even caught a glimpse of Weiss conjuring up some smaller glyphs that began rapidly shooting out beams of light at Blake.

Yang did her best to give Blake some support, but her efforts were hampered by the summon. It was essentially a fresh combatant that hadn’t been worn down by the grueling fight which had unfolded in the Schnee mansion’s ballroom. And while it looked like Ruby, it didn’t fight like her at all. Yang was struggling to adapt.

The summon’s scythe jabbed at Yang, but Yang backhanded it aside. Electricity crackled from the contact, but the summon barely even seemed to notice. It struck again. Yang blocked with her bracer, and more current leaped off of her forearm. This time the summon wavered, but only for an instant.

Suddenly, Yang realized something. The summon’s weapon wasn’t made of metal. The electricity surrounding Yang’s fists was hurting the summon, but it wasn’t an easy way to bypass its defenses like it had been Ruby’s. It seemed this fight was going to be even harder than Yang had thought. She steeled herself. Things may have been looking bad, but she wasn’t going to let herself lose to something that wasn’t even technically alive.

As Yang continued trying to overpower the summon, she heard the sound of an aura crackling a few feet away. In her peripheral vision, she saw Ruby and Blake really going at it. She desperately wanted to help Blake, but the summon wasn’t letting up. At least it looked like Weiss’s other glyphs had stopped shooting.

Just as Yang felt like she was starting to get a handle on the summon’s fighting style, things got worse. A hail of automatic gunfire pelted Yang out of nowhere. The small bullets bounced off her aura, but each one took its toll. In the instant that Yang could afford to glance away from the summon, she saw dozens of security guards closing in, all of them wielding machine pistols. It seemed the crowds had dispersed enough for the guards to finally push through to the ballroom.

Between the summon and the gunfire, Yang’s semblance was going into overdrive. Unfortunately, that wasn’t a good thing. Instead of being filled with an energizing heat, Yang felt like her insides were being burned to ash. As loathed as she was to admit that she had limits, she knew she was reaching them.

The summon’s scythe clashed against one of Yang’s bracers yet again. Sparks flew as the electricity surged into the summon, but then the energy faded. All the Dust had been used up.

Yang glanced at her other bracer. Its charge held out for another second or two, but then it died as well.

“Oh—” Yang started to say.

Yang was interrupted by the summon’s foot kicking her hard in the head. Stars exploded in Yang’s eyes. She blindly staggered backward and ended up colliding with Blake. The impact wasn’t much, but it was enough for Yang to lose her already tenuous grip on her semblance.

The glow faded from Yang’s hair, and her eyes turned lilac again. A massive wave of exhaustion hit
Yang waited for the guards to pounce on her, but their gunfire had stopped. The summon seemed to have backed off as well. At first, Yang took all that as a good sign, but once she had a chance to get her bearings again, she realized that it wasn’t. She and Blake had been hemmed in, back against one of the ballroom’s windows. Ruby, Weiss, the summon, and a whole gaggle of security guards had them surrounded. Yang glanced at Blake. It was obvious that Blake wasn’t doing much better than she was. She could hear Blake’s heavy breathing, and sweat was dripping off of her chin from under her mask.

Yang wasn’t the only one feeling the effects of the battle. Ruby couldn’t believe the fight that she’d just been through. She anchored Crescent Rose on its blade so that its barrel was pointed at the pair of intruders. Her arms were absolutely burning from swinging her scythe around so much, one of her eyes felt like it was swelling up, and she was pretty sure that her nose was bleeding. Her legs were barely holding her weight, and it didn’t help that her feet were aching from having to fight barefooted. Between Sparrow and the cat-eared faunus, she didn’t even want to think about what kind of bruises she was going to have tomorrow morning.

Ruby looked over at Weiss. It seemed that Weiss was struggling to maintain her summon, although she was doing a good job of concealing the strain that she was under.

Ruby put on a brave face. “You’re a really good fighter, Sparrow,” she said. “But it’s time to give up.”

The faunus tilted her head. “Sparrow?” she asked her companion.

A realization dawned on Ruby. “That’s not your real name, is it,” she said.

“Nope,” the blonde who wasn’t named Sparrow said. “Sorry.”

“Well it doesn’t matter!” Ruby said. “There’s no way you can escape!”

The blonde suddenly perked up. “Oh yeah?” she said. She seemed to rally her strength. “Watch this!”

The blonde grabbed the faunus by the front of her robe.

“What are you—!?” the faunus shouted, but the blonde levered her over her hip and threw her full-force at the window.

The faunus slammed into the window back-first and smashed through the glass like it wasn’t even there. She flew through the air outside before she started to drop toward the ground hundreds of feet below.

The blonde sprinted for the window. She sprang out of it. Then her body began to shift, and she transformed into an eagle. The eagle let out an earsplitting screech. Then it flapped its mighty wings. It used its talons to snatch the faunus out of the air by her shoulders and began flying away at top speed.

It was only a matter of seconds before the eagle and its faunus cargo were lost to the black of night.

“What…” Ruby muttered, utterly dumbfounded. Then she shouted, “What on Remnant was that!?”

Chapter End Notes
Ruby, you told Yang she couldn’t do something. You shouldn’t have done that.

Before I get to the rest of this author’s note, I have some announcements. First of all, I will be taking a planned hiatus now that this chapter is posted. I’ve learned the hard way that trying to write a novel-length story all in once go might lead to, say, me having to be browbeaten by my wonderful readers into realizing, a month later, that the story actually needs one more chapter to come to a proper conclusion. Just as a seemingly random example. My hiatus won’t be all that long. I plan to start posting again before Volume 6 starts. Think of this chapter like the mid-season finale of a TV show.

And speaking of Volume 6, my other announcement is that I’ll once again be live blogging the new volume of RWBY over on tumblr. Come watch me be completely wrong about things and make a fool of myself. Like when I was live blogging Volume 4, and I thought that Kali (who we first saw in the opening credits) was a really, really bishōnen man. Good times.

Okay. Announcements over.

So yes, I gave Klein a semblance. Why? Because Klein is awesome and he deserves one. One of my biggest questions about the RWBY-verse is if everybody has a semblance or not. Clearly they’re not rare, but does every average joe walking down the street have a superpower on the world of Remnant? Do you need to have your aura activated for your semblance to work? I have so many questions!

Believe it or not, I didn’t select Klein’s semblance because it would be effective at fighting Blake. I just picked something that I felt suited him and worked from there. I guess you could say he got lucky. Or unlucky as the case may be. He’s definitely going to feel that last punch he took from Blake in the morning.

For anyone who’s interested, if I had split this chapter into two, the break point would have been just after Blake and Yang’s disguises failed. But like I said, that would’ve been evil. =P

Oh! And yes, Roman’s disguise was mostly just removing his eyeliner. Tell me it wouldn’t work!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
A Night When All Hearts Will Be Mended

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“She turned into a bird,” a skeptical-sounding police detective said to Weiss.

“That’s correct,” Weiss said.

The detective shook his head, but he jotted down what Weiss had said on his notepad anyway.

Weiss and the detective were standing in the Schnee mansion’s ballroom right next to the broken window that the cat-eared faunus and her blonde accomplice had escaped through. It had been less than an hour since the incident. A dozen or so of the detective’s fellow police officers were combing over the ballroom for clues. Weiss thought they were wasting their time. There were literally hundreds of eyewitnesses to the crime. In her opinion, the police should have been out looking for the perpetrators, although so far she hadn’t said as much.

“And did you see which direction this…bird flew off in?” the detective asked.

Weiss scowled. “I’m not sure it matters. It’s obvious that you don’t believe me,” she said.

“You story is a bit much to swallow, ma’am. Uh, no pun intended,” the detective said. “I’m sure it’s what you think you saw, but I’ve been with the Atlas PD for twenty years. I’ve had to account for every kind of semblance you can possibly imagine. And I’ve never even heard of someone who could turn into a bird.”

“Need I remind you that not so long ago the kingdoms fought a war against a literal fairy-tale legend?” Weiss said. “Clearly the world is a stranger place than you or I ever thought.”

“Right then,” the detective said with a sigh. “Did you see which direction the bird went when it fled the crime scene?”

“Toward the city, I think,” Weiss said. “It was dark.”

“And you have no idea who your assailants were or what their intentions were?” the detective asked.

“Their intentions should be obvious,” Weiss said. “But no, I don’t know who they were.”

The detective flipped over to a new page in his notepad. Weiss could tell that more questions were coming, but her patience for them had long since run out. She said, “Most of my security personnel were present. I’m sure you need to interview them as well. If you’ll excuse me.”

Weiss turned on her heels before the detective could say anything more. As she walked away, she heard him mutter, “I don’t get paid enough for this.”

Weiss weaved her way through the maze of overturned tables and chairs that littered the ballroom. She considered the mess an apt metaphor. Tonight’s events would be all over the news by morning, if they weren’t already. The public would be hungry for answers, and it’d be up to Weiss to provide them. She’d also have to reach out to the more prominent of her guests and make token gestures of recompense for what had happened, if not outright apologies. The public could be fickle, but the ire of the masses was nothing compared to that of a well-connected member of the social elite.
Weiss’s head swam as she thought about everything that she’d have to do to minimize the damage this evening could potentially cause, but she forced herself to put those concerns aside. There was something, or rather someone much more important who she needed to attend to.

Just ahead of Weiss, Ruby was plopped down in a chair. She looked like she’d gone ten rounds with an angry beringel, although Weiss suspected that Ruby would have been in better shape if that had been the case. One of Ruby’s eyes had finished swelling shut, and her nose had only recently stopped bleeding. She’d been given an ice pack for her eye, but she wasn’t using it. She was just holding it in her lap. She looked distinctly miserable, although Weiss suspected that didn’t have anything to do with her injuries.

Ruby didn’t seem to notice when Weiss walked up to her. Weiss stood silently in front of her. She hated seeing Ruby so bruised and bloodied, and she hated it even more knowing that it was her fault. She wanted to hug Ruby more than she’d ever wanted anything in her life, but she couldn’t. She was in a room filled with strangers.

“Ruby…” Weiss said.

Ruby glanced up.

Weiss struggled to find something to say that wouldn’t be too telling just in case any of the police officers were listening in. However, it was Ruby who spoke first. “I’m sorry, Weiss,” she said.

Weiss was taken aback. “You’re sorry?!” she asked. “Why are you sorry?!?”

“I didn’t do a very good job of protecting you,” Ruby said.

“Ruby! I saw you fighting!” Weiss said. “That blonde woman was some kind of demon! She would have killed me in a heartbeat if you hadn’t held her off!”

“Killed?” Ruby echoed. “I don’t think she was trying to kill us.”

“It doesn’t matter what she was trying to do,” Weiss said. “What matters is that you stopped her.”

“She still got away. And you still had to fight that cat-eared lady,” Ruby said. She shifted in her seat and sighed heavily. “And I didn’t even get to see it!”

“You’re…disappointed that you didn’t get to see me fighting for my life?” Weiss asked.

“No! That’s not…I’d never want you to be in any danger,” Ruby said. “But I just know you’d make a great fighter. You’re smart and graceful. I bet if you wanted to you could be an incredible huntress.”

Weiss almost felt like laughing. It seemed that Ruby was still Ruby, even when she was despondent. Weiss wouldn’t have had it any other way.

“I appreciate your faith in me,” Weiss said. She glanced down at Ruby’s lap. “You really should be using that ice pack.”

“I’ll be fine,” Ruby said. “My aura’ll take care of it.”

“Oh, give me that,” Weiss said. She grabbed the ice pack out of Ruby’s hand and pressed it gently to her swollen eye.

Ruby squirmed a bit and hissed in discomfort.
Weiss said, “If you can fight off a pair of assassins then you can handle something like this without being childish about it.”

“Okay, okay,” Ruby said.

Weiss held the ice pack in place. She looked Ruby over for other injuries that she might have been hiding. Fortunately, she didn’t find any. Ruby’s dress had seen better days, but Weiss didn’t care about that. The dress was replaceable. Ruby was not. However, Weiss did spot one thing that was amiss.

“Ruby, where are your shoes?” Weiss asked.

“I threw them at the blonde lady,” Ruby said.

“You…threw them at her,” Weiss repeated.

“Well yeah,” Ruby said. “You didn’t really expect me to fight in those stupid heels, did you?”

“You really are something else,” Weiss said softly.

“That’s a good thing, right?” Ruby asked.

“Yes. It’s a good thing,” Weiss said.

Weiss continued to hold the ice pack to Ruby’s eye. She didn’t really think that it was doing much to help, but the act of tending to Ruby was soothing. She took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. The rest of the world seemed to fade away. There was no way she could deny the swell of love for Ruby that was filling her heart. But after she’d been thrust into such extraordinary circumstances, how could she not love her? That was perhaps the greatest tragedy of the evening for Weiss. She’d been hoping to have time to let her feelings for Ruby evolve more naturally. That way she’d know for sure if she was genuinely in love or not. But it seemed the universe was conspiring against her to prevent that from happening. She almost had to wonder if some sort of karmic force was punishing her for surrendering to her desires. She’d be willing to accept it if that were the case, but she would never be willing to let Ruby suffer because of her sins.

“Weiss…” Ruby said.

Weiss didn’t respond. She was too lost in thought to have heard Ruby.

“Weiss?” Ruby said again. She reached up and touched Weiss’s hand.

The physical contact snapped Weiss out of her trance. “Yes?” she asked.

“You can put the ice pack down,” Ruby said. “It’s all melted.”

“Oh,” Weiss said. She lowered the pack from Ruby’s eye. She wasn’t sure what to do with it, and none of the tables around her were sitting upright. So she just set it on the floor.

“Weiss…” Ruby said. “I really am sorry for not doing a better job.”

“No, Ruby!” Weiss said. “Stop thinking that you were anything less than magnificent tonight! I…. We’re…we’re both still alive.”

Ruby gave Weiss a tiny smile. “I guess we are,” she said.

A single tear slipped out of the corner of Weiss’s eye. Her emotions were surging inside of her. She
almost told Ruby that she loved her right then and there. She desperately needed to do something to express her feelings. But she couldn’t.


“I…” Weiss faltered.

Suddenly, Weiss heard someone approaching. She turned, fearing that the detective was coming to pester her again, but instead she saw Klein walking up with a tray in his hand.

“Klein?” Weiss said. She hadn’t expected to see him up and about. He looked surprisingly dapper given what he’d recently been through.

“Miss Schnee! I…” Klein suddenly paused. He looked back and forth between Weiss and Ruby. Then he said, “Ah. Miss Schnee, I know it’s not my job to meddle in your affairs, but you and Miss Rose have had quite the traumatic evening. I should think that a hug would not be unwarranted.”

Weiss’s eyes went wide. She suddenly had many questions about what Klein had meant by that, but Klein had already politely diverted his gaze elsewhere.

Weiss turned back to Ruby. She only hesitated for a moment before throwing her arms around her. Ruby hugged Weiss back. Weiss felt an absolute rush of relief as her emotions finally found an outlet, but even that relief was almost too much for her to handle. In an instant, she was sobbing.

“It’s okay, Weiss,” Ruby said as she rocked Weiss back and forth. “It’s okay.”

Weiss felt like she could spend an eternity with Ruby there in her arms. Nevertheless, she reluctantly let go. She wiped the tears off of her cheeks. Ruby gave her a big smile. It was incredibly sweet, but the juxtaposition of Ruby’s happy expression with her swollen eye made Weiss laugh a little. It felt good to laugh.

“There now,” Klein said. “Much better.”

“Klein,” Weiss said. “Do you…?”

“Do I what, Miss Schnee?” Klein asked with genuine innocence.

A question hovered on the tip of Weiss’s tongue. *Do you know?* But she didn’t dare give it voice. Instead, she asked, “Klein, why are you up? You should be resting.”

“Nonsense,” Klein said. “I’ve been seen to. And I thought you could use a spot of hot chocolate. I find that’s what always makes me feel better.” He held out the tray in his hand. Two mugs were sitting on it.

“Klein…” Weiss said exasperatedly.

Ruby said, “I’ll have some!”

Weiss shook her head, but she grabbed both of the mugs off of the tray. She handed one to Ruby and kept one for herself.

Ruby immediately started drinking from her mug without even giving it time to cool. Whether from the hug, the chocolate, or both, her mood seemed to have improved considerably. Weiss was grateful for that.

Ruby wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She asked Klein, “Why are you supposed to be
resting? You didn’t get hurt, did you?”

Weiss answered for Klein. “He foolishly decided that it was his duty to fist fight with one of the assassins.”

“Really?” Ruby asked, sounding far too excited for Weiss’s taste.

Klein said, “I may not look it, but I was the captain of my boxing team back during my school days.” He threw a few textbook punches to demonstrate.

Weiss said, “You could have gotten yourself killed.”

“Now, now, Miss Schnee,” Klein said. “My only regret is that I’m not twenty years younger. Then I really would have shown that blaggard the door!”

“Dang it. I didn’t get to see you fight either!” Ruby said. “I really missed all the good stuff.”

Weiss couldn’t help but smile at Ruby. She stared at the mug in her hand for a moment before lifting it to her lips and taking a drink. “Klein. Thank you,” she said. “For everything.”

“Think nothing of it, Miss Schnee,” Klein said.

Suddenly, an angry voice over on the other side of the ballroom shouted, “Out of my way you imbecile!”

Weiss turned and saw her father barging his way past a police officer. He marched straight toward where Weiss, Ruby, and Klein were gathered. “Weiss!” he said. He looked his daughter over. “You seem to be unharmed.”

“I’m perfectly fine, Father,” Weiss said.

“Well. Good,” Jacques said. Then he looked around the ballroom. Anger bubbled up on his face. “This is an absolute travesty. I warned you against holding your gala tonight, Weiss!”

Klein cleared his throat. “Mr. Schnee. If I may.”

“No, Mr. Sieben, you may not,” Jacques said. “That will be all.”

Klein’s mustache twitched, but he politely bowed and walked off.

Weiss could see that Ruby was about to blurt something out. She put her hand on Ruby’s shoulder, hoping that it would signal her to stay silent. Ruby must have gotten the message because she kept her mouth shut.

“Father,” Weiss said. “I doubt it would have mattered if I’d waited a month or even two. This wasn’t some random attack. My assailants were skilled and organized professionals.”

“They dare to attack my child in my home,” Jacques said like he hadn’t heard Weiss at all. “There will be reprisals for this.”

Something in Jacques’s voice disquieted Weiss. Her grip on Ruby’s shoulder tightened. “Father…” she said.

Jacques glanced at Weiss. “See to it that these officers get what they need and leave quickly,” he said. “There’s been quite enough intrusions for one night.”
“Yes, Father,” Weiss said.

“If you’ll excuse me. There are arrangements that need to be made,” Jacques said. He walked away without another word.

“Weiss,” Ruby said with a strained voice. “Your hand’s right on a bruise.”

Weiss immediately released her grip on Ruby’s shoulder. “I’m sorry!” she said.

“It’s okay,” Ruby said. She sat her now empty mug of hot chocolate down on the floor. Then she asked, “Why does your dad want you to deal with the cops? Shouldn’t that be his job?”

“He’s a busy man,” Weiss said.

“He’s not that busy,” Ruby muttered. Then she said, “Sounds like he’s really going to go after the people who attacked us.”

“Yes,” Weiss said, but she wasn’t actually sure if that was the case. Something in the way Father had spoken almost made Weiss think that he had other designs, although she had no idea what they might be.

Ruby stood up. Her gaze turned toward the broken window across the ballroom. “So where do you think those two are now?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Weiss said.

“Well if we ever see them again, you know what to do!” Ruby said.

“I do?” Weiss asked.

“Yeah!” Ruby said. “Do that thing where you summon another me! How does that work, by the way?”

Weiss’s cheeks turned red. “I’m not sure,” she admitted. “I didn’t think my summoning glyph could do something like that.”

“Sounds like we’re going to have to spend some time practicing!” Ruby said excitedly.

“Ruby…” Weiss said, trying not to smile. “I won’t have time. There are a million things I’m going to need to do to clean up this mess. Tonight could be a public relations nightmare if it’s not handled properly.”

“But you’ll get it cleaned up eventually,” Ruby said. “And then you’ll have plenty of time!”

“You’re not going to forget about this, are you,” Weiss said.

“Nope!” Ruby said.

“Alright,” Weiss said. “I promise I’ll find some time. But only after things get back under control, not before!”

“It’s a deal,” Ruby said. Then she leaned in close and whispered into Weiss’s ear, “We can make it a date!”

“We can what?” Weiss asked.
“You know! Make it a…” Ruby trailed off so that she wouldn’t have to say the word out loud.

Weiss sighed. Only Ruby would think that something like practicing using a semblance was worthy of being called a date, but surprisingly, Weiss found herself smiling at the idea.

“Very well,” Weiss said. “We will…set a date.”

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Yang had absolutely no idea where she was or even how long it had been since she’d tossed Blake out of the Schnee mansion. A bitter northern wind was blowing underneath her wings, carrying her south. Even for an early spring’s night in Atlas it was uncomfortably cold, and her feathers didn’t seem to be doing anything to keep her warm. Ordinarily she would have used her semblance to keep the cold at bay, but that wasn’t an option right now.

Yang’s talons were still clutching Blake’s shoulders, but Blake’s weight was becoming harder and harder to bear. Yang knew that she’d been losing altitude for a while now, but it was all she could do just to keep herself aloft. She’d already been pushing herself beyond her limits from the moment she’d flown away with Blake, and the last ounce of her strength was nearly spent.

Yang suddenly saw the ground appear out of the gloom of night. It was rushing up to meet her at an alarming rate. She angled her wings, trying to level her descent anyway she could. She’d almost gotten her trajectory under control when Blake’s feet skidded against the ground. The jolt tipped Yang forward. It was too much for her to compensate for. Blake was ripped out of her talons, and Yang went careening toward the ground.

Just before Yang hit the dirt, she felt a tingling sensation from the magic infusing her body. Suddenly, she wasn’t a bird anymore. She crashed hard into the ground and tumbled helplessly across it. She felt every last rock and root that battered her body, her aura having long since been depleted. When she finally rolled to a stop, she ended up face down in a crumpled heap.

Yang sucked in a breath. Now that she had a human body again, she began sweating profusely. Every last part of her ached with pain. She tried to push herself onto her back, but her muscles fought her every step of the way.

It took a herculean effort, but Yang finally succeeded in rolling herself over. She landed flat on her back, and her arms splayed out helplessly at her sides. She doubted that she’d be moving again until her aura had time to recharge.

Yang couldn’t see much of her surroundings as she lay on the ground attempting to breathe, but she’d apparently flown far enough to get away from the more developed areas of Atlas’s capital. There wasn’t a building in sight.

“Blake?” Yang tried to call out, but she was too winded to shout. She attempted to lift her head to see what had happened to Blake, but her body refused to cooperate.

“Blake?” Yang said again, slightly louder this time.

“I’m here,” Blake said. She sounded distant.

Yang started to laugh, but her laughter quickly turned into her gasping for air.

When Yang finally felt like she had enough breath in her to talk again, she said, “You know, I didn’t think that was going to work.”
“But you…” Blake trailed off.

“I mean, I was going to catch you, no matter what,” Yang said. “But eagles aren’t really built for carrying things as big as people. I figured we’d get about a hundred feet before I would’ve had to land.”

Blake was silent. Yang tried to lift her head again so that she could see her, but she still couldn’t manage it.

Eventually, Blake asked, “Why?”

“Why what?” Yang asked.

“Why did you try to save me?” Blake asked. “You could have flown off alone and gotten away for sure. Why not just save yourself?”

“Come on, Blake,” Yang said. “You know I wouldn’t do that. We’re partners.”

“I’m a faunus. You’re a human,” Blake said.

“Like that matters,” Yang said.

“Of course it matters!” Blake said. “My whole life, it’s the only thing that’s ever mattered!”

“Not to me.”

“We’re not partners.”

“Yeah we are.”

“You’re a mercenary. I hired you for a job.”

“Yeah. Maybe that was true for like a day,” Yang said. “But I think if I was just a mercenary I would’ve asked to be paid by now. You know, with cash instead of food and airship rides.”

Blake didn’t say anything more.

Yang really wished she could see Blake. “Hey,” she said. “If this is about the mission… I’m sorry. But we got away. We can always try again.”

“No. That was our only chance,” Blake said. “If you think we’ll get within a mile of Weiss again without getting caught then you’re deluding yourself.”

“Blake, we—” Yang started to say.

“I think…” Blake interrupted. “I think it would be better if we split up. The authorities will have a harder time searching for us that way.”

“What?! No!” Yang said.

When Blake didn’t immediately answer, panic shot through Yang. If Blake really was about to walk away, she had to stop her.

“Blake! Don’t go!” Yang shouted. She struggled, pitting her willpower against the dead weight of her exhausted body. Every muscle she had screamed bloody murder, but she managed to push herself up onto her elbows.
Blake hadn’t left. She was standing a few feet away. Her face was hidden behind her mask like always, but that wasn’t a hindrance for Yang anymore. She could clearly see Blake’s despair, but it was tempered by disbelief and maybe even hope.

“Don’t leave, Blake. Please,” Yang said. Her arms trembled as she struggled to hold herself up. Horrible pain, like a thousand pins pricking her simultaneously, was making her eyes water. “Don’t leave,” she repeated.

Yang’s arms gave out. She collapsed back to the ground. She knew that she wasn’t going to be able to get up again any time soon. She’d never felt more powerless in her life.

A pair of feet started crunching against the grass, and to Yang’s absolute relief, they were getting closer. Blake appeared in Yang’s field of vision. “Why?” she whispered. “Why do you care about me?”

“You really want to know?” Yang asked.

Blake nodded.

“You remember way back when we were riding the airship here?” Yang asked. “You told me you could count on me.”

“So?” Blake asked.

“No one’s ever told me that before,” Yang said. “Not even my mom. I never really fit in with my tribe. I never felt like I belonged. And I’ve never had anything to look forward to in my life except who I might get to rob the next day. When you found me in that bar? I was just killing time until Mom showed up to drag me back home.”

“That’s…” Blake said, but she was apparently at a loss for words.

“Then just like that, this beautiful, badass lady comes walking up to me and offers me everything I’ve ever wanted,” Yang said. Words were pouring out of her all on their own now. “You gave me a new life! You showed me a bigger world! You’re the bravest, most awesome person I’ve ever met! I’d do anything for you! I’ll…I’ll even let you walk away, if that’s what you really think is best.”

Tears were streaming out of Yang’s eyes, and they weren’t from any physical pain. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d felt so emotionally exposed. She hadn’t even been consciously aware of half the things she’d said just now.

Yang suddenly remembered the bracelet that she’d seen Ruby wearing. In hindsight, it seemed crazy that she’d thrown away what might have been her only chance to learn about her dad, but she’d do it again if she had to, without a second thought. Blake was worth it. Blake would always be worth it.

Blake was standing there stock-still, but then she stepped in closer to Yang. She bent down and put an arm under her and pulled her to her feet.

Blake draped Yang’s arm over her shoulders and wrapped her own arm around Yang’s torso. “Come on,” she said. “We need to get out of here.”

Blake tried to help Yang take a step forward, but Yang couldn’t move her legs. Even with Blake’s support it was all she could do to simply stand.

“Sorry,” Yang muttered. “I’ll be fine in an hour or two.”
Blake looked at Yang from behind her mask, like she was weighing her options. She apparently made up her mind quickly because she slung her arm under Yang’s legs. Before Yang even knew what was happening, Blake had picked her up and was cradling her in her arms.

Yang was silent with wonder as Blake started walking. Being held in Blake's arms was the most comforting sensation she’d ever felt. Blake’s warmth banished the chill of the night, and Yang could even feel Blake’s heart beating in her chest. It was simply amazing.

Yang said, “I carry you, you carry me. Eh, partner?”

“Yes,” Blake whispered.

“Where are we going?” Yang asked.

“We can’t go back to the safe house,” Blake said. “Fennec knows about it.”

“You think this was his doing?” Yang asked.

“I don’t know,” Blake said. “But I’m not going to take that chance.”

“Yeah…” Yang said.

“We’re on the south side of Atlas, right?” Blake asked.

“That’s the direction I was flying,” Yang said.

“I know a cabin that shouldn’t be too far from here,” Blake said. “I was holed up in it once. It’s old and drafty, but it’s well hidden. Assuming it’s still standing. I haven’t been to it in years.”

“It’ll be there,” Yang said.

Blake continued to carry Yang along the open terrain. The northern wind howled as it picked up speed. Something had changed in Blake; Yang could feel it. In fact, she had never felt more connected to Blake than she did in that very moment. It was wonderful beyond description.

Yang nestled into Blake’s arms. There wasn’t another soul in sight. The two of them might as well have been out in the wilderness beyond Atlas’s borders where they’d be easy prey for the grimm, but Yang wasn’t afraid. She had Blake, and Blake had her. It was all that mattered.

Chapter End Notes

And I’m back in the saddle again! Just in time for Volume 6 like I hoped. You know, I always seem to be half-way through these huge fanfic projects right as a new volume comes out which will be filled with new canon ready to obliterate the assumptions I’ve based my story on. Oh well. This is an alternate universe!

And speaking of being wrong about canon, I will be live blogging Volume 6 over on my tumbler as is now traditional.

You guys answered a lot of my questions about semblances last chapter, and I thank you all for that, but now after having written this chapter I can’t help but wonder how the existence of semblances affect law enforcement and criminal investigations in the
RWBY-verse!

As a side note, when I went to look up the word “blaggard” all the sources I found said it was typically only used to refer to a male person. I obviously decided to use the word anyway because it sounded like the kind of thing Klein would say. There really needs to be a female version!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
No Place to Rest

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A loud creaking sound startled Yang awake. Her eyes flew open, and she sat up. She didn’t recognize her surroundings at first, but everything slowly came back to her. She was lying on top of an old, musty mattress in the cabin that Blake had brought her to. The night winds had picked up again, and the cabin’s rickety wooden walls were groaning in protest.

It had taken Blake a while to locate the cabin, and by the time that she had, Yang had been able to walk on her own again. Her aura had healed her body, but she’d still been completely exhausted. Blake had shown Yang to one of the cabin’s two bedrooms. It was furnished with a mattress and nothing more. There weren’t even any blankets, sheets, or pillows; but Yang hadn’t particularly cared. She’d pulled off her bracers and boots, crawled onto the mattress, and instantly fallen asleep.

The wind continued to blow. Yang had no idea what time it was, but it was still very dark outside. She lay back down on the mattress. She wasn’t sure if she could get back to sleep, but there wasn’t anything else for her to do except try.

Yang listened to the sounds of the cabin’s walls shuddering. She was pretty sure that she’d been dreaming before the wind had woken her up. The images were rapidly fading from her memory, but she recalled the face of Weiss’s bodyguard, Ruby, featuring very prominently. The question still lingered in the back of her mind as to why Ruby had a bracelet with Taiyang’s crest on it. Yang didn’t really want to worry about that right now, but her brain had other ideas. The more she unwillingly mulled the mystery over, the more it frustrated her. There had to be a simple explanation for Ruby’s bracelet, but there just wasn’t any way for Yang to figure it out without knowing more.

Yang let out an exasperated sigh. Her encounter with Ruby had really forced her to acknowledge just how little she knew about her own dad, and it seemed the only way she was going to get answers was to track Ruby down again. She had a few ideas about how she could do that, but her search for Ruby might have to wait. Blake hadn’t been in the best of moods when she’d gone off on her own to the cabin’s other bedroom. Yang didn’t really want to leave her by herself right now.

Yang closed her eyes. She decided that she should wait and see how Blake was feeling in the morning. Then she could determine what her next course of action would be.

Yang had only just begun to doze off again when a new sound disturbed her ears. It was the lightest patter of bare feet against the cabin’s floor. She opened her eyes and was shocked to see Blake standing at the side of her mattress.

Blake had taken off most of her White Fang robes for bed. She was wearing just the loose-fitting pants and an undershirt. Her mask, however, was exactly where it had always been. It contrasted oddly with her sleepwear, but its presence was no more odd than Blake being there in the first place.

“Bla—?” Yang started to say, but she was silenced by Blake pressing a finger over her lips. There was something in Blake’s body language, the tilt of her head and the slight quiver of her hand, that sent a thrill racing through Yang.

Blake’s finger began to gently trace Yang’s lips. It was the first time that she’d touched Yang in such a familiar way without some kind of prompting. At first, Yang thought that she must have been dreaming, but she knew she wasn’t. The sensations she was feeling were far too real.
Eventually, Blake’s finger slid off of Yang’s lips. Yang wondered if she should say something now, but before she could, Blake suddenly crawled up onto the mattress with her. Yang’s eyebrows shot all the way up to her hairline. She didn’t want to make any assumptions about what Blake’s intentions were, but the signals Blake was sending her seemed pretty clear. Yang’s imagination was already running wild with possibilities, and when Blake straddled her on her knees, Yang’s heart just about exploded in her chest.

Blake softly caressed Yang’s cheek with the back of her hand as she hovered over her. Raw excitement sent Yang’s pulse racing. She couldn’t believe what was happening. She’d wanted to share a moment like this with Blake for so long, and yet she found herself completely unprepared for it. Her usual confidence was smothered by the sudden and overwhelming power of her desire.

Yang reached up and touched Blake’s hand, but the moment her fingers made contact, Blake gently yet firmly pushed them away. It was a small gesture, but it sent a potent shiver running up Yang’s spine. In an instant, she understood that Blake was the one in control right now. She had never even considered surrendering to someone so completely before, yet she found herself helpless before Blake, and to her complete and utter surprise, she was reveling in her defeat.

Blake’s finger traced its way down Yang’s sternum. It hooked itself into the top of Yang’s vest. Yang began to tremble as anticipation threatened to overwhelm her. Blake pulled at the zipper and then opened up one side of Yang’s vest. She sat there on her knees, staring. After what felt like an eternity, she reached out and brushed her fingers against the cup of Yang’s bra. She slowly slid the bra upward, exposing one of Yang’s breasts.

Blake’s hand floated over Yang’s bare skin. When her fingers finally made contact, Yang bit her lip. She clutched at the mattress as Blake began to explore. She wanted so badly to touch Blake that it physically hurt, but Blake hadn’t given her permission to do that.

Blake’s feather-soft touch was beautifully maddening. It drew a quiet groan from Yang’s lips. Yang doubted that it was on purpose, but Blake’s fingers were mercilessly teasing her, whetting her appetite without any promise of real satisfaction.

Eventually, Yang couldn’t take it anymore. She thrust her chest forward, pressing her breast into Blake’s palm. Blake actually jumped slightly like she’d been startled, but then her hand closed around Yang’s breast. There was a tiny shift in Blake’s posture. Yang saw the uncertainty vanish from her demeanor, and she saw a hunger take its place.

Suddenly, Blake let go of Yang. She started scooting forward while her hands fumbled with her waistband. In seconds her pants and undergarments were down around her ankles, and she was practically sitting on top of Yang’s face.

Yang knew what to do. Her tongue flicked out, all too happy to give Blake what she was silently demanding. A moan tore itself from Blake’s lips despite her best efforts to swallow it. Her hips thrust forward, pushing Yang’s head down into the mattress, and her legs pressed in.

Yang, feeling bold enough to break a taboo that Blake had placed on her, reached up and grabbed Blake’s hips to anchor herself. She wanted nothing less than to give Blake her very best.

It wasn’t long before Blake was absolutely writhing in pleasure, making the entire mattress shake. Her legs squeezed even tighter around Yang’s head. Her hips danced as Yang’s tongue lapped at her. No more moans were forthcoming from her, but Yang could hear her ragged breath slipping out from underneath her mask.

Yang had thought that she knew everything about lovemaking. She’d been wrong. Every aspect of
this moment was new and wonderful. It was easily the most intense experience of her life. She’d never been happier to bring someone to the height of ecstasy before. She was practically being smothered by Blake now, but Blake was so incredibly responsive that Yang couldn’t bear to stop, even for a second. She just held on tighter and tried even harder, all the while hoping this would never end.

Blake tipped forward, unable to hold herself upright any longer. Her hands hit the wall at the head of the mattress as she caught herself. The tips of her fingers dug deeply into the aging wood, and she whimpered in exquisite agony.

Yang pulled every trick she knew, trying to give Blake more. Suddenly, Blake’s hips thrust forward, shoving Yang’s head even harder into the mattress. Blake went completely rigid. She quivered as a few awestruck gasps escaped her.

With one last shudder, Blake’s hips finally let up. She pushed herself away from the wall and rolled off of Yang. She collapsed down onto the mattress, sweat glistening on her skin.

Spots danced in Yang’s eyes. She tried to blink them away. She was breathing just as heavily as Blake was, if not heavier. She felt the whole room spinning, both from wonderment and a lack of oxygen.

Yang was about to say something when the mattress shifted. She lifted her head and saw Blake finish pulling up her pants. Then Blake stood.

“Blake? Where…?” Yang started to ask as she sat up, but Blake walked out of the room without so much as a glance over her shoulder. Yang heard her footsteps echo down the hall, followed by the sound of a door closing shut.

Yang was completely stupefied. Her head was still swimming, and her body was burning with arousal, but Blake was gone.

“What was that all about?” Yang asked the empty room.

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By morning, the wind had finally died down, and light was pouring in through the bare windows in Yang’s room. Yang was sitting on her mattress with her arms crossed. She hadn’t gotten any more sleep last night, but she wasn’t feeling tired. She had too much on her mind to be tired.

Yang had been thinking for hours and hours as the sun had slowly crept up into the sky. Two people in particular had been occupying her thoughts: Blake and Ruby. She knew who was more important to her, but she also knew who might slip away if she waited too long.

Yang uncrossed her arms. Her hair was still loose from yesterday. She reached up and started tugging it back into its customary braid. Unfortunately, the mundane task wasn’t enough to distract her from her conundrum.

Ultimately, Yang’s dilemma came down to Blake. Clearly, Blake’s feelings for her had grown. Yang couldn’t have been happier about that, except she wasn’t sure what exactly they’d grown in to. Judging by what had happened last night, Yang was guessing that Blake didn’t fully understand her new feelings either. Yang wasn’t sure if she was supposed to give Blake space to figure things out on her own, or if she was supposed to be there to reassure her that everything was okay.

Yang finished braiding her hair. She looked over to where her boots and bracers were lying in a jumble on the floor. She stood up and walked over to them. She slipped on her boots and started to
lace them up. When she finished, she reached into her pocket and produced a vial of yellow Dust. Ember and Blaze needed to be refilled after her escapade at the Schnee mansion, and the one thing she still knew for certain was that she always needed to be prepared for a fight.

By the time that Yang had refilled her bracers and strapped them to her arms, she was no closer to figuring out what she should do. She decided that she could use some fresh air right now to help clear her head. She stepped out of her room. However, she was immediately confronted by the door to Blake’s room. It was still closed. Blake must have been on the other side.

Yang somehow resisted the urge to knock on Blake’s door. She understood that this was one of those times that she really needed to think things through before she acted, so she left and walked out the cabin’s front door.

It was a crisp and clear morning outside. Yang strolled a few feet away from the cabin. She wasn’t really in the mood to take in the view, but its beauty was difficult to ignore. Trees were dotted around the green fields surrounding the cabin, and Atlas’s skyline was visible off in the distance, its tall buildings glinting in the sunlight. The vista was a striking blend of nature’s sereneness and humanity’s triumphs.

All of a sudden, a voice from behind Yang said, “I hope you’ve finally had your fill of Atlas.”

Yang spun around. She didn’t believe her eyes at first, but there was no denying what she saw. Raven was casually leaning up against the side of the cabin like she’d been there all along.

“Mom!?” Yang exclaimed. “What are you doing here!?”

“Don’t be a fool,” Raven said, straightening her posture. “You know why I’m here.”

“I know you’ve been following me,” Yang said.

“Since the moment you flew away from camp,” Raven said. “I’m disappointed. In all that time I only saw you notice me twice.”

Yang’s expression turned sour. “What else is new? I’ve been a disappointment to you my whole life,” she said. “You’ve got Vernal now. Why’d you even bother following me?”

“You’re still my daughter, Yang,” Raven said. “And despite what you may think, Vernal will never be a replacement for you.”

“Well too bad,” Yang said. “She’s who you’ve got.”

“Please,” Raven said, rolling her eyes.

“Go away, Mom!” Yang said. “You’re the last person I need right now.”

“Still as stubborn as ever, I see,” Raven said. “Surely by now you’ve realized that you don’t belong here. It’s time for you to come home.”

Yang smiled at Raven, although there wasn’t any warmth in her expression. “I guess you haven’t been paying attention,” she said. “I am home.”

“Oh yes,” Raven scoffed. “And are you referring to this forgotten shack in the middle of nowhere? Or that would-be revolutionary pursuing a hopeless cause who you’ve been fawning over?”

“At least she has a cause! Unlike you!” Yang shouted. “I think what’s really got you upset is that I’m
doing okay without you. It turns out I can get along in the world just fine!”

“Yang—” Raven started to say, but Yang turned her back on her, knowing precisely how much it would anger her, and started walking away.

Yang had only gotten a foot or two farther away from Raven before a portal suddenly sprung into existence directly in front of her. She was so startled that she backpedaled a few steps.

Raven walked through the portal, looking very upset. She fixed her gaze on Yang. “I gave you the courtesy of asking, but I don’t need your permission. I can find you anytime, anywhere, in an instant. One night while you’re sleeping I can just whisk you away back to Mistral.” She grinned evilly. “I wonder what your little girlfriend will think when she wakes up and finds you gone.”

It had been a long time since Yang had truly been afraid of something. Raven was right. She could just steal her away in the middle of the night like some kind of bogeyman from a child’s fable. A sickening sensation settled in the bottom of Yang’s gut as she imagined Blake believing that she’d left without so much as saying goodbye. It terrified her, but it also angered her.

Yang’s rage quickly overtook her fear. Her eyes turned red as her resolve hardened. She’d never allow anyone to hurt Blake, especially not her own mother. She calmly walked forward until her nose was practically touching Raven’s. “You have to sleep sometime too, Mom,” she said.

Raven looked incensed. “Are you threatening me?” she asked.

“Yeah. I am,” Yang said. “I may not have a fancy semblance like yours, but I got this.” She lifted her arm. A blade shot out of her bracer, just barely threading the needle between her and Raven’s faces.

Raven flinched, much to Yang’s twisted delight, but she didn’t back down. She grabbed Yang’s arm and tried to pull it away. Yang resisted, causing her blade to tremble ever so slightly.

“How dare you,” Raven said, her voice dripping with menace.

“What’s the matter, Mom? I thought you’d be proud of me,” Yang said. “You’ve been trying to get me to solve my problems with murder ever since I was a teenager. I guess all I needed was the right motivation.”

Raven didn’t say anything more. She continued to tug on Yang’s arm, but Yang refused to budge. They both stood there, locked in a stalemate.

Minutes passed, each one lasting for what felt like an hour, but it was Raven who relented first. She slowly eased off of Yang’s arm and let go. Her portal closed behind her.

Yang lowered her arm. She let her blade retract back into her bracer.

Raven’s expression softened. “I am proud of you, Yang,” she said. “I’ve always been proud of you.”

“You’ve got a funny way of showing it,” Yang said.

“Everything I ever did was to make you strong,” Raven said. “So you’ll be ready when the day comes for you to take my place in our tribe.”

“It’s not our tribe,” Yang said. “It’s yours. It’s always been yours.”

“But it could be yours. Every last bit of it,” Raven said. “Come home, Yang.”

Yang was silent for a moment. Then she said, “Maybe I will, someday. But it won’t be today, and it
won’t be because you want me to.”

A look of resignation crossed Raven’s face. She turned away from Yang. She drew her sword, and with a single swipe, opened a new portal.

Raven was about to step through to wherever her portal led, but at the last moment, she turned back to Yang and said, “I love you. Never forget that.”

“I won’t,” Yang said. “I…love you too.”

Raven closed her eyes. Then she walked into her portal which promptly vanished, leaving an eerie silence in its wake.

Yang stood there. She was half-convinced that she’d seen her mom for the last time. That was when it hit her; her last link to her family, such as it was, might have been gone forever. She thought about Ruby and her bracelet again. It was suddenly much more important that she not let Ruby slip away from her.

Yang turned back to the cabin, but there was another surprise waiting for her there. Blake was standing just outside the cabin’s door, still dressed as she had been last night. She had Wilt in one hand and Blush in the other, apparently ready to fight Raven if it had been necessary.

“Blake!” Yang said. She ran up to her. “How much of that did you see?”

“Enough,” Blake said. She slid Wilt back into its sheath. “Yang…I…."

Yang didn’t wait for Blake to finish her thought. Instead she threw her arms around her in a hug. Blake didn’t act surprised or try to resist. She just hugged Yang back.

“Blake,” Yang said. “I’m not going to leave you. I’m never going to leave you. If I ever disappear, I promise I’ll come back. Even if I have to cross an ocean or two.”

“I believe you,” Blake said.

Yang pulled herself out of the hug, but she kept her arms on Blake’s shoulders. “Blake…. There’s something I need to do. It might take a few days.”

“Then go do it,” Blake said. “I’ll be here.”

Yang let go of Blake and took a few steps backward. “I’ll be back as soon as I can! I promise!” she said.

Yang turned. She started running in the general direction of Atlas. She reached inside herself and touched the magic that had always been a part of her. In an instant, she transformed into an eagle.

She flapped her wings and climbed high into the sky.

Yang circled around once to catch a final glimpse of Blake back down on the ground. Then she took to the winds, letting them carry her away, toward what she could only hope were answers.

Chapter End Notes

I had a very difficult time creating the Teen and Up version of this chapter. Maybe that
will teach me not to mix important character beats with, ahem, adult situations. But I doubt it.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Ruby was trudging up the stairs of her apartment complex. She’d never really weighed the pros and cons of living up near the top floor of the building before, and she still wasn’t. She was far too exhausted to contemplate anything requiring complex thought.

It was the first time that Ruby had been back home in the past three days. Ever since the gala, she’d been by Weiss’s side constantly for fear that her attackers would strike again. Weiss hadn’t been lying about having a million things to do. She’d been working tirelessly to, as she had put it, “direct the public discussion about the incident at the mansion in the right direction”. She’d hardly slept, and she’d been talking on her scroll constantly, only pausing when something else demanded her attention.

Ruby had accompanied Weiss everywhere as she’d traveled about, from her penthouse to her office to no less than three different news studios to elsewhere. Ruby even recalled the two of them making a trip to a tailor for some reason, but she’d been so tired by then that she wasn’t sure she hadn’t just hallucinated that part. She still would’ve been by Weiss’s side now if she’d had her way, but Weiss had insisted that she go home and get some sleep.

Ruby finally reached her floor. She walked up to her apartment’s door and began fumbling with the knob. It took some effort on her part, but the lock finally clicked open. Ruby dragged herself inside, shutting the door and locking it behind her.

The only thing illuminating the inside of Ruby’s apartment was the moonlight shining in through the windows, but Ruby didn’t bother turning on any of the lights. She unbuckled Crescent Rose’s harness, and let her weapon drop to the floor right where she was standing. She unpinned her hood from her shoulders and let it fall too. Then she started shuffling toward her bed, loosening her tie with one hand and unbuttoning her vest with the other.

Ruby slipped her tie up and over her head and shrugged off her vest. She literally collapsed onto her bed and fell asleep the very moment her head hit the pillow.

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A hand lightly slapped Ruby’s cheek. It roused her from a deep slumber, although not enough for her to open her eyes. She grumbled quietly, and immediately began drifting back to sleep.

The hand slapped against Ruby’s cheek a few more times.

“What?” Ruby mumbled. She pried her eyes open and sat up in bed.

It was still night, and the moon was still the only source of light in Ruby’s apartment. Ruby blinked her eyes a few times, trying to make them focus. Slowly, the image of a blonde woman standing there resolved itself.

Ruby stared at the blonde woman with half-lidded eyes, her sleep- addled brain not really making any kind of connection with what she was seeing. Then she flopped back down onto her bed, content to worry about whatever was going on in the morning.

All of a sudden, Ruby realized that she wasn’t alone, and she realized just who was standing in her
apartment. Her eyes flew open as adrenaline shot through her. She jumped out of her bed and frantically looked around the room, searching for Crescent Rose.

Ruby quickly located her scythe. It was lying on the floor nearby, but unfortunately, the blonde woman had her booted foot firmly planted on it. Undaunted, Ruby zoomed forward and lashed out at the woman with her fists.

The woman fell back into a defensive posture, all without taking her foot off of Crescent Rose. She blocked Ruby’s first few blows, but she quickly stopped when it became apparent how ineffectual they were. Soon, Ruby was just flailing away with her fists, not doing much of anything.

“Wow,” the woman said. “You really need to learn how to throw a punch.”

“Thanks! I’ll keep that in mind, Sparrow!” Ruby said, sarcastically emphasizing the name. She gave up trying to hit the woman and grabbed her leg instead. She pulled with all her might, attempting to free Crescent Rose, but the woman’s foot didn’t budge.

“Sparrow’s not my real name,” the woman said.

“I know!” Ruby said, still tugging on the woman’s leg.

Eventually, Ruby was forced to concede that she wasn’t going to get her scythe back just yet. She let go of the woman’s leg with an exasperated sound. She put her fists up again, ready to make do, but that was when she noticed that the woman hadn’t made any move to attack her yet.

“Uh…” Ruby said. “Aren’t you going to, you know, fight me?”

“Nope,” the woman said. “Unless you want me to.”

“Not really,” Ruby said. “But how’d you even get in here?!”

“Through the window,” the woman said. “It wasn’t locked.”

“It doesn’t lock,” Ruby said. “But this is the fourth floor! Did you climb up?”

“You’ve seen me turn into a bird before,” the woman said.

“Oh. Right,” Ruby said. “Uh…how exactly did you find me?”

“It wasn’t hard,” the woman said. “I’m an awesome scout.”

“Because you can turn into a bird?” Ruby asked.

“Well, that does help,” the woman admitted. “I’ve been flying around the city for a few days now looking for you. I finally saw you getting into a taxi outside of the Schnee HQ. From there I just followed you home.”

“But why?” Ruby asked. “If you’re not here to fight me, what do you want?”

The woman pointed at Ruby’s wrist. “I want to talk to you about that,” she said.

Ruby glanced down. She must have forgotten to take off her good luck charm before she’d gone to bed because she was still wearing it. “My bracelet?” she asked. “What about it?”

“Where’d you get it?” the woman asked.
“I made it,” Ruby said. “Why do you care?”

The woman bent down and untied a red bandanna from just above her knee. She unrolled it and held it up for Ruby to see. On it was a crest that matched Ruby’s bracelet.

The woman said, “Because this belonged to my dad.”

Ruby stared at the bandanna. Her eyes flicked back and forth between it, her bracelet, and the woman several times. Then, everything clicked inside her head.

Ruby’s jaw dropped, and she gasped loudly. She thrust a finger toward the woman and exclaimed, “You’re Yang!”

The woman looked taken aback. “You know my name?!” she asked.

“Yang! We’re sisters!” Ruby said, practically bouncing with delight. “Well…half-sisters I guess, but that still counts!”

“So…Taiyang Xiao Long is your dad?” Yang asked like she didn’t believe it.

“Yup!” Ruby said.

“But you said your last name was ‘Rose’! If Taiyang’s your dad, why aren’t you ‘Ruby Xiao Long’?” Yang asked.

“‘Rose’ was my mom’s last name,” Ruby explained.

“Oh,” Yang said. “Well the name suits you.”

“Thanks!” Ruby said. “And you’re Yang…Xiao—”


“I guess you’ve got your mom’s last name too then,” Ruby said.

“If you know about me, then my dad should too!” Yang said. “Why hasn’t he ever tried to find me?!”

“He did!” Ruby said. “Every few years he’d get a new lead about you and go off on a trip to try to chase you down. He’d always come back empty-handed and…really sad.”

Yang got quiet. She looked like she was thinking about something. Eventually, she asked, “Where’s my dad now? I want to meet him.”

Ruby’s heart sank. “He…he was there,” Ruby said, swallowing the lump that had formed in her throat. “At the Second...
Battle of Beacon, the last battle of the War. He was part of the team that killed Cinder Fall. But… well. They told me he lived for about an hour after the fighting had stopped. But he never made it home like he promised he would.”

Ruby’s head bowed under the weight of her memories. Tears began falling from her eyes.

Suddenly, Ruby felt a firm hand touch her shoulder. She raised her head and saw Yang looking at her with sympathetic eyes. Without another word between them, Yang gave Ruby a big hug.

Ruby wasn’t sure how to react to what was happening at first, but her arms slowly lifted until she was hugging Yang back. There was something about the warmth radiating off of Yang that made Ruby feel like everything was going to be okay.

After a minute or two had passed, Ruby said, “You know, it’s going to be weird having a family again.”

Yang pulled out of the hug. “Again?” she asked. “What about your mom?”

“She died a long time ago,” Ruby said. “And the only other family I had was my uncle, Qrow. He’s dead too.”

“Wait, Qrow?!” Yang asked. “As in Qrow Branwen?! That Qrow?!”

“You knew Uncle Qrow?” Ruby asked, shocked.

“Of course I did!” Yang said. “He’s my uncle! You’re not even related to him!”

“Huh. I guess I’m not,” Ruby said. She’d never considered that before. “It doesn’t matter. He was still Uncle Qrow.”

“So you’re telling me that Qrow knew where to find me and my dad, and he knew we wanted to meet each other, and he didn’t do anything about it?!” Yang asked. “If he was still around I’d beat him within an inch of his life!”

“Yeah, it’s kind of weird that he never said anything about you,” Ruby said. “Although I wonder if he was where Dad kept getting his leads about you from.”

“Maybe,” Yang said. “I guess I didn’t really know him that well. He and Mom didn’t get along.”

“That’s too bad,” Ruby said. “He was a great uncle to me.”

“How…how did he die?” Yang asked. “I knew he was dead. Mom told me. But she didn’t give me any of the details.”

“He fought in the Maiden War too,” Ruby said, trying not to let the unpleasant memories affect her. “He died pretty early on. Somewhere in Mistral, I think.”

Yang looked down at the bandanna still in her hand. She bent down and tied it back around her leg. “Thanks. For giving me some answers,” she said.

“Wait! Are you leaving?” Ruby asked. “Don’t go yet! We have so much to catch up on! Like…our entire lives! I’ve always wanted a sister! Haven’t you?”

“I’ve never really thought about it,” Yang admitted. “You are way more fun to be around than Vernal, that’s for sure.”
“Vernal? Who’s that?” Ruby asked.

“No one important,” Yang said. “But…I don’t think I can be your sister right now.”

“Why not?” Ruby asked.

“You’re Weiss Schnee’s bodyguard,” Yang said. “And I was hired to kidnap her.”

“Oh. Yeah, that might be a reason,” Ruby said. Then she muttered to herself, “I knew you weren’t trying to kill us.”

“Why are you even working for Weiss anyway?” Yang asked. “You should quit and go be a real huntress. Just think of all the awesome adventures you could go on!”

“First of all, I am a real huntress! And, um…well…” Ruby said. She felt her cheeks reddening. “I’m kind of…dating Weiss.”

Yang blinked. “You mean…she’s your girlfriend?”

“Yeah,” Ruby said. “That’s supposed to be a secret though! Don’t go telling anyone!”

“But…Weiss?!” Yang asked. “Can’t you find someone better than her? Does she treat you right? She doesn’t try to boss you around does she?”

“Well she is my boss,” Ruby said, trying to make a joke. Yang didn’t look very amused.

Ruby held up her hands reassuringly. “Weiss is wonderful to me,” she said. Then she giggled. “Actually, it’s funny how timid she can get when we’re alone.”

Yang crossed her arms. “I’m still not sure she’s good enough for you.”

“Well too bad. You don’t get a say in the matter,” Ruby said, also crossing her arms.

“Me being your big sister doesn’t count for anything?” Yang asked.

“Maybe it would,” Ruby said. “But you just told me that you couldn’t be my sister.”

“Yeah, but….” Yang let out a huff and put her hands on her hips.

“Weiss is a very respectable person,” Ruby said. “You’re the one who’s working with that cat-eared lady who wants to kidnap someone. Maybe you’re the one who should quit.”

Yang suddenly looked embarrassed. “Yeah, um…about that,” she mumbled. “We’re kind of… hmm.”

“Wait…” Ruby said. She uncrossed her arms as her mind put the clues together. “Is that cat-eared lady your girlfriend?”

Yang scratched the back of her head. “Maybe? We’ve been…together.”

“So…your maybe-girlfriend wants to kidnap my girlfriend. And my girlfriend wants to have your maybe-girlfriend arrested,” Ruby said.

“Yup,” Yang said.

“Huh,” Ruby said.
It got quiet in the room. Ruby honestly had no idea what to say next. Too much new information had been dumped on her all at once. She was still figuring things out.

It was Yang who eventually broke the silence. “Her name’s Blake, by the way.”

“That’s a pretty name,” Ruby said.

“I think so too,” Yang said. “There are reasons why she wants to kidnap Weiss, you know. Weiss’s company is doing a lot of bad stuff.”

“That’s no excuse,” Ruby said.

“Maybe, maybe not,” Yang said. “But it’s a reason.”

Ruby thought for a moment. Yang wasn’t the first person she’d heard say that the Schnee Dust Company was up to no good. She wasn’t even the second. Ruby readily admitted to herself that she was largely ignorant to the Company’s inner workings. Who knew what secrets she wasn’t privy to. But there was one thing that she was certain about.

“Weiss is a good person,” Ruby said. “I’m not going to leave her.”

“And I’m not going to leave Blake,” Yang said. “So what does that mean for us?”

“Nothing,” Ruby said. “We’re still sisters. We were even before we ever met.”

Yang looked thoughtful. She asked, “Do you have a scroll?”

“Yup. Hold on a second,” Ruby said. She glanced around her apartment until she spotted her vest lying on the floor. She walked over, picked it up, and pulled her scroll out of its pocket.

Yang said, “Let me see that for a second.”

Ruby handed Yang her scroll. Yang tapped at the screen for a minute. Then she tossed it back to Ruby.

Ruby caught her scroll and looked at it. She saw that a new contact named “Sparrow” had been entered into it, complete with a number.

The sound of a window sliding in its frame made Ruby lift her head. She saw Yang standing with one foot on the sill of the window she’d just opened. Yang winked at her and then stepped out of the apartment into the open air.

Ruby jogged up to the window. She got there just in time to see an eagle soar up into the sky. “I have a sister,” she whispered, clutching her scroll to her chest. “A sister who can turn into a bird. That. Is so. Cool!”

Chapter End Notes

Like Ruby’s apartment, the first place I ever lived in college (that wasn’t a dorm) had windows that didn’t lock. Only these windows were on the ground floor. One of my friends got into the habit of just crawling through the window instead of knocking.
Now I know some of you might think it’s strange that Ruby graduated Atlas Academy without learning how to punch, but please consider that in canon Ruby only really started to learn how to fight unarmed after receiving extra attention from Ozpin/Oscar. Plus, in this version of Ruby’s life, one of her emotional coping mechanisms was being passively antagonistic toward her instructors at Atlas. I don’t imagine any of them wanted to spend extra time with her.

After re-watching Volume 5, I’m convinced that Ruby didn’t know about her uncle’s ability to turn into a bird until Yang spilled the beans. So it’s safe to assume that she never learned about that particular secret in this alternate universe.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
“Mr. Schwartzman wasn’t happy about his appointment with you being rescheduled,” Rosalie said over Weiss’s scroll.

Weiss was not in her office like she’d originally intended today. Instead, she was riding in the back of a luxury sedan as it drove down the streets of Atlas. She said to Rosalie, “Mr. Schwartzman is never happy about anything. So there’s no reason I should care.”

“Very true,” Rosalie said. “The rest of your calendar has been cleared for the day, just like you asked. Are you sure you can’t tell me what you’re up to?”

“I’m afraid not,” Weiss said. “You’ll have to get your office gossip from some other source today.”

“Why, Miss Schnee! No one here would ever dream of gossiping about you,” Rosalie said with just enough sincerity that Weiss might have believed her.

“Of course they wouldn’t,” Weiss said in a dry tone.

“Before I go, is there anything else you need?” Rosalie asked.

“Yes, I wasn’t able to watch the news last night,” Weiss said. “Was there anything of note?”

“Hmm,” Rosalie said. “Lisa Lavender did present a fascinating retrospective on the Faunus Rights Revolution.”

“I see,” Weiss said. “Faunus malcontentedness must still be on the public’s minds.”


Weiss actually chuckled. Rosalie used to be the only person who could make her laugh, until Ruby had come along. Weiss said, “Thank you, Rosalie. That will be all.”

“Of course, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said. “Make sure you have fun today!”

“I will. Goodbye,” Weiss said. She lowered her scroll and ended the call.

Weiss peered down at her scroll. It had been pressed to her ear almost nonstop since the gala. She probably still would have been talking on it again for the majority of today if it hadn’t been for a certain realization she’d had late last night.

For the past three days, discipline, willpower, and an obscene amount of coffee had taken the place of sleep for Weiss. It wasn’t the first time her job had demanded incredibly long hours from her, and it wouldn’t be the last. She’d learned how to handle the strain. Ruby, however, had not.

Ruby had kept a constant vigil since the attack at the mansion, but yesterday, she’d finally succumbed to exhaustion. Weiss had found her napping in one of her office’s chairs. She’d immediately sent her home to go get some sleep, and only then, once Ruby had gone, did she realize that she’d been taking her presence for granted. She’d practically treated Ruby like she wasn’t even there, focusing entirely on her work instead.
Weiss knew that she was out of practice being a friend—and she didn’t have any experience being a girlfriend—but nevertheless, her behavior was unacceptable to her. There was still a lot of work to do in the wake of the disastrous turn of events at the gala, but that was a poor excuse. If Ruby was truly important to her, she could find the time to prove it.

After getting some sleep herself, Weiss had decided to set aside today for Ruby and Ruby alone. The only problem was that she hadn’t told Ruby that yet. She knew exactly why; it was another emotional defensive mechanism. So long as her plans hadn’t been finalized they were just theoretical, and she wouldn’t be compelled to contemplate what had driven her to make them. It frustrated her how readily she seemed to avoid any sort of introspection. Ruby inspired so many emotions in her that were completely baffling if for no other reason than how straightforward they were, but confusing or not, Weiss didn’t want to hide from them anymore.

Weiss glanced out of her car’s window. She didn’t recognize any of the buildings rolling by. That undoubtedly meant that she was getting close to her destination, Ruby’s apartment. If she wanted to let Ruby know that she was coming before she arrived then she was running out of time.

Weiss looked at her scroll again and opened up her list of contacts. Her finger hovered over Ruby’s name for a moment. Then she swallowed her fear, tapped her scroll’s screen, and lifted it to her ear.

There was only one ring before Ruby answered. “Hi, Weiss!” she said cheerfully. “I was wondering when you’d call! I’m all rested and ready to go back on duty!”

“Actually,” Weiss said. “I was thinking that we should spend some time together. Off the clock.”

There was a pause on Ruby’s end. Then she asked, “Really?”

“Yes. Really,” Weiss said. “Would it be okay if I met you at your apartment?”

“Yeah! That’d be awesome!” Ruby said. “When do you think you can get here?”

Weiss’s car pulled up to a curb and stopped. “Um…now,” Weiss said.

“Now?!” Ruby asked.

“Yes, I’m already here,” Weiss said. “Is that alright?”

“Of course it is!” Ruby said. “Come on up!”

“I’ll be right there,” Weiss said. She hit the button to end the call. Nervousness was bubbling up in her, and she wasn’t sure why. Ruby cared about her. Ruby wanted her to be there. Why should she be nervous?

Weiss quickly composed herself as her driver opened her door. She stepped out of the car. She hadn’t really been paying attention to her surroundings during the drive, but now that she was, she didn’t like the look of Ruby’s apartment building or the area around it. Everything was so grimy and run-down, even more so than she’d been expecting. Weiss had intentionally dressed more casually than usual today in an effort to blend in during her journey to the less affluent side of Atlas. She was wearing a simple white blouse, dark slacks, and plain but stylish boots. However, she could tell that she was still going to stick out like a sore thumb.

Weiss knew that Father would explode if he learned that she’d come to this part of the city. She could almost hear his lecture about the supposed danger she’d exposed herself to by mingling with the riffraff of Atlas. Yet she didn’t feel like she was in danger. Ruby was close by, and if there was any upside to all the White Fang attacks that she’d recently endured, it was that she’d gained a much
Weiss turned to her driver. “Don’t wait for me. I’ll call you when I need you,” she said. She was eager to get rid of him before he figured out this was where Ruby lived.

“Yes ma’am,” the driver said. Weiss could see that he had concerns about leaving her there alone, but it wasn’t his place to question her and he knew it. He walked back to the front of the car and got in.

As Weiss’s car pulled away, she heard someone above her shout, “Weiss! Weiiss!”

Weiss looked up and saw Ruby poking her head out of an open fourth-story window. Ruby waved excitedly when she saw Weiss notice her.

Weiss smiled. Just seeing Ruby somehow made her fears fade away. An idea came to her. With a wave of her hand, dozens of small, white glyphs appeared in the air. They formed a helical pattern, creating an impromptu spiral staircase that led all the way to Ruby’s window.

Weiss started climbing up the stairs that she’d conjured. She hoped that Ruby didn’t think she was trying to show off. She simply wanted to get to her as quickly as possible, and this was the fastest way.

A few trips around the helix deposited Weiss on Ruby’s window sill. She started to say, “Ru—”

Weiss was interrupted by Ruby grabbing her, lifting her off her feet, and spinning her around into the apartment. The moment Weiss’s feet hit the floor, Ruby hugged her and planted a kiss on her lips.

Weiss’s eyes went wide with surprise, but they quickly fluttered closed as she kissed Ruby back. She had no idea what was happening, but she didn’t dare try to stop it.

By the time that Ruby finally broke the kiss, Weiss’s lungs were screaming for air. She felt dizzy, but in a good way. It was fortunate that Ruby’s arms were still around her. Otherwise she might have fallen over.

“I’m so happy to see you!” Ruby exclaimed.

“We’ve only been apart for less than a day,” Weiss said.

“Yeah, but yesterday you were my boss,” Ruby said. “Today you’re my girlfriend.”

“I appreciate you making that distinction,” Weiss said, but then she looked away guiltily. She pulled herself out of Ruby’s arms. “But… I’m sorry that you have to.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ruby said. “It’s not like you hired me as part of some elaborate plan to seduce me or anything.”

“N-no! Of course not!” Weiss said. She felt herself blushing. She’d never even considered such a scenario before, but it was a disturbingly appealing fantasy.

“Although, I guess it would’ve worked,” Ruby said. “I mean, I am your girlfriend now.”

Weiss’s blush deepened. She quickly shook her head clear. “Regardless! I was hoping… that… we….” Weiss trailed off as her gaze began to wander around Ruby’s apartment.

“Uh… is something wrong?” Ruby asked.
Weiss was completely aghast at what she saw. Ruby’s apartment was a single room and not even that large of one. The bare floors were worn to the point that the wood was splintering, the appliances looked like they came from the time of the Great War, and the furnishings, what little there were, could charitably be described as shabby.

Weiss asked, “Is this really where you live?”

“Yeah?” Ruby said. “It’s what I can afford.”

“I know what you’re paid, Ruby,” Weiss said. “You can afford better than this!”

“Yeah, maybe so,” Ruby said. “I guess it couldn’t hurt to get a little nicer place now.”

“You won’t have to settle for a little nicer! You’re getting a raise!” Weiss declared. “Effective immediately.”

“Weiss! You don’t have to do that!” Ruby said.

“Yes I do. I was already planning on putting a bonus in your next paycheck, but…” Weiss hesitated. Conventional wisdom had already told her that dating an employee would be fraught with peril, but now she was starting to experience that peril firsthand. “The fact of the matter is, I was only paying you the bare minimum amount someone in your position could expect to make.”

“Really?” Ruby asked. Fortunately, she didn’t sound upset. “Well I thought it was a lot.”

“The point is, you deserve more. Especially after the gala,” Weiss said. “You deserve to live in a better place than this.”

“Okay,” Ruby said. “I’ll start looking for a new apartment soon.”

Weiss thought that should have satisfied her, but it didn’t. She couldn’t stand the idea of Ruby spending one more night in this hovel. Without really stopping to consider it, she said, “I have plenty of extra space in my penthouse. You can stay in one of my guest rooms in the meantime.”

Ruby giggled. “Wow, Weiss. You’re asking me to move in with you already?”

Weiss knew that Ruby was making a joke, but it gave her pause. “Perhaps I am,” she said. “It… it would save you the expense of having to pay rent.”

“Wait. You’re being serious?” Ruby asked.

Weiss’s worries from earlier returned. Sweat started to bead on her forehead. She’d told herself that she didn’t want to hide from her feelings anymore, but that didn’t necessarily mean that she had to share them with Ruby. This didn’t seem like a good time to discuss them anyway. Then again, maybe there never would be a good time.

“Ruby…” Weiss said. “I am being serious. Because… because I’m in love with you!”

“Love?” Ruby softly echoed. “But… we haven’t even really been on a date yet.”


Ruby looked bewildered. It was not the reaction that Weiss had been hoping for, but it was one that she’d been expecting.

Weiss said, “I know you probably don’t feel the same way, but—”
“No, no,” Ruby interrupted. “I, uh…. I….”

“Ruby? What’s the matter?” Weiss asked. She started to fret, fearing that she’d just ruined everything. Why couldn’t she have kept her mouth shut?

Ruby grabbed her own wrist and squeezed her palm against her bracelet. “It’s just that if you love someone, and…..” She trailed off.

“Ruby, please tell me what you’re thinking,” Weiss said.

Ruby wandered over to her bed and sat down on it. She pulled her legs up and held them close to her chest.

Weiss walked over to the side of Ruby’s bed. It was plain to see that Ruby’s mind was racing a mile a minute. Weiss stood there, giving Ruby all the time she needed.

Eventually, Ruby said, “I’ve never told you about my dad.”

“Something obviously happened to him,” Weiss said.

“Yeah. Something did,” Ruby said.

Over the next several minutes, Ruby told Weiss the tale of how her father and uncle had fought and died in the Maiden War, and how her mother had been killed fulfilling her duty as a huntress. Weiss quietly listened, growing more and more dismayed at the hardships that Ruby had unfairly been forced to endure.

Ruby said, “Everyone I’ve ever loved is dead. That’s what happens to people you care about too much. They die or leave you or something.”

Weiss felt a physical pain in her chest from hearing Ruby’s story. She said, “I’m so sorry. But…I’m not going to leave you.”

“That’s exactly what Mom and Dad and Uncle Qrow thought too,” Ruby said. “It’s not a promise you can make.”

“Ruby…” Weiss said. She saw tears rolling down Ruby’s cheeks. It was too much for her. She sat down on the bed next to Ruby and put her arms around her.

Ruby turned and hugged Weiss. She buried her head in Weiss’s blouse and began sobbing.

Weiss held Ruby close. She kept trying to think of something to say, but nothing she came up with seemed adequate.

Minutes slipped by. Eventually, Weiss felt Ruby calm down somewhat. In an effort to banish the silence, Weiss said, “My sister fought in the War too.”

Ruby lifted her head. Her eyes were red from crying. “You mean Winter?” she asked. “The one you don’t talk with anymore?”

“Yes,” Weiss said. “The War changed her. The sister I knew who went off to fight Cinder Fall wasn’t the one who came back. I’ve always wondered if that’s the real reason we’re no longer on speaking terms.”

“What happened to her?” Ruby asked.
“Beyond the typical horrors of war? Her mentor, General Ironwood, died right before her eyes,” Weiss said.


“Yes. That’s him,” Weiss said. “Winter thought very highly of him. He was like a father to her. She was never the same after his death.”

“I’m sorry,” Ruby said.

“IT doesn’t really compare to what you’ve been through,” Weiss said. “But I do understand, at least a little bit. The War effectively took my sister away from me.”

“Sister…” Ruby said. Then she suddenly seemed to perk up. “Sister!”

“Ruby?” Weiss asked.

Ruby got up off the bed and started pacing back and forth. Her hand dipped into her pocket and pulled out her scroll. She didn’t try to use it; she just held onto it tightly for reasons that Weiss couldn’t fathom.

Ruby said, “I guess just because you run out of family, it doesn’t mean you can’t find more. I mean, maybe there’s someone out there you never knew about who could care about you. Surprises don’t always have to be bad!”

“I…suppose,” Weiss said. She was very confused.

“I like you, Weiss. A lot,” Ruby said. She stopped pacing. “Although…hmm.”

“Although what?” Weiss asked. “Ruby, you’re not making any sense.”

“Sorry,” Ruby said. She glanced down at her scroll for a moment before shoving it back into her pocket. “Something…happened last night.”

“Just last night?” Weiss asked. “What was it?”

“I don’t think I can tell you yet,” Ruby said.

Weiss was dumbfounded. That was not something she’d ever thought she’d hear Ruby say.

“I want to tell you. And I will,” Ruby said. “But we’ve got to do something first.”

“Name it!” Weiss said, eager to understand what was going on.

“So you know how a lot of people have said that your company still mistreats the faunus?” Ruby asked.

Weiss’s mouth hung open a little. Ruby was the last person she’d expect to accuse the Schnee Dust Company of misconduct. She said, “I am aware.”

“I think we need to double-check and make sure that’s not true,” Ruby said.

“I have double-checked!” Weiss said. “Father himself arranged for me to tour one of our mining facilities.”

“Your dad did?” Ruby asked.
“Yes! Why do you…?” Weiss trailed off. Suddenly, she realized why that mattered. It was something that she should have considered years ago, but she hadn’t. Perhaps she hadn’t wanted to. Anxiety gripped her. She still didn’t believe that her company was guilty of the accusations leveled against it, but for the first time, a doubt had been placed in her mind.

“I’m sorry, Weiss!” Ruby said. “Never mind! It’s not that important!”

“No,” Weiss said. She stood. “It is important. And you and I are going to get to the bottom of this once and for all. Together.”

A small but hopeful smile crossed Ruby’s face. “Together,” she said.

Chapter End Notes

Ordinarily I’d say it’s too early to ask Ruby to move in with you, Weiss, but I’ll give you full credit for ripping off that emotional band aid. I wish I were that brave sometimes.

As far as I know, Ironwood doesn’t have a canon middle name. The middle initial I’ve used for him in this chapter is an incredibly obtuse reverence to a popular science fiction franchise. I’ll be seriously impressed if anyone gets it.

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The wind billowed beneath Yang’s wings as she flew through the air. If there was a downside to leaving her tribe, it was that she got fewer opportunities to fly here in Atlas. It had been her greatest joy for as long as she could remember. She dearly wished there was some way she could share the experience with Blake, but being carried by an eagle didn’t compare at all to actually being an eagle. The absolute freedom of being able to soar up high into the sky on a majestic pair of wings was thrilling beyond belief.

Unfortunately, Yang hadn’t really been able to enjoy her flight back out to the relative wilderness surrounding the city. Between meeting the sister she’d never known and learning that the dad she’d never met was dead, there was a lot on Yang’s mind. Looking back, she recalled many times in the past when Raven had spontaneously decided to relocate the Branwen camp, seemingly on a whim. Yang couldn’t help but wonder now if some of those times had been because her dad had gotten close to finding her. She supposed that was something that she’d never really know for sure. Even if she were to go all the way back to Mistral and demand answers, Raven would never admit to doing such a thing.

Yang spotted the cabin that she and Blake had been making use of below her. She began circling around, spiraling back down to Remnant. When she was low enough, she transformed into a human again and plummeted the rest of the way. Her boots hit the dirt with a satisfying thud.

As far as Yang could tell, no one else had found the cabin yet. She hadn’t really been worried about that, but based on the few snippets of news that she’d caught while she’d been out searching for Ruby, the police were definitely on the hunt for a faunus woman with cat ears and her blonde accomplice. Yang wished them luck. Even if they did catch up to her and Blake, she could just grab Blake and literally fly away.

Yang opened the front door of the cabin and walked on in. Besides the two bedrooms and an extremely tiny bathroom, the interior of the cabin was taken up by a combination living area and kitchenette. Whatever furniture might have been there once was all but gone. Only a wobbly, old table and an equally old chair remained. They were set up next to a window where they’d likely stood for decades.

Blake was sitting in the chair, gazing at the world outside. She was dressed exactly like she had been the day that Yang had first met her, in her mask and White Fang robes. Only Wilt was missing, but it was still nearby, leaning up against a wall.

Yang shut the cabin door behind her. Blake turned to face her like she’d just now noticed her presence. “You came back,” she said.

“I promised you I would, didn’t I?” Yang said as she walked up. “I’m sorry for abandoning you like that.”

“It’s alright,” Blake said.

“I’m not sure that it is,” Yang said. “Things were kind of…weird between us when I left, and I think it might’ve been my fault.”
“No. It wasn’t your fault at all,” Blake said. She turned back toward the window. “About what happened that night….”

“I can’t say I was expecting you to do that,” Yang said. “But it was pretty awesome.”

“If—” Blake cut herself off. She looked at Yang again. “What did you say?”

“It was awesome!” Yang repeated. “I mean, I wasn’t sure what to make of you walking away like you did, but that was kind of hot.”

“It was…? Why would you think that?!” Blake asked, sounding bewildered.

“I don’t know,” Yang said with a shrug. “I guess I liked you showing me who was in charge.”

“I…” Blake stammered. Then her head drooped. “I still don’t think I should have just walked out on you.”

“Are…you feeling guilty about it?” Yang asked.

Blake didn’t say anything, but she didn’t need to. Yang could see that the answer was a resounding yes.

Yang wasn’t about to let Blake punish herself needlessly. She walked right up to where Blake was sitting and put her hands on her shoulders. “Hey,” she said.

Blake’s head slowly lifted up. Yang said, “I do know how to say no. Don’t think you did anything I didn’t want you to. If you’d asked, I would’ve said yes. I would’ve said yes a long time ago.”

“But…you…” Blake said. She couldn’t seem to find the words that she was looking for.

“You’re a beautiful person, Blake,” Yang said. “Don’t ever think you’re not.”

“You don’t know that,” Blake said. “You can’t.”

“Sure I can!” Yang said.

“Yang…” Blake said. She hesitated for a moment, but then she reached up and took Yang’s hands in her own. She guided them upward and placed them on either side of her mask.

It took Yang a second to understand what Blake was telling her to do, but when she did, it hit her like a ton of bricks.

Blake must have seen the shock register on Yang’s face because she quietly whispered, “Please.”

Yang’s hands suddenly felt sweaty. She might have pulled them away if Blake hadn’t been holding them in place. Ever so slowly, Yang slid Blake’s mask upward. She met no resistance, even though she felt like she should. Blake let go, allowing Yang to pull her mask off the rest of the way. Then, just like that, Yang found herself looking at Blake’s face for the first time ever.

Yang stared in silent wonderment. Blake looked almost exactly like she’d expected her to. However, she never could have been prepared for the power of Blake’s soulful, amber eyes or the profoundly sad expression on her face. Yang clutched at the mask in her hands as if it could somehow anchor her against the flood of emotions threatening to wash her away.

Blake’s pale skin seemed impossibly flawless, but half a dozen or more scars were crisscrossing over the entire left side of her face. It looked like she’d received them all at the same time. Yang wondered
if that was also when she’d lost the tip of her left cat ear.

Yang set Blake’s mask down on the table. Her fingers reached out and softly touched Blake’s face. She gently traced Blake’s scars, fascinated by how their jagged texture colored the smoothness of Blake’s skin. They made Blake look fragile yet completely unbreakable.

“You are beautiful,” Yang practically whispered.

“Yang, that’s not true. I’m….” Blake trailed off.

Yang’s lips started drifting toward Blake’s, and Blake’s eyes locked onto them. A look of complete disbelief crossed her face. She tried to say something more, but she was silenced by a soft kiss from Yang.

Yang couldn’t put into words what she was feeling right now, so she tried to explain it to Blake with her kiss. Her lips lingered. The last thing she wanted was to dispel the magic of the moment. It wasn’t until she felt herself growing lightheaded that she finally pulled back.

Yang and Blake both gasped for air. Yang rested her forehead on Blake’s as she stood over her. She said, “See? Kissing is way better when you’re not wearing the mask.”

Blake’s eyes were shining with amazement. It took her a moment, but she asked, “You really don’t mind my scars?”

“Why would I mind them?” Yang asked. “They’re part of who you are. And they’re pretty sexy too.”

“You don’t need to say that to make me feel better,” Blake said.

Yang frowned at Blake. “I’m saying it because it’s true.”

It was obvious to Yang that Blake didn’t believe her. She decided that was unacceptable. She took a step back from Blake and held out her hand.

Blake looked confused at first, but Yang offered her a reassuring smile. Blake put her hand in Yang’s, and when she did, Yang pulled her to her feet. Blake let out a surprised yelp as she stumbled forward, but Yang caught her in a big hug.

Yang didn’t waste a second. She kissed Blake again, tipping her back as she did. Blake’s arms wrapped around Yang, and her fingers dug into the fabric of Yang’s vest.

Yang didn’t relent until she was sure that Blake had gotten the message. When she broke the kiss, she pulled Blake back upright, all while still holding her in her arms.

“Believe me now?” Yang asked. “If you don’t I can kiss you again. Although I was going to do that anyway.”

Blake leaned forward. “Not if I kiss you first,” she said, and she did just that. Yang was actually caught off guard as Blake’s lips found hers, but she didn’t let that stop her from kissing Blake back.

When Blake’s lips parted from Yang’s, she said, “Yang…I….” Her arms squeezed tighter around her.

“You don’t need to say anything, Blake. I understand,” Yang said, and it was true. She’d become a master of reading Blake’s body language, and now that her mask was no longer hiding her
expressive eyes, Blake was like an open book. Yang could see the storm of emotions playing across Blake’s face. There was sorrow, regret, and guilt; but there was also relief, joy, and even what Yang might have called love.

Yang looked into Blake’s eyes, absolutely delighted that she could do that now. The two of them stood there in each other’s embrace for a long time. A smile worked its way onto Blake’s face ever so slowly. The storm inside of her was passing.

Yang grinned at Blake. She started to go in for another kiss, but at the last second she diverted her lips and started nibbling on the curve of Blake’s neck. Blake gasped, and Yang felt her shudder.

Yang started kissing her way up Blake’s neck. Blake let out a whimper as she buried herself even deeper into Yang’s arms. She seemed to be especially sensitive to these tender kind of touches. Yang had no idea why, but she wasn’t going to complain.

Yang’s lips worked their way higher. They began nibbling on Blake’s earlobe.

Blake sucked in a breath. “Yang…” she said.

“What? Want me to stop?” Yang joked.

“Don’t. Please,” Blake said.

Yang grinned again. She started kissing her way along Blake’s jawline, appreciating the way Blake’s eyes fluttered closed. She planted a brief kiss on Blake’s lips, then two. And then she pulled back just far enough so that she could enjoy the flushed look of Blake’s face.

Blake’s eyes opened when Yang’s lips failed to return. She looked directly at Yang with a bewildered expression, but then a hunger started creeping onto her face.

All of a sudden, Blake’s arms slipped free of Yang’s. She grabbed the back of Yang’s head, pulled it toward her, and started kissing her with reckless abandon.

Yang greedily drank in Blake’s passion, returning her kiss with equal fervor. It didn’t take long before she was feeling bold enough to deepen her kisses. Her tongue tickled Blake’s lips which readily parted for her. Blake’s hands found the front of Yang’s vest and clutched it tightly.

Yang began leading Blake toward the bedroom that they had shared a few nights before. They were furiously kissing each other now, only pausing here and there to suck in a lungful of air. They had just made it to the bedroom door when Blake started pawing at the front of Yang’s vest. One of Yang’s hands blindly groped for the fasteners that held Blake’s robes closed.

The door to the bedroom slammed open as Yang and Blake stumbled through it, only vaguely paying attention to where they were going. Blake finally got a hold of Yang’s zipper and pulled it down. Her hand reached around inside of Yang’s vest, trying to unclasp her bra, but the band slipped out of her fingers and ended up snapping against Yang’s back.

Yang laughed, interrupting her and Blake’s kissing.

“I’m sorry!” Blake said, looking horribly embarrassed.

“Allow me,” Yang said, reaching behind her back. “You can even look at both of my boobs this time!”

Blake blushed, looking even more embarrassed.
Yang unhooked her bra. She slid it and her vest off, leaving herself in nothing but her bracers from the waist up.

Blake stared. Yang thought her expression was priceless. Blake’s blush hadn’t gone away, and her face was filled with a mixture of innocent curiosity and not-so-innocent longing. Her eyes repeatedly shifted between Yang’s breasts and her well-defined abs as if she couldn’t decide which she liked looking at more.

It would’ve been a lie if Yang had said that Blake’s fascination with her body didn’t stroke her ego. She knew she looked amazing, but Blake’s obvious infatuation was still far more gratifying than she’d anticipated.

Once Yang felt that Blake’s eyes had gotten enough of a feast, she held out her arms. “Help me with these?” she asked, indicating her bracers.

Blake nodded. She unclasped Ember and Blaze from Yang’s arms, each in turn, letting them fall to the floor. Then she stood there with her hands hovering close to Yang’s body, looking like she wasn’t sure what to do next.

Yang took a hold of Blake’s hands. She guided them up to her chest and pressed them against her breasts. Blake looked at Yang with uncertainty, but Yang nodded at her.

Blake began to explore. Her touch was light at first, but she quickly grew bolder. Yang wanted to laugh, but she didn’t for Blake’s sake. This was obviously a new experience for her, and there was something about her earnest wonder that Yang found incredibly cute.

Suddenly, Blake leaned forward. For the second time today she surprised Yang when her tongue flicked out across one of Yang’s nipples. Yang let out a soft moan at the unexpected sensation. She brought her hand to the back of Blake’s head, silently encouraging her.

Blake’s tongue danced across Yang’s breast, and Yang’s body began to respond. A heat simmered up from her core, spreading out to the rest of her.

Yang whispered into one of Blake’s cat ears, “You know, there’s still more of your present to unwrap.”

Blake stiffened up. Her tongue withdrew, and she stood up straight. It hadn’t been quite the reaction that Yang had been hoping for.

“Don’t I need to…?” Blake started to say. She looked down at herself. She was still fully clothed. Yang had only managed to get two of the fasteners on her robe open.

“Well I’m not going to tell you no,” Yang said. She winked at Blake. “I can help you if you want.” She reached out, intending to playfully pluck at another one of the fasteners, but Blake reflexively batted her hand away.

“I’m sorry!” Blake immediately said.

“No, that’s alright,” Yang said. She wasn’t sure what was going on, but she was chiding herself for not recognizing Blake’s nervousness for what it was. “We don’t have to do this if you’re not feeling good about it.”

“No. I want this to happen,” Blake said.

“You can keep your clothes on if you like,” Yang said. “You already know I can work with that.”
“No,” Blake said resolutely. She turned so that her back was to Yang, and then she began to undress herself.

Blake wasn’t disrobing in a way that was meant to be titillating, but she was having that effect on Yang all the same. Each bit of skin that Blake revealed sent a thrill shooting through Yang. She had to suppress the urge to whistle appreciatively at her.

Blake finished taking off the last bit of her clothing. She stood completely naked, although she was still keeping her back to Yang.

Yang was grinning from ear to ear at what she saw. She slowly walked up to Blake and hugged her from behind. Her grin got even bigger as she pressed into Blake’s back. The feeling of Blake’s skin on hers was breathtaking.

Blake resisted for a brief moment, but then she leaned into Yang. Tension began melting out of her.

“Blake,” Yang said in a soothing tone. “Your butt is the most awesome thing I’ve ever seen.”

Blake let out a tiny, nervous laugh.

“I’m not joking,” Yang said. She slid her hand slowly down Blake’s back, giving her the chance to protest before firmly grabbing her butt. What she really wanted to do was slap it, but she suspected Blake might not appreciate that.

“I think…” Blake said with a trembling voice. “I think I’m ready to unwrap the rest of my present.”

“Now you’re talking,” Yang said, giving Blake’s butt one last squeeze.

Blake stepped out of Yang’s arms. Then she turned around. Yang happily took in the sight. She said, “You’re pretty good looking from the front too.”

Blake laughed with slightly more confidence this time.

Yang beckoned for Blake. Blake nodded and drew in close. She took her time undressing Yang, starting with her boots. Soon, Yang was just as naked as Blake was. Blake was staring again, and Yang gave her some time to enjoy the view. Then she stepped in closer. She pressed herself into Blake and tenderly kissed her lips. Blake eagerly kissed her back. Yang felt her already substantial desire growing. She had no idea what it was that made Blake so special, but she was, without question, the most enticing lover that Yang had ever had.

Yang walked Blake over to the mattress as they kissed. When their lips finally parted, Yang scooped Blake up in her arms, drawing a delighted gasp from her. Then she gently set her down on the mattress.

Yang began to crawl up onto the mattress herself, but Blake held up a hand.

“What is it?” Yang asked.

“I…I need to be on top,” Blake said.

“I love a woman who knows what she wants,” Yang said. “We can always do what we did last time. I wasn’t kidding when I said it was awesome.”

“Yang, I…” Blake hesitated. “I want to make love to you.”

“Well yeah,” Yang said, but then realization dawned on her. “Oh. Oh! Yeah!”
Blake scooted over to make room on the mattress. Yang climb onto it and lay down next to her. She gave Blake her biggest smile. “I’m all yours, lover,” she said.

Blake gulped, and she hesitantly nodded. She crawled up to Yang and stood on her knees. “I’ve never been with a woman before,” she admitted.

“Yeah you have,” Yang said. “You’ve been with me! Remember? It wasn’t *that* long ago.”


“I’m just trying to help you relax,” Yang said.

“Do I…need to…warm you up?” Blake asked. Her blush returned.

It was Yang’s turn to laugh. “If you’re talking about foreplay, what do you think we’ve been doing for the past ten minutes?” she asked.

“I suppose so,” Blake said.

“Here,” Yang said. She took Blake’s hand and molded it into shape, extending two of Blake’s fingers. Then she slowly guided it down to her center.

“Just take it slow at first,” Yang said. Then she added with a grin, “Until I scream for more.”

“A-alright,” Blake said.

Blake’s fingers started tracing around Yang’s center, making her shudder. The teasing touches were maddeningly delightful. It wasn’t long before Yang wanted to tell Blake to just go for it already, but she was willing to let Blake take things at her own pace.

After some time, Blake’s confidence started to grow. Her fingers finally entered Yang. Blake fumbled about at first, but then she began to settle into a steady rhythm. Yang sighed softly. There was something sweet about Blake’s touch. It was inexperienced, but there was so much care behind it. Yang had all but forgotten how beautiful lovemaking could be when there wasn’t any pretense.

Yang grinned. “Go a little faster,” she said.

Blake increased her tempo. It was enough to really start making Yang’s body respond. She began pumping her hips in time with Blake. The sudden change apparently startled Blake because she almost stopped.

“Whoa! Keep going!” Yang said.

Blake nodded. She quickly found her rhythm again.

“Yeah! That’s it!” Yang said. “Faster!”

Blake must have taken Yang’s words as a challenge because she really picked up her pace. It was almost too fast for Yang at first, but soon she was moaning and thrashing her hips even harder.

“One…” Yang tried to say in between moans. “One…m-more…."

Blake understood. A third finger soon entered Yang, drawing an exquisite groan from her lips. Her eyes squeezed shut.

Suddenly, whether by luck or by instinct, Blake’s fingers curled upward in just the right way,
causing Yang’s head to slam back against the mattress as raw pleasure flooded into her. Her hips pounded against Blake over and over again, but Blake refused to relent. Yang wanted to tell Blake to use her other hand for something as well, but she was too busy shouting her lungs out. Her hands clawed at the mattress, and she felt herself getting close. Then her body went rigid, and she crashed over the edge with an earsplitting scream.

Blake began to withdraw her fingers, but Yang shouted, “Not! Yet!” her hips thrust forward a few more times, and then she collapsed, gasping, onto the mattress.

“O-okay,” Yang said. She felt Blake’s fingers leave her, drawing one last whimper from her lips.

Blake crawled up to Yang. She had the most incredible awestruck look on her face. Yang couldn’t help herself. She grabbed Blake’s hand and suckled each of the fingers that had given her such joy, one at a time.

Blake was speechless, but she eventually managed to say, “Wow.”

“Yeah. Wow,” Yang agreed. “Just wait until I teach you some of my tricks.”

Blake lay on her side next to Yang. “I’m sorry if I wasn’t any good,” she said.

“No, no! That’s what I’m saying!” Yang explained. “You’re a natural.”

“I…” Blake started to protest, but she apparently changed her mind and said, “Thank you. Although I know I could still learn a lot from you.”

Yang grinned. She reached a finger out and started running it over Blake’s breast, teasing her nipple with a flitting touch.

Blake gasped.

“Then what do you say, Blakey?” Yang asked. “Ready for your first lesson?”

Blake was lying on the bare mattress, staring up at the cabin’s ceiling. Her body was exhausted in the most blissful way. Yang was lying next to her, pressed snugly into her side. Blake had never considered herself a cuddler before, but maybe that was because she’d never been given the opportunity. If she wasn’t careful, she was going to get addicted to the sensation of Yang being so close to her. It felt like she’d found a heaven down on Remnant.

Even now, Blake was baffled to find herself lying next to Yang like it was the most natural thing in the world. She readily admitted to herself that she’d been harboring a desire for Yang for some time now, but it hadn’t been until that night they’d escaped from the Schnee mansion that she’d fully understood how deep that desire ran. Something important had changed when she’d seen how desperate Yang had been for her to not leave. Maybe that was what it had taken for her to finally believe that Yang didn’t see her as just some faunus. Or maybe that was what had finally made her see Yang as more than just some human. She didn’t think she liked what either one of those possibilities said about her.

Startling revelations aside, Blake still didn’t know what had compelled her to wander into Yang’s bedroom that night, and she absolutely did not understand why she’d taken things so far so fast. It was true that she’d been without physical companionship for years, but that didn’t seem like a good reason in and of itself. The entire time that Yang had been gone, doing whatever it was she’d left to do, Blake had been tortured by guilt. She’d once accused Yang of wanting to take her pleasure from
her, like so many humans had done to her faunus sisters and brothers in the past. Yet she had been the one to do that very thing to Yang. She couldn’t even describe how relieved she was that Yang hadn’t seen it that way. If she had, Blake didn’t think she would have been able to live with herself.

Blake turned to look at Yang. Yang’s eyes were closed and she had a big, dopey smile on her face. The sight of it made Blake smile too. Looking back, it was painfully obvious that Yang had been flirting with her since the moment they’d first met. Blake had been too prejudiced against her to notice at the time, but now that she had, there was a question on her mind.

“Yang?” Blake quietly asked, not sure if Yang was asleep or not.

“Hmm?” Yang responded, keeping her eyes closed.

“How did you know that I can be attracted to women?” Blake asked.

“Everyone’s attracted to women,” Yang said.

It took Blake a moment to realize that Yang was being completely serious. “That’s…not true,” she said.

Yang finally opened her eyes. “People tell me that all the time, but I don’t think I believe them,” she said. “Either you’re into someone or you’re not. What’s it matter what kind of plumbing they have? You can have fun either way.”

“Yang,” Blake said, chuckling. “It matters to a lot of people.”

“Hmph,” Yang said, pouting. “Well no one I’ve ever seriously asked has turned me down before.”

Blake resisted the urge to ask Yang how many people she was referring to. Yang was obviously experienced. Blake didn’t mind, but she was worried that she wouldn’t ever be able to fully satisfy her.

Blake sat up. “Sorry I was so…particular,” she said. She hadn’t allowed Yang to be on top at all during their lovemaking, and she doubted that was going to change any time soon.

Yang propped her head up with her arm. “That’s alright. It was fun!” she said. “If that’s what you prefer, I can get behind it.”

“It’s not really a matter of preference,” Blake said.

“What’s that mean?” Yang asked, suddenly sounding concerned.

Blake sighed. She wished she hadn’t said anything. But Yang had asked, and she didn’t want to keep secrets from her. “Do you remember what I told you about Adam?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Yang said. “He’s the idiot who attacked Beacon alongside Cinder, right?”

“Yes,” Blake said. “He was also my lover. For…years.”

“Oh! Oh wow,” Yang said. She sat up as well. “He didn’t, uh…? He never…?”

“He never forced himself on me, but he wasn’t good for me all the same,” Blake said. Her hand started to reach up for the left side of her face, but she forced it back down.

Yang scooted closer to Blake. She extended her fingers and began to trace Blake’s scars again. Blake’s eyes fluttered closed. She didn’t understand why Yang touching her like that was soothing.
It should have been anything but.

Yang said, “Adam did this to you, didn’t he.”

Blake’s eyes opened. “Yes,” she whispered.

“Blake, I’m so sorry!” Yang said. She withdrew her fingers and put her arms around Blake.

“I’ve moved on,” Blake said, although she wasn’t sure if that was entirely true. “And I have you now, don’t I?”

“You bet you do, girlfriend,” Yang said.

Blake smiled. “Girlfriend,” she quietly repeated.

“If I ever start to act like Adam did, even a little bit—” Yang began to say.

“You won’t,” Blake interrupted. “You’re different from him in a very important way.”

“How’s that?” Yang asked.

“You’re in love with me,” Blake said.

Yang was silent for a moment. Then she said, “Huh. I guess I am. That explains a few things.”

Blake blinked in surprise. She turned to look directly at Yang and said, “You mean you didn’t know?”


“I…love you too,” Blake said. It was surprisingly difficult for her to get those words out of her mouth, but she didn’t doubt them. As unbelievable as it was, she really did love Yang, a human. She immediately scolded herself for thinking of Yang in those terms. Yang was Yang. That was all that mattered.

Yang smiled. She leaned in and kissed Blake sweetly on her cheek.

Suddenly, a dinging noise came from across the room.

“Is that a scroll?” Blake asked. “It doesn’t sound like mine.”

“It’s mine,” Yang said.

“No one’s ever tried to contact you since we started traveling together,” Blake said. “Who would be sending you a message now?”

“Bet you it’s my sister,” Yang said.

“I didn’t know you had a sister,” Blake said.

“Yeah. Funny story actually,” Yang said, scratching the back of her head. “Weiss’s bodyguard? At the big party? Her name’s Ruby. It turns out she’s my long-lost sister.”

“What!”? Blake exclaimed.

“That’s why I had to leave for a couple of days. I was tracking her down so I could talk to her,” Yang said. “I was going to tell you when I got back, but, well…you know. We got caught up in
other things.”

Blake sat there with her mouth agape. She had no idea how to process this new information. There were too many questions and too many implications for her mind to even get a foothold on it.

“I should probably go read Ruby’s message,” Yang said, but before she could get up, another, different ding sounded.

“That one wasn’t my scroll,” Yang said.

“It was mine,” Blake said. She looked over to where her robes were lying on the floor. A feeling of dread suddenly filled her, overpowering her astonishment at Yang’s news.

Blake got up off the mattress. She walked over to her robes and fished her scroll out of a pocket. Sure enough, there was a message waiting for her.

Unknown:
The Tigress has arrived. Your presence is required. Tonight. –F

Fear silently gripped Blake, twisting her insides into knots. Sienna had made it to Atlas, and she would want answers.

“What is it?” Yang asked.

“Nothing good,” Blake said. “Nothing good at all.”

Chapter End Notes

Even though it’s good and appropriate to acknowledge sexualities other than your own, I’m still very amused by Yang being so pansexual that she can’t imagine anyone not being the same as her. And because I know some of you will ask, Blake in this story is bisexual with a slight preference for men. She’s a two on the Kinsey Scale if you will.

So it took a few chapters for Blake to finally take off her mask. I didn’t originally intend for that plot point to be quite so…enduring, but I can’t say that I’m disappointed.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
One of the Schnee Family’s private airships gracefully parted the clouds in the late morning skies high above northern Atlas. Its hull was gleaming in the sunlight, and the decorative banners hanging from its pylons were fluttering in the air.

Inside the airship’s cabin, Weiss and Ruby were the only passengers. They were sitting in plush, comfortable seats that were across a narrow aisle from one another. Weiss had spent the entire flight watching Ruby as she’d alternated between energetically tapping at her scroll and enjoying the view of Atlas from the air. Presently, Ruby had her nose pressed against her window and was staring out of it with gleeful delight. Quite frankly, Weiss was surprised that Ruby’s scroll had been able to compete for her attention at all. Weiss wasn’t aware of anyone who might have been messaging Ruby, so she had to assume that Ruby had been playing a game on it.

Weiss began drumming her fingers against her armrest. Her and Ruby’s destination today was Creek Basin Mine. It was one of the Schnee Dust Company’s largest mining operations. It was also all but inaccessible by land. There weren’t any roads leading to the mine, and the terrain surrounding it was rough and infested with grimm.

Weiss had initially planned on visiting a mine called Atlas North. It was the very same facility that she’d toured under her father’s guidance some years ago. However, something had occurred to her. Atlas North was only a few miles outside of the city of Atlas proper. It was readily accessible to government regulators, the media, and even independent watchdog groups. Creek Basin Mine’s geographically remote location would make it a much more suitable place for the Company to hide any questionable practices that it might have been engaged in.

Weiss turned her attention back to Ruby. She tried to focus on how much Ruby was enjoying the flight. She hoped it would help distract her from the sense of dread that had been quietly eating away at her since the moment the airship had taken off. She still couldn’t bring herself to believe that the Company’s accusers were right, but she’d feel much better after she’d confirmed that for herself.

“Oh wow!” Ruby said. “Look at the mountains, Weiss!”

Weiss glanced out her window. Down on the ground she spotted twin mountain ranges running side-by-side. They weren’t half as impressive as some of the mountains in the higher latitudes of Mistral, but seen from above, they were still quite majestic.

Weiss said, “We’re getting close. The mine is located down in that valley.”

As if on cue, the airship began to descend. Ruby remained glued to her window. After a few minutes, she said, “I see it!”

Sure enough, Weiss saw the perimeter wall marking the outer edge of the mine come into view. It was dotted with guard towers every few feet, no doubt crewed by armed Schnee Dust Company security guards.

“Why does the mine look like a prison?” Ruby asked.

“We’re far outside the borders of any city,” Weiss explained. “Mines at locations this remote have to be built like fortresses. Otherwise the grimm would easily destroy them.”
“Oh. That makes sense,” Ruby said. Then she excitedly pointed. “Look! There are houses down there!”

“Of course,” Weiss said. “All of the workers and their families live on-site.”

“They live here?” Ruby asked.

“Yes,” Weiss said. “The only other alternative would be for them to fly in and out each day. Disregarding the expense, there would hardly be enough time for them to sleep, much less do anything else before they’d need to fly back to the mine.”

“I guess I’ve never thought about stuff like that,” Ruby said. “It’s kind of neat! They have their own little village down there.”

The airship flew on, descending lower as it went. Weiss caught a glimpse of a landing pad up ahead, next to what she assumed was the mine’s administrative building.

Soon, the airship slowed until it was hovering in the air. Then it gently touched down.

“We’ve arrived,” Weiss said, standing. “Shall we?”

“We shall,” Ruby said, trying to imitate Weiss’s manner of speaking. She stood as well.

Weiss led Ruby to the front of the cabin where the crew was busy extending the boarding ramp. The two of them stopped just long enough for Ruby to collect Crescent Rose, and then they exited the airship.

It was chilly outside. Creek Basin Mine was far enough north that the early spring weather still carried with it the chance of snow, but Weiss and Ruby had come prepared. They were both dressed in jackets. Ruby’s was even brand-new. Weiss had taken her on an emergency shopping trip yesterday after she’d seen the state of Ruby’s old, and now retired, jacket.

A pair of security guards, armed with machine pistols, were standing just off the landing pad. They didn’t look like a welcoming committee, but Weiss couldn’t imagine what else they’d be there to do. She walked right up to them with Ruby in tow and said, “I trust you know who I am?”

The guards didn’t answer, which Weiss found rather perplexing. They just exchanged glances with one another.

Weiss decided to ignore the guard’s rudeness for now. She started to say, “I need to speak with—”

“Miss Schnee! Miss Schnee!” a voice called out, interrupting Weiss.

Weiss looked past the guards and saw a short, thin, and balding man running up. He was wearing a charcoal-gray business suit and a pair of glasses with circular lenses. His suit looked about ten years out of style, but it was nevertheless immaculately clean and pressed.

“Miss Schnee!” the man said as he reached Weiss, huffing and puffing. He clearly wasn’t used to physically exerting himself. He took a moment to catch his breath. Then he said, “My apologies, Miss Schnee. I wasn’t told to expect your arrival today.”

“That is entirely on purpose,” Weiss said. “And you are?”

“Oh, how improper of me! My name is Albert Smoke. I am the overseer of Creek Basin Mine,” the man said. He politely nodded his head.
Weiss was impressed. Even without being briefed ahead of time, Albert had apparently known not to try to shake her hand. That was certainly a point in his favor.

Albert looked at Ruby. “And you, young lady? Might I ask your name?”

“I’m Ruby! Ruby Rose,” Ruby said.

“Judging by that impressive bit of hardware on your back, am I to assume that you are Miss Schnee’s bodyguard?” Albert asked.

Weiss answered for Ruby, “That’s correct. That won’t be a problem, will it?”

“Why of course not,” Albert said. “Our security here is more than adequate for the day-to-day, but it isn’t often that we’re graced with the presence of someone of your import, Miss Schnee. Your personal safety is paramount.”

“I’m glad you understand,” Weiss said.

“I imagine you’ll be wanting to inspect our operation here,” Albert said. “Shall we get started?”

“Yes. Let’s begin with your office,” Weiss said.

“Right this way then,” Albert said, gesturing toward the building behind him, a drab, two-story structure.

Weiss, Albert, and Ruby all started walking. Weiss noticed that the security guards she’d encounter on the landing pad were not following them. They just continued to loiter where they’d been standing. Weiss still had no idea why they were there, but that was a question she could always ask later.

As everyone walked, Albert said, “Surprises aside, I’m pleased you’re here, Miss Schnee. I know our quaint little facility must seem so much less glamorous than the excitement of the Company’s headquarters, but we here are all pleased to do our part.”

“Your facility is anything but little,” Weiss said. “I’ve been looking at the numbers. Your mine is one of the most consistently productive in all of Atlas.”

“If you will permit me to be something of a braggart, this is one of the most productive mines on Remnant,” Albert said. “We take great pride in what we accomplish here.”

“As does the rest of the Company,” Weiss said. “I hope you’re not under the impression that your efforts go unnoticed.”

“Of course not, Miss Schnee,” Albert said. “But it is so rare that I get the chance to boast to someone like yourself.”

“Then I’m happy to have given you the opportunity,” Weiss said. She made a mental note to find time in her schedule to visit the Company’s mines more regularly. Albert Smoke was clearly a valuable employee, and there were doubtlessly more like him. Weiss had learned over the years that a small dose of her personal attention did wonders for employee retention. It was one of the many things that she’d never been able to make Father understand.

Weiss and Albert reached the administrative building. Albert was about to open the door, but he paused. “Miss Schnee, it seems your companion has wandered off,” he said.
Weiss looked to her side. Sure enough, Ruby was gone. Weiss hadn’t even noticed her leave. She was still amazed by Ruby’s ability to quietly slink away when she wanted too. However, Weiss wasn’t all that surprised by Ruby’s sudden disappearance this time. The two of them had agreed ahead of time that Ruby would be more useful today as a second pair of eyes rather than as a bodyguard. This was a secure facility after all, and even if something unexpected happened, Weiss had her dagger tucked away under her jacket. Carrying it with her was becoming a habit of hers.

“Ruby has the tendency to do that,” Weiss said to Albert. “She’ll show up again before too long.”

“Miss Rose must be quite skilled if she can protect your person from a distance,” Albert said.

“You have no idea,” Weiss said.

“Well. Let us continue,” Albert said.

Albert and Weiss walked into the administrative building. It was just as plain on the inside as it had been on the outside. It was clearly a functional space and nothing more. Albert led Weiss up to the second floor. He held open another door for her that had his name on it and then followed her into his office.

Albert’s office was just as austere as the rest of the building. Rows of file cabinets lined two of the walls, and windows looking out over the landing pad filled a third. The final wall was decorated with what looked like framed letters. Weiss noticed that one of them was even signed by her father himself, although it wasn’t addressed to Albert personally.

“Have a seat, if that’s your preference,” Albert said, gesturing to a chair.

“Thank you,” Weiss said, sitting down.

Albert walked over to his desk. There were several folders lying on top of it. He picked them up and carried them over to one of the file cabinets. “Pardon the clutter,” he said as he put them away. “I know it must seem old-fashioned, but I still prefer to work with real paper. However, I assure you that all of my files are stored electronically as well, as per the Company’s operating procedures.”

“I have no doubt,” Weiss said. “But I didn’t come here to discuss your paperwork.”

Albert took a seat behind his desk. “As much as that would please me, bureaucracy being a favorite topic of mine, I didn’t think as much,” he said. “If I may presume, Miss Schnee, I have my suspicions as to the nature of your visit. Rest assured, the prices on foodstuffs being sold to the laborers in the company store have been increased by twenty percent as per your father’s instructions.”

“The…” Weiss said before she did a mental double take.

“There were…objections among the laborers of course,” Albert continued. “But a strategic series of demonstrations have largely silenced any dissent.”

“Demonstrations?” Weiss asked, growing more confused and concerned.

“Forgive my use of euphemisms,” Albert said. “I personally find physical violence distasteful. I much prefer it to be used only as a tool of last resort. Fortunately, when properly employed, it only has a minor impact on the overall fitness of our faunus population.”

Weiss’s mouth hung open. Albert’s statements were so unbelievable, and said so callously, that his words were all but stripped of meaning to her.
“As I am certain you know,” Albert said. “I have filed a formal complaint.”

“I should hope so!” Weiss said, glad that Albert was finally making sense again.

“But I want to make clear that it should not be interpreted as questioning your father’s instructions,” Albert said, unwittingly tossing Weiss back into a sea of confusion. “The fact of the matter is, the faunus laborers are not machines. They require a certain amount of nutritional sustenance to work at maximum efficiency. The new pricing policy…strains that margin somewhat. There will be a drop in production numbers this quarter as a result. I merely filed my complaint so as to document on paper the reason why.”

Weiss was too stunned to really absorb what she was hearing. “Maybe…” she said. “Maybe you should start from the beginning.”

Ruby’s feet were treading along one of the unpaved roads that wound through the mine. It had become painfully clear to her the moment that Weiss and Albert had started talking business that she wasn’t going to be of any use during their conversation. She’d decided to wander off on her own. The way she figured it, if there was something bad going on at the mine, she’d stumble across it sooner or later.

The dirt beneath Ruby’s feet was hard packed and still mostly frozen from the winter just passed, but Ruby suspected that when summer came the slightest bit of rain would turn the path she was walking down into a muddy mess. She didn’t understand why the roads weren’t paved, especially if this mine was really as important as Weiss and Albert seemed to think it was.

The houses that Ruby had seen from the air were looming ahead. She was walking toward them, and she wasn’t alone. One of the security guards from the landing pad had left his post as soon as she’d split off from the group. He’d been following her at a discreet distance ever since. She wasn’t sure why, but so far she’d done him the courtesy of pretending not to notice. If he became a nuisance she could always use her semblance to get away.

Eventually, Ruby reached the first of the houses. They were lined up along both sides of the dirt road like a suburban neighborhood, but they were not what Ruby had been envisioning when she’d seen them from above. She knew that her apartment back in the city wasn’t a great place to live by anyone’s standards, but it was practically a luxury condo compared to the houses she was walking past. Every last one of them looked old and in desperate need of repair.

As Ruby continued to walk past more dilapidated houses, it struck her how quiet it was. There wasn’t another person in sight, save for the security guard shadowing her. The silence made her footsteps seem unnaturally loud.

Soon, Ruby came to a crossroads. She paused. The decaying neighborhood continued in all four directions, but none of the residents seemed to be out and about. Surely they couldn’t all be working in the mine right now.

“Hello?” Ruby called out to no one in particular.

Suddenly, Ruby heard a noise. It didn’t sound like it had come from far away. Ruby jogged in its direction down one of the streets. “Hello?” she repeated.

A face peeked out from around the corner of one of the houses, only to pull back again before Ruby could get a good look.
“Hello? Who’s there?” Ruby asked. She ran up to the corner of the house and cautiously stepped around it into the narrow gap between it and its neighbor.

A young faunus girl was standing there. She couldn’t have been older than six. A pair of sharply pointed dog ears were sitting on top of her head. She had jet-black hair that contrasted with her pale skin, and she was looking at Ruby with the most remarkable blue eyes.

“Hi there!” Ruby said in a friendly tone as she walked up. “I’m Ruby! What’s your name?”

The girl didn’t answer. She just stared at Ruby.

“Are you okay?” Ruby asked. “Is your family around?”

Suddenly, the girl’s ears twitched, and she cocked her head to the side.

“What is it?” Ruby asked.

The girl pointed at something behind Ruby.

Ruby turned around, following the girl’s finger. She didn’t see anything, but when she strained her ears, she thought she could hear a faint sound carried by the wind. She stood there listening, trying to figure out what it was that she was hearing. It almost sounded like someone screaming.

Ruby looked back at the little girl, finally recognizing the fear in her eyes. Ruby’s expression hardened. “Stay here,” she said. “I’m going to go check it out.”

Ruby turned, but she found her path blocked. The security guard who’d been following her was suddenly standing there, right by the front corner of the house.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” the guard said as he walked toward Ruby. “Miss Schnee was requesting your presence back at the administrative building.”

Ruby heard the sound of feet scampering behind her. She glanced over her shoulder in time to see the little girl run off around the back of the house. Ruby turned toward the guard again. Her eyes narrowed. “If Weiss needed me she would have called my scroll,” she said.

“The reception’s not great out here,” the guard said. “Please, come with me. I’ll show you the way back.”

The scream rose up again, louder this time. There was no longer any mistaking what it was. Ruby decided that she didn’t have time to waste with the guard anymore. She dug her feet in, and then she surged forward like a bullet fired from a gun.

“Hey!” the guard said, but he was too late. Ruby slipped past him faster than the eye could follow, leaving a dusting of rose petals in her wake.

Ruby poured on the speed as she homed in on the screaming. She zoomed over the dirt roads until she turned one final corner and stopped dead in her tracks.

Another Schnee Dust Company security guard was there in the middle of the road. He had his back to Ruby and a truncheon in his hand. He was standing over a screaming faunus woman down on the ground and repeatedly lashing out at her with his club.

Ruby didn’t need to see anything more. She sprinted forward and drew her scythe from off her back. Even as Crescent Rose was still unfolding, Ruby slammed it into the guard.
The guard never saw the blow coming, and if he had an aura, it was too weak to offer him any real protection. The second Crescent Rose made contact, he went flying head over heels, arcing through the air. He landed in a crumpled heap on the ground. A pained groan escaped his lips. He didn’t try to get back up.

Ruby looked down at the guard’s victim. A pair of dog ears were perched on top of her head that looked a lot like the little girl’s. In fact, she could have easily been the girl’s mother. She had on coveralls like Ruby would expect a mine worker to wear, and she was tightly clutching a small loaf of bread in her hands.

“Are you okay?!” Ruby asked.

The woman’s eyes were frantic. They rapidly flicked back and forth between Ruby and the downed guard. “What did you do!?” she asked, sounding horrified.

“He was—!” Ruby tried to say.

“Get out of here!” the woman shouted. “Get out of here now! You’ll only make things worse!”

Ruby was completely taken aback. Indecision gripped her. She wanted so badly to help, but it seemed that her help wasn’t welcome.

Rapid footsteps echoed behind Ruby. She spun around and saw the guard who had been following her run up. He put his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath, but he immediately straightened up again when he saw his comrade on the ground.

The woman pointed at Ruby and shouted, “It was her! She did it!”

It was all too much for Ruby. She didn’t know what was going on, but it was clear that she was far, far out of her depth. She took off running, zipping past the standing security guard for the second time in only a handful of minutes. She kept on running as fast as she could toward the administrative building. She had to find Weiss. She had to tell her what she’d witnessed.

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Weiss was standing beside Albert’s desk, looking at a payroll file that she’d requested lying open on it. Even seeing the truth spelled out in the black and white language of accounting wasn’t helping her accept it.

“What does this letter mean?” Weiss asked, pointing at a lowercase “s” next to one of the numbers.

“Script,” Albert said matter-of-factly.

“And what is that?” Weiss asked.

“Oh. My apologies. I assumed you knew,” Albert said. “We pay our laborers in Company-issued script. They in turn use it to buy necessities from the Company-run general store. It aids in reducing our operating costs.”

“They’re not paid in Lien, actual money?” Weiss asked.

“Heavens above, no!” Albert said.

“And…what is this amount?” Weiss asked. The wages listed at the top of the report seemed reasonable from what she knew about a laborer’s typical earnings, but there were huge amounts
“That is the rent we deduct directly from the laborers’ pay,” Albert said. “The Schnee Dust Company owns all of the property here at this facility, including the houses.”

Weiss’s finger slid down the long list of deductions, all the way down to the final amount. Even if the number had been in Lien and not monetarily-worthless script, it was criminally small.

“How…how could you do this?!” Weiss asked.

“Pardon me?” Albert asked.

“This whole operation! It’s practically slavery!” Weiss exclaimed.

“The slaves of old would consider themselves fortunate to be employed here,” Albert said. “Regardless, faunus labor is a resource. And like any resource, it can be exploited wastefully or efficiently. We pride ourselves on our efficiency at Creek Basin Mine.”

“The faunus are people!” Weiss shouted. “They deserve to be treated better than this!”

Albert gave Weiss a perplexed look. He pushed the bridge of his glasses up his nose and said, “I’m sorry, Miss Schnee. May we take a step back for one moment? If asking this question causes me to fail whatever assessment you’re administering, then so be it. What exactly did you come here to do?”

“I came here to prove to myself that my family doesn’t exploit the faunus!” Weiss said.

“Miss Schnee,” Albert said in a consternated tone. “You and your kin are extremely wealthy people. Now forgive me, but it sounds like you’re questioning the very mechanism that provides for you that wealth.”

Albert might as well have punched Weiss in the gut. She was having trouble breathing, and she felt like the walls were closing in around her. It was true. What her sister had said, what the bat-winged faunus had said, what the cat-eared assassin had said, it was all true.

“Don’t you think that you’re not responsible for this as well!” Weiss said, lashing out. “This place is just as much your crime as it is my family’s!”

“I don’t think I appreciate that statement, Miss Schnee,” Albert said. “No letter of any law is being violated here. And I must disagree with my supposed culpability on philosophical grounds.”

“Philosophical grounds!?” Weiss shouted.

“I am but an administrator,” Albert said. “If my instructions had been to take this spot of land and transform it into a faunus paradise, I would have done so to the best of my ability. I have done only what I have been told to do.”

Weiss was about to start absolutely ranting and raving, but she was preempted by a voice echoing from outside. “Weiss!? Weiiiss!?”

Weiss walked over to the window and looked out it. She saw Ruby running up to the building. Even from a distance, Ruby looked distraught.

Weiss scowled. She was ready to leave this place. There was no more point to staying. Her questions had been answered. She glared at Albert as she headed for the door. She said, “I’m leaving, but this isn’t over.”
“For you, Miss Schnee, I suspect not,” Albert said. “Good luck on the road ahead of you. It will be a trying one.”

Weiss had no idea what Albert had meant by that, and she didn’t care to ask. She stormed out of his office and headed for the stairs.

When Weiss reached the ground floor, she heard the sound of someone running down the hallway. Ruby’s voice shouted, “Weiss!”

Ruby suddenly appeared from around a corner. She spotted Weiss instantly and sprinted over to her. “Weiss! I—!”

“We’re done here, Ruby,” Weiss interrupted. “Let’s go.”

“But—!” Ruby tried to say.

“I said we’re done here!” Weiss snarled. “I’ve seen what I need to see. Anything else you can tell me about back on the airship.”

“O-okay,” Ruby said, looking even more worried than she had been.

Weiss began marching out of the administrative building. Anger was burning inside of her. She held on to it, letting its flames grow. Anger was her salve and her refuge. It was the only thing keeping her from falling into utter despair.

Chapter End Notes

Well. Things got kind of heavy in this chapter, didn’t they?

If any of you out there are history nerds, I based the Schnee Dust Company’s modus operandi in this chapter on early 20th century American coal mining towns. They were the closest analogue I could find, and by all accounts, not pleasant places to work or live.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
The night surrounding Blake was an especially dark one. Clouds had rolled in earlier before the sun had gone down, and now they were smothering out the moonlight. Blake was walking down a sidewalk, alone in an old, forgotten corner of Atlas. Tired-looking commercial buildings surrounded her, most of them empty.

Wilt was in its customary place, tucked into Blake’s belt, but her mask was not. She still had it with her, but she was holding it in her hand. After having worn it for so long almost nonstop, she felt exposed and vulnerable without it on. She was doing her best to get used to not wearing it again, but even now she had to fight the impulse to slip it back on over her face. At least she didn’t lack for motivation. Yang had taken every opportunity to express how much she loved seeing her unmasked. Blake didn’t really understand why, but it was obvious that Yang adored her, scars and all.

Blake sighed. Unfortunately, not everything with Yang was perfect. Yang was, as always, a source of new and unforeseen complications. Blake still didn’t know what to make of Weiss’s bodyguard, Ruby was her name, being Yang’s younger sister. Clearly, it wasn’t an issue that was going to go away. Yang had already exchanged several messages with Ruby via her scroll. Blake had purposefully not allowed herself to learn what the sisters were saying to each other for the sake of her own sanity.

Ever since Blake had learned of Yang’s newfound sisterhood, a voice in the back of her head had been nagging her. Despite her best efforts not to, she couldn’t help but wonder if Ruby could somehow be used to get to Weiss. Unfortunately, she knew that Yang would not appreciate her sister being exploited like that, despite the fact that she’d only just recently become aware of their familial connection. The path to Weiss was closed, and Blake understood that she needed to accept that. However, the question remained what she was going to tell Sienna. She supposed the truth would have to suffice, although she would have to omit certain details. The magnitude of the consequences of being in love with Yang were only just now dawning on her. If Sienna found out that she had a human girlfriend, she just might cut her down where she stood.

Blake stopped at a street corner. She took a minute to get her bearings. She turned to her left and spotted her destination ahead, a warehouse that had long since been abandoned by its owner.

Anxiety welled up in Blake, contorting her expression into a worried frown. She took in a deep breath and released it slowly. Then she put her mask on, letting the relative anonymity it provided calm her. When she was ready, she started walking toward the warehouse.

Even as she got close, she didn’t see any signs that the warehouse was occupied. That was good. It meant that Sienna’s guards weren’t being sloppy.

When Blake reached the warehouse, she saw that most of the doors were locked with heavy chains. She wandered around the building until she found a small side entrance. There were three parallel scratch marks that had been etched into the wall next to it. They were the sign that Blake had been looking for. She reached out to open the door, but when she did, a voice said, “Wow. You actually showed.”

Blake’s head snapped in the direction that the voice had come from. She didn’t see anyone there at first, but then Ilia walked up, appearing from out of the darkness as her skin shifted in color from a
jet-black to a more human-like shade of pink.

“Ilia!” Blake said.

“Don’t sound so surprised,” Ilia said. There was a concerned expression on her face that she wasn’t bothering to hide. “Where’s your human friend?” she asked.

Blake resisted the urge to look up into the sky. She said, “You don’t really think that I’d bring Yang to a meeting with Sienna, do you?”

“You brought her to your meeting with me,” Ilia said.

“I suppose I did,” Blake said.

Ilia sighed. “I heard about what happened at the gala,” she said.

“You and all of Atlas,” Blake said. “From what I heard the news wasn’t shy about reporting on it.”

“I know,” Ilia said. “I watched every last minute of it.”

“I didn’t think you’d be interested in the human media,” Blake said.

“I watch it all the time. You’d be surprised how easily you can figure out what they don’t want you to know by what little they do tell you. And I…” Ilia looked away. Her spots turned a bright shade of pink. “I was worried about you. I was so afraid that I was going to hear about how you’d been found and dragged away to jail.”

“I may wish I had been,” Blake said. She glanced over at the warehouse where Sienna was undoubtedly waiting for her. “Was I crazy, Ilia? To think that I could walk into Weiss Schnee’s home and kidnap her right out from under everybody’s noses?”

“Of course you were!” Ilia said, looking at Blake again. Her skin returned to a uniform color. “But you’ve never let that stop you before! It’s one of the things I lo…like about you.”

Blake was silent for a moment. Then she said, “It could have worked. I know it could have. If Vesper hadn’t tried to kill Weiss a few days before that gala, everything would have gone according to plan.”

“Vesper?!” Ilia exclaimed. “Vesper was the one who tried to kill Weiss?!”

“Yes. You didn’t know?” Blake asked. “I thought you said you watched the news.”

“The news never reported who it was! It was really odd. I didn’t even know that one of our White Fang brothers was responsible,” Ilia said. “I guess that explains why Vesper disappeared all of a sudden.”

“If the news never revealed Vesper’s name, then how did Fennec know he was the one who did it?” Blake asked, thinking out loud.

“Fennec?” Ilia echoed. She suddenly looked worried. A blue color briefly tinted her skin.

“What’s wrong?” Blake asked.

“Maybe it’s nothing,” Ilia said. “But I told Fennec about the gala, and that you were planning to strike then.”
“You were the one who told him?” Blake asked.

“He wanted to know!” Ilia said defensively. “It didn’t seem like that big of a deal. I assumed he was in on the plan. And even if he wasn’t, why would he work against you? You two are the High Leader’s top lieutenants!”

Blake didn’t say anything. Pieces of a puzzle were coming together in her head, but she couldn’t see what kind of picture they were making just yet.

“Blake, I’m sorry,” Ilia said. “I didn’t think…. You know I’d never do anything to put you in danger, right?”

“Of course I do,” Blake said. “Don’t worry. Like you said, maybe it’s nothing.”

“Yeah. Maybe,” Ilia said.

“I have to go,” Blake said, turning toward the warehouse. “The High Leader is expecting me.”

“Good luck in there,” Ilia said.

“Thank you,” Blake said. She opened the door and stepped into the warehouse.

Inside, old cargo containers had been stacked up high in the middle of the warehouse’s main floor. There were enough of them sitting side-by-side that they formed a makeshift wall. It took Blake a moment, but she realized that the cargo containers had been used to create an impromptu room within the warehouse itself.

The only opening in the cargo containers that Blake could see was a door-sized gap covered by a curtain. Light was seeping out from the edges of the curtain, and two large men were standing in front of it. They were obviously Sienna’s guards.

Blake walked up to the men. They both looked at her with wary expressions. One of them held out his hand. Blake understood what the guard was asking of her. The rules hadn’t changed just because Sienna had left Mistral. No weapons were allowed in her presence.

Blake slid Wilt out from her belt and handed it over to the guard. He nodded as he took it. Then he tucked Wilt under his arm and lifted up the curtain for Blake.

Blake stepped past the curtain, resigned to meet her fate.

Inside the perimeter of the cargo containers was a reasonably accurate facsimile of Sienna’s throne room. Electric lights had taken the place of the open-flame sconces, but almost everything else was as it should have been. Sienna’s throne had even made the journey from Mistral. It was sitting in the middle of the area, and in front of it was Sienna herself.

The warehouse didn’t have a dais for Sienna to use, but that didn’t diminish the imperiousness of her presence in the least. Her spear was in her hand, and more distressingly, Fennec was standing before her a respectful distance away.

Blake’s nervousness grew, especially now that she was unarmed. She was grateful that her mask was concealing both her expression and the sweat that was starting to bead on her forehead. The last thing she needed right now was to show weakness. She glanced up at the large skylights that were built into the warehouse’s ceiling. When she didn’t see anything there, alarm shot through her. Fortunately, before panic could eat her alive, a golden-brown blur whizzed past the skylight, and a second later, an eagle hopped up to one of the windows and peeked inside.
A tiny smile graced Blake’s lips, hidden by her mask. She felt immensely better knowing that she wouldn’t have to face Sienna and Fennec without at least one pair of friendly eyes watching over her.

“Blake,” Sienna said, her voice carrying surprisingly well in the large, open space. “Come forward.”

Blake walked toward Sienna until she was standing close, but not too close, to Fennec’s side. Fennec’s face was unreadable as always, although Blake thought she saw a hint of smugness seeping into his expression.

Blake bowed to Sienna.

Sienna didn’t immediately say anything more. She simply stared at Blake with a piercing gaze and a look of displeasure on her face. Blake managed to not cower away. The silence grew more and more unbearable by the second, but Blake didn’t dare be the one to break it.

Eventually, Sienna said, “Blake. For years you’ve been my most reliable agent. I could always depend on you to succeed where others would fail. You even saved my life once, and I have never forgotten that. So imagine my surprise when I arrived in Atlas and learned that Weiss Schnee is still beyond my reach.”

“I’m sorry, High Leader,” Blake said. “I did succeed in infiltrating the Schnee mansion, but—”

“I’ve been told what happened,” Sienna interrupted before Blake could continue. “What I want to understand is why. Why, if you were able to get so close, isn’t Weiss Schnee here groveling at my feet!?”

Blake was taken aback by Sienna’s choice of words, but she steadied herself. “I was betrayed,” she said.

“Betrayed?!” Sienna asked. “By who?”

“By one of the human mercenaries who was supposed to assist me,” Blake said.

Fennec finally spoke up. “Surely that is something you should have anticipated,” he said. “If you place your trust in humans you’ll be disappointed every time.”

Sienna said, “A lesson that everyone here should have already learned ten times over. Blake, why did you even stoop so low as to work with humans?”

“Humans have their uses,” Blake said. “And the human I hired did her job admirably. The ones you directed my way, Fennec, were the ones who betrayed me.”

“Fennec,” Sienna said with a sneer. “You failed to mention that you had a hand in this. You enabled humans to interfere with Blake’s mission?”

“If I may, High Leader, we don’t truly know which human is to blame,” Fennec said. “But you are correct. I should have informed you. After the earlier attempt on Weiss Schnee’s life by our misguided brother, Vesper, it became apparent to me that Sister Belladonna would require further assistance to complete her mission. I sought a way to help her, but unfortunately, the only individuals readily available with the skills the situation demanded were human. I had no choice, unlike Sister Belladonna who immediately hired a human mercenary days after concocting her plan.”

Sienna asked, “Is that true, Blake?”
“It is,” Blake admitted.

Fennec said, “I should think it’s obvious that the human you so foolishly recruited is the one to blame. She was privy to your plans from the beginning. She had weeks to plot and scheme how best to foil you.”

“She isn’t at fault here,” Blake said, straining to keep her tone even.

“Are you so sure about that?” Fennec asked.

“I am,” Blake said. Even if it wasn’t clear that Neo and Torchwick were most directly responsible for the fiasco that had occurred at the Schnee mansion, Blake would never believe that Yang would betray her.

“Hmm,” Fennec said. “Well. It is…fortunate at least that you weren’t apprehended by the authorities. But that doesn’t change the fact that you’ve failed the High Leader.”

Blake was certain that Fennec dearly wished she had been arrested. She muttered, “I’m sure Vesper would’ve appreciated having company in jail. If he…” Blake trailed off. Underneath her mask, her mouth opened in shock as a realization struck her like a lightning bolt out of the blue. The puzzle pieces floating around in her head suddenly came together, and she finally saw the whole picture.

Sienna asked, “If he what?”

“High Leader,” Fennec interjected. “No matter what excuses Sister Belladonna has to offer, they are just that, excuses. No explanation can change the fact that she failed. I suggest—”

Sienna held up her hand to silence Fennec. She stared intently at Blake. “If he what?” she asked again.

Blake’s instincts were telling her that she only had one chance to get this right. She took a moment to collect her thoughts. Then she turned to Fennec and asked, “How did you know it was Vesper who attacked Weiss?”

“How could I not?” Fennec responded. “The human media was talking about nothing else.”

“They never mentioned his name,” Blake said.

“Excuse me?” Fennec asked.

“They never mentioned his name,” Blake repeated. “They never even identified him as a member of the White Fang.”

“As convenient as that would be for you, I’m certain you weren’t watching those broadcasts,” Fennec said. “Otherwise I wouldn’t have needed to inform you about the attack.”

“You’re right. I wasn’t,” Blake said. “But Ilia was. We can ask her about them if you’d like. She’s just outside.”

“I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” Fennec said.

“You thought I’d never met Vesper before,” Blake said. She took a step forward, advancing on Fennec. “But I have. There’s no way a man like him could have gotten so close to Weiss without help. He’s too impulsive for his own good.”

“Then perhaps he had help,” Fennec said, taking a step back. “Such speculation is pointless.”
“You set Vesper up,” Blake said, pointing a finger at Fennec. “You picked him to be your patsy because you thought I didn’t know him. You thought I’d have no choice but to believe whatever you told me about him. If he somehow succeeded, you could’ve swooped in and taken credit. And if he didn’t, you had a plausible excuse to ‘help’ me. You hired mercenaries, human mercenaries, specifically to ensure that I would fail!”

Fennec’s calm expression had faded away, and his ears were twitching with agitation. “This is ridiculous,” he said. “I will not tolerate such baseless accusations!”

“Fennec,” Sienna said in a low and dangerous tone. Blake and Fennec turned toward her. Her hand was tightly gripping her spear, her eyes were narrow, and her teeth were bared.

The color drained from Fennec’s face. His hand drifted toward his pocket as he laughed nervously. “High Leader, surely you don’t believe such a fanciful tale,” he said.

“What I believe is that one of you has failed me so completely, either through incompetence or petty ambition, that it’s tantamount to treason,” Sienna said with an absolutely menacing voice. “I will get to the bottom of this, and when I do, the consequences will be dire.”

Blake swallowed hard. She knew that Sienna didn’t make idle threats, and she wasn’t above suspicion yet any more than Fennec was. She might very well be the one to suffer Sienna’s wrath.

Fennec took a few swift steps toward Sienna and said, “High Leader, I beg—!”

A loud crashing sound overhead interrupted Fennec. All eyes in the room turned upward just in time to see an eagle smash through the skylight. The eagle let out an earsplitting screech and swooped straight for Fennec as shards of glass cascaded down around it.

“What!?” Fennec shouted. He backpedaled as the eagle rushed to meet him.

The first strike of the eagle’s talons dragged across Fennec’s aura. The bird flapped it wings hard, hovering in the air as it savagely clawed and pecked at him. He flailed his arms about, trying to defend himself.

Suddenly, the eagle pulled back. It flew away from Fennec at top speed, but it quickly circled back around and rammed into him with its body, knocking him off his feet.

“Agh!” Fennec cried out as he hit the floor. He didn’t even get a second’s reprieve. The eagle landed on him, digging its talons in hard enough that his aura flashed. It furiously pecked at his pocket before he had a chance to collect himself.

The eagle pulled something metallic out of Fennec’s pocket with its beak and tossed the object away from him. Whatever it was, it landed and skidded noisily across the concrete floor until it came to a stop just in front of Sienna’s boot.

The room got deadly quiet. Blake, Sienna, and even Fennec focused on the object sitting less than an inch from Sienna’s feet. It was a dagger.

The quiet was broken when the eagle flapped its wings again. It hopped off of Fennec and flew right up to Blake. Blake reflexively brought up an arm to shield herself as she was buffeted by the air pushed by the large bird’s wings, but then the eagle perched right there on her raised arm, careful not to let its talons scratch her.

Down on the floor, Fennec laughed hysterically. “Have you become a falconer since last we met?” he asked. “How do you keep inventing new ways to torment me?!”
Blake was too stunned to respond. She wasn’t sure she believed what she’d just witnessed, even having seen it with her own eyes.

Fennec pushed himself to his feet. “Mark my words, Belladonna! I will not—!”

“Fennec,” came a growling voice.

Blake and Fennec both turned and saw Sienna absolutely seething with rage.

Fennec stammered, “N-now, High Leader. I—”

Without any warning, Sienna lunged forward with startling speed, her spear in hand. She lashed out at Fennec with the blade of her weapon in a ferocious storm of blows, ripping his aura open in a heartbeat. Then her foot came up, and she kicked him in the nose.

Fennec went crashing to the ground again, blood leaking from his nose. He hit the concrete hard, and with no aura to protect him, he was momentarily knocked senseless.

Blake jumped back in alarm at Sienna’s brutal assault. The eagle perched on her arm had to flap its wings a few times to keep its balance.

Sienna stomped over to Fennec. She planted a foot on his chest and thrust her spear forward so that its tip was just a hair’s breadth from his chin.

“High Leader,” Fennec wheezed. “Please, I beg you.”

“Five years, Fennec!” Sienna shouted. “For five years I trusted you, despite the treachery of your brother! And this is how you repay me?! By bringing a weapon into my sanctum?! How long have you been planning on assassinating me?!”

“Never!” Fennec said. “This is not what you think!”

“Explain yourself, and quickly!” Sienna said.

“The dagger was not for you,” Fennec said. “It was for me. So that I would have the courage to stand in the presence of the woman who killed my brother.”

“Are you really still claiming you serve me loyally?” Sienna hissed. She pushed her boot harder against Fennec’s chest.

“I must!” Fennec said, gasping against the pressure of Sienna’s foot. “With Adam dead, you were the one to lead us! My brother believed in the White Fang above all else! I had to ensure that the cause he gave his life for didn’t fail! That his death would not be in vain! I must serve you. To keep you safe.”

“Safe from what?” Sienna asked.

Fennec lifted a finger and pointed it at Blake. “Her,” he said. “She was the reason that Adam failed. She made him question his convictions. She made his heart soft. I couldn’t let her do the same thing to you.”

Sienna pressed the tip of her spear into the bottom of Fennec’s chin, just hard enough that it drew blood. “Are you the reason Blake failed?” she asked.

Fennec gave Sienna a pained expression, but he said, “Yes.”
“You know how I deal with traitors, Fennec,” Sienna said. She pulled her spear back, ready to strike a killing blow.

“Wait!” Blake said.

Sienna’s head snapped toward Blake. She looked incensed at first, but then she grinned sinisterly. “He’s betrayed you just as much as he has me, Blake,” she said. “His life is in your hands. What will his punishment be?”

Blake sucked in a surprised breath. She wasn’t used to sitting in judgment of someone in such a literal way. She was suddenly very aware of the weight of the eagle perched on her arm.

The first thought that popped into Blake’s head was that Adam would have ordered Fennec’s execution without reservation. There was a certain cold logic to that course of action. It was the only way to ensure that Fennec wouldn’t be a problem any longer. However, Blake remembered her brief conversation with Weiss back at the mansion about there being a better way to change the world than with violence. She wasn’t entirely convinced that Weiss had been right, but she also wasn’t prepared to admit that Weiss Schnee was theoretically a better person than her. And she certainly wasn’t prepared to sentence someone to death in front of Yang.

“Let him go,” Blake said.

Sienna scowled. “After all that he did, you really want to forgive him?” she asked.

“I didn’t say anything about forgiveness,” Blake said. “But if we really want to prove that we’re better than the humans, first we have to prove it to ourselves.”

Sienna scoffed. “There’s too much of your father in you for your own good.” She took a step back, finally releasing Fennec from underneath her foot. “Go,” she said to him. “And if I ever lay eyes on you again, I will kill you.”

Fennec scrambled to his feet. “It’s already happening! She’s doing to you what she did to Adam!” he said. “I will save the White Fang! I will! Whatever it takes!”

The eagle perched on Blake’s arm took off again. It flew straight toward Fennec with a screech.

Fear registered in Fennec’s arm. He ran for the small opening in the cargo containers.

Blake hadn’t even noticed in all the excitement, but the guards who had been standing outside had stepped into Sienna’s makeshift throne room, probably to see if the High Leader was in danger.

Fennec pushed past the guards and vanished beyond the curtain.

The eagle glided around in the air. Then it flapped its wings, climbing higher, and flew up through the broken skylight, back out into the night.

Sienna’s eyes followed the eagle as it left. “Where did you even find that bird?” she asked.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Blake said.

Sienna glanced at her guards. “Leave us,” she said.

Both of the guards bowed and stepped back out of the room.

Sienna walked over to her throne and sat down heavily on it. She pinched her forehead with her index finger and thumb, and she let out a weary breath. “Could you really have succeeded?” she
asked. “Without Fennec’s interference, could you have captured Weiss Schnee?”

“Yes. I could have,” Blake said.

“Fennec, you fool,” Sienna muttered.

The throne room grew silent. Blake waited for Sienna to speak again, but she didn’t say anything more. Eventually, if only to remind Sienna that she was still there, Blake said, “I actually spoke with Weiss briefly. She wasn’t who I expected her to be. We might have actually been able to convince her that she and her family are in the wrong.”

“Now is not the time for your idealism,” Sienna said. “Weiss was never the real target.”

“She wasn’t?” Blake asked, shocked. “Who was!? If…if I may ask, High Leader.”

“Her father of course,” Sienna said. “Jacques Schnee. The proverbial head of the snake.”

“How would kidnapping Weiss have let us get to him?” Blake asked.

“It wouldn’t have. Not directly,” Sienna said. “But we could have used her to torment him for months, years even. Feeding him hope that maybe his daughter would be returned safely, only to snatch it away time and time again. Then he’d finally understand what it’s like to live with fear and uncertainty as your constant companions. And when we were done with him. Well…. Nothing destroys a parent quite like the death of their child.”

A look of abject horror spread across Blake’s face. Fortunately, her mask hid her expression from Sienna. The room seemed to spin as the implications of what she’d almost been a party to sunk in.

When Blake felt like she could speak again without her voice wavering, she asked, “It was all just about revenge then?”

“What else do we have left but revenge,” Sienna said with a resignation that Blake had never heard in her before.

Sienna straightened herself up. “You are dismissed, Blake,” she said. “For now.”

Blake bowed. She turned on her heels and walked away from Sienna, not daring to let any of the disgust or doubt that filled her show.

Chapter End Notes

Have you ever read a story before where a bird tackles someone to the ground? Well now you have! Yang as an eagle is the gift that just keeps on giving!

Those of you reading this on Archive of Our Own may have noticed that I’ve bumped up the estimated chapter count to 32. That should be the correct and final number. Probably anyway. Weiss does like to throw me for a loop with annoying regularity.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Ruby’s head was buried in her scroll as she paced back and forth down a hallway in Weiss’s penthouse. Her fingers were rapidly typing out a message to Yang.

*Me:
Weiss hasn’t said anythin since we got bck. I dont no what 2 do

*Sparrow:
She really didn’t know about the faunus thing?

*Me:
No!! She wouldn’t let stuff lik that happen if she new!! I told u shes a good prson!!

*Sparrow:
Ok sorry. If shes really feeling that bad you just got to be there for her. Its all you can do.

*Me:
Ill try. Talk ltr

Ruby let out a pained sigh. She slid her scroll back into her pocket. During the flight back from Creek Basin Mine, she and Weiss had shared with one another what they’d each seen. Weiss had been furious at first, but she’d quickly gotten quiet. By the time that they’d landed again, Weiss had been walking about like she was in a complete daze. Ruby had followed her to her car and ridden back to her penthouse with her. Weiss hadn’t actually asked Ruby to come home with her, but she hadn’t asked her not to either. In fact, she hadn’t said anything at all; Ruby had been the one who had told Weiss’s driver where to take them.

Ruby walked back into the penthouse’s living room. Despite having her scroll with her, she’d lost track of the time. She knew it was late, and judging by the darkened view out of the penthouse’s windows, the sun had set hours ago.

Weiss was sitting there on the living room sofa. She had a glass in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other. The bottle was mostly empty, despite it having been full when Weiss had taken it out of her wine cabinet. She was staring at it like it was the most fascinating thing in the world.

Ruby walked over to Weiss. There was a second, empty wineglass on the coffee table in front of the sofa. Weiss hadn’t said why she’d retrieved two glasses from her kitchen, but Ruby assumed that the second one was for her. It was the most that Weiss had done to acknowledge her presence since
before they’d landed. Ruby hadn’t partaken of any wine yet. Alcohol wasn’t really her thing, and she figured that she needed to stay sober right now.

At first, Ruby just stood there looking at Weiss, but after a few minutes, she decided that wasn’t doing anyone any good. She sat herself down on the sofa next to Weiss. She wasn’t sure if that was any better, but she had no idea what else to do. She’d never seen Weiss like this before.

Ruby and Weiss continued to sit quietly, but after what felt like an eternity, Weiss said, “How many, I wonder.”

Ruby perked up at finally hearing Weiss’s voice again after the long and agonizing hours of silence. “How many what?” she asked.

Weiss’s eyes were still trained on the wine bottle in her hand, but they were soft and unfocused. “This is a very expensive vintage,” she said. There was a pronounced slur in her speech. She was unquestionably drunk. “I wonder how many faunus suffered so that I could buy it. I wonder how many died.”

“Weiss! You didn’t know!” Ruby said. “You can’t blame yourself.”

“Don’t think that you, Ruby Rose, can tell me what to do,” Weiss said, lifting her eyes away from the bottle. “And just because you didn’t know you were responsible for something doesn’t make you any less responsible.”

“Yeah, but…” Ruby said. Unfortunately, she couldn’t think of a good counterargument.

Weiss raised her glass to her lips and drained the rest of it. Then she said, “I should have known. I don’t have any excuse. But that’s not important. This isn’t about guilt. Well it is. But it isn’t.”

Ruby waited for Weiss to explain what she’d meant by that, but she’d gone quiet again. More than that, she was slouched forward with her eyes glazed over. There was a distinct redness in her face now, and it looked like she was struggling to stay awake.

“Weiss?” Ruby asked.

Weiss shook like she’d been startled. “What?” she asked.

“If it’s not about guilt, what is it about?” Ruby asked.

“I already told you, didn’t I?” Weiss replied. “Responsibility. It’s about responsibility. How do I fix this? I can’t fix this. Where would I even start?”

“Aren’t you the heiress to the whole Schnee company?” Ruby asked. “I think that’s a good start.”

Weiss actually snorted with indignation, something she never would have done sober. “Shows what you know,” she said. “And even if that was enough, what do I do during the years it’ll take before Father abdicates? Do I enjoy my wealth, knowing what it costs? Do I give it all away? What good would that even do? Those faunus would still be at that mine, working like slaves.”

Weiss started to pour herself another glass of wine.

Ruby asked, “Don’t you think you’ve had enough already?”

“No,” Weiss said. “The bottle’s not empty.”

“Fine,” Ruby said. She grabbed the second glass from off the table. “But I’m helping you finish it
Ruby held out her glass for Weiss. It took some obvious concentration on Weiss’s part, but she managed to fill it up without spilling.

“A toast,” Weiss said. “To the bliss of willful ignorance.”

Weiss didn’t bother clinking her glass against Ruby’s. She just took another sizable drink from it.

Ruby took a small sip from her own glass. She was so unaccustomed to alcohol that the wine burned going down her throat like it was hard liquor. She grimaced at the sensation.

Weiss set the now empty bottle down on the table. Then she slumped back on the sofa, displaying none of her usual poise. “Winter was right,” she said. “I must have sounded like the biggest idiot when I yelled at her.”

Ruby still wasn’t completely sure what exactly Weiss and Winter’s argument had been about, but she could guess now that the Schnee Dust Company’s treatment of the faunus had been part of it. “I’m sure Winter would forgive you,” she said.

“How did she even find out?” Weiss asked, ignoring Ruby. “She was fighting a war, not snooping around for Company secrets.”

“I bet she’d tell you if you asked her,” Ruby said. “You said she still tries to talk to you every now and then. Give her a call!”


“Why not?” Ruby asked.

“Because I’m drunk,” Weiss said.

“You don’t—” Ruby started to say.

Weiss interrupted Ruby by leaning heavily into her side. The wine in Weiss’s glass sloshed about, almost splashing out.

“Whoa!” Ruby said. She snatched the glass out of Weiss’s hand. She wasn’t sure how much the sofa they were sitting on cost, but she suspected seeing the amount would make her eyes bug out. She might not have known how to make Weiss feel better, but she decided she could at least save her from having to regret ruining her sofa.

Ruby leaned forward and set her and Weiss’s glasses down on the table, relieved that she didn’t have to drink any more wine. The second she sat back, Weiss’s arms wrapped around her, and Weiss buried her head against her shoulder. Ruby went stiff for a moment. She really wanted to hug Weiss back, but she also didn’t want to disturb her by shifting her position. She settled for reaching over and softly patting Weiss on the head.

Weiss looked up. She stared at Ruby with drunk eyes and a mystified expression. After a minute, she reached over with one hand and tried to push Ruby’s head away, much to Ruby’s confusion.

Weiss said, “Stop. Stop it.”

“Stop what?” Ruby asked, her voice muffled by Weiss’s hand.

“Stop being so beautiful,” Weiss said. She let her hand drop. “Who gave you permission?”
Weiss rested her cheek on Ruby’s shoulder. Ruby caught a whiff of the sickly-sweet smell of wine on Weiss’s breath. It made her glad they weren’t kissing right now.

“I love you, Ruby,” Weiss whispered.

“I…” Ruby said as she reflexively hesitated.

“Ignorance!” Weiss suddenly declared, apropos of nothing.

“Uh…what?” Ruby asked.

“You asked me what it’s about,” Weiss said. “Ignorance. I can’t know what it’s like to be a faunus. How can I fix the problem if I can’t even understand it?”

“Maybe the most important thing is to try,” Ruby said.

“Let’s…” Weiss said. She lifted her head, but she immediately set it back down on Ruby’s shoulder. “Let’s talk about that tomorrow.”


Weiss’s eyes closed. After a few minutes, she asked in a small voice, “Ruby?”

“Yeah?”

“Will you still be here when I wake up?”

“Yeah. I will.”

“That’s…good.”

Ruby sat there. Weiss got very still. Ruby wasn’t sure if she was awake or asleep, but she decided to just let her be. She looked out the window. The moon had come into view. It had always fascinated Ruby how the moon’s broken fragments never drifted away from one another. They might not have been whole, but they weren’t really separate either. It was strangely beautiful. Ruby felt like she could stare at them forever.

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In a very different part of Atlas, the same broken moon was shining through the windows of the cabin that Yang and Blake were using. Yang was standing over in the cabin’s kitchenette, contemplating her scroll. Based on Ruby’s messages, it sounded like Weiss was suffering from a cold, hard dose of reality. Yang readily admitted that she hadn’t known much about the whole faunus plight before she’d started traveling with Blake, but even she’d understood that things weren’t all sunshine and roses for the faunus like Weiss had apparently believed. Yang didn’t feel any sympathy for Weiss, but Ruby obviously did, and Yang wanted to be there to help out her sister in any way that she could.

Yang stuffed her scroll back into her pocket. She crossed her arms and looked over to the cabin’s table and lone chair. Blake was sitting there. Weiss wasn’t the only one who was dealing with a case of disillusionment at the moment. Blake had definitely come away from her meeting with Sienna worse for wear.

Blake’s mask was lying on the table in front of her. She’d been blankly staring at it for a while now. Yang wanted to walk over there and kiss away all of Blake’s troubles, but she knew Blake better.
than that by now. Blake needed time alone to process what she was feeling undisturbed. Only then would she be ready for Yang to give her love and attention. Yang didn’t like having to be patient, but Blake was who she was, and Yang wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Yang couldn’t help but smile as she continued to watch Blake. She still couldn’t believe that she’d needed Blake to point out that she was in love with her. It was blatantly obvious now that she knew. Although maybe the reason she’d missed it was because she hadn’t been looking for it.

Once, what felt like a lifetime ago, Yang had been completely enamored with the idea of being in love. A young, teenaged Yang had thought that it sounded like the most beautiful thing in the world. However, as Yang had grown into adulthood and started to venture out beyond the walls of the Branwen camp, she’d found nothing meaningful in the arms of others beyond a night or two of enjoyable companionship.

Yang had eventually concluded that love—real love, not the physical kind—just wasn’t something that she was capable of. She hadn’t been upset by the realization. She hadn’t even been upset that she wasn’t upset. She’d simply accepted it and moved on.

Now that love had finally found Yang, she knew there were all kinds of questions that she probably should have been asking herself, but she didn’t really care to. She loved Blake, and she was ready to fully embrace what that meant. Everything else was just pointless details.

Blake shifted in her seat. It was a subtle signal to say the least, but Yang understood it all the same. Blake was finally ready for her.

Yang walked over to Blake and hugged her from behind. She leaned forward and rested her head in the crook of Blake’s neck.

Blake was silent for a moment longer, but then she said, “It was supposed to be about making things right. The White Fang was supposed to change the world for the better.”

“I don’t know if I heard everything that, was her name Sienna?” Yang asked. “I don’t know if I heard everything that she said, but it didn’t sound like she really cared about changing the world.”

“No. I don’t think she does anymore,” Blake said, sounding more disappointed than depressed. “Adam. Sienna. Even Fennec was more concerned about getting rid of me than saving the faunus.”

“Good thing he’s out of the picture then,” Yang said.

“I’m not so sure he is,” Blake said, mostly to herself. Then she added, “That was…incredible, by the way. What you did to expose Fennec. How did you even know he was armed?”

Yang lifted her head. She let go of Blake and walked around until she was standing in front of her. “Eagle eyes,” she said with a wink. “They’re not just good for spotting small animals.”

Blake actually chuckled. “You really are magical,” she said.

“In more ways than one,” Yang said, preening.

Blake shook her head, but she was smiling.

“Look, Blake,” Yang said, sounding serious again. She picked up Blake’s mask from off the table and held it out. “This doesn’t have to be who you are. You want to save the faunus? Then go do it! You don’t need the White Fang to make it all legitimate.”
Blake sighed. “It’s not that simple,” she said.

“Why not?” Yang asked.

“It’s…” Blake trailed off, apparently at a loss for words. After thinking about it for a moment, she said, “My father used to be the High Leader of the White Fang.”

“Whoa! Really?” Yang asked. She never would’ve suspected.

“Yes,” Blake said. “Back when it was a peaceful movement.”

“What happened?” Yang asked.

“Peace wasn’t working,” Blake said. “Nothing was working, except violence. Violence is the only thing that’s ever won the faunus an inch of freedom. I guess part of me is afraid that, even now, Sienna’s right.”

“There’s got to be a better way,” Yang said.

“You’re not the first person to say that to me,” Blake muttered. Then she said, “The problem is that we don’t have any other tools at our disposal, the faunus I mean. Political power. Social influence. Wealth. You can’t get them unless you already have them. Not quickly anyway.”

“You’ve really thought about this,” Yang said.

“I’ve had to,” Blake said. “The only other alternative was…to become like Adam.”

Yang set Blake’s mask back down on the table and put her hands on Blake’s shoulders. She looked her directly in the eye and said, “You’re not like Adam. You never will be.”


“Doesn’t matter,” Yang said. “Any guy who thought attacking a huntsmen’s school was a good idea didn’t ask himself the questions that you have. Besides, you’ve got me now. I’m not going to let you do the whole slaughter-of-innocents thing.”

“I guess you wouldn’t,” Blake said.

Suddenly, a ding came from Yang’s pocket.

Blake said, “That must be your sister again.”

“Yeah, but I can check it later,” Yang said. “I’m more worried about you right now.”

“I’m okay, Yang,” Blake said. “You looked concerned when you were messaging her earlier. And I’m not going to go slaughter any innocents just yet.”

It took Yang a moment, but she laughed when she realized that Blake had just made a joke. Blake must not have been feeling so bad after all.

Yang let go of Blake’s shoulders and pulled out her scroll. As expected, a message from Ruby was waiting for her on it.

*Rubes*

*Do u no how 2 fix a hangovr? I thk weiss will have 1 in the morning*
Yang had to resist the urge to snicker when she imagined prim and proper Weiss Schnee acting falling-down drunk. She knew it had to be incredibly insensitive of her given how bad Weiss must have been feeling to get that way, but she couldn’t help but find it funny. She typed out a reply.

*Me:*
*Is she still drinking?*

*Rubes:*
*No shes sleepin*

*Me:*
*Wake her up and make her drink water. Then let her rest.*

*Rubes:*
*Thx*

*Me:*
*Shes really that upset about what you two found?*

*Rubes:*
*Yes. I don’t thk she knows what 2 do. She tld me she wants to fix it but doesnt no how*

Yang was about to send another reply when a thought struck her. She slowly looked up from her scroll and stared at Blake.

“What is it?” Blake asked.

Yang was silent, but her mind was racing forward at top speed, trying to figure out a way to make her idea work without it being a complete disaster. Eventually, she asked Blake, “Do you trust me?”

“Of course,” Blake said.

Without a word of explanation, Yang looked back down at her scroll and sent Ruby another message.

*Me:*
*I have a crazy idea.*

Chapter End Notes

I’m sure some of you were expecting Ruby to get drunk alongside Weiss, but I don’t think that was ever in the cards. It’s probably better for the both of them that Ruby stayed sober anyway.

I’m sorry that I haven’t been as active down in the comments as of late. We’ve been unseasonably busy at work, and it’s eaten up most of my time and energy. Hopefully things will calm down soon. (I say as the holidays are fast approaching, bringing with them a cornucopia of familial obligations.)

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified
of updates.

**Messages from the beginning of the chapter:**
Ruby: Weiss hasn’t said anything since we got back. I don’t know what to do.
Yang: She really didn’t know about the faunus thing?
Ruby: No! She wouldn’t let stuff like that happen if she knew! I told you, she’s a good person!
Yang: Okay, sorry. If she’s really feeling that bad you just got to be there for her. It’s all you can do.
Ruby: I’ll try. Talk later.

**Messages from the end of the chapter:**
Ruby: Do you know how to fix a hangover? I think Weiss will have one in the morning.
Yang: Is she still drinking?
Ruby: No, she’s sleeping.
Yang: Wake her up and make her drink water. Then let her rest.
Ruby: Thanks.
Yang: She’s really that upset about what you two found?
Ruby: Yes. I don’t think she knows what to do. She told me she wants to fix it but doesn’t know how.
Yang: I have a crazy idea.
“Ruby, at some point you’re going to have to tell me where we’re going.” Weiss said.

“You’ll see!” Ruby said with a giggle.

Weiss and Ruby were hiking down a trail that cut through the lightly wooded wilderness surrounding Atlas, and Weiss was growing more perplexed with each passing step. Technically, she and Ruby were still within the city’s borders, but Weiss doubted that anyone came this way very often. She wasn’t even sure how Ruby had known about the trail in the first place.

Weiss had woken up late that morning to three things: a headache, some embarrassing memories of her drunken antics the night before, and an extremely energetic Ruby who was babbling on about something that the two of them were going to do today. Weiss had not been thrilled, but she supposed she should count her blessings. Her headache hadn’t been nearly as bad as she imagined it could have been, and her memories of yesterday night were too hazy to be truly mortifying.

After a quick breakfast, a shower, and a call to Rosalie to clear Weiss’s schedule for the day; Ruby had practically demanded that Weiss summon a car. Ruby had told the driver to take her and Weiss to a grocery store of all places. There they’d purchased everything on a shopping list that Ruby had mysteriously produced on her scroll. The list had included several vegetables, an excessive number of spices, and other odds and ends.

At first, Weiss had assumed that Ruby was planning on cooking something up for her, but Ruby had eventually admitted that she didn’t have the first clue how to do anything more complicated than boil water. When Weiss had pressed her for details as to why then they were buying groceries, the only answer she’d gotten was a laugh and a smile.

Once Ruby and Weiss had finished at the grocery store, Ruby had insisted that Weiss’s poor, bewildered driver drop them off at the edge of the city. It was there that Ruby had found the trail, and she’d been leading Weiss down it for well over an hour now.

It was fortunate that Ruby had at least informed Weiss that they were going to be outside today. Weiss had dressed appropriately. She had a light-blue waistcoat meant for outdoor activities on over her white blouse, and her dark slacks were tucked into a rugged pair of calf-high boots. She also had her dagger in a sheath that was clipped to her belt. She wasn’t expecting trouble, but trouble had developed the unnerving habit of finding her as of late.

Ruby was walking just ahead of Weiss. She’d elected to wear her usual work outfit today, including her flats. She didn’t seem to be bothered by the fact that her shoes weren’t suited for hiking at all, but Weiss was still certain that they would need to be replaced after today. At least the trail wasn’t muddy.

Ruby had her scroll in one hand and a cooler with all the food that she and Weiss had bought in the other. She’s been following directions on her scroll, although Weiss didn’t have the faintest idea where she’d gotten them from. She wanted to question Ruby about them, but by this point she knew that she wasn’t going to get a satisfactory answer.

Weiss glanced up at the sky. It was a clear day out, and the afternoon weather was especially
pleasant. However, between her late start that morning, the shopping, the driving, and the hiking, the sun had already sunk down low enough to touch the treetops. Weiss asked, “Are we almost there, Ruby? It’s going to be dark in an hour or two.”

“Almost!” Ruby said.

Weiss wasn’t sure she liked the game that Ruby was playing, although she had to admit that the mystery had distracted her from the awful truths that she’d learned yesterday. Unfortunately, ignoring them wouldn’t make them go away. Sooner or later, she’d be forced to confront them.

The trail opened up into a clearing ahead. As soon as Ruby and Weiss had reached it, Ruby put her scroll away. “We’re here!” she announced.

Weiss looked around the tiny meadow that she found herself in, expecting something to happen. When nothing did, she asked, “And where is here?”

“It’s…here!” Ruby said. “We just have to wait for a bit. It shouldn’t be long.”

“Ruby,” Weiss said, exasperation filling her voice. “I appreciate that you’re trying to make me feel better, but—”

“Shh!” Ruby said to Weiss. “Do you hear that?”

Weiss listened for a moment. There was indeed a noise rising up off in the distance. It almost sounded like loose bits of metal clanking together.

“I bet that’s them!” Ruby said.

“They?” Weiss asked, but by the time she had, Ruby had already run off. The cooler bounced in Ruby’s hand as she dashed over to the far side of the meadow, toward where the noise was coming from.

Weiss jogged after Ruby. She caught up with her where she’d stopped in front of a leafy shrub. The shrub was obscuring a second trail that led out of the meadow in the opposite direction that she and Ruby had entered it from.

The clinking sound was growing louder, and now Weiss could hear a voice talking over it. “…think this is it up ahead.”

“Ruby, who’s that?” Weiss asked. She thought the voice sounded familiar, but she couldn’t place it. Ruby’s only response was to smile as excitement danced in her eyes.

A second voice joined the first. “You still haven’t explained where we’re going,” it said.

There was a noticeable pause in the conversation. When the first voice spoke again it sounded like it was coming from much closer. “So remember how you said you trust me?”

The second voice said, “How couldn’t I? You’ve only reminded me of that a dozen times today.”

Suddenly, some of the shrub’s leaves were pushed aside, and a pair of women emerged out from behind it. They stopped in their tracks when they saw Weiss and Ruby standing there.

One of the women had a long braid of blonde hair. She was carrying a cast-iron pot that had various cooking implements shoved into it along with a stack of bowls. They must have been what had been making all the noise. The other woman was a faunus with cat ears on her head, a sword tucked into
her belt, and scars covering one half of her face.

The faunus woman’s jaw fell open like she’d gotten the shock of her life. The blonde woman, however, just grinned. “Hiya! Fancy meeting you here,” she said. Hers had been the first voice that Weiss had heard.

“And who are—?” Weiss started to ask, but she cut herself off. The faunus woman’s scars had distracted her for a second, but now she realized that a scant few feet in front of her were the assassins who had attacked her at the gala. The faunus wasn’t wearing a mask this time, but everything else about her was exactly the same.

“You!” Weiss shouted. She scrambled backward in a panic. Her hand fumbled for her dagger, eventually managing to draw it from its sheath.

“Whoa! Whoa!” Ruby said. She stepped in front of Weiss, holding her free hand up in a calming gesture. “It’s okay, Weiss!”

“Okay?! Ruby! They tried to kill us!” Weiss shouted.

“No they didn’t!” Ruby said.

“Yes they did!” Weiss said.

The blonde woman interjected, “No we didn’t. We were just trying to kidnap you.”

“Like that’s so much better!” Weiss said.

“It’s okay, Weiss!” Ruby repeated. She pointed at the blonde woman. “This is Yang. She’s my sister! I promise she’s not going to try to hurt us. Uh…again anyway.”

“You don’t have a sister!” Weiss said.

“Yeah I do!” Ruby said.

“No you don’t!” Weiss insisted. “You specifically told me, and I quote, ‘I’ve always wanted a sister.’”

“Well I guess Yang here is proof that sometimes dreams really do come true,” Ruby said.

Suddenly, the faunus woman said, “Everybody. Stop talking.” Her tone was ostensively calm, but there was a decided edge to it.

The meadow got quiet all of a sudden. Weiss looked at the faunus woman, as did Ruby and Yang. The woman’s hand was gripping the hilt of her sword, although she hadn’t drawn it yet. She looked alarmed, bewildered, and infuriated all at the same time. She turned to her companion and said with a strained voice, “Yang. What is going on here?”

Yang tapped her foot in a nervous manner. “You did say you trusted me,” she mumbled.

“That doesn’t answer my question!” the woman said, her composure finally breaking.

“Uh…” Ruby said, “Maybe we should introduce everyone to each other.”

“Yeah! Good idea!” Yang quickly agreed, undoubtedly eager to escape her conversation with the faunus woman.
“Weiss,” Ruby said. “This is Yang Branwen, my long-lost sister, and that’s Blake…uh….”

“Belladonna,” Yang supplied.

Blake shouted, “Don’t tell them my name!”

Ruby ignored Blake and finished her introduction. “Blake Belladonna.”

“And Blake,” Yang said. “This is Ruby Rose, who I told you about, and…I guess you already know who Weiss is.”

Blake scowled at Yang. But then she turned to look at Weiss. The two of them warily eyed one another. Weiss kept expecting Blake to draw her sword at any moment, but she didn’t. Based on what she’d said, it sounded like she’d been caught just as unaware by this meeting as Weiss had been. Nevertheless, Weiss kept a firm grip on her dagger.

After a full minute of incredibly tense silence, Weiss cautiously lowered her dagger. When Blake lifted her hand off of her sword’s hilt, Weiss reluctantly returned her weapon to its sheath. “Ruby,” she said. “Why are they here? Why are we even here? What’s the point of all of this?”

Blake said, “That’s a very good question.”

“Well,” Ruby said to Weiss. “You told me you couldn’t fix the whole faunus problem because you don’t know what it’s like to be a faunus. Blake’s a faunus. I bet she could tell you all about it!”

Yang looked at Blake. “And you told me that the faunus don’t have any money or influence they can use to make things better for themselves. I’m pretty sure Weiss has those,” she said. She held up her cooking pot. “So Ruby and I thought we’d all talk about it over dinner! You get the ingredients I told you to bring, Sis?”

“Sure did!” Ruby said with a smile, proudly presenting her cooler.

Weiss stared in complete disbelief. She said, “This is utterly ridiculous.”

At almost the same time, Blake said, “You have got to be kidding me.”

Yang grinned. “See!” she said. “You two agree on something already!”

Weiss scoffed and Blake rolled her eyes. They both pretended not to notice each other’s similar reaction.

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The afternoon soon gave way to evening, and the last of the sun’s rays were vanishing behind the horizon. Light from a campfire was dancing across Blake’s face. She was sitting on one of a pair of logs that Ruby had helpfully rolled into place, creating a little campsite in the meadow. Before the daylight had faded, Yang had made everyone go out and gather wood for the fire while she’d prepared the ingredients for dinner, a vegetable stew if Blake wasn’t mistaken.

Blake thought that this hastily-planned get-together with Weiss Schnee was the most audacious stunt she’d ever seen Yang try to pull, and that was not a claim that she would make lightly. She was still trying to decide precisely how angry she should be with Yang. Here Weiss was, practically served up on a silver platter only after Blake had decided that she couldn’t go through with the kidnapping. Blake had no idea what Yang was hoping to accomplish with this ridiculous farce of hers, but she was just curious enough to stay and let things play out.
Yang was busy stirring her stew in the big, cast-iron pot that was sitting on top of the campfire. The pot and all of the other cooking utensils were the fruits of an exhaustive search of the kitchenette in the cabin Yang and Blake were using. Yang had been especially excited about the pot. If Blake had been in a better mood, she might have laughed as she recalled the moment. Yang had danced about like she’d discovered buried treasure.

Ruby was leaning over Yang, watching her sister cook with wide-eyed amazement. Looking at Ruby now, Blake hardly recognized the fierce huntress that she’d briefly fought against at the gala. There was an aura of innocence surrounding her that Blake hadn’t believed existed in the world anymore. She saw now why Yang had instantly accepted her role as Ruby’s big sister. It was just a shame who Ruby worked for.

Blake’s gaze shifted. Weiss was sitting on the other log, opposite the campfire from Blake. She was staring directly at Blake and not even bothering to hide the fact. Blake’s eyes locked with hers, and neither one of them seemed to be in a hurry to look away.

Blake had thought that she’d understood Weiss, but she was having difficulty reconciling her preconceived notions with the woman she was looking at now. Weiss Schnee, the avatar of the Schnee Dust Company, was an easy concept to grasp. Weiss the individual was decidedly not. Blake had gotten her first taste of having to think of Weiss as a real and complex person at the gala. She hadn’t cared for it then, and she certainly didn’t care for it now. The world was complicated enough without her being forced to humanize her demons. Unfortunately, she knew that she couldn’t afford to think in simple absolutes. That was the road that Adam had walked down, and in the end, it had destroyed him.

Blake and Weiss continued to stare at each other. After a few minutes, Weiss’s face scrunched up into a look of consternation. It mirrored how Blake felt. It seemed that Weiss was having just as much trouble figuring out Blake as Blake was her.

Weiss finally looked away. She impatiently asked, “Is dinner ready yet?”

“Don’t get yourself all worked up, Princess,” Yang said. “It’ll be done soon.”

“Excuse me, but I skipped lunch today,” Weiss said. “And don’t call me that! I’m not a princess.”

“Oh. Well I am,” Yang said.

Ruby looked delighted. “Really?” she asked.

“Yup!” Yang said. “My mom is Raven, Bandit Queen of the Branwen Tribe. And I’m first in line to take her place someday.”

Weiss said, “Being the heiress of some outlaw doesn’t make you royalty.”

“You’re just jealous that I’m a princess and you’re not,” Yang said.


Blake shook her head. Sometimes she really envied Yang. It hadn’t been that long since Yang had endured what must have been an emotionally painful encounter with her mother, but she was already able to make jokes about it like it was no big deal.

Ruby asked, “If you’re a princess then how’d you learn to cook? Shouldn’t you have had, like, servants to do that for you?”
Yang chuckled. “We didn’t exactly live in a castle, Ruby. Although I guess our camp did have cooks. Too bad they were terrible. Mom always hated it when I made dinner for everyone. I don’t think she thought it was very princessly of me. But it was the only way I could ever get a decent meal!”

Weiss said, “As fascinating as that is—”

“Hold that thought,” Yang said, lifting her hand to call for silence.

Weiss looked indignant, but she stopped talking.

Yang scooped up some of the stew into her stirring spoon and gave it a taste. “Dinner’s ready!” she said.

Ruby helped Yang serve up four bowls of piping-hot vegetable stew. As soon as everyone was seated with their food, Ruby started wolfing down her dinner like she hadn’t had a bite to eat in days. Yang and Blake started eating as well. Only after everyone else was several spoonfuls into their stew did Weiss finally taste hers.

The meal passed quietly at first, with the sound of spoons clinking against bowls taking the place of conversation. But eventually, Weiss of all people broke the silence. “This is…good,” she admitted. It sounded like she’d been expecting otherwise.

“You know it!” Yang said with a smug look on her face.

Blake’s ears pressed sideways against her head. She noisily set her spoon down in her bowl to get Yang’s attention and asked, “But the question is, why didn’t I know it?”

Yang turned to Blake. Her smug expression faded a little when she saw the look of displeasure on Blake’s face. “I guess it never came up,” she said. “You’re not mad, are you?”

“You drag me away without telling me where we’re going,” Blake started. “You blurt out my name. You expect me to have dinner with a Schnee. And now I find out that all this time we’ve been together we could’ve had real food in our bellies instead of eating out of cans and boxes?”

Yang laughed nervously. “I don’t cook for just anyone you know,” she said, trying to smooth things over.

Blake gave Yang her best glare.

“Okay, okay!” Yang said. “If it makes you feel better, I’ll cook for you whenever you want.”

Blake tried to resist, but a smile worked its way onto her face. The stew Yang had made was easily the best thing that Blake had eaten in a long time. The prospect of getting more meals from Yang was making it difficult for Blake to stay angry.

Yang let out a sigh of relief. She smiled back at Blake. Then, before Blake realized what was happening, Yang leaned in and gave her a quick kiss on the lips.

Ruby gasped excitedly. “Are you two officially girlfriends now?!” she asked.

Blake slowly turned to look at Ruby, trying to hold back her apprehension. It was true that she’d never told Yang to keep their relationship a secret, but she’d thought it had gone without saying. Suddenly, all she could think about was what would happen if Sienna somehow found out. Logically she knew there was little chance that the news could travel from Ruby to Sienna, but she’d
seen stranger things happen.

Yang grinned, oblivious to Blake’s discomfort. “You bet we’re girlfriends!” she said.

Weiss asked, “You two are…dating?”

Ruby said, “It’s not that surprising, is it? I mean you and I are—”

Weiss’s hand clamped over Ruby’s mouth almost faster than Blake could blink. “Ruby!” she hissed. Yang laughed. “Sorry. I already know you’re dating my sister,” she said.

Weiss’s hand fell away from Ruby’s mouth, and her jaw dropped. She turned to Ruby and shouted, “You told her!”

“Well…yeah?” Ruby said. “Yang’s my sister.”

“What part of ‘no one can find out’ didn’t you understand?!” Weiss bellowed.

“Hey!” Yang said sharply. “Relax! It’s not like we’re going to tell anyone, right Blake?”

Blake was silent on the issue until Yang nudged her with her elbow. “Right,” she said. She considered asking Weiss to extend her the same courtesy of secrecy, but she decided it would be safer not to call attention to the fact that her relationship with Yang needed to be kept secret. She almost couldn’t believe that there was a burden that she and Weiss had in common.

“See?” Yang said to Weiss. “Your secret’s safe with us. Princess’s honor!”

“Ugh,” Weiss said, rolling her eyes. She turned back to her dinner.

Everyone continued eating. Ruby was the first to finish her stew. She set her bowl down on the ground and let out a satisfied sound. She looked around the group. Whatever she saw must have displeased her because she frowned. But then an idea flashed in her eyes. “I know!” she said. “Let’s share stories!”

Blake asked, “Stories?”

“Yeah!” Ruby said. “I mean, we’re a huntress, a rebel, an heiress, and a princess, right? There’s got to be all kinds of interesting things we can talk about!”

Weiss muttered, “Please don’t encourage your sister.”

Yang said, “Oh, I’ve got a doozy of a story. It’s about this huntress I fought once in a mansion.”

“Ooo!” Ruby cooed excitedly. But then she said, “Hey, wait. This isn’t about me, is it?”

“Maybe,” Yang said in a playful tone. “It’s not every day that someone throws their shoes at me.”

“She threw her shoes?” Blake asked.

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It was well and truly night by the time that the last of the stew had been eaten. The campfire was burning down low. Much to Blake’s surprise, Ruby’s suggestion that they swap stories had done wonders to put everyone at relative ease. Ruby had even managed to convince Weiss to open up a little. She was presently taking a turn at telling a tale.
Weiss said, “And that’s when she tackled me right out of my chair.”

Yang said, “No way!”

Ruby mumbled, “Why have most of these been about me?”

Blake asked, “You still hired her after that?”

Weiss said, “It wasn’t an easy decision, believe me. But if there’s one thing that Ruby’s good at, it’s making an impression.”

Ruby crossed her arms. “I’m good at more than that,” she said. An impish smile suddenly crossed her lips. “For example, I’m a pretty good kisser. Right Weiss?”

Weiss immediately turned beet red. “Ruby!” she said.

Ruby nuzzled up to Weiss’s side. “That doesn’t sound like you’re saying no,” she teased.

Weiss’s face got even redder, if that was possible, but she didn’t resist when Ruby took her hand.

“So…” Yang said. “Anyone else got a good Ruby story?”

“Oh, okay,” Ruby said. “I think that’s enough stories.”

“Then maybe we should talk about the goliath in the room,” Yang said.

The conversation abruptly died.

Yang looked at Blake and Ruby looked at Weiss. However, neither one of them seemed able to entice their respective girlfriend to talk. Blake, for her part, had no idea where to even begin. Good food and surprisingly tolerable company aside, sitting across from her was a woman who had spent years poisoning the public’s minds and denying her company’s atrocities. Up until yesterday, Blake wouldn’t have even questioned which one of them was in the right; yet she had been the one who had almost unwittingly dragged Weiss away to be tortured and murdered. Blake had seen the evils of the cycle of revenge firsthand. She knew that it did nothing but harm both parties. She’d worked very hard to resist perpetuating it, but she had still ended up being a slave to its design.

“I’m—” Blake started to say to Weiss.

Simultaneously, Weiss said, “You—”

Both Blake and Weiss got quiet again, waiting for the other to speak.


It took Blake a moment. The words she wanted to say to Weiss didn’t come easily to her. But eventually, she forced out, “I’m sorry.”

Weiss looked shocked. “You’re…sorry?” she asked.

“I thought we were kidnapping you so that…. I don’t know what I thought,” Blake said. “All of a sudden people I’ve worked with for years are proving themselves to not be who I thought they were.”

“I know what you mean,” Weiss muttered. She took a deep breath and said, “I haven’t forgotten our conversation at the gala. And…you were right.”
It was Blake’s turn to be shocked. “I never thought I’d hear a Schnee admit to being wrong,” she said.

“You weren’t incorrect in thinking that,” Weiss said. “But I’ve seen now what my family and what my company are guilty of with my own eyes.”

“So what are you going to do about it?” Blake asked.

“I don’t know,” Weiss said.

“You could always quit and walk away,” Blake said, although she wasn’t sure if she was speaking more to Weiss or to herself.

“No,” Weiss said resolutely. “I’m not going to step down.”

“Even knowing what you do?” Blake asked.

“Someone will take my place if I leave,” Weiss said. “I at least might be able to mitigate some of the damage.”

“Are you so sure about that?” Blake asked. “Your job is to spread the Company’s lies.”

“If I leave the Company, nothing happens to help the faunus,” Weiss said. “If I stay…maybe nothing still happens.”

“Very convenient that you choose the nothing that lets you keep your money and power,” Blake said.

“What do you expect from me?” Weiss asked, sounding frustrated. “And what about you? Are you going to leave the White Fang?”

“I…” Blake hesitated. Then she said, “No.”

“Do you know what they’re guilty of?” Weiss asked, anger seeping into her voice. “Do you even want to?”

“I know what the White Fang has done,” Blake said.

“Do you though?” Weiss asked. “When I was a little girl, my parents had to explain to me, more than once, how friends of our family had been murdered by the White Fang! I had to stand by their graves and pretend to be brave! Can you imagine what that does to a child?!”


Weiss’s jaw clenched. Blake could actually hear her teeth grinding together. But eventually, Weiss let out a long breath and said, “Neither one of us is innocent. And as much as you might believe otherwise, I can’t change the world any more than you can.”

Blake didn’t respond. As loathed as she was to admit it, Weiss might have had a point.

Yang spoke up. “So maybe neither one of you can change the world. But what about both of you?” Weiss asked, “What do you mean?”

“Maybe the reason no one’s ever fixed the world is because they haven’t been working the problem from both sides,” Yang said.
Ruby said, “Yeah! And don’t forget about me and Yang either! Think what we could do if we all worked together!”

“What are you two suggesting?” Weiss asked. “That we form some kind of…team?”

“Exactly!” Yang said.

Blake said, “That’s… Would that even work?”

Ruby said, “It couldn’t hurt to try.”

Weiss asked, “What would we, as this supposed team, even do?”

Yang shrugged. “I don’t know,” she said. “I usually just make stuff up as I go.”

“And how is that working for you?” Weiss asked, obviously intending the question to be biting.

“It’s working great!” Yang said. She pointed at Blake. “Have you seen my awesome girlfriend?”

Weiss shook her head with a heavy sigh. “Look,” she said. “You can’t just start a…a revolution on a whim.”

Suddenly, Blake interjected, “Weiss. Do you actually care about the faunus?”

“What do you mean by that?” Weiss asked.

“It’s a simple question,” Blake said. “After everything that’s happened in your life, after what the faunus have done to you, shouldn’t you hate us?”

“The faunus haven’t done anything to me,” Weiss said. “I told you at the gala, I understand the distinction between the White Fang and the faunus as a whole.”

“You’d be amazed how rare that is,” Blake said.

“Perhaps not,” Weiss said.

“Then here’s another question,” Blake said. “Do you want to make this right? Really think about it. You have your family, your company, your reputation, and your career to consider. When you take all of that into account, is the suffering of the faunus really that important to you?”

Weiss glanced at Ruby. She gently set Ruby’s hand aside. Then she stood and said, “Yes. Once, many years ago, I considered becoming a huntress. I didn’t because I thought that I could do more good by utilizing my company’s power and wealth. And I did, or so I thought. Charity events. Fundraisers. Donations of Dust to settlements that vitally needed it. But none of that matters. All of my good deeds are meaningless if they’re predicated on the suffering of the faunus.”

Blake stood as well. She said, “You don’t know this, but I’m a lieutenant for the High Leader of the White Fang herself.”

Weiss looked a little fearful. “You mean Sienna Khan?” she asked.

“Yes,” Blake said. “By all rights, you and I should want to kill each other.”

Blake reached for Wilt. She pulled it out from her belt, still in its sheath, and set it down on the ground. Then she stepped forward, walking past the campfire and right up to Weiss. She said, “Maybe what needs to happen before anything else, is that you and I agree that we can work
together to make the world a better place.”

Blake extended her hand toward Weiss.

Ruby said, “Uh…Weiss doesn’t really—”

Ruby cut herself off when Weiss firmly took Blake’s hand and shook it.

“Agreed,” Weiss said.

“Oh…” Ruby said. “Wow.”

Yang was grinning from ear to ear. She said, “Alright team!”

“Team…” Ruby mused. Then she exclaimed, “Team name!”

Weiss asked, “Excuse me?”

“It’s a thing they do at the academies!” Ruby said. “They give the teams names made up from the teammates’ initials. We need to have one!”

“I don’t really think…” Weiss started to say, but it was too late. Ruby had already picked up a stick and was using it to scratch out different combinations of the letters “R”, “Y”, “W”, and “B” in the dirt.

Yang stood and strolled up to Blake and Weiss. She hooked her arms around both of their shoulders and said, “Now that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Weiss reflexively stiffened up. She wriggled out from under Yang’s arm. “I agreed to work with Blake,” she said. “You I’m not so sure about.”

Blake pulled away from Yang as well. “And I’m still mad at you,” she said.

“Well that’s one more thing you two agree on!” Yang said.

All of a sudden, Ruby shouted, “I got it! I got it! We’re Team RWBY!”

Blake, Yang, and Weiss all glanced down. The firelight dimly illuminated the final combination of letters that Ruby had tried: “RWBY”.

Yang said, “Huh. That’s…."

Blake said, “That’s suspiciously convenient.”

Weiss said, “That’s not how ‘Ruby’ is spelled.”

“Pff,” Ruby said, waving her hand dismissively. “You always have to get a little creative with the spelling. Otherwise It’d never work.”

“Well, I’m convinced,” Yang said. “We’re Team RWBY!”

Weiss groaned. She said, “If we must be, I suppose.”

Everyone looked at Blake. She felt silly, but she halfheartedly said, “Go Team RWBY.”
A while later, the campfire was out, and everyone had packed up. Blake was watching from a short distance away as Yang and Ruby were saying their goodbyes.

Ruby waved to Yang. “We’ll be in touch,” she said.

Yang said, “You’ve got my number. Good luck out there, Sis. I’m proud of you.”

Ruby walked up to Weiss. “Are you ready to go?” she asked.

“Hmph,” Weiss said. Her arms were crossed.

“What’s wrong?” Ruby asked. “You sound angry.”

“That’s because I am,” Weiss said.

“About what?” Ruby asked.

“No number of things,” Weiss said. “But mostly for you telling your sister about our relationship.”

“Yeah, but…!” Ruby started to say. Then she hung her head. “Okay, yeah. I’m sorry. But wasn’t it nice not to have to pretend in front of Yang and Blake?”

“I suppose that was a bit refreshing,” Weiss admitted.

“So do you forgive me?” Ruby asked.

“Don’t think you’re getting off that easily,” Weiss said. She turned in the direction of the trail that she and Ruby had hiked in on. “How are we supposed to find our way back now that it’s night?”

Ruby puffed out her chest. “As your bodyguard, I am always prepared,” she said proudly. She produced a small flashlight from her pocket and turned it on. “Just stick close to me.”

“Do I have a choice?” Weiss asked.

“Nope!” Ruby said. She took Weiss’s hand.

Blake watched as Weiss and Ruby walked away, stumbling around in the dark like humans always did. The glow from Ruby’s flashlight began to fade away. The last bit of her and Weiss’s conversation that Blake caught was Ruby saying, “I didn’t know you’d thought about becoming a huntress.”

Blake sighed. She’d gained a lot of perspective tonight, but it was causing her no end of grief. Her future had already been in question, and now it was more uncertain than ever before. In the course of two days, she’d gotten into an official relationship with a human, lost her faith in the White Fang’s High Leader, and had now literally broken bread with the enemy. She’d foolishly thought that there might have been a way for her to continue her association with the White Fang while still being Yang’s girlfriend, but it was clear now that she’d been deluding herself.

Blake had literally grown up in the White Fang. The prospect of losing what was in a way her family scared her more than she was willing to admit. She had no idea how she was going to survive. Even being on this “Team RWBY” didn’t reassure her much. It remained to be seen if it was anything more than a hollow gesture on Weiss’s part.

Suddenly, Blake’s ears twitched. A sound pulled her out of her morose thoughts. For just a moment
she thought she could hear footsteps that were distinct from Weiss and Ruby’s. She turned in the
direction the sound had come from, but she didn’t see anything out of the ordinary among the bushes
and trees.

Blake strained her ears, but then Yang came walking up, carrying her cooking pot. All of the utensils
were back inside of it, clanking loudly against one another. The ruckus drowned out anything else
that Blake might have been able to hear.

Yang said, “I still don’t know about my sister dating Weiss, but they are cute together.”

Blake turned to Yang, the strange sound momentarily forgotten. In a very real sense, many of the
things that had happened to her recently were Yang’s fault. Blake wanted to be furious with her, but
she couldn’t find it in herself. Yang might have been the catalyst that had sparked all of these sudden
and overwhelming changes in her life, but Yang was also the only person she could count on right
now.

“Blake?” Yang asked. “Are you alright?”

Blake walked up to Yang and threw her arms around her. Yang let go of her cooking pot in surprise.
It crashed to the ground with a mighty clatter. Yang hugged Blake back, and suddenly everything in
Blake’s world was a bit less frightening.

Yang and Blake stood there like that for several minutes. Eventually, Yang asked, “Are you still
mad?”

“A little,” Blake admitted.

“Okay. So maybe this was a bit of a gamble,” Yang said. “But it all worked out.”

“How did you know I wouldn’t just attack Weiss on sight?” Blake asked.

“Because you’re better than that,” Yang said. “I love you, Blake.”

“I love you too,” Blake said. She sighed and stepped out of Yang’s arms. “Let’s go. I’m ready to get
home.”

Yang grinned. “I guess I’m not the only one who thinks of the cabin as home then,” she said.

Blake’s train of thought paused. Yang was right. She had called the cabin home. She hadn’t even
consciously thought about it. “I guess it’s home because you’re there,” she said. The words sounded
incredibly sappy to her ears now that she’d said them out loud, but they were true.

“Aww,” Yang said. “You’re so sweet.”

“Let’s... just go,” Blake said.

Yang bent down and picked up her cooking pot. “Right behind you,” she said. “You’re my eyes out
here, girlfriend.”

Blake took one last glance over her shoulder in an effort to spot whatever it was that she’d heard a
moment ago, but she still didn’t see anything amiss. Maybe it had just been some animal out for its
nightly hunt.

“This way,” Blake said. She started leading Yang down the path for home.
Oy, what a chapter. It might have been as difficult to write as the fight at the gala, and that’s saying something! Well, it’s done, and it’s posted. I hope you all enjoyed it.

So that’s why Weiss decided not to become a huntress in this alternative universe. I honestly had no idea. I find it interesting that the changes in Yang and Ruby’s lives in this story are due to external forces, whereas the changes in Blake and Weiss’s lives are because of decisions they made. That’s one more way they’re more alike than they realize. I’d like to take credit for planning that, but I really can’t.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Unsurrendered Pride

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Weiss slid one last sheet of paper into a file folder sitting on her desk and flipped it closed. She hated to agree with Albert Smoke about anything, but he had been correct on at least one point. There was something satisfying about working with real paper.

Weiss leaned back in her chair. She was alone in her office. It had been almost a week since her clandestine get-together with Ruby’s sister, Yang, and the cat-eared faunus, Blake, and in that time, she had not been idle. The folder lying in front of her was one of many that she’d put together. There was a whole stack of them on her desk, reaching nearly a foot high. They collectively contained a veritable mountain of paperwork that documented the Company’s practices and policies regarding its faunus laborers.

Technically, none of what the Schnee Dust Company had done was illegal—that was another thing that Albert had been correct about—but the spirit of the law had been so grossly violated that Weiss highly doubted the Company would come out ahead if it was taken to court. Even if it did manage to avoid legal repercussions, it certainly wouldn’t weather the court of public opinion with any kind of grace. The public may not have been all that sympathetic toward the faunus, but it was difficult to forgive what amounted to slavery. Weiss found it ironic that after all the years she’d spent building up the Company’s public image, she’d now assembled the means to destroy it.

While Weiss had been plumbing the depths of her company’s dirty secrets, many other things had been weighing on her mind as well. She still didn’t know what to make of Yang or Blake. They were criminals who had literally tried to kidnap her. Yet when she’d met them last week, they had seemed like good people. Weiss supposed she was even in league with them now, although she had no intention of working outside the confines of the law; she still believed in the need for order. More than once, she’d wondered what would ultimately come of this “Team RWBY” and if she even had the right to be a member of it. She’d certainly meant every word that she’d said to Blake back in that meadow, but after having a week to think about it, she’d reached some uncomfortable conclusions about herself.

When it came right down to it, Weiss was forced to admit that she didn’t love the faunus. But she didn’t hate them either. They were just one more demographic by which she categorized the general public, and in a strange way, that made her feel even worse about how her Company exploited them. They were just ordinary men and women in her eyes after all.

Unfortunately, Weiss’s realization about her attitude regarding the faunus had only been the tip of the iceberg for her. She’d always believed she was a philanthropist at heart, but after really thinking about it, she’d finally come to understand that all of the charity work she’d done over the years had been driven by a disappointingly simple motive. It had made her feel good about herself. Weiss had no idea if that meant she was a bad person, or if it meant she was just like everybody else. She knew for a fact that she’d made a positive difference in many people’s lives. Did it really matter that she’d done so for selfish reasons?

Weiss closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. There would be time to ruminate on philosophical conundrums later. She had a monumental day ahead of her. It could very well be the most impactful day of her life. She needed to get started if she didn’t want to fall behind schedule.

Weiss opened her eyes. She picked up the folder in front of her and set it on top of the stack. Then
she reached over and hit the intercom button on her desk.

“Yes, Miss Schnee?” Rosalie’s voice echoed over the intercom speaker.

“Come into my office, please,” Weiss said. “There’s something we need to discuss.”

“I’ll be right there,” Rosalie said.

The intercom clicked off. A moment later, Weiss’s office door opened, and Rosalie walked in. Her eyes immediately found the stack of file folders sitting on Weiss’s desk. “Oh my,” she said. “So that’s why I’ve had to refill the printer so many times this week. Is this the secret project you’ve been working on?”

“It is,” Weiss said. “Perhaps you should take a seat.”

There was a subtle change in Rosalie’s expression. She had obviously guessed that something very serious was about to happen. She sat down in one of the chairs in front of Weiss’s desk.

“I’ve assembled an electronic archive of all these documents,” Weiss said, indicating the stack of folders. She hit a button on her desk’s console. “And I’ve just sent a duplicate of it to you. I’d like you to make a copy of your own and keep it somewhere safe, secret, and off-site.”

Rosalie was quiet for a moment. Then she asked, “Am I supposed to know what’s in this archive?”

“That’s up to you,” Weiss said. “The files pertain to…certain Company activities.”

“Perhaps then it’s best that I don’t peek at them,” Rosalie said.

“Again, that’s up to you,” Weiss said. “But if you do decide to read them, and you feel that you can no longer work for the Company, I’ll understand.”

“Miss Schnee, I don’t work for the Company. I work for you,” Rosalie said. “If you decide that whatever you’ve discovered warrants your resignation then I’ll be next out the door behind you. If not, then I’ll be here, ready to help you in any way I can.”

“Thank you, Rosalie,” Weiss said. She felt some tension that she hadn’t realized she’d been holding onto ease out of her muscles.

“Is there anything else you need?” Rosalie asked.

Weiss was about to tell Rosalie no, but then she realized something. If she was going to involve Rosalie in this, however indirectly, there was something that she had a right to know.

Weiss said, “There is one thing more.”

Rosalie waited patiently for Weiss to elaborate.

Weiss’s lips pressed together. Suddenly, her throat felt dry. Being the Schnee Dust Company’s Director of Public Relations had given her a deep appreciation for the power of words. They were not things to be taken lightly. But if she couldn’t even tell Rosalie what she had to say, then she might as well give up on her plans for today.

Weiss prepared herself for the worst. Then she forced herself to say, “I’m gay! Ruby is my girlfriend. We’ve been dating for a while now.”

“Oh. I see,” Rosalie said calmly.
“You don’t seem surprised,” Weiss said. Then a disturbing thought struck her. “Don’t tell me that you knew!”

“I didn’t know,” Rosalie said. “But I did suspect.”

“How could you have suspected?!” Weiss asked. “I’ve been very careful not to give myself away!”

“That is true,” Rosalie said. “But I’ve seen the way you look at Miss Rose. It’s rather telling. I wasn’t the only one to notice either. A rumor was starting to circulate the office that the two of you might be an item.”

Weiss’s eyebrows shot up in alarm. The thing she’d been most desperate to avoid, besides her family discovering the nature of her relationship with Ruby, was the two of them being the subject of idle gossip.

Rosalie laughed. “I know that expression,” she said. “Don’t worry, Miss Schnee. I made sure to quash that particular rumor right away.”

“You did? How?” Weiss asked. In her experience, trying to suppress a rumor only made it spread faster.

“I may have ‘accidentally’ let slip some information that I’d been holding on to about the marketing director’s extracurricular activities with one of her assistants,” Rosalie said. “It was a much more tantalizing and verifiable bit of gossip. She wasn’t nearly as careful as you were. It was all anyone could talk about for weeks! Behind her back of course.”

Weiss knew that her position of power and her status as a Schnee usually excluded her from the office rumor mill, but even she’d caught whispers of that particular scandal. “You did that?” she asked. “To protect me?”

“Of course, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said. “I didn’t position myself as the go-to source of gossip around here because I enjoy it. Well…not just because I enjoy it. I’m sure you understand how vital it is to keep a firm hand on the flow of information.”

Weiss’s mouth hung open a little. “I had no idea,” she said.

“I don’t like to brag,” Rosalie said, although she was clearly basking in the moment.

Weiss cleared her throat. “Thank you, Rosalie. That will be all,” she said in her most professional manner. “When you get back to your desk, please call Ruby and tell her that I’m ready to see her now.”

“Weiss’s mouth hung open a little. “I had no idea,” she said.

“I don’t like to brag,” Rosalie said, although she was clearly basking in the moment.

Weiss cleared her throat. “Thank you, Rosalie. That will be all,” she said in her most professional manner. “When you get back to your desk, please call Ruby and tell her that I’m ready to see her now.”

“Of course, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie said. She stood and walked out of the office.

Alone again, Weiss let herself relax just a little. She never would’ve imagined that her confession to Rosalie would have gone so smoothly. And it turned out that Rosalie was an even more incredible assistant than she’d thought. Weiss resolved that if she still had her job by the end of the day she would give Rosalie a raise. Her budget for the quarter was already in shambles due to the substantial pay increase that she’d given Ruby. The damage was already done, so there wasn’t any reason not to spend a few Lien more.

It wasn’t long before Ruby walked through Weiss’s door. She’d already been in the building. Weiss had told her first thing that morning that she would need to report to headquarters today.

“Well that was weird,” Ruby said in lieu of a greeting.
“What was?” Weiss asked.

“Rosalie just told me to go on in,” Ruby said. “She usually buzzes you on the intercom first. And I think she was smiling at me more than usual.”

“I told her that we’re dating,” Weiss said.

“Oh,” Ruby said. “Wait…what?! You told her?!”

“It was a bit of a trial run,” Weiss explained.

“A trial run for what?” Ruby asked, throwing up her arms. “I thought you were still mad at me for telling Yang!”

“I am,” Weiss said. “But that whole…incident forced me to consider a few things.”

“Oh yeah?” Ruby asked. “Like what?”

Weiss leaned forward. She looked directly at Ruby and asked, “What do you see the future holding? For us.”

“I…I don’t know,” Ruby said. “I guess I haven’t really thought about it.”

“Well I have. Considering future ramifications is a part of my job,” Weiss said. “I love you, Ruby.”

“Weiss, I…” Ruby trailed off. A distraught expression crossed her face.

Weiss couldn’t say that she was pleased with Ruby’s non-response, but she at least understood where it was coming from given Ruby’s history. She said, “Whatever your feelings are, I think you and I are going to be together for a long time. And the longer this goes on, the more painful it will be to keep it a secret. And the more likely it will become that we’ll be discovered.”

Ruby cast her eyes down. “Yeah,” she said. “You’re probably right.”

“I know I am,” Weiss said. She stood. “So it’s high time we got in front of this problem instead of chasing after it.”

Ruby looked up again. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“I have a plan,” Weiss said.

“You always do,” Ruby said with a fondness in her voice.

“It’s not going to be easy,” Weiss said. “Or pleasant.”

“I don’t care,” Ruby said. “Just tell me what you need me to do.”

Weiss smiled, although a tinge of resignation colored it. She walked over to Ruby and leaned in close. She savored the silly, happy grin that crossed Ruby’s face before quietly kissing her on the lips. Ruby kissed Weiss back without the slightest hesitation, and her arms embraced her.

Weiss drank in all the physical sensations that told her what Ruby was unable to say. She wished this moment could last forever, and perhaps it could, but only in her heart.

Eventually, Weiss broke the kiss. She said to Ruby, “All I need from you right now is for you to stay with me and be brave.”
“I thought you said this wasn’t going to be easy,” Ruby joked. “Don’t forget I’m a huntress. I beat up monsters!”

Weiss turned her head away from Ruby. “Not all monsters are like the grimm,” she said.

Before Ruby could ask any more questions, Weiss pulled out of her arms. She walked over to her desk and picked up the stack of folders, hefting their weight in her arms. “Let’s go,” she said. “There’s somewhere we need to be.”

“Do you want me to carry those for you?” Ruby asked, pointing at the files.

“No,” Weiss said. “This part I need to do myself.”

Weiss walked out of her office, through Rosalie’s office, and out into the hallway. Ruby followed, opening the doors for her as they went. Weiss led Ruby to the elevators, and Ruby hit the call button without Weiss having to ask. When the doors opened, they both stepped inside.

Ruby asked, “What floor?”

“The top,” Weiss said.

Ruby pushed the button for the building’s highest level. The doors closed, and the elevator began to rise.

“What’s on the top floor anyway?” Ruby asked. “I’ve never been up there.”

“My father’s office,” Weiss said.

“Oh. I guess that is where it’d be,” Ruby said. It took a moment, but then realization suddenly dawned on her face. She looked wide-eyed at Weiss with an unspoken question hanging on her lips.

Weiss nodded.

Nothing was said for the rest of the elevator ride.

When the elevator stopped and the doors opened with a ding, Weiss and Ruby stepped out. They walked through the floor’s small lobby and into the antechamber of Jacques’s domain. It was an office that was staffed by his secretary, a woman not much older than Weiss was. Weiss had never liked her, so it gave her great pleasure to see her sit up in alarm when she and Ruby barged in.

“Miss Schnee?” the secretary asked. “I didn’t see you on the calendar today. Your father is—”

Weiss marched right past Jacques’s secretary without saying a word.

“Miss Schnee?” the secretary asked. “Miss Schnee!”

Weiss pushed open the door to her father’s office with her shoulder and let herself inside. An anxious-looking Ruby was practically tiptoeing behind her.

Jacques’s cavernous office was almost devoid of decorations or personal touches. It was meant to impress with its size alone. The somber blue colors filling the room made it seem dark inside even though it was well lit. Jacques himself was present, standing behind his desk in front of a large, floor-mounted holographic display. The display was projecting the image of a man dressed in an expensive-looking suit.

Jacques’s head turned. “Weiss?” he asked. “What’s the meaning of this?”
Weiss’s confidence started slipping away from her. She suddenly felt like she was walking into the lair of a beast, intending to hurl herself into its jaws. But it was too late to back down. She stomped up to her father’s desk with an assertiveness that she didn’t feel and dropped the stack of folders she was carrying onto it. They landed with a resounding thud.

“Father. We need to talk,” Weiss said. “Now.”

Jacques scowled. He glanced at the hologram next to him and said, “Councilor, I’ll have to call you back.”

The man looked incensed. “Now see here—!” he started to say, but he was interrupted by Jacques turning off the projector.

Jacques walked to his chair and sat down in it. He clasped his hands together and set them on his desk. “What’s all this then?” he asked in a perfunctory manner, eyeing the folders.

“Evidence,” Weiss said. “About our company’s abuse of its faunus laborers.”

Jacques sighed wearily. “Figured it out, have you?” he asked. “It took longer than I expected. I’ve been through this song and dance once before with your sister. I’d very much like to skip to the end. And you do know how it ended for Winter.”

“Please,” Weiss scoffed. “We both know that Winter was never going to be your heiress. She never had the desire or the passion for such a life.”

“Fortunately, I have a third option,” Jacques said.

“Whitley? Don’t make me laugh,” Weiss said. “Putting him in charge would destroy this company, and you know it! All he cares about is himself. He’ll drain the company dry lining his own pockets and then laugh as its desiccated husk collapses in on itself. And maybe that wouldn’t matter to you, Father. Except what you truly care about is your legacy. That’s why you married Mother. Because you didn’t know how to start one of your own. You rode on the coattails of the Schnee name all the way to wealth and power, but that’s as far as it’s gone. It was my grandfather who made this company great! And I’m the one who’s taken it to new heights in the public’s eye! I am your heiress, Father! I always have been, and I always will be!”

Jacques was silent for a moment, but then he did something very disconcerting. He smiled. “You know, I’ve had my doubts about you for years,” he said. “But today you’ve finally proven to me that you truly are my daughter. Bravo. It’s just a shame your sympathies are so misplaced. The faunus have done nothing to deserve them.”

“This isn’t about what they’ve done,” Weiss said. “It’s about what we’ve done.”

“In that case it’s about what everyone’s done,” Jacques said. “Don’t delude yourself into thinking that we’re special in that regard. Every major Dust company, every major company period, treats the faunus no better than we do.”

“Even if that’s true, it doesn’t matter,” Weiss said. “We’re a symbol. An icon even. It’s our responsibility to make things better.”

Jacques shook his head. “Let’s cut to the chase,” he said. “What do you want? You’re not quite so excitable as your sister. You wouldn’t storm into my office merely to hurl accusations at me.”

“I don’t want anything, Father,” Weiss said. She reached out and pushed the folders on Jacques’s desk toward him. “It’s just important you know that I know. I have something to tell you.”
“This should be interesting,” Jacques said, sounding mildly amused.

“More than you realize,” Weiss said. She braced herself. It was now or never. “I’m gay.”

The amusement fled Jacques’s face. “What did you say?” he asked.

“I’m gay. I’m a lesbian. I like women, not men,” Weiss said, making sure she was being unequivocally clear. She pointed at Ruby and added, “Ruby here is my girlfriend.”

Ruby laughed nervously and gave Jacques a sheepish wave.

Jacques’s eyes narrowed. “This had better be a joke,” he said in a steely tone.

“I would never joke about something like this, Father,” Weiss said.

“After all this. After all I’ve given you. You would really throw away your career? Your life?! All for some nobody?!” Jacques said, his voice growing louder.

“If that’s what it comes to. But if I were you, I’d consider the consequences of ostracizing me, Father,” Weiss said. She meaningfully glanced at the stack of folders.

“Don’t threaten me, girl!” Jacques bellowed. “I’ve been playing this game far longer than you!”

“Long enough that you don’t realize the rules have changed!” Weiss said. “I’m much better liked by the board of directors than you! They know who’s responsible for this company’s golden image. They’d probably side with you, if it comes down to it, and oust me. But I doubt they’d be on your side after that.”

A nasty scowl crossed Jacques’s face. He stood and pointed at Ruby. “You! You’re responsible for this! I demand to know what you’ve done to my daughter!”

Weiss interposed herself in between Jacques and Ruby. “Leave her out of this!” she said, anger seeping into her voice. “This is between us!”

“Then let’s keep it between us!” Jacques shouted. He visibly reined in his emotions and said, “What is it that you want?”

“It’s quite simple. I want you to leave me alone to do my job! And I want you to leave Ruby alone as well! If you come after either one of us in any way, I’ll show you just how much like you I can be!” Weiss shouted. “I’ll make you long for the days that all you had to worry about was the White Fang!”

The room suddenly got very quiet. Jacques glared at Weiss with the most wrathful look in his eyes. For a moment Weiss actually thought that he was going to physically assault her, but he didn’t do or say anything more.

Weiss took a step back. It was all she could do to keep from shaking, whether from anger or fear, she couldn’t tell. She bowed politely. “That will be all, Father,” she said with perfect cordialness. “I apologize for taking up your valuable time.”

Weiss turned to leave, but then she paused. “Oh. One last thing,” she said, facing Jacques again. “You’re going to lower the price of food sold to our workers back down to a reasonable amount.”

“No. I won’t have to,” Weiss said. “Your new pricing policy is hurting our production numbers. If
you don’t believe me, you can ask Albert Smoke, the overseer at Creek Basin Mine. He’s very good at his job. You’d do well to listen to him. If we fail to hit our growth targets for this quarter, and our stock prices drop, our investors are going to want to know why. I imagine they’ll be very upset to discover that they lost money because you wanted revenge and used our workers as scapegoats.”

Weiss turned toward the door. She said over her shoulder, “You’re going to lower those prices because it’s what’s best for you.”

Weiss started walking away.

Ruby took a few steps backward. She quietly said, “Um, it was…good to see you again? Sir? You have an amazing daughter.” Then she quickly scampered after Weiss.

Weiss marched out of Jacques’s office. She marched past his bewildered secretary. She marched right up to the elevator and hit the call button.

Ruby said, “Weiss, that was…just, wow. But what about those mine workers? Don’t we need to do more?”

“We will,” Weiss said tersely. She had plans, but they were not at the forefront of her mind right now. She was barely holding it together, and she didn’t want to speak for fear that everything inside of her would come pouring out.

After what seemed like an eternity, the elevator doors finally opened. Weiss and Ruby walked inside. Ruby pushed the button to take them back down to the twenty-ninth floor.

The elevator began to descend, but it didn’t get far before Weiss reached out and flicked the emergency stop switch.


Weiss walked backward until she bumped into the elevator’s wall. Her composure finally broke. She began sobbing uncontrollably as all of the fear and anxiety that she’d been tamping down finally burst forth. She’d never openly defied her father before, and she’d never even imagined doing anything that would so fundamentally alter her relationship with him. She’d threatened and embarrassed one of the most powerful men in the world, and somehow she’d been allowed to walk away.

“Weiss!” Ruby said. “Weiss, no! It’s okay! We’re okay!”

Tears were gushing from Weiss’s eyes now. Ruby threw her arms around her. Soon, she was crying as well, and the two of them slowly sunk to the floor.

“Weiss!” Ruby said. “I… I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!” She repeated those words over and over again like a mantra as she and Weiss clung to each other, both of them holding on for dear life.

Chapter End Notes

Weiss sure doesn’t do things halfway, does she?

And now for an important announcement! By this time tomorrow (assuming you’re
reading this the day I posted it) I will be traveling out of town for the holidays. I’m going to have to go on hiatus as I’ll be too busy attending to familial obligations to get much writing done. Updates will resume again in early January. I’ll announce the exact day on my tumblr as soon as I know what it is. I hope all of you have a pleasant December, and I’ll see you again in the new year for the final five chapters of *A Different Shade of RWBY*!

Is it wrong that I’m kind of disappointed this chapter didn’t end on more of a cliff-hanger?

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
A Point Where it Balances

Chapter Notes

I’m back! Finally! I certainly didn’t expect my hiatus to take so long, but life is a thing that happens sometimes. I hope everyone’s New Year is starting off right! A belated thank you to all of you who wished me happy holidays in your comments/reviews.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was an absolutely beautiful morning outside. Yang was thoroughly enjoying herself as she soared through the sky on eagle wings. She was tempted to spend the whole day just flying about, and maybe she would. But she had something important to take care of first.

Yang peered down at the ground. A swiftly flowing stream cut through the field below her. It made for a picturesque sight, but Yang wasn’t there to admire the view. She focused in her keen eyes on the water.

Suddenly, Yang dove, swooping in low. She skimmed the surface of the stream and snatched a fish right out of the water. Then she flapped her wings to gain some altitude again, her prize secure in her talons.

If Yang had been a human at the moment she would’ve been grinning wide. Despite being able to transform into an eagle since before she could remember, it had taken her years to learn how to hunt like one. She’d been so excited way back when on the day she’d finally caught her first prey as a bird. She’d flown all the way back to camp as fast as her wings could carry her so that she could show her mom. It was only after she’d burst into Raven’s tent that she’d realized her mom might not appreciate a dead rat being waved in her face.

Yang angled away from the stream and started flying in the general direction of her and Blake’s cabin. It wasn’t long before she spotted a landmark up ahead that she’d been looking for, a small outcropping of rocks. As she flew past them, she let go of her fish and let it fall to the ground. Then she winged over and glided in low. Her talons touched down, and she turned back into a human.

Yang had been eager enough to start her hunt that morning that she hadn’t bothered getting properly dressed. She was just wearing the undershirt and loose-fitting pants that she’d gone to bed in. Her boots, bracers, and all the rest of her clothes were still back at the cabin. Yang didn’t care though. She didn’t need any of that stuff to catch some breakfast.

Yang started searching for the fish she’d dropped. It didn’t take her long to find it plus two more that she’d caught earlier. She gathered them up and started walking in the direction of home, humming a happy tune to herself as she went.

Of all the things that Yang had hoped to find outside the walls of her tribe’s camp, a domestic life had not been one of them. Yet that was more or less what she’d been living the past week. It had just been her, Blake, and their little cabin. Blake in particular had seemed to really enjoy her temporary freedom from her struggle against society’s ills.

Yang had been worried at first that she’d get bored with such a simple existence, but so far that hadn’t been the case. Blake’s company, the splendor of the relative wilderness surrounding Atlas,
and the excitement of providing food for the both of them had been more than enough. It had really
gotten Yang thinking about her future, which was not something she usually did. Maybe this really
could be her life. She and Blake could live here together. There was more than enough game, fish,
and plants around for them to eat. They could even take the occasional bit of mercenary work when
things got dull to bring in some money. It was simply perfect in Yang’s mind. The only thing missing
was a motorcycle.

Unfortunately, Yang knew that her and Blake’s little cabin vacation would have to come to an end
sooner or later. Either Sienna would summon Blake or Team RWBY would finally take its first steps
toward making the world a better place. Yang definitely wouldn’t mind things getting exciting again,
but for once she was content to let trouble find her rather than vice versa. And maybe, just maybe,
when it calmed down again, she could convince Blake to make their cabin, or someplace like it, a
permanent home.

Yang’s barefoot hike finally brought her back to the cabin. She let herself in through the door. Blake
was nowhere to be seen, but Yang wasn’t worried. Blake was undoubtedly still in bed.

“Blake! I’m home!” Yang called out. She walked over to the kitchenette and set her fish down on the
counter. A large bowl was sitting there as well. It held a collection of wild herbs that Yang had
gathered over the past week. She looked them over, trying to decide how best to season the fish.

Yang still didn’t hear Blake stirring. “Wake up, sleepyhead!” she shouted in the direction of the
bedroom. “You’re going to miss breakfast!”

Yang slid open a cluttered drawer filled with mismatched utensils. She had just started sifting through
it, looking for a knife, when she finally heard the sound of feet shuffling behind her.

Yang turned around. She saw a bleary-eyed Blake come shambling out of the bedroom that the two
of them had been sharing, still dressed in her sleepwear. Now that Blake wasn’t single-mindedly
pursuing a mission for the White Fang, she’d outed herself as very much not a morning person. It
was a good thing that Yang thought Blake looked incredibly cute when she wasn’t fully awake. Of
course, she always thought Blake looked cute.

“Well look who’s finally up,” Yang said. She walked over to Blake and gave her a hug and a quick
peck on the cheek.

“Mmph,” was Blake’s only reply.

“Ready for some breakfast?” Yang asked.

“Mm-hmm,” Blake said.

Yang laughed. “Come on. Over here,” she said. She led Blake over to the cabin’s single chair.

“Have a seat, and I’ll get cooking,” Yang said.

Blake sat down. Her head bobbed lazily as she settled into the chair.

Yang leaned in and kissed Blake on her forehead. “I love you,” she said.

“Love you too,” Blake mumbled. She yawned and stretched, trying to wake herself up.

Yang smiled. She walked over to the window to get one more look at the beautiful day before she
got to cooking. There could be no doubt about it; motorcycle or no, right now life was good.
Suddenly, a low humming sound reached Yang’s ears. It started off quiet, but it rapidly grew louder. Yang’s smile faded. She turned to Blake. “Do you hear that?” she asked.

“What?” Blake asked. She blinked a few times to clear the sleep out of her eyes. Her cat ears perked up. “That’s…. It’s coming from outside. Is there something out there?”

Yang turned back to the window. “No. There’s…” Yang trailed off when she realized she could see something after all. Not so far away, arcing bolts of electricity were dancing about in place like something was keeping them suspended in midair.

Yang leaned in closer to the window to get a better look. As she did, the colors surrounding the floating electricity suddenly shifted. Yang’s eyes shot open wide when she saw a woman that she recognized appear from seemingly out of nowhere. It was Ilia, one of Blake’s White Fang compatriots.

Ilia had swapped out her usual dark outfit for one with a green camouflage pattern on it, but it wasn’t doing anything to conceal her now that her skin had turned an angry shade of red. She had her whip-sword pointed directly at Yang, and it was charged with the power of yellow Dust to the point that its blade was beginning to glow red-hot. There were tears in her eyes, and her face was contorted into an expression of pure rage.

Before Yang could speak, before she could move, the electric energy surged off of Ilia’s blade. There was a deafening boom followed an instant later by a crash as the bolt of electricity smashed through the cabin’s window and slammed into Yang with all the force of a freight train.

Yang was blown off her feet. She was flung backward into the wall behind her, and her body blasted through the aging wood like a cannonball. She continued flying through the air until she hit the ground with enough force that she skipped against it like a stone that had been tossed across a lake. She eventually rolled to a stop, ending up flat on her back.

Yang gasped for breath, coughing a few times. Aura or no, the colossal blow she’d just taken had knocked the wind out of her. Unfortunately, she knew she couldn’t just lay there waiting to recover.

Yang crawled to her feet in time to see Ilia emerge from around the side of the cabin. Her skin was an ordinary shade of pink again, but her anger hadn’t diminished in the least. In fact, seeing Yang standing seemed to enrage Ilia even more. She sneered, and then sprinted for Yang, sword in hand and screaming like a madwoman.

Yang dug her heels in and clenched her bare fists. She was unarmed and on the back foot, but amazingly, her aura had held, if only just. More than that, her semblance was primed to the point that it was screaming to be let loose. There were limits to what it could absorb, but that hadn’t stopped it from gorging itself on Ilia’s massive blast of lightning. Nevertheless, Yang held it back. She recognized the blind rage in Ilia’s eyes for what it was, and she fully intended to teach her a painful lesson about the dangers of losing control.

Ilia came lunging at Yang, sword-first. There wasn’t any electricity dancing on it this time. Yang suspected that Ilia had used up her weapon’s entire reserve of Dust in her opening salvo. At the last moment, Yang lifted her arm to block and stepped to the side. She let Ilia’s blade grind against what was left of her aura, siphoning off energy from her semblance to keep it intact.

Ilia’s momentum continued to carry her forward as her sword glanced off of Yang without doing any real damage. Ilia’s head turned. Yang could tell that she realized her mistake, but it was too late for her to do anything about it. Yang sent her fist flying and finally unleashed her semblance.
An absolute inferno erupted from Yang’s body, and her hair began to glow like the sun itself. She poured every last drop of her semblance’s power into her punch, holding nothing back. Her fist plowed into Ilia. There was a sharp crack as a shock wave ripped through the air. Ilia’s aura flared brilliantly against the sudden impact, but it might as well have not even been there. She was knocked off her feet by the overwhelming force and thrown skyward like a rag doll.

Ilia arced high into the air. She hit the ground some distance away, sending up a spray of dirt. Through the sudden haze, Yang saw Ilia’s aura flicker one last time before it gave out.

Yang’s hair had dimmed considerably, and the flames surrounding her had vanished just as quickly as they’d appeared. Releasing all of her semblance’s energy at once had been a calculated risk, but it had paid off. Yang purposefully let her semblance drop, fighting back the exhaustion it left in its wake. As much as she could use the strength it gave her, there was no way she could maintain both it and her aura right now. It was nothing short of a miracle that her aura was intact at all. Even the smallest strain might push it past its breaking point.

Ilia managed to get partway back up. She rested her weight on her hands, looking disoriented by the monstrous blow she’d just taken.

Yang started walking toward Ilia, doing her best to act like she was just getting warmed up. Ilia noticed her coming and scrambled to her feet. She’d lost her grip on her sword during her flight through the air, but it had landed nearby. She scampered over to it, picked it up, and pointed it at Yang.

“Don’t be stupid,” Yang said, marching right up to Ilia. She stopped close enough to let Ilia know she wasn’t intimidated by her. “You’re just going to get yourself hurt if you keep fighting. What’s your problem with me anyway?”

“You stole Blake from me!” Ilia said.

“I didn’t realize she belonged to you,” Yang said.

“She…she doesn’t! I just…!” Ilia sputtered. Then her mouth clenched shut, and her spots turned a bright pink color like she was blushing.

Yang stared at Ilia for a moment. Then something clicked in her head. “No way,” she said.

“Shut up,” Ilia muttered, confirming Yang’s suspicions.

“You’re in love with Blake,” Yang said.

“Shut up!” Ilia repeated, louder this time.

“Does she even know?” Yang asked.

Ilia’s only response was to grit her teeth.

“Did you ever think about telling her?” Yang asked. “Or did you just plan on following her around like a lovesick schoolgirl?”

“I said shut up!” Ilia bellowed, hatred burning in her eyes. She let out a roar and lunged for Yang.

Yang dropped back into a defensive stance, raising her fists. She couldn’t believe that Ilia was just going to blindly charge her again. She hadn’t thought Ilia was dumb enough to make the same mistake twice. That was fine by Yang though; she was ready to end this.
The moment Ilia was close enough, Yang threw a punch. Ilia instantly ducked and slipped past Yang without so much as a swing of her sword. Yang stumbled off balance, having overcommitted to her punch. Alarm shot through her when she realized that she’d severely underestimated her opponent. Ilia hadn’t made the same mistake twice after all.

The instant Yang recovered, she spun around, only to catch a glimpse of Ilia’s skin turning green. The indistinct blur that was Ilia juked this way and that. She wasn’t completely invisible, but her camouflage made her nigh impossible for Yang to follow.

Ilia’s sword suddenly whipped across Yang’s face. Yang stumbled backward from the sudden attack. She kept her fists up, but now she’d completely lost track of Ilia.

Without warning, a blade slashed across Yang’s back. Yang swung around, throwing a blind punch, but she wasn’t nearly quick enough. Ilia came at her again, and this time, Yang’s aura couldn’t hold.

Light washed over Yang, leaving her vulnerable. Not even a second later, Ilia’s sword wrapped around her ankle. A sudden yank sent Yang toppling face-first to the ground.

Yang rolled herself over, but Ilia pounced on her. Her sword snaked around Yang’s neck, and she pulled hard on it, making Yang’s eyes bug out.

Yang’s hands clawed at her neck as she struggled to breathe. Her vision started going blurry.

“You humans always think you can take whatever you want!” Ilia said, turning a normal color again. “I never should have left Blake alone with you!”

“Hey…lizard-girl,” Yang said with a strained voice. “You…you want…to see…something cool?”

Fresh anger lit up Ilia’s eyes. She pulled even harder on her sword. “Don’t you DARE call me that, you condescending, dimwitted brute!”

Yang had stopped listening to Ilia. She touched the well of magic deep inside of her. Its power filled her body, and suddenly, she transformed into an eagle. Ilia’s sword was no longer constricting Yang’s considerably smaller neck, and the sweet rush of air filled her lungs.

“What!?” Ilia exclaimed.

Yang didn’t waste a second. She battered Ilia with her wings and flailed at her with her talons, scratching her face hard enough to draw blood.

Ilia yelped in pain and scrambled backward.

Yang righted herself. She hopped into the air and took off flying as fast as she could. The moment she’d built up enough speed, she circled back around. Ilia was just getting to her feet when Yang swooped in low and grabbed her by the shoulders, snatching Ilia off the ground as forcefully as she could.

The jolt knocked Ilia’s sword out of her hand. “Agh!” she exclaimed. She started squirming in Yang’s talons. “What’s happening!? Let me go!”

Yang flapped her wings for all that she was worth. Muscles she didn’t have when she was a human were screaming at her in agony. She wasn’t flying as high or as fast as she would have liked, but it was all she could manage.

Ilia was thrashing about now, making things even more difficult for Yang. Yang pushed herself as
hard as she could, squeezed out just a little bit more speed, and then dropped Ilia.

Ilia plummeted toward the ground, hitting it hard. She rolled across the open field, helpless to stop herself. She eventually came to a halt, groaning but still conscious.

Yang landed nearby. As she turned back into a human, an unexpected wave of dizziness hit her. She teetered for a moment but managed to keep herself upright. She was completely exhausted, and a nasty bruise left by Ilia’s sword was encircling her neck, but she wasn’t going to back down now.

On the ground, Ilia stirred. It took her a great deal of effort, but she managed to climb back to her feet. She was battered from her fall and bleeding from where Yang had scratched her, but she still looked defiant.

Yang and Ilia just stood there glaring at each other. They were both breathing heavily and swaying unsteadily on their feet. It was Ilia who made the first move. She took some lumbering steps forward. Then she clenched her fist and delivered a sloppy hook right into the side of Yang’s face.

Yang was too tired to have much of a reaction to being punched. She just balled up her own fist and uppercut Ilia in her jaw with as much oomph as she could muster.

Ilia wobbled for a moment. When she recovered, she punched Yang again, not as hard this time.

Yang lifted her fist. But suddenly, a voice called out, “Stop it! Both of you!”

Yang wearily turned her head. She saw Blake running up.

Ilia’s expression softened. “Blake?” she practically whispered. Tears began trickling out of the corners of her eyes.

Blake finally caught up to Yang and Ilia. She asked, “Ilia, what are you doing here?!”

“You’re not wearing your mask,” Ilia said.

“That’s not what’s important right now,” Blake said.

“You took your mask off for her,” Ilia said. She tried to take a step back, but her legs gave out and she fell into a sitting position. Tears were freely flowing down her cheeks now. “For her, but not for me.”

“Ilia!” Blake said. She rushed over to her. “Everything was fine! You…you didn’t need to come here!”

“But…you…I…” Ilia stammered. She couldn’t control herself any longer. She began violently sobbing.

“Ilia…” Blake said, sounding like she might start crying herself. She sat down beside Ilia and cradled her in her arms.

Yang looked on as Blake tried to comfort Ilia. She sighed heavily. Her body was aching, and now that she wasn’t in a fight for her life, her stomach was growling loudly at her. She really wished Ilia had waited until after breakfast to show up.

Once Ilia had calmed down somewhat, she, Yang, and Blake had all gone back to the cabin, such as it was with a window blown out and a Yang-sized hole in one of the walls. Ilia was sitting in the
chair, staring at her hands in her lap. Blake was standing next to her, looking on worriedly, and Yang was watching them both from the kitchenette.

Blake had known the fantasy she’d been living the past week couldn’t last forever. Still, she hadn’t expected it to end quite so dramatically. She supposed that was the price she’d paid for deluding herself into thinking that there wouldn’t be consequences for essentially betraying the White Fang. Even now she still didn’t think of herself as a traitor, but she doubted that her White Fang brothers and sisters would see it that way.

Blake was at least grateful that she’d managed to catch up to Yang and Ilia in time. She’d been terrified that one of them would seriously injure the other if left to their own devices.

Ilia glanced up at Blake. Dried blood was sticking to her face, but at least she’d stopped bleeding. She’d been quiet ever since returning to the cabin, but she finally said, “Blake, if the High Leader finds out about this, she’ll kill you herself.”

“Are you going to tell her?” Blake asked.

Ilia’s lips pressed together. She didn’t answer.

Blake wasn’t sure how to take Ilia’s non-response. She asked, “Did Sienna send you looking for me? Is that why you’re here?”

“No,” Ilia said. “That night at the warehouse. Fennec came tearing out of there like his ears were on fire. I stopped him to find out what was wrong. All he told me was that I needed to keep a close eye on you. That you were plotting something. Then, a few minutes later, one of the guards came out and summoned me into the High Leader’s chamber. As soon as I got there, the High Leader told me I need to report to her immediately if I ever catch sight of Fennec again. What on Remnant happened in there, Blake?”

“We exposed Fennec as a traitor,” Blake said.

“We?” Ilia asked.

Blake glanced at Yang, silently wondering how much they should tell Ilia. Yang just shrugged.

Blake said to Ilia, “It would take too long to explain. But you still haven’t answered my question. Why are you here?”

“I figured Fennec might be plotting against you,” Ilia said. “I was worried. So I decided to track you down. It wasn’t easy, but about a week ago I finally found this cabin. You weren’t here, but I was able to follow your trail into the woods. And there you were. Talking to Weiss Schnee.”

Yang suddenly interjected, “You saw that?!”

“Not all of it,” Ilia said. “But enough.”

Blake frowned. “It must have been your footsteps that I heard,” she said.

“Footsteps?” Yang asked.

Before Blake could explain, Ilia said, “Tell me this is all part of your plan, Blake! Tell me you’re earning Schnee’s trust so you can kidnap her later.”

“I…. I’ve learned things recently,” Blake said. “I can’t trust Sienna to do the right thing anymore.
The meeting with Weiss wasn’t my idea, but I think…I think she might hold the key to actually accomplishing some good in this world.”

Ilia looked devastated. “You say Fennec’s a traitor,” she muttered. “Fennec says you’re up to something. The High Leader says Fennec needs to be watched. You say you don’t trust her anymore. How am I supposed to pick a side?”

“I’m sorry, Ilia,” Blake said. “But you know me. You know I wouldn’t be doing any of this unless I thought it was right.”

Ilia laughed bitterly. “I bet Fennec thinks he’s doing the right thing too,” she said.

“I’m sorry,” Blake repeated. A serious expression crossed her face. “If you’re going to report all of this to Sienna….”

“I’m not going to tell her,” Ilia said. “Even though I should.”

“Thank you,” Blake said.

“Don’t,” Ilia said. “Whatever you do, don’t thank me.”

Yang spoke up. “It’s been a few days since we saw Weiss. You haven’t been following us this whole time, have you?” she asked in an accusing tone.

“Yang…” Blake said. She really didn’t want to antagonize Ilia any further.

“It’s okay, Blake,” Ilia said. “I spent most of last week gathering information, trying to make sense of what was happening. Eventually I decided the only way I was going to get answers was by asking you directly. I figured I’d start looking for you here. But what do I see when I arrive? You exchanging I-love-you’s with a human.”

Yang rolled her eyes.

“Ilia,” Blake said. “I understand that—”

“No. You don’t understand at all!” Ilia said. She looked like she was about to start crying again.


Blake was perplexed. She glanced at Yang. Then she looked back at Ilia. “Tell me what?” she asked.

“I…” Ilia stammered. “I love you, Blake.”

Ilia’s confession completely blindsided Blake. Her mouth fell open. She’d had no idea.

“All those years you were with Adam…” Ilia said. “I never once thought…. You were straight! But now you’re with…her.”

“Ilia…I…” Blake stammered.

“I guess I was never good enough for you,” Ilia said.

“Ilia, that’s not true!” Blake exclaimed.

Ilia stood. She walked over to the broken window and looked out of it. She let out a long and weary
sigh. “I should go,” she said.

“Ilia, please,” Blake said.

“It’s not what you think,” Ilia said. “I’ve heard rumors. Fennec’s up to something. Something big. I don’t know what yet, but I’m going to find out. For you.”

“Ilia,” Blake said. She wanted so badly to soothe Ilia’s hurt, but she didn’t have the slightest idea how. “I may not feel the same way about you that you do about me, but I’ll always care for you.”

Ilia turned back around to face Blake. A single tear rolled down her cheek. “That may be the cruelest thing anyone’s ever said to me.”

Ilia’s skin shifted to a green color. She slipped out of the cabin through the window and was quickly lost to sight amongst the grass and bushes.

Blake was absolutely forlorn. She wanted to believe that if Ilia had confessed to her years ago things would’ve been different, but she couldn’t convince herself of that. It was rare that she found women appealing in such a way. Ilia had been one of her truest friends for years, but she was never going to be anything more than that.

Yang suddenly walked up behind Blake. She wrapped her arms around her. Blake leaned into Yang and let herself be comforted by Yang’s embrace. After what she’d just learned it seemed selfish, but she wasn’t strong enough to deny herself something that she so desperately needed right now.

“It’s not your fault,” Yang said, seeming to sense what Blake was thinking. “You know that no one can help how they feel.”

“Maybe,” Blake said. She stood up straight again and turned around in Yang’s arms so that she could look into her eyes.

Yang smiled comfortably. The simple gesture managed to cheer Blake up a little bit. She leaned forward and gently kissed Yang before pulling out of her arms.

Blake said, “We’ve got to do something about Fennec.”

“I’d love to take that jerk down,” Yang said. “But we don’t know where he is or what he’s up to.”

“Ilia will find out sooner or later,” Blake said. “After all, she managed to find us, even way out here.”

“Yeah, but…” Yang said. An idea flashed across her face. “Maybe we don’t have to just wait around in the meantime.”

“What do you mean?” Blake asked.

“We do know someone with a lot of resources at her disposal,” Yang said. She reached into her pocket and pulled out her scroll. “I think it’s time for Team RWBY to start saving the world.”

Chapter End Notes

Ow. My feelings. I understand your pain, Ilia. I sure hope the next chapter will be
happier. I mean, I already know if it will be or not, but don’t expect me to spoil it for you.

I have a quick announcement about the update schedule for the final chapters. First of all, I’m not going on hiatus again. I’ve had more than enough of those, thank you. That being said, there are some long and challenging chapters ahead of me, so don’t expect them to come quite as quickly. My best guess (subject to change) is that it will take about eight to ten days per chapter instead of the usual five or six. Rest assured, they will be posted in due time!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
“I sure didn’t expect us to come here again so soon. You know, after what happened yesterday,” Ruby said to Weiss as she followed her down a hallway in the Schnee mansion. “We’re not going to run into your dad, are we?”

“No, he has an all-day meeting with some important investors,” Weiss said. “And even if he didn’t, I have just as much right to be here as he does.”

“What are we doing here anyway?” Ruby asked. It was really odd for Weiss to not be hard at work on a weekday like today.

“That will just have to remain a mystery for now,” Weiss said. “Turnabout is fair play after all.”

Ruby giggled. “Are you still mad about that whole dinner-date-with-you-know-who thing?” she asked.

“I suppose it’s been long enough that I should forgive you for that,” Weiss said. “But I hardly think it counted as a date.”

“I guess not,” Ruby said. “We probably should go on a real date sooner or later. Since we’re girlfriends and all.”

Weiss didn’t immediately say anything more.

It took Ruby a moment, but the significance behind Weiss’s lack of a response suddenly dawned on her. “Wait…” she said. “Is that what we’re doing here?”

Weiss picked up her pace slightly, keeping her back to Ruby.

Ruby’s eyes lit up. “It is!” she said, prancing around to Weiss’s front.

Weiss stopped walking. She gave Ruby a consternated look. “It might not be,” she said.

“I can’t believe you’re really taking time off of work for me!” Ruby said.

Weiss put her hands on her hips. “It wouldn’t be the first time!” she said. “Besides. I spent a whole week investigating my company’s deepest, darkest secrets all while faithfully performing my duties as the Director of Public Relations. I think I’ve earned at least one day’s vacation.”

“You sure have,” Ruby said. “But don’t we, you know, need to be doing something about the faunus thing?”

“We will,” Weiss said. “But the abuse of the faunus isn’t the kind of problem I can just magically solve with a wave of my hand. It will take years of work.”

“Yeah. You’re probably right,” Ruby said, although she was a little disappointed. After yesterday’s confrontation between Weiss and her dad, Ruby had felt like there was nothing the two of them couldn’t do. She’d imagined herself and Weiss barging into Albert Smoke’s office up at Creek Basin Mine and freeing the faunus workers there in a suitably dramatic fashion. It was really annoying sometimes that life didn’t work like a storybook.
Weiss took Ruby by the hand. “I promise you, I will do everything in my power to make things better for the faunus,” she said.

“I know,” Ruby said with a smile.

“Come. This way,” Weiss said. She started walking again, Ruby’s hand still in hers. “There’s something I want to show you.”

Ruby was surprised that Weiss was so openly holding hands with her. Weiss usually shied away from such displays of affection. Granted, the two of them weren’t exactly in public, but the gesture still felt significant. Ever since this morning, there had been something different about Weiss. Ruby couldn’t quite put her finger on it, but she liked it.

Eventually, Weiss stopped in front of a large pair of double doors. She let go of Ruby’s hand and took a hold of one of the doorknobs. However, she didn’t turn it just yet. Instead, she smiled playfully at Ruby. It was not an expression that Ruby was used to seeing from her.

“Is this where we’re going to have our date?” Ruby asked.

“Perhaps. Assuming we are going on a date,” Weiss said, attempting to be coy. “My grandfather wasn’t officially a huntsman, but in his prime he still defeated more than his fair share of grimm. When he had this mansion built, he was very insistent that it include a world-class combat arena.”

“Combat arena?” Ruby asked excitedly.

Weiss pulled one of the doors open and gestured for Ruby to walk inside.

Ruby stepped through the door. Her jaw hit the floor when she beheld the room on the other side. It was a massive, open space with windows tall enough that they actually extended most of the way up the room’s sharply slanted ceiling. There weren’t any stands for spectators to sit and watch from like in the academies’ arenas, but the combat floor itself looked bigger than any Ruby had ever trained on. There was all kinds of space for her to zip about using her semblance if she wanted to.

“Wow!” Ruby said, spinning around so that she could really take in the size of the room. “This is incredible!”

“I thought you might like it,” Weiss said, giving herself a satisfied nod.

Suddenly, Ruby’s eyes landed on a giant suit of armor that was sitting in a heap in one of the arena’s far corners. It was hard to tell exactly how big it was since it wasn’t standing upright, but it had to be at least twenty feet tall. There was even an equally gigantic sword lying next to it that must have weighed a literal ton.

“Weiss! What is that!?” Ruby asked, astounded.

“I’m told that Grandfather used it as part of his training regimen,” Weiss said.

“Is it a robot?” Ruby asked.

“No. Robotics was only in its infancy back in my grandfather’s day,” Weiss said. “Grandfather used to capture a type of grimm that can possess inanimate objects, don’t ask me how, and let them inhabit the armor so he could fight them.”

“Your grandpa took on geists!? All by himself!?” Ruby asked, astounded.
“According to the stories that Grandmother used to tell,” Weiss said. “If you ask me, it sounds like a good way to end up with a scar. Or worse.”

“I wish I could’ve met your grandpa,” Ruby said.

“I never got the chance to know him as well as I would’ve liked. He passed when I was still very young,” Weiss said. “But I think you and he would have gotten along.”

“I bet we would’ve,” Ruby said. “Now. What about this date that you and I are definitely going on? Does it start with a tour of all the cool stuff in your mansion?”

“It can, if you want,” Weiss said. “But I was thinking that it’s past time my grandfather’s arena got some use again.”

“You want to spar with me?” Ruby asked. “As a date?”

“That…that is something we discussed once,” Weiss said, suddenly sounding sheepish.

“I know,” Ruby said. “But I didn’t think you’d actually want to. Weiss, this is perfect!”

“That’s…good,” Weiss said, but she didn’t sound very enthused.

Ruby was confused. “What’s wrong, Weiss?” she asked.

Weiss sighed. She said, “It’s just that our relationship has been constantly surrounded by danger and excitement. I’m worried…I’m worried that when things finally calm down we’ll suddenly realize that what we feel for one another has more to do with adrenaline than any kind of genuine connection.”

Ruby couldn’t say that she didn’t see the reasoning behind Weiss’s concern, but she didn’t for a second believe that it was justified. She stepped in close and put her hands on Weiss’s shoulders. “Do you love me?” she asked.

“Yes,” Weiss said without any hesitation.

“Well I love you too,” Ruby said. “Isn’t that what’s important?”

Ruby could see the protest forming on Weiss’s lips. So she leaned in and kissed her.

Weiss surrendered to Ruby’s kiss without putting up a fight. Her eyes fluttered closed, and she hugged Ruby, holding on to her tight. Ruby didn’t think she’d ever get tired of kissing Weiss. She leaned in closer, wanting more.

Suddenly, the doors to the arena swung open. Before Ruby had a chance to register what was happening, Weiss pulled away from her. In an instant, Ruby’s lips were left puckering up against the empty air.

The sound of squeaking wheels reached Ruby’s ears. She swallowed her disappointment at the sudden lack of kisses from Weiss and turned to look. She saw Klein walking into the room. He was pushing a wheeled clothing rack that had two garment bags hanging on it.

“Klein,” Weiss said casually, like she hadn’t just been making out with Ruby. “I trust that’s the delivery I’ve been waiting on.”

“Quite so, Miss Schnee,” Klein said. “It just arrived from the tailor.”

Ruby asked, “Tailor?”
“Excellent,” Weiss said, ignoring Ruby.

Klein wheeled the clothing rack up to where Weiss and Ruby were standing. “Shall I have the outfits taken to your wardrobe once you’ve had an opportunity to inspect them?” he asked.

Ruby asked, “Outfits?”

“That won’t be necessary,” Weiss said, ignoring Ruby again. “Just leave them here.”

“Very good, Miss Schnee,” Klein said. “Is there anything else you require?”

“No,” Weiss said. “But do see to it that Ruby and I are not disturbed. We have important business to attend to.”

“Of course,” Klein said. He politely bowed. Then he winked at Ruby and said, “Miss Rose. Always a pleasure to see you.”

“Uh…thanks?” Ruby said, perplex by Klein’s sly expression.

Klein walked away from Weiss and Ruby, leaving the clothing rack behind. When he had left the room, Ruby said, “So we’re not going to tell him about us? I mean, we told your dad. Why not Klein?”

“Just because my father knows doesn’t mean I’m ready to make an announcement to the entire world,” Weiss said. “Just…give me time. The situation has to be handled delicately. I don’t want the media to learn about us prematurely and make a mockery of our relationship.”


“What?!” Weiss said. “He does not!”

“If you say so,” Ruby shrugged. “Sooo…what are those?” she asked, indicating the garment bags.

“You were with me when we went to the tailor,” Weiss said. “Don’t you remember?”

Ruby scratched her head.

“It was just after the gala,” Weiss elaborated.

“Oh yeah!” Ruby said, snapping her fingers. “I guess I didn’t hallucinate that part after all.”

“Hallucinate?” Weiss asked.

“I was really tired! I’d been awake for like three days straight!” Ruby said. “But that’s okay. Now whatever those are get to be a fun surprise for our first real date!”

Weiss examined one of the garment bags. She pulled its zipper down just far enough to get a peek inside before closing it up again. Then she pulled it off the rack and handed it to Ruby. “This one’s yours,” she said. “There are locker rooms just down the hallway. Go get changed.”

“You mean right now?” Ruby asked, taking the bag.

“Of course,” Weiss said. “You do want to look nice for our date, don’t you?”

“Yeah I do,” Ruby said. Then she smiled mischievously. “Although…maybe we could go get changed together.”
Much to Ruby’s shock, Weiss didn’t blush. Instead, she said, “You wouldn’t want to ruin the surprise now would you?”

Ruby silently watched as Weiss pulled the other garment bag off the rack. She slung it over her shoulder and began walking toward the arena’s doors.

It seemed that Weiss was getting harder to fluster. Ruby realized she was going to have to try a little harder when she flirted with her from now on. She was okay with that.

A few minutes later, Ruby was staring at herself in a locker room mirror, and she was looking pretty awesome if she did say so herself. She’d never really considered how much of a difference an outfit could make, even though this was the second time that Weiss had shown her such.

Ruby was wearing a white blouse with poofy sleeves that were tucked into black wristbands. She also had on a black corset and combat skirt, both of which were trimmed in red. Thigh-high stockings, a pair of sturdy boots, and her hood completed the ensemble.

Ruby didn’t have a vain bone in her body, but she felt like she could spend hours staring at herself right now. She decided that Weiss was in charge of picking out all of her outfits from now on.

As much as Ruby wanted to keep admiring her new clothes, she was extremely curious as to what Weiss had gotten for herself. Ruby tore herself away from the mirror and grabbed Crescent Rose from where it was leaning against a nearby wall. She clipped her scythe into place on her back and then rushed out of the locker room.

Ruby practically ran back to the arena. When she burst through the double doors, she saw that Weiss was already there waiting for her. Ruby slid to a halt, and her eyes delightedly took in what they saw.

Weiss was wearing a glittering, lilac-colored dress with a long skirt that was slit on one side all the way up to her thigh. A long-sleeved shrug covered her shoulders, and around her waist was a belt decorated with silver that had a small sheath seamlessly incorporated into it. The sheath was subtle enough that Ruby almost didn’t even notice the hilt of Weiss’s dagger peeking out from it.

“What do you think?” Weiss asked. She twirled around once so that Ruby could see her from all sides.

Ruby didn’t say anything. She just stood there, staring at Weiss with a goofy grin on her face.

“Careful,” Weiss said to Ruby. “You’re about to start drooling.”

Ruby shook her head clear. “You look incredible, Weiss!” she said.

“I gathered as much,” Weiss said. Her eyes took a slow trip down Ruby’s body and then came back up again. “You don’t look so bad yourself. But the real test will be to see how well these outfits hold up in combat.”

“Wait. You want to spar in that?” Ruby asked. She’d thought what Weiss had on was more of an evening gown than anything meant for use in an arena.

“Of course,” Weiss said. “That is why I had this dress commissioned.”

“I’ve never seen a combat skirt that long before,” Ruby said.
“The extra length was necessary,” Weiss said. “And you can’t tell me there aren’t huntresses who wear even more idiosyncratic outfits when they battle the grimm.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” Ruby admitted.

“Shall we get started then?” Weiss asked.

“You bet!” Ruby said.

Weiss led Ruby to the center of the arena where a pair of starting marks had been artfully incorporated into the floor. They each took their place.

“What kind of rules are we using?” Ruby asked.

“Tournament rules are fine,” Weiss said.

“You know them?” Ruby asked.

“I did my research when I considered becoming a huntress,” Weiss said. “And I’ve taken dozens of self-defense classes over the years. I’m not a neophyte when it comes to combat.”

“I know you’re not,” Ruby said. “But I’ve got Crescent Rose! And you’ve just got a little dagger.”

“That’s not all I’ve got,” Weiss said. She swept her arm to the side in a showy gesture. A veritable rainbow of light washed over her dress as glowing, colored patterns lit up the fabric, starting at the hem of Weiss’s skirt and working their way up.

Ruby’s eyes went wide when she realized what she was seeing. Dust of every color imaginable had been sewn into Weiss’s dress. It was an old technique that few huntresses or huntsmen used anymore, but that wasn’t because it didn’t still work. No wonder Weiss had needed a longer skirt. More fabric meant more Dust.

Weiss said, “I kept the dagger mostly for sentimental reasons. I’m sure you’ll agree that it’s not a necessity for me anymore.”

“Yeah…” Ruby said, slack-jawed with amazement. She snapped herself out of it, and a big grin crossed her face. She drew Crescent Rose from her back, letting it unfold into its scythe form.

“Tournament rules it is then.”

Ruby and Weiss faced off against one another. As excited as Ruby was, she found herself in a bit of a dilemma. She didn’t really want to go all out on Weiss, but she also didn’t want to patronize her by holding back too much. She wasn’t sure what to do, but then an idea came to her.

Weiss shifted on her feet a few times until she settled into an even stance. Then she said, “Begin.”

The moment the word had left Weiss’s lips, Ruby went charging for her. She didn’t use her semblance just yet, but she was still plenty fast. Weiss was ready for her. With a wave of her hand, red stitches of Dust lit up her dress, and fireballs came flying at Ruby. Ruby dodged the first few. Then she spun forward, batting the next one aside with her scythe.

Ruby lunged for Weiss, but just as she got close enough to strike, a white glyph appeared beneath Weiss’s feet. The glyph swiftly carried Weiss away, and a huge stalagmite of ice shot up right where she’d been standing.

Ruby crashed face-first into the freshly conjured ice. She bounced off of it and took a staggering step
backward. She reached up and brushed off some of the frost that had clung to her nose and cheeks, grinning all the while. Weiss was better at this than she’d thought.

Ruby pulled Crescent Rose back and hewed down the icy stalagmite at its base with a single sweep of her scythe. As the ice crashed to the floor, Ruby spotted Weiss standing several feet away. Ruby anchored her scythe on the tip of its blade and pointed its barrel at Weiss. She pulled Crescent Rose’s trigger, curious to see how Weiss would handle it.

Weiss scrambled out of the way of Ruby’s first few shots. Then she lifted her hand, and a large, white glyph appeared in front of her. Ruby’s bullets bounced harmlessly off of it.

Ruby kept shooting, trying to test how much damage Weiss’s glyph could take, but suddenly the hairs on the back of her neck stood up. Acting on instinct, she rolled out of the way as a bolt of lightning crashed down. It struck close enough that Ruby felt her skin tingle with a buzz of electricity.

Weiss’s glyph disappeared. She looked pleased with herself.

Ruby smirked. She dug her feet in, coiling her legs beneath her. Then she sprung forward and began sprinting toward Weiss. But before she could reach her, Weiss thrust both of her arms outward. A mighty gust of wind erupted from Weiss’s hands. Ruby pushed against the howling air with all her might, but for every step she took forward, her boots slid a step back.

“Not bad, Weiss!” Ruby shouted to be heard over the rushing wind. “But that’s not going to hold me back!”

Ruby finally tapped into her semblance. She zoomed forward. Rose petals billowed chaotically behind her as the wind scattered them every which way. Before Weiss had a chance to react, Ruby collided with her shoulder-first.

Ruby had intended to tackle Weiss to the floor, but Weiss surprised her once again when she spun aside. Weiss managed to neatly separate herself from Ruby. She stay on her feet while Ruby continued to careen forward.

Ruby hit the floor, but she rolled with her momentum and popped back up almost instantly. She lunged for Weiss again, but Weiss twirled out of the way.

Ruby stuck with Weiss, stepping this way and that as she looked for an opening to attack, but Weiss kept herself just out of reach. They moved together, Weiss leading and Ruby following, in a dance right there on the arena floor. Time seemed to slow as Ruby watched Weiss’s skirt billow and flow with the tempo of their waltz. Ruby was struck by the beauty of the moment. It almost made her forget that she was supposed to be sparring with Weiss.

Ruby came to her senses again. As much as she wanted her dance with Weiss to continue, she didn’t want Weiss to think that she wasn’t taking this seriously. She went in for one more attack.

As Weiss dodged out of the way, Ruby used her semblance to zip around right into her path. Weiss must have realized that she’d finally been caught because Ruby saw her cringe in anticipation, but all Ruby did was reach out and flick the tip of Weiss’s nose.

“Boop!” Ruby said.

Weiss reflexively backpedaled from Ruby’s “attack”. She touched her nose and exclaimed, “What was that?!”
“You didn’t expect me to actually hit you, did you?” Ruby asked.

“Of course I did!” Weiss said, sounding angry. “We’re sparring! I don’t need to be coddled by you of all people.”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do,” Ruby said. “You’re really good at this, Weiss! But I’m a huntress. I’ve spent most of my life learning how to fight.”

Weiss glared at Ruby. “Then let’s up the stakes, shall we?” she said.

Suddenly, a brightly glowing glyph appeared in the air beside Weiss. It began to spin rapidly.

“Ooh! That’s your summoning glyph, right?” Ruby asked excitedly.

“Yes!” Weiss said, visibly straining. “Now be quiet! I…I need to….”

A blob of light started to emerge out of the glyph, but it seemed to get stuck.

Weiss said, “…need to….”

The glyph abruptly stopped spinning and burst apart into a thousand shards of light. The fragments cascaded onto the floor with a strangely melodic sound before vanishing completely.

“It didn’t work?” Ruby asked.

“Obviously not,” Weiss said, sounding frustrated. “I’ve only ever succeeded in summoning once when I created that duplicate of you. I didn’t even think my semblance could do something like that.”

“You said that before,” Ruby mused. She folded up Crescent Rose and clipped it onto its holster. “Let’s figure this out. How is your glyph supposed to work?”

“As Winter explained it to me, we Schnees are capable of summoning our defeated foes to aid us,” Weiss said.

“Well there’s your problem,” Ruby said. “You work in an office. Unless there’s something I don’t know about your job, I don’t think you’ve ever defeated anything. Not in combat anyway.”

“That’s…true,” Weiss said. “But I was able to summon. You saw it!”

“Well I guess you did defeat me,” Ruby said with a wink. “If you know what I mean.”

“Ruby! That’s not…!” Weiss said, finally blushing a little. But all of a sudden, she got quiet.

“Weiss?” Ruby asked.

“Maybe that’s it,” Weiss said.

“Maybe what’s it?” Ruby asked.

“Maybe what’s actually required to summon something is a strong emotional connection,” Weiss said. “Defeating an enemy in battle would certainly produce one, but….”

Weiss closed her eyes. Her summoning glyph reappeared beside her. She took a deep breath, and a serene look crossed her face.

“Come on, Weiss,” Ruby said, pumping her fist. “You can do it.”
Weiss’s aura started to glow, pulsing in time with her glyph. She opened her eyes. As she did so, a duplicate of Ruby, composed of pure light, stepped out of the glyph.

“It worked!” Ruby cheered. She walked up to her summoned doppelgänger and poked at it with her finger. “This is so cool!”

The summoned Ruby reacted to the real Ruby’s prodding with pantomimed annoyance.

Ruby asked, “Can you control it directly, or does it do things on its own?”

“Both, I think,” Weiss said. She closed her eyes again.

Suddenly, the summon took Ruby’s hands in its own. Ruby was confused at first, but then she laughed as the summon spun her around in some classic ballroom dance steps.

Ruby let go of the summon and bowed to it. The summon did the same. Ruby asked, “How long does it last?”

“I’m not sure,” Weiss said, opening her eyes again. “But the longer it’s active the harder I have to concentrate to maintain it.”

An impish grin crossed Ruby’s lips. She slipped around behind Weiss and whispered into her ear, “Then we should work on your concentration.”

“Ruby? How would we—?” Weiss started to ask, but she was interrupted by Ruby’s arms wrapping around her and Ruby’s lips kissing her neck.

Weiss gasped. The sound thrilled Ruby. It had been far too long since she’d been able to share any real physical intimacy with Weiss. She was more than ready to rectify that. This was a date after all.

The summon wavered for just a moment. Weiss said, “Ruby, I don’t think—”

Weiss was interrupted again, this time by Ruby’s lips finding just the right spot on her neck. She went rigid in Ruby’s arms and sucked in a sharp breath.

Ruby started nibbling on the spot she’d found. The moment she did, the summon exploded like a fireworks, briefly filling the entire room with a bright light.

“Gees, Weiss,” Ruby teased. “I thought you’d last longer than that.”

If Weiss had caught Ruby’s innuendo, she didn’t say anything. She turned in Ruby’s arms and stared into her eyes for just a moment. Then she planted a scorching kiss on Ruby’s lips.

Ruby was caught off guard, but it only took her a second before she was kissing Weiss back. She had no idea where Weiss’s sudden hunger had come from, but she wasn’t going to complain about it.

Weiss deepened the kiss, and Ruby opened up to her, greedily drinking in Weiss’s passion. Ruby felt the room growing overly warm as Weiss’s body pressed tightly into hers. Her head spun, intoxicated by Weiss’s ravenous desire.

Weiss pressed in even closer to Ruby as if any space between them was unbearable. Suddenly, their legs tangled together, and Ruby lost her balance. The two of them went spilling onto the floor, but Weiss hardly even seemed to notice. Her lips continued to assault Ruby with reckless abandon.

Now with Weiss’s weight on top of her, Ruby felt like she might burst into flames. The sensations bombarding her were overwhelming, but she didn’t want them to stop.
Weiss finally pulled back a little. Both she and Ruby were breathing heavily. Weiss looked at Ruby like she wasn’t sure what had just happened, but the wonderment on her face touched Ruby’s heart.

Weiss reached out with the tips of her fingers and gently caressed Ruby’s cheek. Ruby smiled sweetly in response. Something silently passed between them. There was no need for words.

Weiss pushed herself up off the floor. Then she reached down, offering Ruby her hand. Ruby took it and let Weiss help her up.

“This way,” Weiss said without letting go. She started leading Ruby out of the arena.

Ruby had to jog to keep up as Weiss pushed open the arena’s doors and rushed down the mansion’s hallways. It didn’t take long before she led Ruby to another door and opened it up. She immediately shoved Ruby inside.

Ruby found herself in one of the mansion’s many guest rooms. She only had a moment to look around before the sound of the door closing followed by the click of a lock drew her attention. She turned and saw Weiss pressing herself back up against the door.

There was a wild and hungry look in Weiss’s eyes. She reached up and unfastened the clasp that held her shrug closed.

Ruby grinned. She didn’t need Weiss to tell her what to do. She unpinned her hood and let it slide off her shoulders. Her holster came next, and Crescent Rose hit the floor with a thud.

Ruby had to fumble for a moment with her new corset’s laces to get it open. She had just slid it off when Weiss unexpectedly grabbed her arm and started dragging her toward the bed.

Ruby was about to protest—she still had her blouse, skirt, and boots on—but when she looked up, she saw that Weiss was completely naked already. The sight of Weiss’s lithe backside sent Ruby’s thoughts scattering about this way and that, preempting whatever she had been going to say.

Weiss practically dragged Ruby onto the bed, and as soon as they were up, her lips crashed into Ruby’s. She pushed Ruby down onto the mattress as she kissed her. Ruby would have laughed at Weiss’s overeagerness if her mouth hadn’t been otherwise occupied.

Suddenly, Weiss’s hand found Ruby’s thigh and squeezed, sending thrilling sensations shooting through her. Ruby moaned into Weiss’s lips as she felt a heat building.

Weiss finally broke the kiss. Ruby looked at her. “Weiss…” she said, her face glowing with love.

Weiss’s fingers slipped into Ruby’s waistband. In one deft motion, she tugged Ruby’s skirt and panties down to her ankles.

“Weiss!” Ruby said with a delighted giggle.

Weiss took in the sight of Ruby, but then she hesitated. She met Ruby’s eyes. “Is this… alright?” she asked.

“Weiss,” Ruby said with a sigh. “Make love to me.”

The expression that crossed Weiss’s face took Ruby’s breath away. She saw Weiss’s love, and her powerful longing, as clear as day. Ruby had never before felt as wanted as she did in that moment.

Weiss leaned forward, looking unsure but undaunted. Ruby trembled with anticipation, not knowing
what to expect. She had certainly made love before, but things felt different this time.

When Weiss’s tongue flicked out, Ruby’s entire body shivered. “Oh!” she gasped.

Weiss lifted her head. “Was—?”

Ruby reached out and forcefully pressed Weiss’s head back down. She hadn’t been aware until just now how desperately she’d needed this. When Weiss’s tongue returned, Ruby moaned loudly. Her fingers dug into Weiss’s hair, imploring her to continue.

Ruby was quickly lost to a world of undiluted bliss. Weiss was inexperienced, but Ruby loved her too much for that to matter. She needed Weiss like she needed air. She’d been a lost soul for too long, desperate to find a rock she could cling to but too afraid to let herself become attached to anyone. Yet Weiss was there for her. Weiss loved her. And she loved Weiss.

Ruby’s moans quickly turned into a chorus of needy whimpers. Her legs strained against the waistband of her skirt which was still around her ankles. She reached up with her free hand and grabbed her own breast, trying to massage her nipple through her blouse and bra. Every nerve in her body felt raw. It was too much, but she needed more. She had to have more.

Everything inside of Ruby, all of her fear and joy and pain and hope came bubbling up to the surface as she pushed closer to the edge. Her breath caught in her throat, and her body quivered. Her hips ground against Weiss, looking for more. She ached for release, physically and emotionally. She was so close yet impossibly far.

 Suddenly, Ruby exploded. She screamed at the top of her lungs. Her thighs squeezed together around Weiss, and every muscle in her body went tense. She shook, thrust onto a plateau of ecstasy with no way down.

Tears squeezed out of the corners of Ruby’s eyes as one last scream escaped her. Then she went limp. More than that, she felt a weight lift off her chest. For a moment, she was floating on a cloud. Then Weiss was there, holding her hand and calling her back down to Remnant.

“I love you, Weiss,” Ruby said softly. “I love you.”

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Hours later, Weiss was lying in the same bed with Ruby curled up next to her. Weiss’s body was absolutely exhausted, but in a way that was oddly blissful. Today had only been the second time that she and Ruby had been together like this. Weiss didn’t know if she should be proud of her restraint or exasperated by it. The only thing she knew for certain was that it had been far too long.

All of the crazy things that had been happening in Weiss and Ruby’s lives had been partially to blame for the long delay, but they weren’t the only reason. There had been plenty of times as of late that Weiss had wanted to make love to Ruby, but she’d either been too afraid to ask or simply hadn’t known how to broach the subject.

Clearly, Weiss would have to figure out some way of bringing up the subject of sex with Ruby. Especially if today was anything to go by. There was a reason that she was so exhausted. Neither she nor Ruby had seemed to want to stop. It had probably been because of how long they’d been without, although Weiss had to admit that the location had been partially responsible for her own insatiable appetite. There was something thrillingly transgressive about making love to Ruby here in her family’s mansion. She could only imagine what Father might think if he ever found out.

Over by Weiss’s side, Ruby stirred. She propped her head up in her hand and smiled at Weiss.
Weiss looked Ruby over. They’d eventually managed to get most of the rest of Ruby’s clothing off, although Ruby was still wearing her stockings and boots. Weiss wasn’t sure why, but she found the look intensely arousing. Even in her weary state, it still sent a thrill running through her. She hoped that didn’t make her a pervert.

Ruby said, “That was incredible, Weiss.”

“Only because of you,” Weiss said. She was embarrassed by her lack of experience, but she supposed that was a problem that would be solved in time.

Ruby giggled. “Give yourself some of the credit,” she said. “Something’s been different about you today.”

“What do you mean?” Weiss asked.

“I don’t know,” Ruby said. “You’ve just seemed more…confident, I guess.”

Weiss thought about it for a minute. Then she said, “Maybe it’s because of yesterday.”

“What does yesterday have to do with it?” Ruby asked.

“My father knows about us now,” Weiss said. She looked up at the ceiling. “The worst possible consequence of our relationship has come to pass. But we survived it. Now I don’t have to live in constant fear. You could say that I’m finally free.”

Ruby looked concerned. She said, “I didn’t know you were so worried about that.”

“It wasn’t your burden to bear,” Weiss said. Then she sighed. “I suppose I really should tell Klein about us. He deserves to know.”

“That’s okay,” Ruby said. “He already knows anyway.”

Weiss rolled her eyes. “He does not,” she said.

“If you say so,” Ruby said. “But when we tell him, and he already knows, you owe me a whole bunch of cookies.”

Weiss laughed despite herself. She turned to Ruby again. Then, out of the blue, she said, “Move in with me. Like we discussed.”

Ruby looked surprised. Weiss didn’t blame her. Even she hadn’t been expecting herself to say that.

Ruby asked, “You mean it?”

“Yes,” Weiss said. “I want our relationship to be about more than what we do in between moments of danger. I want to have breakfast with you each day. I want to spend quiet evenings with you at home. I want to get into an argument with you about something inane. I want you to be a part of my life, Ruby. All of it.”

“Weiss…” Ruby said, looking like she was getting choked up. “How could I say no to that?”

“I love you, Ruby,” Weiss said.

“I love you too, Weiss,” Ruby said.

Suddenly, an electronic ding cut through the air, dispelling the magic of the moment.
“Ugh…” Weiss said. She recognized the sound as coming from Ruby’s scroll. “Can you please tell your sister to leave us alone?”

Ruby snickered. “How about I just ignore her for now?” she suggested.

Another ding suddenly came from Ruby’s scroll, quickly followed by two more.

“Or maybe I should see what she wants,” Ruby said.

Ruby got out of bed. Weiss sat up, not wanting to miss the opportunity to gaze at Ruby. When Ruby found her clothes, she pulled out her scroll and opened it up. She began reading the messages she’d been sent. Her expression quickly grew serious.

“What is it?” Weiss asked.

“I’m not sure,” Ruby said. “But I think it’s trouble.”

Chapter End Notes

In case my descriptions weren’t up to snuff, Ruby and Weiss’s new clothes are basically their Volume 4 outfits. (Or variant outfit in Weiss’s case.) They don’t look exactly the same though. Ruby’s tights and cape aren’t ripped, and Weiss has a belt instead of a sash.

Hey, look at that. I finally got the explanation for why Weiss was able to summon Ruby into the story proper. It only took me twelve chapters. Better late than never I guess.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
Some of you *really* took exception to Ruby’s abuse of the English language way back in Chapter 25 when she was texting with Yang. Well, I feel I should warn you that she’s up to it again in this chapter. It’s only one quick message though. I’m sure we can get through it!

I don’t really think it’s necessary this time, but I’ve once again included a transcript under the author’s note at the end of the chapter for the sake of consistency if nothing else.

Blake could see the entire floor of the old warehouse she was hiding in from her vantage point up in the rafters. Not that there was anything to see at the moment. The place was just as abandoned as the other warehouse Blake had been in recently where Sienna had held court a few weeks ago. Blake had never fully understood why every major city on Remnant seemed to be littered with empty warehouses, but she supposed she shouldn’t complain. The White Fang had certainly taken advantage of them over the years, using them as makeshift hideouts and meeting places.

It had been days since Ilia had shown up at Blake and Yang’s cabin and delivered her warning about Fennec, but in that time, they hadn’t learned anything new about whatever he might be up to. Blake and Yang had even enlisted the help of Weiss and Ruby, without Ilia’s knowledge of course, but to no avail. Yang had been growing restless at the lack of news, but Blake hadn’t been worried. Even if she and her teammates weren’t able to find any leads, she still had faith in Ilia.

A soft clacking sound came from across the warehouse, making Blake’s ears twitch. None of the warehouse’s lights were on—Blake doubted they even worked anymore—and the skylights were so caked with dirt that the late morning sunlight was barely filtering through, but Blake’s faunus eyes were able to see just fine in the darkness. She glanced in the direction the sound had come from. A short distance away, Yang was perched up in the rafters as well in the guise of an eagle. She was shifting her weight back and forth on her talons, causing them to noisily tap against the decaying metal beam she was standing on.

Blake sighed internally. She’d had to prod Yang into using her bird form today. As much as she loved and respected Yang, she was not impressed with Yang’s ability to be stealthy. Even as a bird she was far too loud for Blake’s taste. Blake could only hope that she wouldn’t draw attention to herself at an inopportune moment.

Suddenly, the creaking of rusty hinges echoed loudly inside the warehouse. An exterior door opened, causing a wedge of light to spill out across the floor. Blake felt herself tense up. This was it. She was about to find out if her faith in Ilia would be rewarded.

A man Blake didn’t recognize stepped through the door. He closed the door behind him and started walking into the warehouse. Dark scales covered his arms and face, including several on his chin and brow that protruded like spines. He was obviously a faunus, but he wasn’t wearing anything to indicate he was a member of the White Fang.
The man walked to the center of the warehouse floor. He stopped almost directly below where Blake was hiding and put his hands on his hips. “You can come on out,” he said. “I know you’re there.”

Blake didn’t move a muscle. She just sat there perfectly still, trying not to breathe too loudly.

A moment later, a patch of darkness near the man began to shift. Ilia appeared as her skin changed color. “What did you find out, Ryn?” she asked the man in a curt tone.

“I found out plenty. You owe me a drink for this one. Maybe two,” Ryn said. “Fennec’s gone a special kind of crazy. What the heck happened to him? He was always a little nuts, but not like this.”

“I’ll tell you the whole story if you want,” Ilia said. “But not right now. Did you figure out what Fennec’s up to?”

“Yes. And no,” Ryn said. “He’s gathered up a group of loyal followers. I’ve been pretending to be one of them. He’s really whipped them up good, ranting constantly about how the High Leader’s too weak to do what needs to be done.”

“That’s not what I need to know, Ryn,” Ilia said.

“Relax. I’m getting to it,” Ryn said. “You see, early this morning, Fennec took all of us faithful and snuck us onto the Atlas airdocks. Once we were there, he had one of his strong guys pry open the door to a bullhead.”

“And?” Ilia asked.

“And that was when I decided it was time for me to slip away,” Ryn said. “Last I saw, everyone was climbing aboard.”

“What would Fennec need a bullhead for?” Ilia asked.

“No idea,” Ryn said.

“Nope,” Ryn said with a shrug. “He didn’t say. But he was blathering on about doing what Belladonna couldn’t and exposing the evils of the Schnee Dust Company in a way the world couldn’t ignore. Whatever that means. Oh, and he had one of his minions carrying a big duffel bag stuffed full of something or other.”

“Weapons probably,” Ilia said.

“Do you know where he was planning on going?” Ilia asked.

“Nope,” Ryn said. “He didn’t say. But he was blathering on about doing what Belladonna couldn’t and exposing the evils of the Schnee Dust Company in a way the world couldn’t ignore. Whatever that means. Oh, and he had one of his minions carrying a big duffel bag stuffed full of something or other.”

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“Alright. Good job, Ryn,” Ilia said. “I’ll get this info to…those who need it.”

“Great,” Ryn said, sounding like he didn’t care about that. “You want to go get that drink now? Because I basically joined a cult, and I think I need some alcohol in me to make myself sane again.”

“Later,” Ilia said. She started shooing Ryn away. “I’ve got people I need to talk to.”

“You’ve always got people you need to talk to,” Ryn said as he let Ilia nudge him in the direction he’d come from. “Don’t think you’re going to get out of this.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Ilia said dryly.
“Later then,” Ryn said. He started strolling on his own back toward the door. When he got to it, he opened it up and saw himself out.

Alone again down on the warehouse floor, Ilia looked up toward the rafters. “Did you get all of that?” she asked.

Blake slid off her perch and landed next to Ilia with near perfect silence. Yang hopped out of the rafters as well, transforming back into a human on the way down. She landed on her feet with a loud thud.

Blake said to Ilia, “I got it. Your friend Ryn does impressive work.”

Yang walked over to join Blake and Ilia. She said, “Sounds like Fennec’s making his move. Too bad for him we found out about it.”

Ilia glared at Yang like she was offended that she’d dared to speak. But she kept whatever ugly thoughts were passing through her head to herself.

Blake said, “Unfortunately, we still don’t have much to go on. Fennec could take that bullhead to anywhere in Atlas. Especially if he has a place where he can refuel it.”

Ilia said, “At least he’s not going after the White Fang.”

“It doesn’t matter what his target is,” Blake said. “It won’t end well for us.”

“So you’re still part of ‘us’ then, Blake?” Ilia asked pointedly.

Blake flinched at Ilia’s words, but she wasn’t going to argue with her. Yang, however, looked offended on Blake’s behalf. She opened her mouth, doubtlessly intending to give Ilia a piece of her mind, but Blake shot her a look, preemptively silencing her.

Ilia said, “I know you’re all buddy-buddy with a Schnee now, Blake, but maybe Fennec’s got the right idea. Even if he’s not doing it for the right reasons.”

“IIia…” Blake said. “Adam thought he was doing the right thing too when he attacked Beacon at the beginning of the Maiden War. I don’t need to tell you how that turned out.”

Ilia scowled. “You’re right. You don’t.”

“Weiss isn’t who you think she is,” Blake said.

“We’ll see,” Ilia said. “You do what you have to, Blake. And I’ll do the same. I’m going to report this to the High Leader.”

“IIia…” Blake said.

“Don’t worry,” Ilia said, rolling her eyes. “I’m not going to tattle on you or your…girlfriend. But unlike you, I still believe in the White Fang. The High Leader needs to know about Fennec’s plans just as much as you do.”

Blake didn’t say anything more. She just nodded.

“Good luck, Blake,” Ilia said. Her expression softened. “I mean that.”

“You too,” Blake said quietly.
Ilia started walking away. A moment later, she slipped out through the same door that Ryn had left by.

Blake was about to say something to Yang, but when she turned and looked at her, the expression on Yang’s face made her pause. Yang looked downright upset, which was extremely unusual for her.

Suddenly, Yang’s arms wrapped around Blake, and she hugged her so tightly that Blake almost found it comical.

Blake asked, “Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?” Yang responded.

“You’re holding me like I might die if you let go,” Blake said.

“Oh! Sorry,” Yang said, actually sounding embarrassed. She let go of Blake. “It’s just…. I thought Ilia was supposed to be one of your best friends. Is everyone you know in the White Fang going to take us being together as badly as she did?”

“I’m sure most of them will be far more concerned about the fact that I’ve allied myself with a Schnee,” Blake said.

Yang frowned. “I guess I’ve never really thought about how much you’re sacrificing.”

“It doesn’t necessarily have to come to that,” Blake said, all the while chiding herself for still wanting to believe that she could somehow reconcile her newfound allegiances with her life as a prominent member of the White Fang. “But if that’s what it takes to see that the right thing gets done…then it will be worth it. And…it’ll be worth it to stay with you.”

Yang actually blushed. Blake wondered if she should feel proud of herself.

Yang cleared her throat. “So…what’s our next move?” she asked, obviously trying to play it cool.

“I think next we need to meet up with Weiss and your sister,” Blake said. “Maybe they’ll have made some discoveries about Fennec as well.”

“I sure hope so,” Yang said. “I’m way past ready to punch that guy right in his face.”

Ruby was glued to her scroll as she paced back and forth in one of the guest rooms in Weiss’s penthouse. Although it wasn’t really a guest room anymore; it was Ruby’s now. She’d moved in, just like Weiss had asked her to. She knew that she should’ve been overflowing with excitement about living with her girlfriend on top of a skyscraper in downtown Atlas, but unfortunately, too many other things were vying for her attention right now. She was starting to see what Weiss had been talking about back at the Schnee mansion a few days ago. Their relationship really was surrounded at every turn by danger of one sort or another. It was starting to get a little disconcerting.

Chief among Ruby’s concerns at the moment was the hunt for the White Fang guy, or rather ex-White Fang guy, named Fennec. Ruby had only learned of his existence a few days ago, but based on what Yang had told her, he really sounded like someone who needed to be taken down.

Ruby’s finger dragged across her scroll’s screen as she reread the last few messages that she’d received from Yang. She didn’t know why she was so apprehensive about them. According to the messages, Yang and Blake were heading to meet up with someone who knew something about
Fennec, but it all sounded kind of shady to Ruby. She didn’t like the idea of her sister creeping around the criminal underworld, even if it was to get the information they needed. Although she supposed that as a former bandit, Yang was technically a criminal herself, but the idea had never taken root in Ruby’s head. Yang was simply her sister, and she wanted her to be safe.

After several minutes, Ruby reluctantly tore her eyes away from her scroll. She slipped it back into her pocket which was carefully concealed by the pleats of her new combat skirt. Yang would send her a message when she could, and all the worrying in the world wouldn’t make that happen any sooner.

Ruby tried to distract herself by looking around her new room. It still hadn’t really sunk in for her that she lived here now. It was so strange seeing her stuff sitting alongside all the fancy, rich-person décor. But her clothes were hanging in the closet, her comic books were stacked up on the nightstand, and a bundle of tools that she used to maintain Crescent Rose was lying in a corner on the floor. Only the bed was untouched by Ruby’s clutter. She hadn’t even used it once yet. It was probably really comfortable by the look of it, but if Ruby had her way, she would never find out. She much preferred to spend her nights in Weiss’s bed.

Suddenly, Ruby’s pocket buzzed. Her hand immediately dove in and pulled out her scroll. She opened it up and finally saw a new message from Yang waiting for her on it.

Sparrow:
Where you at?

Ruby quickly typed out a reply.

Me:
@ weiss penthouse

Sparrow:
Found out some stuff. Be there soon to tell you about it.

Ruby let out a relieved breath. Hopefully Yang’s message meant they could finally do something about Fennec. All this waiting around had left Ruby feeling very impatient.

Ruby typed out a quick acknowledgment to Yang and then put her scroll back into her pocket. She walked over to her room’s panoramic windows. There was a glass door there among them. Ruby slid it open and walked out onto the penthouse’s terrace.

It was a little embarrassing for Ruby, but she hadn’t even realized that the penthouse had a terrace until her third or fourth visit when Weiss had pointed it out to her. Now that she knew it existed, she loved spending time out on it, preferably with Weiss. The view from the penthouse was awesome, and somehow it was even more awesome without a pane of glass to get in the way.

Ruby walked over to a second door that connected the terrace to the living room and went back inside. Weiss was there, right where Ruby had left her.

Weiss was sitting on the sofa in front of her scroll which was propped up by a stand on the coffee table. Now that the weekend had come, and Weiss wasn’t as distracted by the demands of her job, the search for Fennec had begun in earnest. Ruby had thought that would’ve involved a lot of running around Atlas, but Weiss had taken a different approach.

Weiss was on a video call with someone, a cop judging by his uniform. She said to him, “Don’t give me that! Unless you mean to tell me you don’t have the authority necessary to carry out your duty to
Ruby quietly slipped around to the side of the room where she could unobtrusively watch Weiss verbally spar with the police officer. She always loved seeing Weiss in her element. She had no idea what specifically Weiss and the cop were arguing about, but there was no doubt that it had something to do with Fennec.

The cop said, “It’s not a matter of authority, ma’am. Atlas is a big city. Crimes are committed every hour of every day. It would take me a week to sift through all of the reports that have been filed in the last day alone.”

“Hmph,” Weiss said. “Very well. But I expect to be informed if something relevant crosses your desk. Understand?”

“Ma’am, I can’t—” the cop started to say.

Weiss tapped her scroll’s screen, and the call abruptly ended.

“No luck?” Ruby asked.

“No,” Weiss said. “And unfortunately, the officer I was talking to had a point. Even if the police were being more cooperative, which they’re not, it’d be difficult for them to separate whatever this Fennec might be up to from every other misdeed they have to deal with.”

“I guess we have to keep looking then,” Ruby said. “But I’m sure we’ll find him sooner or later.”

Weiss stood. She was wearing her new combat outfit today. Ruby had insisted. She didn’t expect Weiss to need it; she just liked the way it looked on her.

Weiss walked over to Ruby and said, “I have Rosalie looking into a few things for me. She was kind enough to volunteer her free time. And Klein is keeping an eye on the news. He’ll call if anything big happens.”

Ruby laughed.

“What?” Weiss asked.

“Nothing,” Ruby said. “You’re just really getting into this is all.”

“Of course I am!” Weiss said. “A dangerous criminal is on the loose. Why shouldn’t I be… enthusiastic about stopping him?”

“I didn’t say you shouldn’t be,” Ruby said. “I’m just kind of surprised.”

“It’s simply nice to have a concrete goal for once,” Weiss said. “Something less nebulous than ‘save the faunus’.”

“Well I think you’re just filled with that Team RWBY spirit!” Ruby said. “This is our first mission after all.”

“I suppose it is,” Weiss said. “Although it seems a bit strange to call it when half of the team is absent.”

“Oh!” Ruby said, suddenly remembering Yang’s message. “About that. I—”

Ruby was interrupted by a sharp rapping on the living room’s windows.
Weiss just about jumped out of her skin at the sound and let out an undignified squeak. She spun around, and her hand flew up like she intended to conjure one of her glyphs.

Ruby peered over Weiss’s shoulder and saw Yang and Blake standing out there on the terrace. Yang was waving with a mischievous grin on her face. Blake, on the other hand, looked as stoic as ever, although Ruby thought she saw the tiniest hint of a smile from her.

Ruby stepped past Weiss and waved back at Yang. “Hiii!” she said, shouting to be heard through the glass. She pointed. “There’s a door right over there!”

Yang spotted the door. She and Blake walked toward it and let themselves into the living room. Yang said, “Hiya, Rubes! Nice outfit.”

“Thanks!” Ruby said, fluffing her skirt a bit. “Weiss picked it out for me.”

“She did, huh,” Yang said. She looked Ruby over with a more critical eye before nodding her approval. “She’s got good taste.”

“Isn’t it great?” Ruby asked with a happy smile.

Yang glanced around the living room. “This place sure is…fancy,” she said.

“I know!” Ruby said. “I’m still getting used to it.”

“Used to it how?” Yang asked.

“I live here now!” Ruby said. “Can you believe it?”

“Nice! My little sister, living the good life!” Yang said. She held up her hand, and Ruby slapped it in a high five. But then Yang asked, “Isn’t it a little early for you to be moving in though? There’s nothing funny going on, is there?”

“Yaaang!” Ruby whined. “Don’t treat me like I’m not an adult! I’m twenty-one you know.”

Weiss suddenly exclaimed, “Excuse me!”

Ruby and Yang turned toward Weiss.

“This is the top floor!” Weiss said. “How did you two get up here?!”

“We flew,” Yang said matter-of-factly. “You’ve seen me turn into a bird before.”

“And I’ve yet to receive a satisfactory explanation for how you can do that,” Weiss said.

“Magic,” Yang said.

Weiss glared at Yang.

“No really,” Yang said. “It’s actual magic.”

Weiss shook her head in exasperation. “I suppose I should be more concerned about how you know where I live,” she said. She glanced at Ruby. “You didn’t tell her, did you?”

“No!” Ruby said. “I’ve learned my lesson about stuff like that.”

Blake finally broke her silence. “I knew your address already,” she said.
Ruby had almost forgotten that Blake was in the room. Blake seemed incredibly nonchalant for someone who was standing in the home of her former archrival. Ruby began to wonder if Blake was really as composed as she seemed, or if she was doing a masterful job of masking her emotions.

Weiss asked Blake, “You already knew my address!?"

“I was planning on kidnapping you,” Blake said.

“Thank you so much for reminding me of that fact,” Weiss muttered.

Ruby held up her hands. “Okay. Okay. Let’s all—” She abruptly cut herself off and thrust her finger toward Yang’s neck. “Yang! What happened?!”

“Huh?” Yang asked. She touched her neck. Encircling it was the last vestiges of a fading bruise. “Oh, this? Ran into a crazy ex-girlfriend.”

“A what?!?” Ruby asked.

“Yang…” Blake said chidingly.

“Don’t worry about it, Rubes,” Yang said, waving her hand dismissively. “We’ve got some important stuff to tell you guys about Fennec.”

Ruby and Weiss listened patiently as Yang and Blake relayed what they’d learned. When they’d finished, Weiss said, “We can work with this.”

Ruby asked, “You’ve got an idea?”

Instead of explaining herself, Weiss walked over to where her scroll was still set up on the coffee table. She sat down in front of it and tapped on the screen a few times. Everyone else gathered around her as she dialed a number.

Klein’s face popped up on Weiss’s scroll. “Ah, Miss Schnee,” he said. “No developments in the news as of yet. At least none worth relaying.”

“Never mind that for now,” Weiss said, getting right down to business. “I’ve learned about a bullhead that was stolen just this morning from the Atlas airdocks. I need to find out what its destination was.”

Klein looked thoughtful for a moment. Then he said, “I have an old friend who works with Atlas Traffic Control. He just might know. Let me reach out to him.”

“Perfect. Call me back when you have something,” Weiss said. She hit the button to end the call and immediately dialed another number.

It was Rosalie’s face that appeared this time. “Yes, Miss Schnee?” she asked.

“I need your services as a nexus for company gossip,” Weiss said.

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about,” Rosalie said with a wink.

“It seems the criminal I’m on the hunt for is intending to target the Company,” Weiss said. “Have you heard any rumors in the past few days? Anything out of the ordinary? Odd people seen lurking about company property? Low-level employees acting strange?”

“Hmm,” Rosalie said. “Nothing like that, but one of the admins was complaining the other day about
a purchase order he had to fill out for the security department. Apparently a whole bundle of uniforms never made it back from the laundromat and needed to be replaced.”

“Thank you, Rosalie,” Weiss said. “I’ll call if I need anything else.”

Weiss tapped her scroll, and the screen went dark again.

Blake said, “That was impressive.”

Ruby felt a swell of pride for her girlfriend. She said, “That was nothing. You should see Weiss when she really gets going.”

Weiss said, “Assuming Fennec’s behind the disappearance of those uniforms, what would he need them for?”

“Camouflage,” Yang said. “It’s something every bandit knows. You don’t let people see you coming until it’s too late.”

Blake said, “The uniforms certainly could be what was in that duffel bag we heard about. And they’d be easy to acquire. Most laundry companies heavily employ faunus as workers.”

Ruby said, “We’ve still got to figure out where Fennec’s heading though.”

As if on cue, Weiss’s scroll rang. Weiss answered it, and Klein appeared on its screen again. His eyes had turned a distinct shade of yellow, matching his excited expression. “Miss Schnee! I’ve had some success!” he said.

“What did you find?” Weiss asked.

“I don’t have a destination for you, but I do have a heading,” Klein said. “According to my friend there was indeed a bullhead stolen this morning. When it disappeared off radar it was holding steady on a course of fourteen degrees north.”

“Hold on a moment,” Weiss said. She hit a few buttons on her scroll. Klein’s image shrunk down into one corner of the screen, and an electronic map popped up, filling the rest of it. The map was centered on the city of Atlas, but Weiss began to drag it with her finger along a line of fourteen degrees north.

Everyone in the room watched with rapt attention as Weiss slowly scrolled the map. Miles and miles of empty wilderness passed by, until Weiss’s finger finally landed almost directly on top of a point of interest.

Weiss read the label displayed on the map. “Creek Basin Mine,” she said.

Blake said, “That’s one of the Schnee Dust Company’s largest operations, isn’t it?”


Yang asked, “Why would Fennec want to go there?”

Blake said, “There are hundreds of faunus working at that mine. Maybe he’s trying to liberate them.”

“Maybe,” Yang said. “But knowing Fennec, I bet it’s something way more sinister.”

Weiss said, “Whatever his intentions may be, he’s going to get a lot of people hurt. Human and faunus.”
Ruby spoke up. “It doesn’t matter what Fennec’s trying to do. He’s up to no good. And it’s our job to stop him!”

Yang grinned. “I’m in,” she said.

Blake said, “Me too.”

Everyone looked at Weiss. She turned to her scroll and said, “Klein, call the airdock. Tell them to prepare my ship. My team and I have somewhere we need to be.”

Down in the corner of Weiss’s scroll, Klein smiled. He said, “Right away, Miss Schnee!”

Chapter End Notes

Apparently Weiss arguing with police officers has become a staple of this story. I can’t say I planned that, but here we are.

In keeping with the convention of faunus characters in Volumes 4 and 5 being named after animals, Ryn’s name is derived from the genus of lizard *Phrynosoma*, also known as the horned lizard. He’s the unnamed-in-canon faunus that was seen working with Ilia in Blake’s Volume 5 character short.

This chapter introduces perhaps the most fantastical element of this story yet: girl clothes with functional pockets! Okay, okay, those aren’t as rare in real life as they used to be, but I think my point stands.

Only two chapters left to go. And with the last one being more of an epilogue, the big, possibly explosive climax is just around the corner. I hope you’re ready for it! I sure am, but I don’t really have a choice in the matter. You know, because I’m the one who has to write it.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.

**Messages:**
Yang: Where are you at?
Ruby: At Weiss’s penthouse.
Yang: We found out some stuff. We’ll be there soon to tell you about it.
Heroes in the End

Chapter Notes

Oh. Hello again. It’s been a long time since I’ve been able to update this story. Way, way too long. The lesson to be learned here is that you shouldn’t try to write the longest chapter you’ve ever written in your life during an extremely busy time at work. That’s pretty obvious in hindsight, but here we are.

And I’m not joking about this chapter being the longest I’ve ever written. It’s 20,000+ words! That’s four to five times the length of one of my average chapters. Now far be it for me to discourage anyone from diving right into it, but I am going to recommend you make sure you have enough time to finish before you start.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The cabin of Weiss’s airship was uncomfortably quiet. Despite all of Team RWBY being present, the only sound was the whine of the ship’s engines as they propelled the vessel through the air. Ordinarily, Blake wouldn’t have minded the lack of conversation, but right now she really felt like she could use the distraction. She wasn’t sure why she was so nervous. This certainly wasn’t the first time she’d been airlifted to a mission, but even so, she wasn’t exactly in familiar territory. She was used to the cramped and freezing cargo bay of a bullhead. Given the foreboding circumstances, the plush, climate-controlled comfort of Weiss’s airship was oddly unsettling.

Blake was still amazed that Weiss had been able to arrange for a private airship to be ready on less than an hour’s notice. Blake had known that Weiss was amazingly wealthy, but she hadn’t really understood what that meant until today. She knew she should have been offended by Weiss’s affluence, but she wasn’t. In fact, she was envious. Despite the circumstances, she’d enjoyed the small taste she’d gotten of the pampered lifestyle that Weiss led. Maybe it wasn’t nerves that had her on edge after all. Maybe it was shame.

In a strange way Blake felt like she understood Weiss less now. If their situations had been reversed, she wasn’t sure she’d be able to summon the will to care about the disadvantaged. Why bother trying to right the world’s wrongs when it would be so much easier to retreat into a life of plenty?

Blake shook her head to clear it. She had more important things to worry about at the moment than her own shortcomings. There would be time for her to examine all of these uncomfortable self-revelations later.

Weiss and Ruby were sitting just ahead of Blake in the airship’s cabin. They were holding hands with their arms spanning the narrow aisle that ran between their seats. Blake saw Ruby turn her head to look at Weiss. Ruby didn’t say anything, but her lips pressed together in a worried frown. She was obviously concerned about her girlfriend, and Blake had a guess as to why. Even from behind, she could sense Weiss’s apprehension.

Blake didn’t blame Weiss for being nervous. Fennec was capable of anything. There was no telling what might be waiting for Team RWBY at Creek Basin Mine. Although what Blake feared the most was the possibility that they’d arrive at the mine and find nothing out of the ordinary. If Fennec wasn’t there, if they’d been wrong about his destination, they’d be too late to stop whatever he was really up to.
Blake looked over at Yang who was sitting directly across from her. Yang was grinning ever so subtly, and her eyes were glued to her window. Out of all of Team RWBY, Yang was probably the only one who was eager to get to their destination. Blake just knew that Yang was already savoring the possibility of beating Fennec within an inch of his life. In a way it made her jealous. She doubted there would be any satisfaction waiting for her at the mine, but maybe she could at least find closure.

Yang must have felt Blake’s eyes on her because she turned away from her window and faced Blake. She smiled reassuringly. Blake immediately felt a little better. It never failed to amaze her how much Yang could say without saying a word, especially given how much Yang loved to talk.

Suddenly the timbre of the airship’s engines changed. The ship gently banked to the side and started to descend.

Weiss said, “We’re getting close.”

Blake glanced out her window in an effort to spot the mine, but she didn’t see anything yet except for mountains and wilderness.

The airship continued to sink lower. After a minute or two, Ruby shouted, “There it is!”

Weiss gasped, and Blake quickly saw the reason why. Creek Basin Mine appeared before her, out from behind one of the twin mountain ranges that flanked it. Even from the air, Blake could see flashes of gunfire and explosions of Dust all over the mine.

Yang said, “Looks like we came to the right place. This has got to be Fennec’s doing.”

Ruby said, “They’re even attacking the village where all the workers live!”

Blake looked closer. Sure enough, there was a collection of houses clustered together on the ground below, and it wasn’t being spared from the carnage. Blake didn’t dare imagine what things must have been like for the helpless faunus down there.

Weiss asked, “Why would Fennec do that?! Wouldn’t he want to liberate those faunus?”

Blake couldn’t fathom what Fennec hoped to gain by this attack any more than Weiss could. But as she watched, transfixed by the horrific spectacle unfolding below her, everything suddenly became clear. In one terrible moment, the cruel logic behind Fennec’s scheme was laid bare to her. She said, “The missing uniforms.”

Weiss looked over her shoulder at Blake and asked, “What do they have to do with anything?”

“Think about how this will look to the public,” Blake said. “Think of the outrage when they hear about Schnee Dust Company security personnel attacking their own faunus workers for no reason.”

Ruby said, “But its Fennec’s people who are attacking!”

Weiss said, “No. Blake is right. The public’s perception of an event is always far more important than the truth.”

Blake said, “There’s no way the media won’t hear about this, especially when the Dust stops coming from the mine. And that’s exactly what Fennec wants. He wants Remnant’s faunus population to rise up in anger. He wants to start a new revolution.”

Yang said, “But that’s insane! He’s going to get a lot of innocent people killed!”
“You saw for yourself how unhinged he’s become,” Blake said.

Ruby said, “Then we’ve got to stop him. Before anyone else gets hurt.”

Weiss squeezed Ruby’s hand tight. “Agreed,” she said.

All of a sudden, the airship shook. It’s descent leveled out, and it began to climb again.

Weiss didn’t waste any time looking confused. She let go of Ruby’s hand and unlatched her seat belt. A moment later, she was on her feet and running toward the front of the cabin.

Blake, Yang, and Ruby all looked at each other. Then the three of them all simultaneously started unbuckling themselves from their seats.

By the time the rest of Team RWBY had caught up with Weiss at the front of the airship’s cabin, she had hit a button on an intercom. She said into it, “What’s going on!? Why aren’t we landing?”

A voice, presumably the pilot’s, came out of the intercom’s speaker. “Something’s happening at the mine, Miss Schnee! It looks like a war zone down there!”

“I’m well aware of that!” Weiss said. “Now get us on the ground!”

Suddenly, several sharp pinging sounds echoed inside the cabin. The airship wobbled unsteadily for a moment, and a hissing sound reached Blake’s ears. Blake looked over her shoulder, back near where Team RWBY had been sitting, and saw sunlight shining in through fresh bullet holes in the ship’s fuselage. Someone on the ground had decided to shoot at them.

“There’s no way we can land!” the pilot said. “This isn’t a military craft! If a stray shot hits the engines, we’re done!”

“Weiss!” Ruby said, pointing to a latch on the wall next to them. It was connected to the airship’s exterior door and prominently labeled “TURN TO OPEN”.

Weiss nodded at Ruby. Then she said into the intercom. “Just get us in close! We’ll take it from there!”

“But—!” the pilot started to protest.

“Do it or you’re fired!” Weiss interrupted. Then she shut off the intercom.

The ship held a steady altitude for what felt like forever, but then it began to descend again, albeit at a much sharper angle. Blake let out a breath that she hadn’t realized she’d been holding in, although she supposed she shouldn’t feel too relieved. She and her team were about to throw themselves into the chaos below.

Ruby opened up a nearby storage compartment. Inside were her scythe and Blake’s sheathed sword. Ruby grabbed the sword and handed it to Blake. Then she picked up Crescent Rose and clipped it to her harness on the small of her back. Blake tucked Wilt and Blush into her belt in their customary spot.

Ruby began twisting the latch on the door. Once she’d turned it as far as it would go, she tried to push the door open, but it refused to budge. Air pressure was holding it firmly in place.

Yang said, “Allow me.”

Ruby moved aside. Yang took a small step back. Then she let out a yell and kicked the door with all
her might. There was a loud clang, and the door flung open. The deafening roar of the wind rushing by outside immediately filled the cabin.

The airship was low enough now that Blake could easily see the pandemonium below. Groups of people dressed in Schnee Dust Company uniforms were fighting other identically dressed people. Faunus laborers and non-security personnel alike were darting about this way and that, trying to find somewhere to hide. Confusion was everywhere as the mine’s defenders tried to figure out who was an enemy and who was an ally.

Blake said, “We’ve got to get down there!” She had to shout to be heard over the wind.

Ruby held up a hand, signaling everyone to wait. Her eyes swept across the mine, taking in everything.

The airship started to level off again. Apparently the pilot had flown as low as he dare. Up ahead, Blake spotted a landing pad sitting in front of a drab, two-story building. The ship was approaching it fast, although Blake knew it wasn’t the pilot’s intended destination. Gunfire was spraying out from several of the building’s windows. However, the hail of bullets was doing little to dissuade a group of people from massing nearby. They looked like they were about to storm the place. Blake wondered whose side they were on.

Ruby said, “Weiss. Blake. You two clear out the administrative building. If there’s a way to get all of the real guards organized, I bet it’s in there. Yang, you come with me. We’ll protect the workers in the village.”

Weiss started to ask, “You want me and…Blake to—?”

“Go!” Ruby shouted. Then she jumped from the airship, out into the open sky. Like that, she was gone.

Yang said, “You heard her!” She ran after Ruby. As she leaped from the open door, she spun a half turn around in the air and gave Blake a wink before she vanished from sight.

Blake wasn’t sure she approved of Ruby’s plan, but it was too late to protest now. Either way, there wasn’t a moment to lose. She stepped forward and jumped out of the airship as well.

The wind whipped past Blake as she plummeted down toward Remnant. The ground raced up to meet her, but at the last minute, she used her semblance to create a clone of herself and jumped off its shoulders. She hung in the air for a moment before landing softly.

Blake looked over at what she assumed was the administrative building. She had landed just in time to see the group of people she’d spotted from the air rush inside.

Blake didn’t like the prospect of fighting a whole group of Fennec’s followers or company guards all by herself. She began to wonder where Weiss had gone. She looked up into the sky, and her question was answered. A series of white glyphs were hovering in the air, each about ten feet below the last, and Weiss was hopping her way down them.

One final glyph appeared next to Blake. Weiss landed on it and then jumped to the ground.

“We’ve got to hurry,” Blake said to Weiss. “If Fennec’s people weren’t in the building already, they just charged in.”

“Right,” Weiss said.
Blake and Weiss ran for the building. Blake half expected to get shot at, but not so much as a single bullet was fired their way. The building’s defenders must have had their hands full fighting off the intruders who had barged their way in.

Blake and Weiss reached a door. They both took up positions on either side of it. Blake’s ears could hear the sound of combat raging inside. She was just about to ask Weiss if she was ready when it suddenly dawned on her what was about to happen. She was about to go fight her White Fang sisters and brothers with Weiss Schnee by her side. The word “ironic” didn’t seem strong enough to describe the situation.

“What’s that look for?” Weiss asked, catching Blake off guard with her question.

“Nothing,” Blake said. She hadn’t even realized she’d been staring at Weiss. She was far too used to wearing a mask.

Weiss sighed. “Blake, you and I have an…interesting history.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Blake said.

“But,” Weiss continued. “I want you to know that you can count on me. We’re in this together.”

Blake was silent for a moment as she considered Weiss’s words. Eventually, she said, “Okay. I can count on you. And you can count on me too.”

“It’s settled then,” Weiss said.

Blake slid Wilt and Blush, one still inside the other, out from her belt. She gripped her scabbard firmly and looked at Weiss.

Weiss nodded.

Blake bashed the door open with her shoulder and lunged through it. There were half a dozen or so people standing in the hallway on the other side. They all paused and looked at Blake in surprise, and for a moment, everyone froze. All of the people were dressed in security uniforms, but Blake saw enough telltale signs—claws, ears twitching under caps, tails tucked into jackets—that she knew these were Fennec’s followers.

Blake didn’t hesitate. She squeezed the trigger on Blush. Wilt blasted forward and collided with the closest White Fang operative. He let out a yelp as he was knocked off his feet. Before he even hit the ground, Weiss burst through the door as well. She thrust her hand forward and yellow stitching lit up on her dress. A bolt of lightning leaped off her fingers, striking another two uniformed assailants.

From there, everything seemed to happen all at once. Blake charged forward, snatching Wilt out of the air. She swung it and Blush around and began battering her way through her former White Fang comrades. Weiss was on the offensive as well. For the brief moment that Blake could spare to look, she saw Weiss create a pillar of rock that shot up from the floor, hurling a man trying to attack her into the ceiling with enough force that he knocked the tiling loose.

Before anyone had a chance to so much as blink, all but one of the disguised White Fang operatives had fallen to either Blake or Weiss. And the last one, a woman with a rifle in her hands, was staring at the two of them with her mouth agape.

The woman quickly came to her senses. She spun her rifle around. It unfolded into the shape of a war hammer. Resolve filled her face, and she charged for Blake.
Blake lifted Wilt, ready to defend herself, but before the woman could close the distance completely, Weiss stomped her foot. Her dress glowed with a cyan light, and a sheet of ice appeared on the floor beneath her and rapidly spread down the hallway.

The woman’s feet lost their traction. She skidded off balance and started sliding uncontrollably. Unable to stop herself, her momentum carried her directly toward Blake, but she wasn’t in any position to attack.

Blake slashed at the woman with Wilt. Its blade ripped open her aura. Blush immediately followed and slammed into the woman’s gut.

The woman let out a pained wheeze as the air was forced from her lungs. She collapsed to the floor, even as she kept sliding across the ice. She finally came to a stop right in front of Weiss’s feet.

Weiss prodded the downed White Fang operative with the toe of her shoe, but the unconscious woman didn’t respond.

Blake slid Wilt back into Blush. She looked over all of the uniformed assailants strewn out across the length of the hallway. Then she turned back to Weiss and said, “Not bad.”

“I’ve been practicing,” Weiss said with a hint of smugness.

Suddenly, more gunfire sounded from above, causing Blake’s and Weiss’s heads to snap up. Weiss said, “The overseer’s office! We need to get up there!”

Weiss started running down the hallway. She seemed to know where she was going, so Blake followed her.

Weiss rounded a corner and practically flew up a flight of stairs. Once she reached the second floor, she homed in on an office door that looked like it had been forced open.

Weiss dashed through the doorway, and Blake did the same. Three of Fennec’s followers were inside the office, one of which was spraying a desk with bullets fired from her machine pistol.

Blake lunged for the shooter and kicked the gun out of her hand. She didn’t even have time to look surprised before Blake smacked her across her cheek with Blush. Her head jerked to the side fast enough to give her whiplash, and she crumpled to the floor.

Blake pivoted to deal with the room’s other two intruders, but she needn’t have bothered. From the doorway, Weiss clenched her hand into a fist, and the two men were lifted into the air by a haze of purple energy. Their feet kicked helplessly as they tried to free themselves from the grip of Weiss’s gravity Dust, but to no avail. Weiss walked into the room, and with a flick of her wrist, the two men were launched through the office’s windows with a crash and were violently expelled from the building.

Weiss said, “Hopefully that’s the last of them. For the moment at least.”

“Miss Schnee?” a small voice suddenly said. “Is…is that you?”

A man’s head poked out from behind the bullet-riddled desk. He looked terrified but otherwise unharmed.

“Miss Schnee!” the man said. He stood and attempted to brush off the business suit he was wearing. “My, this is a great surprise! Albert Smoke, in case you’ve forgotten. I…I must apologize for the state of things. As you can see, we’ve had something of an incident. I have been attempting to wrest
control of the situation, but with little success so far.”

Blake asked, “What exactly happened here?” She knew Fennec was behind this, but she still didn’t know the specifics of his plan, not for certain anyway.

Albert turned to Blake. His eyes immediately darted up to her ears, but they only remained there a moment before coming down to linger on her scars. Blake didn’t particularly appreciate him staring at either.

Albert said, “I don’t recognize you as one of our laborers. Surely I’d remember one as distinct as you.”

Weiss derisively said, “Just answer her question.”

“Ah…. Yes of course, Miss Schnee,” Albert said. “It began when an unscheduled aircraft approached the mine. We tried to identify it as is company policy, but before anybody knew what was happening, it had swooped in, and people who appeared to be company personnel started pouring out of it. From the reports I’ve heard tell of, these invaders opened fire on anyone unfortunate enough to be standing nearby, and…well, I believe you can extrapolate the rest.”

Suddenly, the sound of a muffled voice came from the vicinity of the unconscious White Fang woman down on the floor.

Albert asked, “What was that?”

Blake bent down. She reached into the woman’s jacket and pulled out a scroll. When she opened it up, a list of pictures and names appeared on its screen. It seemed that the scroll was connected to some kind of group call.

One of the pictures suddenly lit up, and a voice came from the scroll. “What’s your status at the administrative building? Has the taskmaster been captured?”

Blake felt a jolt of apprehension shoot through her. She knew who the voice belonged to, even without looking at the screen. It was Fennec. She’d already been certain he was here, but having the fact confirmed made everything that was happening feel so much more intensely real.

Blake gritted her teeth. There were a lot of things she wanted to say to Fennec, but she knew she had to be smarter than that. She held out the scroll to Weiss and whispered, “He’ll recognize my voice.”

Weiss looked nervous, but she nodded. She took the scroll from Blake and held it up to her mouth. “We have the…taskmaster,” she said, trying to affect a lower vocal register. “What, uh, what should we do with him?”

“Is he alive?” Fennec asked.

“Yes?” Weiss said. Her eyes flicked over to Albert. She clearly wasn’t sure if that was the answer Fennec was looking for or not.

“Good,” Fennec said. “Bring him to the excavation pit. His death must be made to look accidental. It will be the impetus for the guards’ disgusting slaughter of the innocent faunus here. Or so the public will be led to believe.”

Albert’s face turned pale at the pronouncement. Blake couldn’t say she blamed him. It seemed that she’d been right about Fennec’s intentions, but that didn’t exactly please her.
“R-roger!” Weiss said. “We’ll be there as soon as we can.”

Weiss fumbled with the scroll until she found the mute button and pressed it.

Blake looked at Albert and said, “The excavation pit. Where is it?”

“It’s in that direction,” Albert said, pointing out his office’s broken windows. “Just follow the road that leads northeast from here. It’s quite impossible to miss.”

Weiss asked, “Do we call Ruby and Yang?”

“They’ll have their hands full trying to save everyone in the village,” Blake said. She walked over to the windows. Indecision gripped her. She knew protecting as many people as possible should be the top priority, and unfortunately, that included the human employees there in the building. They may have been culpable in the Schnee Dust Company’s crimes against basic decency, but Blake couldn’t bring herself to believe they deserved to die. That was Adam’s way of thinking. However, Fennec was out there, and if he wasn’t stopped, who knew what he might try next.

“Blake,” Weiss said. “Go. I can handle things here.”

“Are you sure?” Blake asked.

“Just go!” Weiss said. “Before Fennec gets away!”

Blake nodded. She put her foot on the ledge of the window frame. Then she said, “Weiss. Thank you.”

Blake leaped through the window and out of the building. The moment her feet hit the ground, she ran. Reports of gunfire were still echoing from all around her as she sprinted down the path that Albert had told her to follow. The battle for the mine was continuing unabated, but Blake couldn’t worry about that right now. She spared a thought for Yang, hoping that she and Ruby were alright. Then she focused herself completely on the task at hand.

It wasn’t long before the road that Blake was running down let her to the edge of a massive, gaping pit. The monstrous chasm was deep enough and wide enough that Blake imagined all of downtown Atlas could fit inside. Even with modern mining technology, it must have taken the faunus who worked here decades to strip away the rock and dirt, all to extract the Dust underneath for the enrichment of their human masters.

From her vantage point up high, Blake could see three figures down in the basin of the pit. She couldn’t make out any of their features from such a great distance, but her instincts were telling her that one of them was the man she was looking for.

A road snaked its way back and forth down into the mining pit, but that would be too slow for Blake. She had to catch Fennec before he had a chance to escape. So she jumped and simply let gravity carry her down. Twice she used her semblance to slow her fall, but even then, when she landed, her feet hit the ground hard.

The bottom of the pit was littered with massive dump trucks, cranes, and other abandoned pieces of mining equipment. Their operators had no doubt fled when the attack had begun.

Blake had lost sight of the figures, but she didn’t let that deter her. She started quickly moving in the direction she’d last seen them. She stuck close to the vacant vehicles, hoping to stay out of sight from any of Fennec’s followers who might have been lingering in the area. Fighting them would be a waste of time.
After a minute or two of dashing from hiding place to hiding place, Blake knew she had to be getting close. She peeked around the side of a truck that she’d ended up behind, and there she finally spotted Fennec, so tantalizingly close yet still so far away.

Fennec was conversing with one of his subordinates. Unlike the rest of his followers, he was still dressed in his White Fang robes. He didn’t appear to be armed, but Blake would have bet a large sum of money that he had at least a dagger hidden somewhere about his person.

Blake felt the urge to leap out at Fennec rising in her, but she kept to her hiding spot. Over the years Fennec had proved that, if nothing else, he was uncannily skilled at turning the worst of situations to his advantage. Blake couldn’t afford to let that happen this time. She had to stay calm and collected.

Eventually, Fennec said to his underling, “Go. Our victory is at hand.”

The underling saluted Fennec and started walking away to go carry out whatever orders he’d been given.

Fennec clasped his hands behind his back and smiled in the most self-satisfied way. He looked up to the top of the cliff above him. Part of the village that Blake had seen from the air was situated on the edge of the strip mine. The tips of its houses’ rooftops were just barely visible from down in the pit. Fennec bowed to them. “Your brothers and sisters mourn your loss,” he said. “But your martyrdom is the spark that will ignite a new era for the faunus.”

Blake’s blood really began to boil. She didn’t think she could take listening to Fennec for much longer, but fortunately, she didn’t have to. He was finally alone, and his back was to her. She silently slipped out from where she’d been hiding.

Blake’s heart was pounding in her chest and the tips of her fingers were tingling as she crept toward Fennec. She reached for Wilt, keeping her hand steady enough to draw her sword without making so much as a sound.

Fennec was only a scant few feet away from Blake now, but she still didn’t let her emotions get the better of her. She inched ever closer, waiting for just the right moment.

Blake struck in the blink of an eye. She grabbed Fennec from behind and thrust the blade of her sword at his throat, holding it close enough that it flitted against his aura.

Fennec let out an alarmed gasp. He struggled for just a moment, but the weapon pressed against his neck convinced him that wasn’t a good idea.

Blake didn’t have enough free hands to search Fennec for a weapon, but she was confident that she’d have the advantage if he tried anything. She said, “It’s time to end this, Fennec.”

“Blake,” Fennec said like everything suddenly made sense. He actually laughed. “Of course you’re here. Why wouldn’t you be? Even when you fell for my trap you still managed to turn it against me. I really must stop being surprised by your talent for disruption.”

“What trap?” Blake asked.

“Surely you’ve figured it out by now,” Fennec said. “Not even you would be foolish enough to ‘volunteer’ to kidnap someone like Weiss Schnee without a little prodding.”

“What are you talking about?” Blake asked.

“At the time it seemed like an elegant way to rid the High Leader of your influence,” Fennec said.
“Blake Belladonna, captured or killed during her heroic effort to reverse the White Fang’s declining fortunes. I’m sure the High Leader would have remembered you fondly. And I would have finally been free to gently guide her down the correct path.”

“You really expect me to believe the plot to kidnap Weiss was all your idea?” Blake asked.

“Not that specifically, no,” Fennec said. “Any impossible mission would have sufficed. So long as you and the High Leader both believed it was your idea.”

“Not even you could pull off something like that,” Blake said.

“But I did,” Fennec said. “After all, you did attempt to kidnap Weiss Schnee. It wasn’t even that difficult to goad you into it. First, I make a patently false insinuation about your father to get you upset. Then, when I suggest the White Fang should do nothing against the Schnee Dust Company, you jump at the chance to disagree. I express skepticism regarding such a course of action, and it reinforces your conviction. All in all it was a rather brilliant bit of showmanship if I do say so myself.”

Blake was speechless. She couldn’t believe it, but Fennec just might be telling the truth.

Blake quickly regained her composure and said, “To bad for you your trap didn’t work.”

“I must admit I was upset at the time,” Fennec said. “But this is so much better, don’t you see? Now instead of you rotting away in prison, I get to watch you die. Painfully and slowly.”

“You really have gone insane,” Blake said. To illustrate her point, she pressed Wilt a little tighter against Fennec’s neck, making it dig into his aura. “Now call off this attack!”

Fennec flinched, but his conviction didn’t seem to waver. He said, “You have more enemies than you know, Blake.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Blake asked.

“You’ll never believe who sought me out the very day I was cast from the High Leader’s sight,” Fennec said. “I never would have suspected he was the type to be so well informed. And it truly is impressive how much he hates you.”

Blake’s ears perked up at the sound of heavy footsteps approaching. They were accompanied by the rumble of a small motor.

“Fennec, who is that?” Blake asked.

Fennec’s only answer was to grin.

A moment later, a giant of a man walked into view from around the side of a nearby excavator. Blake’s heart just about stopped in her chest as her eyes beheld a demon from her past. She hadn’t seen him in years, yet he looked almost exactly the same. He still wore his old White Fang uniform and a grimm mask that covered his entire face. His chainsaw-turned-weapon was growling in his hands. He had been Adam’s most loyal lieutenant, and Blake didn’t need to see his face to understand what raw anger was burning inside of him.

“You!” Blake exclaimed.

“You!” the Lieutenant said in his deep voice. “You don’t know how long I’ve dreamt of this day. The day I would finally get to kill you.”
“Don’t be stupid!” Blake said, trying to keep the fear out of her voice. She dragged her sword ever so lightly across Fennec’s neck, just enough to call attention to its presence. “If you try anything, Fennec will—!”

The Lieutenant didn’t let Blake finish. He grabbed a sizable rock from off the ground and hurled it at her head with startling speed.

The rock collided with Blake’s temple hard enough to make her see stars. “Agh!” she cried out. Her aura saved her from the brunt of the impact, but the force propelling the rock was powerful enough to knock her off her feet. Fennec slipped out of her grasp as she fell to the ground.

Blake shook her head, trying to make her eyes focus. She propped herself up on an arm and stuck Wilt into the ground so she could use it to steady herself.

When Blake glanced up, she saw Fennec grimacing. He tenderly touched his neck where Wilt had been pressed against it. Then he said to the Lieutenant, “She’s all yours. Do remember to savor the moment.”

The Lieutenant’s chainsaw roared like a beast as he opened up its throttle. Panic flooded Blake when she saw him charge.

A hail of bullets flew toward Ruby. She spun Crescent Rose in front of her, deflecting most of the shots, and let the rest bounce off her aura.

Ruby had arrived at the mine’s village only to find it awash in chaos. Most of the workers had taken refuge in whatever house happened to be the closest, but they were far from safe. Squads of uniformed men and women were running rampant along the village’s roads. Some of them were security guards and some of them were Fennec’s followers, but Ruby had quickly stopped caring which were which. It had become abundantly clear that neither group was concerned about the workers’ well-being.

The man who was firing at Ruby kept his finger on the trigger of his rifle, but his magazine soon ran dry. Alarm registered on his face as his gun clicked impotently in his hands, and his troubles were only just beginning. Yang came charging out from somewhere behind Ruby, her blades extended and ready.

“Hit him low, Rubes!” Yang shouted as she ran toward the man.

“Right!” Ruby said.

The man was fumbling for a fresh clip of ammunition when Ruby surged forward. She quickly overtook Yang. As she zipped past the man, she hooked her scythe around his legs and pulled him clean off his feet. Yang, not far behind, leaped up high into the air. She came down with her legs extended and landed directly on the man’s chest. He let out an ugly wheezing sound as he was plastered against the ground.

Yang stepped off the man, kicking his rifle away for good measure. Ruby wasn’t sure if he was still conscious, but for his sake, she hoped not.

Yang gave Ruby a thumbs-up, but no sooner had she done so than a fresh spray of bullets pelted the both of them. Ruby spun on her heels and saw a new pair of gunmen advancing in their direction down the village road. Each had a machine pistol in his hand.
Yang took off running toward the gunmen, blades crossed in front of her. The men’s fire converged on her, and a dazzling display of sparks shot out from Ember and Blaze as dozens of bullets ricocheted off of them.

Ruby suddenly found herself being ignored by the gunmen. She decided to take advantage. She quickly sprinted down the narrow alley running in between two of the nearest houses. These particular houses sat right on the lip of a massive pit, some kind of strip mine apparently. The bare dirt that passed for their backyards abruptly ended in a sheer drop without any kind of safety barrier. Ruby thought it was incredibly reckless to build houses so close to an open mine, but she had more important things to worry about at the moment.

Ruby zoomed forward, leaving a trail of rose petals behind her, but she wasn’t alone back behind the houses like she’d expected. Up ahead she spotted a man in a security uniform banging his shoulder repeatedly against a back door. He was clearly trying to break in, and the gun in his hand and sinister expression on his face made it clear that he was up to no good.

Ruby didn’t have time to deal with the man, but she wasn’t going to let him terrorize whoever might be hiding inside the house either. She twirled Crescent Rose in her hands and really poured on the speed. As she passed the man, she let the flat end of her scythe slam into the side of his head. The man went flying sideways as he was knocked off his feet. He crashed headfirst into the ground some distance away from where he’d been standing.

Unfortunately, Ruby was running too fast to see if the man was really down for the count, but even if he wasn’t, hopefully taking a hit like that would make him think twice about what he was doing.

Ruby rounded the corner of another house and zoomed back out onto the village road. She spotted the pair of gunmen again. Their backs were to her now, just like she’d intended. Although they were closer than she’d anticipated. They’d apparently been backpedaling in an effort to stay away from Yang. However, it hadn’t done them much good; Yang had almost closed the distance.

Ruby didn’t waste a moment. She ran forward. The gunmen never saw her coming. With one big swing of Crescent Rose, Ruby struck both of them from behind. They went reeling, and an instant later, Yang was there, slashing at them from the front. Trapped between the two sisters, they went down in seconds.

Ruby stood over the downed gunmen lying on the ground. She half expected even more people dressed like security guards to show up out of nowhere, but it seemed that she and Yang had finally been given a reprieve.

“This is crazy!” Ruby said to Yang. “There’s got to be a better way to stop all of this.”

“We could always try to find the actual fighters,” Yang suggested. “If we take them out, mopping up the rest of the White Fang will be easy.”

“Actual fighters?” Ruby asked.

“Yeah. Fennec’s probably got about two or three tough guys with him who can actually hold their own. Unlike these scrubs,” Yang said, gesturing at the defeated gunmen lying at her feet. “That’s how it always seems to work anyway.”

“Oh!” Ruby said, comprehension dawning on her. “Like bosses in a video game!”

“I’ve never really played one of those, but I think you’ve got the idea,” Yang said.

“Alright,” Ruby said. “Then how do we tell who’s a boss?”
“Well they’ll probably be dressed differently than everyone else,” Yang said. “It’s just one of those things. How about we—”

Yang was still mid-sentence when the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps reached Ruby’s ears. Her instincts kicked in, and before she was even fully aware of what she was doing, she used her semblance to lunge forward and grab Yang. As she and Yang disappeared in a blur, Ruby felt a blade graze across the back of her neck. It barely even touched her aura, but it still sent an unpleasant tingling sensation shooting through her.

Ruby had only gotten a few feet down the road before she stopped. She’d learned over the years that dragging someone along with her while using her semblance was a good way to tire herself out quickly.

“Whoa! What?!” Yang said.

Ruby and Yang both looked back toward where they’d been standing. A woman had taken their place. She was facing away from them, but there was no question who she was with or what her motives were. She was not wearing a security uniform but a black and white outfit trimmed in red piping with a large White Fang emblem prominently emblazoned on the back. She had a scimitar in one hand. Just seeing the sword was enough to make the back of Ruby’s neck tingle again.

Ruby said, “I think we found one of the bosses.”

“You got that right,” Yang said.

The woman knelt down next to the gunmen that Ruby and Yang had taken out. One of them stirred, and his eyes open. He must have recognized her, because he said, “Specialist….”

The woman placed her free hand soothingly on the man. Then she stood. She turned toward Ruby and Yang. The top half of her face was hidden by an intricately decorated grimm mask with notches cut in it to accommodate a pair of short, stubby horns that were protruding from her forehead. However, the mask did nothing to hide the ugly scowl her lips were twisted into.

The Specialist drew a second scimitar from her belt. Then she spun the twin swords around once and brandished them at Ruby and Yang. Ruby could tell at a glance that she really knew how to use them too.

Ruby looked the Specialist in the eye, at least as much as she was able to with the mask in the way. “We don’t want to hurt you,” she said. “But we can’t let you hurt anyone else either.”

The Specialist’s mouth turned up into a twisted mockery of a smile. She dragged her scimitars against one another. There was a spark of red Dust, and suddenly, the blades were engulfed in flame.

Yang grinned. “I was hoping she’d say that. You ready for this, Sis?”

Ruby hefted Crescent Rose. “Ready,” she said.

Ruby and Yang took off running toward their opponent. Ruby wasn’t using her semblance, but she still closed the distance faster than Yang. She raised Crescent Rose, preparing to strike, and the Specialist did the same with her swords. Their weapons rushed to meet each other, but at the last minute, Ruby tapped into her semblance. Instead of attacking, she zipped around to the side.

The Specialist fell for Ruby’s feint. Her swords swung and hit nothing but empty air. Her guard was only down for a second, but a second was all it took. Yang came charging in and hit the Specialist with a vicious uppercut, and her blade left a trail of light as it sliced across the Specialist’s aura.
Ruby wheeled around at superhuman speeds. She came at the Specialist from behind and swiped at her exposed back with her scythe. The Specialist whipped out one of her scimitars in an attempt to parry, but she was too slow. Ruby’s scythe struck true. On the Specialist’s other flank, Yang wasn’t being any kinder. She was punching away with Ember and Blaze, and her blades were finding their mark more often than not.

If the Specialist was worried, she didn’t show it, but Ruby knew she must have been. No matter how strong her aura was there was no way it could last long against this kind of assault. Ruby was about to declare the fight all but won, but suddenly, everything changed. The Specialist’s swords whipped out in opposite directions. One scimitar intercepted Crescent Rose, and the other caught Yang’s blade mid-strike. Twin echoes of metal clashing reverberated across the village as both Yang’s and Ruby’s attacks were stopped cold. There was a moment’s pause, and then the Specialist went on the offensive.

The Specialist began to fight Yang with one sword and Ruby with the other, and much to Ruby’s alarm, she seemed to be winning on both fronts. Ruby whipped Crescent Rose this way and that, but she was finding it increasingly difficult to fend off the incoming blows. The Specialist’s reflexes had all of a sudden become unbelievably fast. Ruby wondered if a semblance was involved. She didn’t see any obvious signs of one, but she knew that not everybody’s superpower was big and flashy.

Suddenly, the pommel of one of the Specialist’s swords struck Yang right between her eyes. The blow was vicious enough that even Ruby had to wince at it. Yang went cross-eyed and staggered backward. Ruby tried to do something to help, but it was all she could do to keep herself from taking an equally nasty hit.

With Yang momentarily vulnerable, Ruby did her best to press the attack on the Specialist. She hoped to keep her opponent’s attention focused on her, but the Specialist was having none of that. She deflected Crescent Rose’s next swing with one of her swords. Then she spun on her feet, easily slipping away from Ruby, and in the same motion, she kicked Yang in the throat.

Yang made an unpleasant gurgling noise and fell to one knee. But the Specialist wasn’t done yet. Her leg shot out again, catching Yang in the chest and knocking her off her feet entirely.

Ruby tried to rush to Yang’s aid, but she just as quickly jumped back when a pair of scimitars came whizzing toward her. It seemed she finally had the Specialist’s undivided attention.

Ruby’s eyes flitted down toward Yang for a fraction of a second. She had hoped to see her sister standing back up, but she had no such luck. Yang was struggling to get to her feet. Ruby would have been concerned, but she was far too preoccupied worrying about herself at the moment. The Specialist’s amazing reflexes hadn’t slowed, and her attacks hadn’t stopped coming. It was obvious to Ruby that her odds of beating the Specialist one-on-one weren’t very good. Fortunately, she’d learned from her huntress training how to deal with something, or someone, that she couldn’t fight head-on. The Specialist was dangerous, but she was no goliath or manticore.

Ruby kept up a steady defense, managing to hold the Specialist at bay. She lured her opponent away from Yang inch by inch. Then, when the moment was right, she used her semblance to take off running.

Ruby ducked around the side of a house to make it look like she was running away, even though she was doing nothing of the sort. She sprinted along the edge of the strip mine, much like she had minutes earlier, and shot out from around the corner of another house, charging at the Specialist from an entirely new angle.

Crescent Rose was poised to strike as Ruby ran toward the Specialist. But at the last minute she
heard Yang shout, “Look out!”

It was too late. Even as Ruby swung her scythe, the Specialist’s foot came up and effortlessly intercepted her with a kick. Ruby felt like she’d suddenly run into a brick wall. The high-speed impact caused her feet to lift off the ground, and before she’d even had a chance to think about recovering, the Specialist spun and slammed both of her scimitars into Ruby.

The flames dancing over the Specialist’s swords nipped at Ruby’s aura, but only for a moment before the power behind the blow sent Ruby flying. She shot back down the alleyway she’d just come running out of, bounced hard off the ground once, and then arced back upward. Fortunately, her jarring encounter with the ground had knocked some sense back into her. Rather than let herself tumble helplessly through the air, she swung Crescent Rose’s blade into the dirt and held onto it with all her might. Her muscles strained as her scythe literally plowed the soil beneath her, but she rapidly began to bleed off speed.

Ruby had just about slowed to a stop when the ground suddenly dropped out from under her. She yelped as she began plummeting down. In one horrible moment she realized that the Specialist had launched her in the direction of the strip mine, and she’d just fallen over the edge.

Fortunately, Ruby’s fall abruptly ended just as quickly as it had begun. The tip of Crescent Rose’s blade hooked onto the lip of the cliff above her and held her there.

Ruby looked down as she clung to her scythe for dear life. The cavernous pit loomed below her. She’d known it was a long way down, but she hadn’t realized just how long until now. Even for someone like her, who had been tossed off of high places with disturbing regularity during her time at Atlas Academy, the pit was dizzyingly deep. Her aura alone wouldn’t be enough to protect her from a fall like that, even if it had been at full strength.

Ruby quickly realized that hanging there gaping wasn’t doing her any good. She began climbing Crescent Rose. She put a hand on the ledge of the cliff above her as soon as she could reach and hauled herself up. She rested her arm on the higher ground, but when her headcrested the ridge, what she saw made the pit of her stomach sink.

Ruby found herself with the perfect view down the alleyway between the two closest houses, and right in the middle of it, walking straight for her, was the Specialist. The Specialist’s expression, even half hidden behind her mask, was absolutely dripping with menace, and she was dragging one of her burning swords across the side of one of the houses as she passed. Flames were leaping off the blade and licking their way up the weathered wood.

Ruby fretted for a moment about what had happened to Yang, but a moment was all she got before the Specialist picked up her pace. Ruby quickly realized that if she didn’t get back on her feet she was going to find out for herself just how deadly the fall awaiting below her really was. She gave Crescent Rose one last yank, pulling herself upward. Then she spun her weapon around, pointing it down, and fired.

The recoil from the shot gave Ruby the boost she needed to clear the ledge of the cliff. Her feet landed on solid ground, but at that exact moment, the Specialist charged. Ruby did her best to brace herself, but her heels were less than an inch away from the edge of the strip mine. It wouldn’t take much to send her plummeting to her doom.

Suddenly, a gun, not a bullet, but a gun came hurtling through the air. It smacked the Specialist in the back of her head, causing her to stop in her tracks.

The gun clattered to the ground. Ruby recognized it as one of the machine pistols that the uniformed
The Specialist turned in the direction the gun had come from, and Ruby looked as well. At the far side of the alleyway, past the flames that were steadily spreading across the house, Ruby saw Yang standing there.

“Yang!” Ruby shouted. A huge swell of relief filled her.

“Hey!” Yang said, pointing a finger at the Specialist. “You leave my sister alone!”

The Specialist’s only response was to give Yang an incredulous look.

Suddenly, Yang surged forward. She tore down the alley like an enraged bull, her eyes blazing red. Her blades were extended, and the very moment she reached her opponent, Ember and Blaze crashed into the Specialist’s swords. Yang’s momentum carried the both of them forward, forcing Ruby to roll out of the way in order to keep herself from getting knocked off the cliff.

Yang and the Specialist started trading blow after blow, heedless of their precarious situation. Their feet danced along the threshold of the pit beside them, continually flirting with disaster. More than once as they fought, loose gravel kicked up by their boots went tumbling over the edge where it was swallowed by the abyss.

Ruby’s heart was in her throat. She watched in abject horror as Yang and the Specialist fought. Her hands felt sweaty as she gripped Crescent Rose. She bounced on her feet, almost jumping into the fray several times, but each time she held herself back. She was terrified that anything she did might inadvertently send Yang spiraling over the edge.

The Specialist’s scimitars suddenly spun in a blur of metal and fire. Yang blocked, catching her opponent’s swords with her blades an instant before they would’ve slammed into her face. The two of them struggled against one another as their weapons locked together. However, it was the Specialist’s scimitars that started inching closer to Yang.

Ruby was aghast. It was clearly taking Yang everything she had to keep from being overpowered. Ruby was certain the Specialist hadn’t been that strong a few minutes ago. She was unquestionably using a semblance of some kind, and a dangerously effective one at that.

Yang managed to push the Specialist’s swords slightly to either side, buying herself some time. Even so, the fires burning on them were licking at her ears now, and the heat was singeing the fabric of her vest around her shoulders. Sweat beaded on her forehead, but the determined look on her face was matched equally by the Specialist’s sneer.

“Ruby!” Yang shouted. She frantically nodded her head in the direction of the pit.

It took Ruby a second to figure out what Yang was trying to tell her. When she did, she said, “What!? But…!”

“Do it! Now!” Yang shouted.

Yang’s frenetic tone was enough to harden Ruby’s resolve. She took off running down the alley, away from Yang and the Specialist. There she skidded to a halt. Then, without any hesitation, she ran back toward the pit at top speed. The world turned into a blur as she kicked her semblance into high gear. She closed the distance in the space of a heartbeat, and crashed into Yang and the Specialist shoulder-first.

Ruby staggered back from the impact, and Yang and the Specialist went tumbling over the edge of the cliff.
Ruby was suddenly alone. And without Yang or the Specialist there fighting each other, things had gotten eerily silent. Even the sound of the flames burning behind Ruby seemed to quiet. Ruby kept waiting for something, anything to happen.

“Yang?” Ruby asked, worry creeping into her voice.

Several more unbearably long seconds ticked by, but then a golden eagle flew up from the pit. It winged over in the air and dove back down to the ground. The moment it landed next to Ruby, it transformed back into Yang.

“Yang!” Ruby shouted in relief. She threw her arms around her sister.

“Thanks for the boost,” Yang said as she hugged Ruby back.

“Don’t scare me like that next time!” Ruby said.

“You mean the next time I ask you to throw me off a cliff?” Yang asked.

“Yeah!” Ruby said. “I was worried sick!”

Yang laughed. “I’ll do my best,” she said. She let go of Ruby and started picking at the blackened fabric around her shoulders, looking annoyed.

Yang’s eyes turned toward the strip mine. “Well, that’s one boss down. Now we just need to… Blake!”

“Blake?” Ruby asked. Yang had apparently noticed something down in the pit. Ruby followed her gaze.

In the basin of the strip mine, far below where Ruby and Yang were standing, three figures could be seen. Two of them appeared to be locked in combat. They were far enough away that Ruby couldn’t really make out who they might be. She lifted Crescent Rose and used its scope to get a better look.

“That’s Blake all right,” Ruby said, focusing on the two figures fighting each other. She couldn’t believe that Yang had been able to identify Blake from so far away.

“What’s she doing?!” Yang asked. “She was supposed to be with Weiss!”

“I don’t know,” Ruby said. She shifted her scope over to the third figure. “But I think that’s Fennec down there. At least he looks like the guy you described.”

“We’ve got to go help Blake!” Yang said.

“Okay,” Ruby said, lowering Crescent Rose. “Let’s—”

Suddenly, a scream of terror went up from behind Ruby and Yang. The two of them turned. The nearby house was completely engulfed in flames now, and the scream had come from inside.

“There’re people in there!” Ruby said.

Ruby and Yang looked at each other. Ruby could see the conflict in Yang’s eyes. She knew what needed to be done.

“You help Blake!” Ruby said. “I’ll join you as soon as I can!”

“Right!” Yang said. She turned toward the pit. “I guess next time came sooner than I thought. Could
“You got it!” Ruby said. Once again she sped down the alleyway using her semblance, and once again, she ran for Yang. At the last moment, both Yang and Ruby jumped. They brought their feet together and pushed off one another. Between Ruby’s speed and Yang’s strength, Yang was launched into the pit like a rocket.

Ruby did a somersault in the air and landed on her feet. “Good luck, Yang,” she said.

Ruby turned to face the burning house. There was no time to waste. She sped around to the front door. It was closed, but all it took was one good swing of Crescent Rose to slice it open.

A rush of scalding air burst out from the open door, forcing Ruby to shield her face with her arm for a moment. But then she lowered her arm and glared at the raging flames. She holstered Crescent Rose and flung herself into the burning house without a second thought.

Inside it was nearly impossible for Ruby to see anything through the smoke belching out of every corner of the house. She immediately began to sputter and cough in the dirty air.

“Hello?!” Ruby tried to shout as best she could. The only reply was the roaring of the fire and the cracking of splintering wood.

Ruby moved deeper into the house. “Hello?!” she shouted again.

“Help!” a voice finally answered. It didn’t sound like it was coming from very far away, but Ruby still couldn’t see anyone.

“Where are you?!” Ruby shouted.

“Help! Help us!” the voice called out again.

Ruby followed the voice. Sweat was pouring out of her in the intense heat, but she struggled forward.

After what seemed like an eternity, she spotted movement through the smoke. “I see you!” she said, picking up her pace.

Ruby had to take a detour around a burning, overturned table, but she finally reached the source of the cries for help. A pair of faces that she recognized emerged from the smoke. One belonged to a little girl with remarkably blue eyes and sharply pointed ears on top of her head. It was the same girl who Ruby had encounter during her last visit to Creek Basin Mine. The other face belonged to the worker who Ruby had seen a guard assaulting over a loaf a bread. Seeing the two together only reinforced Ruby’s suspicion that the worker was the little girl’s mother.

The girl was curled into a ball on the floor, looking terrified beyond belief. Ruby rushed over to her and her mother. A glint of recognition flashed in the mother’s eyes when she spotted Ruby.

“Come on! We need to—!” Ruby started to say, but her heart sank when she saw that the mother’s leg was trapped underneath a heavy wooden beam. It must have fallen from the ceiling.

Ruby’s first instinct was to push the beam off the mother’s leg. She tried to do just that, but it refused to budge.

“Don’t worry about me!” the mother said. “Just get my daughter to safety!”
“But—!” Ruby began to protest.

“Get her out of here!” the mother shouted.

Ruby nodded. She hurried over to the little girl. The daughter was practically comatose, so Ruby just picked her up and started carrying her away.

The smoke and heat had gotten worse. Ruby tried to hurry, but she didn’t dare use her semblance for fear that it might whip up a firestorm that would bring the whole house crashing down on her head. Unfortunately, she and the little girl would have to escape the slow way. It wasn’t easy for Ruby. Fear was whispering in her ear, goading her to run as fast as she could.

After some of the most intense seconds of Ruby’s life, she finally found her way back to the front door. She burst out of the house, still clutching the girl in her arms. Clean air filled her lungs, tasting like the sweetest nectar.

Ruby moved a safe distance away from the house and set the girl down on the dirt road. “Stay here for me, okay?” she said, not even sure if the girl could hear her. “I’m going to go help your mother.”

Ruby sped back toward the house, although it more resembled a bonfire at this point. She flung herself inside once again. In the short time it’d taken her to return, the fire had gotten even worse. Ruby retraced her steps, although it was getting harder and harder to find a path through the flames. They were simply everywhere. Ruby feared that the house would collapse at any second.

The mother came into view again. She looked at Ruby with a horrified expression. “What are you doing!?” she asked.

“I saved your daughter,” Ruby said. “Now I’m going to save you!”

Ruby pushed and pushed against the wooden beam that had the mother’s leg pinned in place, but it still wouldn’t budge. She really wished Yang was there to help, but she wasn’t going to let that little inconvenience keep her from saving the day. She was a huntress, and she had a job to do.

“Just leave me!” the mother said.

“No way!” Ruby said. “Your daughter needs you!”

The beam finally started to tip. Ruby redoubled her efforts. “Come ooon!” she said, straining. Degree by degree the beam tilted, until with one last mighty push, it rolled off of the mother’s leg.

Ruby didn’t wait for the mother to get back to her feet. She just grabbed her by the arm, hauled her up, and started dragging her to safety.

Unfortunately, the mother was a lot heavier than she looked, and she was struggling to walk. If Ruby had to guess she’d say that the mother’s leg was broken. But the two of them still inched their way forward.

The front door, their gateway to safety, loomed ahead of Ruby. She focused on it and nothing else. Step by step it grew closer. Ruby could even see the blue of the sky outside through the door. But that wasn’t all she saw. A man dressed in a security uniform had appeared on the village road. He was sneaking up on the little girl, and he had a gun in his hands.

Ruby gasped. She and the mother were so close to the door they could practically touch the frame, but the man was already taking aim. Ruby made a decision. She reached deep down inside of herself and took off running as fast as her semblance would allow.
Ruby pushed her semblance to its limit, and she and the mother blasted out of the house. A whirlwind of fire trailed behind them as the turbulent air they left in their wake fanned the flames into a monstrous inferno.

As soon as Ruby was clear of the house and the fire, she dropped the mother. Her feet barely even touched the ground as she flew toward the gun-wielding man who was threatening the little girl. Yang had pointed out once that Ruby had no idea how to properly punch. Yang had been right, but moving as fast as she was, Ruby’s technique hardly mattered. She just threw her fist forward and let it collide with the man’s jaw.

The man jerked backward from the raw force applied to his face and fell to the ground.

Between the strain that Ruby had already endured today and the demands she was placing on her semblance, her legs gave out before she could bring herself to a stop. She hit the dirt and tumbled along the unpaved road, rolling over a few times until she finally came to a halt.

Ruby didn’t even get a moment to rest before a horrific crashing sound thundered from close by. Spurred by the awful racket, Ruby bolted up into a sitting position. She immediately saw that the house she’d just escaped from was gone. The sound must have been it collapsing. All that was left now was a pile of burning, broken timbers.

Ruby pushed herself to her feet. The little girl was still sitting on the ground exactly where Ruby had left her. Ruby walked over to her and asked, “Are you okay?”

The little girl looked at Ruby. Miraculously, she didn’t appear to be injured. However, just as Ruby was about to breathe a sigh of relief, she heard the sound of a gun cocking behind her. She turned. The man she’d hit was back on his feet. His gun was pointing directly at her and the girl. There was an angry bruise discoloring his cheek, and he looked rather upset about it.

Ruby threw herself in front of the girl to shield her, but the man never fired a shot. A fist came flying in from out of nowhere and punched him in the exact same spot that Ruby had. His face contorted into a look of extreme pain before he collapsed to the ground with a thud.

Ruby blinked in surprise, but then she noticed the mother standing there with her hand balled up into a fist.

“Good hit,” Ruby said.

“I don’t care what they do to me,” the mother said. “But nobody gets to hurt my daughter.”

The little girl suddenly cried, “Mommy!”

The mother’s eyes filled with worry. She limped over to her daughter. “Mommy’s here!” she said. She stumbled to the ground and wrapped her arms around her daughter in a desperate hug. “Mommy’s here,” she repeated, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Ruby really did breathe a sigh of relief this time. Having the opportunity to save people, like a hero right out of a storybook, was exactly why she’d wanted to become a huntress in the first place. Playing the part of a hero had been tiring work today, but it had been completely worth it.

Unfortunately, Ruby knew she couldn’t sit back and congratulate herself just yet. Creek Basin Mine was still under attack.

Ruby walked over to the unconscious man in the guard’s uniform. She reached down and took his hat off his head. Underneath, he had a pair of fuzzy ears that resembled a bear’s.
“He’s a faunus?!” the mother asked, sounding flabbergasted.

“He’s with the White Fang,” Ruby explained. “They’re the ones behind this.”

“But why?!” The mother asked. “Why would they attack us?!”

“I don’t really know,” Ruby said.

Suddenly, a voice, too muffled to understand, came from the man’s jacket pocket. Ruby frowned. She reached into the man’s pocket and pulled out a scroll. She opened it up, and the screen filled with an orderly list of photographs, indicating that it was connected to a group call.

“I repeat. We need help!” a voice said over the scroll. “We’ve been pushed out of the village by a pair of huntresses, and our specialist is down! Is anyone hearing this!?”

Ruby was buoyed by the report. It seemed that she and Yang had done a better job of keeping the workers safe from the White Fang than she’d thought. Yang must have been right. Taking out the Specialist had been the key all along.

A second voice answered the first, “We’re still trying to secure the perimeter wall. What about the group that was supposed to capture the admin building? How hard can it be to kill a bunch of pencil pushers?”

“The admin building is a no go!” a third voice said. “There’s a huntress here too! She’s got security all organized and is raining havoc down on us from the roof!”

The first voice said, “There are three huntresses now?! Where on Remnant did they all come from?! There weren’t supposed to be any!”

Yet another voice joined the conversation. Ruby recognized this one. It belonged to Weiss. Over the scroll, Weiss said, “Actually, only one of us is a huntress, but don’t think that improves your odds.”

“Who is that?” the second voice asked.

“I’m the one ‘raining havoc’ down on you,” Weiss said. “Your mission here has failed, and you’re losing on every front. Surrender now. Otherwise I won’t be able to guarantee your safety.”

Ruby smiled. “You go, Weiss,” she said to herself.

“Lady, you have got to be kidding me!” the second voice said. “Just who do you think you are?”

Suddenly, a new voice, one that was low and sinister but unmistakably feminine, entered the conversation. “I know who she is. You’re a long way from home, little Schnee.”

On the screen in front of Ruby, a blank photograph added itself to the bottom of the list. There wasn’t a proper name for the new caller. It was simply labeled “High Leader”.

Weiss said, “Khan…. Sienna Khan.” There was fear in her voice.

Ruby’s mouth fell open. Had she really heard that right?

A deeply unsettling laugh came out of the scroll. Sienna said, “I’m actually flattered that you recognize me.”

“What are you doing here!?” Weiss demanded to know. She was trying to sound brave, but Ruby could tell that it was all an act.
“I could ask you the same question,” Sienna said. “But in a moment, it won’t matter.”

Suddenly, there was a roar overhead. Ruby looked up and saw a low-flying bullhead tear through the sky directly above her. It was heading straight for the administrative building.

“I see you, Schnee,” Sienna said.

Ruby shouted, “Weiss! No!”

A few minutes earlier, Yang had just gotten her boost from Ruby. She was hurtling through the air, heading directly toward where Blake was fighting for her life down at the bottom of the strip mine.

Yang rolled over in the air, turning her back to the sky. She could see Blake ahead of her. The distance between them was rapidly dwindling but not rapidly enough for Yang. Fortunately, there was something she could do about that. She touched the magic slumbering inside of her. It came to life, washing over her body, and she transformed into an eagle. Having suddenly shed a hundred pounds, Yang’s speed picked up dramatically. She swept her wings back and shot forward faster than gravity alone could have ever carried her.

Yang focused her eagle eyes on the trio of figures in the pit. A man in a White Fang uniform who she didn’t recognize was swinging a chainsaw around like it was as light as a dagger. Blake was desperately trying to fight him off. Fennec was there too, but he wasn’t participating in the battle; he was just watching and laughing.

Anger started seeping up from deep inside of Yang. If Fennec or his new henchman thought they were going to get away with trying to hurt Blake, they were sorely mistaken. Yang’s semblance had already been hovering near its threshold thanks to her fight with that White Fang specialist, and the powerful emotions brewing inside of her were enough to give it the last little push it needed. Her feathers suddenly lit up with a brilliant, golden light, and flames engulfed her body.

Yang streaked through the air like a meteor, leaving a burning contrail behind her. She aimed herself directly toward the duel that Blake was caught in and let out a mighty screech. The racket caught both Blake’s and her opponent’s attention. Their heads turned. Blake’s eyes lit up with hope when she spotted Yang. The man, however, whose face was hidden behind a mask, apparently did not understand what he was seeing. He started to shout, “What is—?!?”

The man never got a chance to finish. Blake leaped out of the way, leaving a clone behind in her place, and Yang plowed into the man with stupendous force. She didn’t so much see the impact as feel it. One minute, the man in the White Fang uniform was standing there, and the next he was swallowed up by a plume of dirt, rock, and fire that exploded outward in all directions. Yang’s aura reverberated from the massive forces at play, but it managed to hold itself together.

Yang flapped her wings and flew clear of the dust cloud that her attack had kicked up. It only took her a second to spot Fennec again. He was standing a few feet away, looking utterly dumbfounded.

Yang dove for Fennec at top speed. The sight of her closing in must have been enough to bring him to his senses because he pulled a dagger from his robe. It was of a similar design to the one he’d gotten caught with in Sienna’s throne room, and Yang would have bet anything that it was loaded with Dust.

Fennec pointed his dagger at Yang, but she was flying too fast for him to properly draw a bead on her. Nevertheless, he pulled its small trigger. A burst of turbulent wind shot out of it, but Yang easily
As Yang drew close to Fennec, she transformed mid-flight. She rolled once, head over heels, and landed directly in front of him. Her hair was still glowing with the same brilliant light that had illuminated her feathers, and her eyes were red like blood.

Fennec’s jaw fell open, but his astonishment was quickly replaced by rage. The most livid expression crossed his face, and he started to shout, “You! This is—!”

Yang didn’t wait for Fennec to complete his thought. She just pulled her fist back and punched him squarely in his face. Fennec’s whole body jerked from the impact, and he was forced to take a few staggering steps backward.

A wicked grin crossed Yang’s lips. She wasn’t ashamed to admit how much she’d enjoyed that.

Fennec clutched at his face for a moment. Then he growled in anger. He suddenly stepped forward and attacked Yang with his dagger.

Yang just stood there as Fennec’s dagger scraped across her aura to little effect. She gave him a wry look. “Is that really all you got?” she asked. Then she lifted her right hand and squeezed her fist closed. A blade popped out of her bracer. “Because mine’s bigger.”

Fennec didn’t seem impressed by Yang’s remark. He tried to attack her again, but this time Yang was having none of it. She parried his dagger with her blade. Then, quick as a flash, she grabbed his hand, yanked him off balance, and slammed her fist down onto his wrist.

Fennec gasped in pain as his dagger was forced from his grasp. He frantically tried to pull his arm free from Yang’s iron grip.

Suddenly, Yang let go of Fennec, causing him to almost trip over his own feet as he stumbled. An evil gleam shone in Yang’s eye. Just as Fennec was getting his balance back, she lunged forward, brandishing her blades. She slashed at him over and over again. A veritable light show danced across his body as his aura tried to protect him from Yang’s onslaught, but it was a losing battle.

The moment Yang saw Fennec’s aura fail, she reached up, grabbed his head with both of her hands, and slammed it down into her rising knee. The jarring impact produced a horrendous sound, and Fennec crumpled to the ground.

Yang stood there for a moment, looking over Fennec’s collapsed form. She’d suspected that he wasn’t much of a fighter, but she couldn’t help but feel a bit disappointed that he’d gone down so quickly. However, it seemed that Fennec wasn’t quite done yet. He stirred and managed to crawl his way back up to his hands and knees.

Fennec must have been disoriented because he tried to crawl away from Yang, for all the good that would do him. Yang chuckled to herself. She casually strolled up to him and tapped the flat of her blade against the side of his cheek. He froze and slowly raised his head to look at her. The fear in his eyes was like ambrosia to Yang.

Yang pulled her bladed fist back. She held it there for a moment, making sure to give Fennec time to wonder if his life was about to end. Then, in a single motion, she let her blade retract back into her bracer and slammed her fist into Fennec’s head. He crashed to the ground again, and this time he stayed there.

Yang’s eyes shifted to where Fennec’s dagger was lying. She walked the few steps over to it and kicked it as hard as she could. It went soaring off into the distance, landing far enough away that she
lost sight of it.

Yang let out a satisfied sigh. She couldn’t describe how good it felt to finally put Fennec in his place.

“Yang!” a voice called out.

Yang turned and saw Blake running up. “Blake?” she said. Her eyes turned lilac again as her semblance’s power began slipping away from her. She let it fade, and the glow vanished from her hair.

Blake reached Yang and threw her arms around her, but she only hugged her for a second before letting go and said, “I thought you were supposed to be with Ruby!”

“Yeah, and you were supposed to be with Weiss!” Yang said. “What happened?”

“Weiss and I overheard Fennec talking on a scroll that one of his followers was using,” Blake said. “I had to stop him while I still could.”

“Okay, but what about Weiss?” Yang asked.

“She’s still at the administrative building,” Blake said. “It was safe. At least it was when I left.”

Yang glanced at Fennec. He let out a soft groan, indicating that he was still alive. Yang said, “Maybe we should tie Fennec up and take him over there. We can regroup with Weiss and—”

Suddenly, the low rumbling of a motor sounded behind Yang and Blake. They both turned. The cloud of dirt and dust that had been kicked up by Yang’s aerial strike was finally dissipating. A small crater had been left in the ground, and the White Fang man who’d been fighting Blake was climbing out of it. He had his chainsaw in hand, and he looked ready to use it.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Yang said.

Blake gritted her teeth. “He never did know when to give up,” she said.

“You know him?” Yang asked.

“Yes. He was Adam’s lieutenant,” Blake said. She drew Wilt from its sheath. “Don’t take him lightly.”

“No chance of that,” Yang said. She lifted her arms, and her blades once again sprung out of her bracers.

“Blake,” the Lieutenant said. “How kind of you to bring a friend. Now I get to make you watch while I kill her.”

Yang’s lips pressed together. Every once in a great while she’d wonder if the people she got into fights with deserved to get beat up or not. This was not one of those times. As far as she was concerned, the Lieutenant had earned everything he had coming.

Yang asked Blake, “You ready for this?”

“Ready,” Blake said.

On an unspoken cue, Yang and Blake charged forward. The Lieutenant revved his chainsaw, but neither Yang nor Blake so much as blinked.
As they ran, Yang and Blake split up, and they came at the Lieutenant from opposite sides. The Lieutenant swung his chainsaw at Blake as she closed in, and the weapon found its mark. Its teeth cut deep into Blake’s torso, but then she, or rather her clone, vanished an instant later.

Yang pounced at the Lieutenant from behind, slashing one of her blades across his back. Despite the power she put into the swing, she still met strong resistance from his aura. She couldn’t believe it was even intact after the opening salvo she’d hit him with earlier. He was tough, but that was fine by Yang. It would make it all the more satisfying to take him down.

The Lieutenant turned his head toward Yang, and he swung his chainsaw at her. Yang didn’t try to dodge it; she knew she didn’t need to.

Sure enough, halfway through his swing, the Lieutenant was interrupted by Blake bashing him over the head with Wilt. The Lieutenant growled in frustration, a sound that bore an uncanny resemblance to his weapon. He lashed out at Blake in retaliation, but she had already gotten clear.

Yang and Blake continued to duck and weave, harassing the Lieutenant with stabs and strikes, all while keeping each other safe. He simply couldn’t keep up. Even with a mask covering his face, his growing frustration was plain to see.

Yang was just coming around for another attack when the Lieutenant swung his chainsaw around in a wide arc. Yang and Blake both ducked out of the way, but as soon as Yang came back up, she saw the Lieutenant body check Blake.

Blake went stumbling backward. Yang tried to rush forward to help, but the Lieutenant had apparently been counting on that. He immediately pivoted and came rushing toward her. Yang realized she had a split second to react as the whirring teeth of his chainsaw closed in. She jumped and kicked off the chainsaw’s blade as the Lieutenant struck. The motorized chain cut a good chunk out of the sole of her boot, but it didn’t get quite close enough to bite into her aura.

The force from Yang’s kick sent the Lieutenant’s chainsaw driving into the ground. The blade caught on the hard rock that covered the bottom of the pit, and it pulled the Lieutenant off balance.

Yang saw her opening. She lunged forward and stabbed at the staggering Lieutenant with Ember and Blaze. Blake jumped back into the fight a moment later, slashing away with Wilt. Yang felt the Lieutenant’s aura finally begin to weaken as she and Blake kept up their assault. He was finally reaching his limit, but unfortunately, he wasn’t finished yet. The back of his fist suddenly came flying for Yang. It smacked her across the mouth, making her head jerk to the side.

Yang reeled backward, her whole face smarting. Aura or no, she’d felt that one. The world tilted underneath her feet for a moment before she finally shook her head clear. When she did, however, panic rose up inside of her. In the short amount of time that she’d needed to recover, the Lieutenant had gone after Blake. He was wielding his chainsaw like it was a finely crafted sword, and it was very apparent that he had put Blake on the back foot. Sparks were flying everywhere as his weapon ground against Wilt. The fear in Blake’s eyes was palpable.

Before Yang could come to Blake’s defense, the Lieutenant struck with his chainsaw, putting his weight behind the attack. Blake managed to block, but the teeth of the chainsaw caught on wilt, ripping it from her hands. Blake’s sword arced through the air, sailing away from her, and clattered uselessly to the ground several feet away.

The Lieutenant lifted his chainsaw high, ready to bring it crashing down on Blake’s head.

“NO!” Yang shouted. She took off running as fast as she could possibly go as the Lieutenant’s
chainsaw began swinging toward Blake. Adrenalin flooded Yang’s body, and the world seemed to slow. She could almost see the individual teeth of the chainsaw whirling around and around.

The very moment that Yang reached Blake, she shoved her out of the way. She immediately brought her blades up and crossed them above her head, blocking the Lieutenant’s chainsaw as it slammed down. The blow was hard enough that Yang felt the impact run all the way down her body.

Yang tried to pull her arms away so that she could get clear of the Lieutenant, but to her horror, she found that they were stuck in place. She looked up, trying to figure out what had happened. Only then did she realize the extent of her predicament. The Lieutenant’s chainsaw had cut a deep notch into the solid Dust both of her blades were made out of, and it had wedged itself in there tight. Yang was trapped.

The Lieutenant must have realized what had happened because he laughed evilly. His chainsaw roared loudly as he really opened its throttle. Its teeth began rapidly chewing through the rest of Yang’s blades, inching toward her head.

Yang did her best to keep the Lieutenant’s chainsaw at bay even as it drew closer and closer. Her arms began to ache from the effort, and the pungent smell of the chainsaw’s exhaust was making it difficult for her to breathe. She was vaguely aware of Blake shouting her name, but Blake’s voice was being drowned out by the noise of the chainsaw’s motor. Yang didn’t know what to do. If she tried to escape, she’d be dead in an instant, but staying put wasn’t any better. There was simply no way out.

“Are you watching, Blake!?” the Lieutenant shouted. “This is the price of betrayal!”

The Lieutenant’s mocking tone suddenly brought Yang’s thoughts back into sharp focus. There was no way she could let the Lieutenant use her to torture Blake. She had to survive, no matter what. She had to win.

Yang focused her attention on the Lieutenant’s chainsaw. It had almost finished cutting through her blades. She steeled herself, knowing she was only going to get one chance at this.

Suddenly, both of Yang’s blades snapped in two. The unrelenting pressure that had been pushing down on her vanished in an instant, and the Lieutenant’s chainsaw began plummeting toward her head, slicing through a plume of loose Dust that was flaking off of Ember and Blaze.

Yang’s arms were still hanging freely above her head, and the broken fragments that had been the pointed ends of her blades had just begun to fall. Then, in the blink of an eye, Yang’s hands rushed to meet one another. They scooped up the broken bits of her blades along the way and slapped them against the sides of the Lieutenant’s chainsaw.

With a thought, Yang activated the Dust. All of it.

There was a blinding flash of light as an electric explosion flared outward from Yang’s hands. Bolts of lightning arced up the chainsaw and into the Lieutenant’s body. He let out a cry of agony, but his spasming muscles prevented him from letting go of his weapon which had essentially become a lightning rod.

The chainsaw’s motor sputtered and died as the surging electricity overwhelm it. Yang pressed her hands in even tighter with a nasty sneer on her face. She wanted to make sure that every last grain of Dust was used up before she let go.

Eventually, the electric storm subsided. Yang finally pulled her arms away and took a step back. The
inert chainsaw slipped from the Lieutenant’s hands and crashed to the ground like a lead weight. Steam was rising off his body. He swayed unsteadily on his feet, but he didn’t topple over.

The Lieutenant’s head slowly tilted up, and his mask met Yang’s eyes. “You…” he said. “I’m going…to kill you…” Then, in defiance of all odds, he took a step forward.

Yang absolutely couldn’t believe it. The fight still wasn’t over. She raised her fists. Her bracers no longer had any Dust to make blades with, and her aura was on the verge of giving out, but she was still prepared to defend herself.

The Lieutenant’s hands balled up into fists of his own. Yang could practically hear his muscles creaking from how tightly he was squeezing them. He seemed to collect himself, and then he charged for Yang with a primal roar.

Suddenly, three shots rang out. Yang reflexively brought her bracers up to block, but none of the bullets had been meant for her.

A silence settled over the pit, causing Yang to lower her arms. The Lieutenant had stopped in his tracks. Once again, he swayed on his feet, but this time he fell forward and crashed to the ground. Blake was standing there behind him with Blush pressed up against her shoulder. The sheath was folded into the shape of a rifle, and smoke was wafting out of its barrel.

Yang glanced at the Lieutenant. Blake’s shots had struck him in the back. It was obvious that he was dead. As angry as Yang had been, she hadn’t gone into the fight with the intention of killing him. But ultimately she couldn’t bring herself to be upset. He’d tried to murder her, and more importantly, he’d tried to murder Blake. As far as she was concerned, the punishment fit the crime.

Yang looked back up at Blake and said the first thing that came to her mind. “I never realized your scabbard was also a gun.”

Blake lowered Blush from her shoulder. “How could you not?” she asked.

“I mean, I knew it could shoot out your sword,” Yang said. “I just didn’t know it fired bullets too.”

“Well. It does,” Blake said, apparently not knowing what else to say.

Wilt was still lying on the ground. Blake walked over to it and picked it up. She extended Blush back to its full length and slid Wilt into it. Then she went over to join Yang.

Blake looked down at the dead Lieutenant. She reached out and took Yang’s hand, squeezing it tightly. Yang had no idea what kind of history Blake and the Lieutenant had shared, but it was clear that Blake wasn’t happy with how things had ended.

Out of the Blue, Blake said, “It’s been years since I’ve seen him. I wasn’t even sure if he was still alive. The day Adam died he just vanished off the face of Remnant. All that time, and he was still driven by his obsession for revenge.”

Yang could hear the unspoken question hiding behind Blake’s words. “You made the right call,” she said. She meant it too. The Lieutenant had been the most implacable person she’d ever fought. She’d be able to sleep better at night knowing that he wasn’t out there plotting against them.

Suddenly, Blake’s ears twitched. Her head turned. Yang was about to ask her what was going on, but then she heard a quiet murmur. It sounded like someone speaking.

Yang looked in the same direction that Blake had and saw Fennec trying to crawl away. There was a
scroll in his hand which Yang assumed had been the source of the voice.

Yang glanced at Blake, and Blake silently agreed. She let go of Yang’s hand, and they both walked toward where Fennec was slowly making his escape.

As Yang and Blake got closer, Yang caught a snippet of what the voice coming from Fennec’s scroll was saying. “…a pair of huntresses, and our specialist is down! Is anyone hearing this!?”

Fennec tried to raise his scroll to his mouth, but he lost his grip on it. The scroll slipped from his fingers and fell to the ground.

Blake strolled around to Fennec’s front, but he hardly seemed to notice her there. He was too busy reaching for his scroll.

A second voice sounded from Fennec’s scroll. It said, “We’re still trying to secure the—”

The voice was cut off when Blake drew her sword and plunged it right through the scroll. Sparks shot out of the device, and its screen went blank.

Fennec glanced up, finally seeming to realize that Yang and Blake were there. He gave them a look that an exasperated adult might give to a misbehaving child. With a weary sigh, he pushed himself into a sitting position. “You’re not wearing your mask, Blake,” he said like he’d just noticed. Then he turned to Yang. “And you. You, you, you. You were that bird that ruined everything. This whole time, it was you. How utterly absurd.”

Blake said, “It’s over, Fennec.”

“Over? No,” Fennec said. “It will never be over now, thanks to your interference. This day was meant to be a turning point in history. It was meant to light the fires of revolution!”

“The price was too high,” Blake said.

“Spare me your foolish sentimentality,” Fennec said. He looked over to where the Lieutenant’s body was lying. “Such a waste. Have you fallen so far, Blake, that you’ll kill your White Fang brothers?”

“More faunus died here today because of you than me,” Blake said.

“And now they die in vain,” Fennec said. “So what happens next? Please, reveal your masterstroke. Is it to kill me as you did him?”

Yang didn’t wait for Blake to answer. She grabbed the front of Fennec’s robe and hauled him toward her. “It’s nothing less than you deserve!” she said.

Fennec actually laughed. “What irony,” he said. “You’re the type of person the High Leader needed by her side all these years. Not Blake.”

A dangerous scowl crossed Yang’s lips.

“Yang…” Blake said.

Yang’s scowl deepened, but she let go of Fennec. He fell unceremoniously back down to the ground.

After a moment, Yang said, “You know what, Fennec? I think you want us to kill you. I think you want to be a martyr. Well that’s not going to happen. You’re going to rot in jail for the rest of your life, and you’re going to watch as the world forgets about you.”
Fennec sneered at Yang, but there was a fear in his eyes that he couldn’t quite hide.

Blake drew Blush from her belt and slid Wilt back into it. “Give Vesper my regards,” she said to Fennec. “I’m sure he’ll be happy to have some company.” Then she swung Blush hard, right into Fennec’s head. There was a satisfying thud, and Fennec slumped over, unconscious again.

Yang let out a long, slow breath. The anxiety that had been gnawing at her since she’d first seen Blake in danger finally subsided. She put her hand on Blake’s shoulder, needing some kind of physical connection to reassure herself that Blake was indeed alright.

Blake turned and met Yang’s eyes. She looked like she was on the verge of tears. The sight made powerful emotions well up inside of Yang. She pulled Blake into a big hug in an attempt to calm herself. Blake hugged Yang back, and they both stood there, clinging to one another.

Yang said, “I’m so glad you’re safe!”

“You’re glad I’m safe!?” Blake said. “I thought you were going to get chainsawed in half!”

“Are you kidding? There’s no way I was going to lose to that guy,” Yang said, although it was easy for her to be boastful now that the danger had passed.

Suddenly, Yang’s scroll started ringing. The unexpected noise made her jump, which was not something she usually did. She felt embarrassed by her skittishness. She hoped Blake hadn’t noticed.

Blake asked, “Is that…?”

“Probably,” Yang said. She reluctantly pulled out of Blake’s arms and retrieved her scroll from her pocket. Ruby’s name was lighting up the screen. Yang hit the button to answer the call and turned on the scroll’s speaker so that Blake could hear too.

“Rubes?” Yang asked.

“Yang! Weiss is in trouble!” Ruby shouted. There was a lot of noise coming from her end of the call like she was standing in a wind tunnel.

“What’s going on!?” Yang asked.

“No time to explain!” Ruby said. “Get to the administrative building!”

Blake suddenly exclaimed, “Yang!” She pointed at something up in the sky.

Yang looked, and she spotted a bullhead off in the distance. It was rapidly flying in the direction of the mine’s administrative center. Something about the sight filled Yang with a sense of dread.

Yang glanced down at Fennec’s unconscious form, hesitant to leave him behind. She looked questioningly at Blake.

Blake nodded.

“We’re on our way!” Yang said into her scroll. Then she hit the button that ended the call.

Yang shoved her scroll back into her pocket. She and Blake started running, away from Fennec and toward Weiss. The towering walls of the strip mine loomed ahead of them, but they were no obstacle for Yang. Between one step and the next, she transformed into an eagle. She flapped her wings and grabbed Blake by the shoulders with her talons.
Yang took off into the air, flying as fast as her wings would carry her. She could only pray that she and Blake would get to Weiss in time.

“What are you doing here!?” Weiss exclaimed into the scroll she’d taken from one of the fallen White Fang operatives.

“I could ask you the same question,” Sienna Khan’s menacing voice said from the scroll. “But in a moment, it won’t matter. I see you, Schnee.”

Weiss looked up. From her vantage point on top of the administrative building’s roof she spotted a bullhead heading her way, and quickly too.

Fear nipped at Weiss. She slammed the scroll shut, ending the call, and tossed it away. But she knew her knee-jerk reaction would do nothing to protect her from Sienna.

“Miss Schnee?” Albert asked from behind Weiss.

Weiss turned. Albert had come up to the roof with her. He’d protested exposing himself to further danger, but Weiss hadn’t given him a choice. He had his own scroll in his hand, and he’d been using it to speak with the security personnel still left in the building, helping to coordinate a defense. It was a job he’d taken to with competence, if not enthusiasm.

Albert asked, “What do we do?”

“Shoot that bullhead down, obviously,” Weiss said, trying to sound calm.

Albert nodded. He said into his scroll, “Attention all guards. There is an airship approaching the building. Kindly open fire on it.”

The bullhead had already gotten close. It swooped in low, and its engines tilted into a vertical position. Then it drifted to a stop, hovering right in front of the building. No sooner had it done so then gunshots rang out from the windows below Weiss. Unfortunately, the small arms the guards were using had little effect. Unlike Weiss’s airship, the bullhead was a militarized vehicle, rugged and armored.

Suddenly, a bay door on the side of the bullhead began to open. However, before Weiss got a chance to see who might be lurking behind it, half a dozen gun barrels appeared, all of them pointing directly at the building.

Weiss shouted, “Tell everyone to get down!”

“Duck! Duck!” Albert yelled into his scroll.

An instant later, a storm of bullets erupted from the side of the bullhead. Weiss lifted her hand. A white glyph appeared in front of her and Albert just in time. Several bullets bounced off of it, but countless more perforated the walls of the building below.

Weiss cringed as she concentrated on maintaining her glyph. She tried not to think about the guards who right now might be as helpless to defend themselves as she was to protect them. She couldn’t stand the idea of them getting hurt on her behalf.

As quickly as it had begun, the gunfire stopped. Weiss dismiss her glyph, needing to see what was happening. When she did, she spotted a lone figure leap from the bullhead. A moment later, an all
too familiar voice bellowed, “SCHNEE!”

Weiss inched toward the edge of the rooftop, dread gnawing at her guts. A woman came into view down below. Weiss recognized her as Sienna Khan, the High Leader of the White Fang. Sienna had a wicked-looking spear clutched in one hand, and an expression of pure hate on her face. Her eyes locked with Weiss’s, even across the distance separating them, and silently challenged her.

“Albert,” Weiss said, not looking away from Sienna. “I’m going to go take care of this. Make sure everybody holds their fire, assuming there’s anyone left. There’s no need for them to get involved.”

“Miss Schnee, I must object!” Albert said. “You’ll be killed!”

“Too many people have already died today,” Weiss said. “I need to ensure that no one else does.”

“I…I wish you gods-speed then, Miss Schnee,” Albert said.

Weiss perched on the ledge in front of her for a moment, fighting against the desire to turn and flee. Then she stepped off the roof. As she fell, a brief flash of purple light pulsed over her dress. The power of gravity Dust slowed her descent, and her feet touched the ground as gently as a feather floating down.

Weiss marched forward. Her heart was hammering in her chest, but she put up a brave front. She’d survived facing down her father after all. What did she have to fear from the likes of Sienna?

An amused look crossed Sienna’s face, although it didn’t do anything to diminish her threatening presence. She waved her hand dismissively at the bullhead above her, and the ship began to lift back up into the air. Its engines tilted forward, and it flew off, leaving Weiss and Sienna to face each other alone.

Weiss stopped in front of Sienna, although she was still far enough away to be out of the reach of her spear. A stillness permeated the air, as if even the wind was afraid to disturb the unfolding showdown.

It was Sienna who spoke first. “I’m surprised there’s a Schnee willing to get her hands dirty and face me herself,” she said. “Don’t you have people to do that for you?”

“Don’t underestimate me,” Weiss said. “I don’t want to hurt you, but I will.”

“I very much doubt that,” Sienna said. Her eyes flicked down for a moment. “Your hands are shaking, Schnee. Are you afraid?”


Any trace of amusement fled from Sienna. “What did you say?” she asked in a dangerous tone.

“I pity you,” Weiss repeated. “You’re a monster, but not by choice. My family created you. So it’s my responsibility to stop you.”

“I was going to make this quick, Schnee. But now I think I’ll take my time,” Sienna said. She spun her spear around once and took hold of it with both hands. There was a measured look in her eye, and despite the malevolence rolling off of her, a collectedness to her demeanor. Weiss readied herself.

Suddenly, Sienna lunged forward at top speed. She was fast, but Weiss has been training with
someone who was far faster. Weiss easily dodged to the side, causing Sienna to overshoot. Red light glowed from Weiss’s dress, and a fireball leaped off her outstretched hand. It struck Sienna right in her back, making her stumble forward.

Sienna’s head snapped toward Weiss with a furious look in her eye. Despite Weiss’s warning, Sienna clearly had underestimated her, but Weiss doubted she could count on that happening a second time.

Sienna quickly wheeled around and came at Weiss again. Weiss flicked a pair of fingers upward, and a thin pillar of rock shot up from the ground. It effectively parried Sienna’s spear as she thrust it forward. However, Sienna didn’t seem fazed by Weiss’s clever tactic. She simply swung her spear, slicing through the pillar Weiss had created, and jabbed at her again.

Weiss backpedaled. There was no time to think, so she conjured up another column of rock, using it to block Sienna’s strike. But Sienna didn’t stop. She just attacked again and again even as Weiss continued to throw obstacles in her path.

Weiss found herself caught in a loop, and she knew it wouldn’t end in her favor. Sooner or later Sienna would overcome her improvised defenses. Weiss’s mind scrambled to come up with a new plan, all the while furiously trying to anticipate what angle Sienna would strike from next. However, try as she might, she couldn’t think of anything cunning or elegant. The only idea she had was: more.

Sienna’s spear came thrusting forward again, and this time Weiss threw both of her arms up. A considerably larger pillar of rock shot up between her and Sienna. It engulfed the blade of Sienna’s spear completely, trapping it in place, and Sienna was quite literally halted in her tracks.

A self-congratulatory smile crossed Weiss’s face, but it quickly faded when Sienna began to pull at her spear. Weiss lifted her hands to do something about it, but before she could, the spear slid free.

Sienna let out a yell and violently swung her spear at the pillar Weiss had created, smashing it with the flat of her blade. The sheer brute force of the attack caused the pillar to burst apart, sending chunks of stone shrapnel erupting out toward Weiss.

Weiss tried to scramble away, but it was too late. A rock the size of her head slammed into her shoulder. She managed to stay on her feet, but the impact made her wobble unsteadily. As she struggled to regain her balance, she caught the gleam of metal out of the corner of her eye. It was the only warning she got before Sienna’s spear swung in and swiped across her torso.

A sickening feeling took root in Weiss’s stomach as she felt Sienna’s deadly blade slide across her chest. Her aura protected her from harm, but Weiss could feel it straining. Fear hit her like a slap in the face, and when she saw Sienna’s spear spin around for another strike, that fear turned into panic.

For one terrifying moment, Weiss lost her focus. All of the myriad colors of Dust sewn into her dress blurred together in her mind. She mentally reached out and grasped at one of them, not knowing which one it was, and blindly activated it.

A wave of purple light washed over Weiss, and a repulsive force exploded off of her body. Sienna was knocked back by the raw energy. She might have even been tossed away like a rag doll, but she plunged her spear into the ground and held on tight, using it to anchor herself in place.

The energy swirling around Weiss began to subside as she wrestled down her fear. She took a few steps back to gain some distance from Sienna, chiding herself all the while for losing control like that. She’d undoubtedly just used up a considerable portion of the purple Dust woven into her dress to little real effect. She knew that she couldn’t afford to be so wasteful if she wanted to have any hope
of winning this battle.

Sienna pulled her spear out of the ground. She said, “Don’t think that little display impressed me, Schnee. All you’ve proven is that you have Dust to burn.”

“I just wanted you to know who you were dealing with,” Weiss said, trying her hardest to sound flippant, but it was all false bravado.

Sienna frowned. Weiss wasn’t sure if that meant Sienna had fallen for her bluff or not, but the issue quickly became moot. Sienna took a few purposeful steps toward Weiss and then broke into a run, her spear pointing in front of her.

Before Sienna got close enough to strike, Weiss’s dress glowed yellow. Weiss clenched her fist together and harnessed as much energy as she could. When she opened her hand, a massive bolt of lightning crashed down from the sky, blasting Sienna.

Sienna stumbled and dropped to one knee. Weiss didn’t wait for her to get back up. She conjured another lightning bolt, bigger than the last, and sent it hurtling toward Sienna as well. It crashed down like the first, causing Sienna to howl in pain.

A low growl started rumbling in the back of Sienna’s throat, and it quickly grew into a roar. Weiss, more than a little intimidated, called down a third bolt of lightning. However, this time Sienna thrust her spear upward, and the lightning struck the spear’s blade, not Sienna herself.

Sienna slowly stood. She slammed the end of her spear against the ground, and the electricity it had gathered sputtered out of it in a shower of sparks. Sienna looked at Weiss with rage in her eyes, but when she spoke next, her voice was dangerously calm. “I am going to kill you, Schnee.”

Suddenly, Sienna surged forward, and her spear came rushing for Weiss almost too fast to follow. Weiss dodged out of the way, but Sienna didn’t let up.

Weiss’s dress began to glow a multitude of colors, and the full power of Nature’s Wrath exploded onto the battlefield. Weiss threw everything she had at her opponent, but Sienna would no longer be denied. She came at Weiss with a ferocity that made the most dangerous of grimm seem meek by comparison. And no matter what Weiss threw at her, she just kept coming.

Sienna quickly broke through the last of Weiss’s defenses, but before she could strike a truly decisive blow, Weiss’s survival instincts took over. A glyph, larger than Weiss had ever managed before, sprung into existence less than an inch from Weiss’s nose. It stood vertically, like a wall, and neatly separated her from Sienna.

Weiss stumbled backward, having only been half-prepared for her glyph to appear. Fortunately, with Sienna momentarily on the other side, Weiss was spared the experience of being run through by a spear.

Weiss scrambled away, anticipating that Sienna would come charging around the side of her glyph at any moment. However, much to her surprise, nothing happened. Sienna was nowhere to be seen.

Weiss decided to not waste her temporary respite. With a wave of her hand, a second glyph appeared in the air beside her. It was much smaller than the first but much more intricate.

Then something happened that Weiss never could have expected. The blade of Sienna’s spear actually pierced through the center of her giant glyph. Weiss was stunned. She hadn’t known such a thing was possible. Yet as she stood there dumbfounded, Sienna’s spear cut the rest of the way through the glyph like it was made of butter.
Weiss’s glyph shattered into a thousand motes of light, revealing Sienna standing there. The blade of
Sienna’s spear and the striped tattoos on her body—at least Weiss assumed they were tattoos—were
glowing with an amber-colored energy. Weiss realized that she was seeing Sienna’s semblance in
action. Sienna could apparently empower her spear to a terrifying degree. Fortunately, its glow was
fading away, although that was of little comfort to Weiss. Even if Sienna couldn’t sustain her
semblance indefinitely, she had just demonstrated that she could use it to devastating effect.

“Any last words, Schnee?” Sienna asked like she’d already won.

Weiss’s lips pressed together with grim resolve. “Just one,” she said as the glyph next to her began to
spin even faster. “I believe it’s pronounced, ‘boop’.”

Sienna gave Weiss a quizzical look. “Excuse me?” she asked.

Weiss didn’t offer any explanation, and a moment later, a glowing Ruby sprinted out of her glyph at
top speed. It pulled its scythe back and smashed it into Sienna’s face.

“Augh!” Sienna cried out. She staggered back, off guard and off balance, but despite being caught
by surprise, she wasn’t down-and-out for long. Her spear came up and blocked the summoned
Ruby’s next strike.

Sienna and Weiss’s spectral guardian began rapidly exchanging blows. Weiss focused all of her
attention on the summon. Ever since her sparring date with Ruby, she’d been contemplating methods
of using it more effectively. She’d had several ideas for new tactics. This wasn’t exactly how she’d
hope to evaluate their effectiveness, but it might very well be now or never.

Weiss waited until her summon and Sienna had crossed blades several times before she put her plan
into action. She allowed the summon to be hit by Sienna’s next blow. Sienna looked pleased with
herself, but a split second later, the summon’s scythe slammed into her gut at full force.

Shock and pain registered on Sienna’s face. If Weiss hadn’t been concentrating so hard, she
would’ve smiled. Sienna had fallen for her trap. She’d automatically treated the summon like any
other opponent. But the summon wasn’t a person. It felt no pain, and it could fight like its life didn’t
matter because it had no life to lose.

All of a sudden, Sienna was on the defensive. She continued to expertly fend off the summon’s
attacks, but she passed up obvious opportunities to counterattack. She’d clearly learned from her
mistake.

Unfortunately for Sienna, Weiss wasn’t done. She steadied herself, knowing that what she had in
mind next would be taxing for her, but she was confident that she could handle it. A yellow light
began to shine steadily from her dress, and her summon likewise shifted in color from white to
yellow. Electricity began arcing off of it as the Dust in Weiss’s dress empowered it.

“What!” Sienna exclaimed an instant before an electrically-enhanced scythe smacked her across the
chest.

Weiss didn’t give Sienna a moment to recover. She had the summon go all out. Sienna struggled to
defend herself, and even when she did manage to parry a blow, she got zapped by the bolts of
lightning shooting off of the summon anyway.

Sienna let out a cry of frustration. It was exactly what Weiss wanted to hear. She was just about to
dare believe that she could win, but then Sienna’s spear and stripes lit up again. This time when the
summon struck, it was Sienna who won out.
Sienna swung her spear wildly, and it ripped through the summon’s torso. Then she brought her weapon up over her head and smashed it down. The summon exploded apart, and with it, hope slipped from Weiss’s grasp. She’d pulled every trick she could think of, but Sienna was just too good.

However, instead of coming to finish Weiss off, Sienna simply stood there for a moment with a pained expression. At first, Weiss thought it was because of the beating the summon had given her, but then Sienna closed her eyes to concentrate. The amber glow coming from her tattoos gradually faded, and when it did, her shoulders drooped in relief.

Weiss’s eyebrows shot up. She realized that she still had a chance. If she was right, Sienna’s semblance caused her pain, and that was something there just had to be a way to exploit. A new plan rapidly came together in Weiss’s head as her brain kicked into overdrive.

Sienna opened her eyes, and when she did, a fresh summon sprung up out of a new glyph that had appeared on the ground in front of her.

A sneer crossed Sienna’s face, but ugly looks couldn’t hold the summon back. It came at Sienna just like the last.

Sienna briefly tried to fight the summon normally before she gave up and called on her semblance once more. Her spear began to glow again, and she quickly sliced the summon apart.

A third summoned Ruby immediately came running for Sienna.

Weiss was no longer directly watching the battle. With each new Ruby she created, she felt a greater and greater strain pressing down on her. It was like a weight sitting on her shoulders, and it wasn’t getting any lighter.

Sienna let out a frenzied scream as she tore yet another summon apart. At the rate things were going, Weiss began to fear that she’d give out long before Sienna did. She decided to go for broke.

Two glyphs appeared, one on either side of Weiss. If she’d thought trying to summon one Ruby was difficult, she’d clearly been mistaken. She felt like her own skin was going to crush her body into a pulpy mess, but she managed to bring forth two summons simultaneously.

Weiss’s head bowed under the pressure. She tried to tilt it back up, but even that small act almost made her pass out. She was dimly aware of Sienna charging at her, so she sent both of her summons rushing to intercept. If they failed, there was no way she’d be able to make more. One way or another, this would be it.

Sienna had a wild look in her eyes, and her stripes were glowing even brighter. She drew her spear back, and in one sweeping blow, she cut through both of the summoned Rubys. Then she wheeled around, and the blade of her spear came rushing for Weiss.

Weiss never felt Sienna connect. One moment she was standing there, and the next she found herself flying backward through the air, not quite able to recall how she’d gotten into such a predicament. However, Weiss didn’t have much time to contemplate her situation before she hit the ground and hit it hard. Pain shot through her body. She hadn’t realized it, but her aura had failed.

Weiss’s momentum carried her onward, and with nothing to protect her, she felt every last bump and scrape as she rolled helplessly along. Eventually, she came to a stop. She must have ended up on her back because all she could see was the blue of the sky.

A dull ache took hold of Weiss’s body. She felt a strong urge to close her eyes and go to sleep, and
she almost did just that. However, a nagging voice in the back of her head told her she didn’t have time for that.

Weiss slowly propped herself up on her elbows. In her dazed state, the first thing she noticed was a small cut in the front of her dress. She brushed her fingers across the new opening in the fabric. There wasn’t any blood, but the cut wasn’t along a seam where it’d be easy to mend. Weiss supposed she could take the dress to a tailor, but she suspected there was nothing that could be done. It was rather disappointing. She’d been fond of the dress, and she knew that Ruby was too.

Weiss’s gaze drifted. She spotted someone standing a ways away from her. She was idly wondering who it might be when she came snapping back to reality. She realized that was Sienna Khan over there. She couldn’t be worried about her clothing right now; her life was in danger!

Sienna was staggering back and forth on her feet. Her stripes were glowing so brightly that they looked like they were on fire. Weiss even thought she could smell the faint odor of searing flesh. Whatever the case, it was very apparent that Sienna was in excruciating pain.

After several failed attempts, Sienna succeeded in visibly bringing her semblance back under control. The glow of her stripes slowly subsided, and soon it faded away to nothing. Sienna all but collapsed on the spot. She managed to catch herself by shoving the butt of her spear against the ground and leaning heavily against its shaft. Then she slowly stood up straight again, and her eyes focused on Weiss.

Sienna started to march toward Weiss, and Weiss knew she needed to do something. Standing was out of the question, so she fumbled for her dagger. Her fingers curled around its hilt, and she drew it from her belt. However, no sooner had she raised it to defend herself then it was knocked from her hand by the blade of a spear.

Weiss looked up. Sienna was standing over her.

Weiss had expected to see hatred in Sienna’s eyes, but it was conspicuously absent. Sienna looked weary more than anything else, but it was obvious that her deadly resolve hadn’t left her. She lowered her spear and pointed it directly at Weiss’s chest. “It’s over, Schnee,” she said. “You fought... well. Now do the world a favor. And die.”

Sienna drew her spear back. Then she thrust it forward to strike the killing blow.

Suddenly, a red blur crossed in between Weiss and Sienna. For a split second, Weiss caught a glimpse of the curved end of a scythe hooking around the blade of Sienna’s spear. As the red blur zoomed past, Sienna’s spear was jerked to the side, making her stumble. Weiss sat there blinking, not fully understanding what had just happened.

Ruby suddenly appeared in front of Weiss, rose petals flying off of her. “You leave Weiss alone!” she shouted at Sienna.

Sienna was clearly not intimidated by Ruby. She said, “I don’t know who you are, but don’t think for a second that you can protect her from me.”

“Above you,” Ruby said, pointing upward.

Sienna gave Ruby an incredulous look. “Do you really expect—?” she began to ask.

Sienna was interrupted by Yang literally dropping out of the sky and kicking her across the face on the way down. This time Sienna was completely knocked off her feet.
Yang hit the ground rolling and sprang back up. She turned to Sienna and said, “She tried to warn you.”

Ruby bent down and offered Weiss a hand. Weiss gladly took it and let Ruby help her back up.

Sienna climbed to her feet again as well. The hate was back in her eyes. “Is this some kind of joke to you humans?!” she asked. “Do you even know what’s at stake here?!”

“Do you?” a new voice asked Sienna from behind.

Sienna’s eyes opened wide. “Blake?” she asked as she turned.

Weiss felt almost as surprised as Sienna looked. She glanced in the direction the voice had come from and saw Blake calmly walking up. Blake’s hand was resting on the hilt of her sword, but she didn’t make any move to draw it yet.

Sienna said to Blake, “You’re not wearing your mask.”

“No. I’m not,” Blake said. She walked past Sienna and joined Weiss, Ruby, and Yang.

It took a moment, but then comprehension dawned on Sienna’s face. She looked utterly flabbergasted. “You’re siding with them?!” she said like the words had difficulty leaving her mouth.

“Ilia must have told you about what Fennec was up to,” Blake said in lieu of answering Sienna. “That’s the only reason you’d come here. But do you understand what’s actually happened?”

“The exploitation of the faunus working here has come to an end,” Sienna said. “At least for now. I’m beginning to think I made a mistake by casting Fennec out.”

“Think again,” Blake said. “A lot of innocent faunus were hurt here today. Some even died. And Fennec and his followers are to blame. They came disguised as the Company’s guards and gunned down innocent workers where they stood.”

Sienna’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t believe you,” she said. “For all his shortcomings, not even Fennec would do something like that.”

Weiss spoke up. “It doesn’t matter what you believe,” she said. “It’s the truth. And soon, the whole world will know.”

Sienna’s grip around her spear tightened. “Only if you live long enough to spread your lies, Schnee,” she said.

Ruby said, “Weiss isn’t lying.” She pointed at something behind Sienna. “Ask them if you want.”

Sienna was obviously reluctant to look at whatever Ruby was trying to draw her attention to, but she glanced over her shoulder anyway. When she did, her jaw practically hit the ground.

Weiss hadn’t even noticed until just now, but a crowd of faunus workers had gathered a short distance away. She assumed they had come from the village. Most of them looked haggard and despondent, but those who still had their wits about them were staring at Sienna like she was the Brother of Destruction himself.

Sensing an opportunity, Weiss said, “You want me to be the one to tell the public about what happened here today. I’m the only one who won’t instantly condemn the faunus for this tragedy. And I’m the one who can keep the eyes of the world on Creek Basin Mine long enough so that
when it’s rebuilt the workers here will be treated how they deserve to be treated. And make no mistake. This mine will be rebuilt, no matter what anyone wants. But something good can still come from this.”

Sienna turned back to Weiss. “And why should I think for a second that a Schnee would do a thing like that?” she asked.

Blake said, “Because she will. It’s what you and I and Fennec and Adam never understood. There are good people on the other side too. The only way things are ever going to get better is if we find them and work with them.”

Sienna shook her head. “After so many betrayals, I thought that you, Blake, were the one person I could truly count on,” she said. “I was wrong.”

“Sienna,” Blake said. “You have to stop this. You can still mold the White Fang into the force of good it was always meant to be.”

“You and I both know that’s no longer possible,” Sienna said. And for a moment, she looked genuinely sad, but the moment quickly passed.

One of the ears on top of Sienna’s head turned slightly. She composed herself and said, “Goodbye, Blake. It’s best for both of us that we don’t meet again.”

Weiss said, “Now wait a minute! We’re not just going to let—!”

Blake shouted, “Look out!”

Suddenly, a bullhead dove in out of nowhere, and a storm of bullets spat out from its open door. Ruby threw herself in front of Weiss, Yang shielded Blake, and the nearby crowd of workers began to cower en masse. Amidst the confusion, Sienna jumped into the airship. As soon as she was aboard, its engines roared loudly, and like that, it sped away.

Calm returned in the wake of the bullhead’s departure, and the workers settled back down into a state of quiet confusion. Even the omnipresent sound of gunfire off in the distance had died away.

Ruby stepped back from Weiss. “Is it over?” she asked.

“Hardly,” Weiss said. “But for now, I think the battle has ended.”

Blake looked up into the sky in the direction that Sienna’s airship had departed. “A lot more than that has ended for some of us,” she said.

Weiss said, “Don’t tell me you’re disappointed to finally be free from the White Fang.”

Blake asked, “Would you be happy if you were suddenly ‘free’ from your company? Or your family? I’ve been with the White Fang for as long as I can remember. I have no idea what to do with my life now.”

“What are you talking about?” Yang asked. She put her arm around Blake’s shoulders. “You and me are going to be mercenaries.”

“Just as simple as that?” Blake asked.

“Sure! Why not? That’s how it worked out for me,” Yang said. “I was two days gone from my tribe when a pretty girl walked up to me at a bar and gave me the offer of a lifetime.”
Blake smiled a little. “I’d say the pretty girl got the better end of the deal.”

“Sweet talker,” Yang said. “Now how about we start with some bounty hunting? Remember that Torchwick guy? He did say he was the most wanted man on Remnant. How much do you think he’s worth?”

Weiss asked, “Torchwick? As in Roman Torchwick? You’ve met him?!”

Yang laughed. “Yup! You wouldn’t even believe me if I told you where.”

Blake said, “Maybe we should save that story for another time. And I think, Yang, we should set our sights a little lower at first.”

A thought entered Weiss’s head. “Perhaps that could be arranged,” she said.

Yang asked, “What do you mean?”

“The Schnee Dust Company can certainly afford to employ a pair of mercenaries,” Weiss said. “If that is what you two intend to become.”

“Oooh!” Ruby said excitedly. “We could make Team RWBY an official thing!”

“I don’t think our team needs the Company’s backing to make it official,” Weiss said. “But that is more or less what I had in mind.”

Yang said, “Huh. That works for me. How about you, Blake? Think you could stand working for the Schnee Dust Company?”

“No,” Blake said. “But maybe I could stand working with Weiss.”

Ruby cheered, “Aw yeah! Go Team RWBY!”

In spite of herself, Weiss smiled. What had happened here today was unquestionably a tragedy, but she honestly felt that it had set something important in motion. Weiss fully intended to seize this opportunity, with the help of her friends of course, and see what might come from it.

Ruby looked over at the crowd of faunus workers. Now that the immediate threat had passed, they had begun aimlessly milling about. “What about them?” she asked. “There’s no way we can just leave them here.”

“We won’t,” Weiss said. “Everyone will have to be evacuated back to Atlas. I’ll see to it that the Company pays for temporary housing and food for the workers. I think Albert needs a new task to occupy his time. Perhaps he could be…convinced to assist in coordinating the relief effort. It will do him some good to turn his talents toward helping the faunus instead of exploiting them.”

Ruby asked, “Do you think he’ll change his mind about the faunus?”

“I doubt it,” Weiss admitted. “But that’s his prerogative. Things will be different around here when the mine reopens, whether he has a future as its overseer or not.”

Suddenly, as if on cue, Albert’s voice shouted from up above. “Miss Schnee! Miss Schnee!”

Weiss and everyone else looked up. Albert was standing on the edge of the administrative building’s roof, frantically waving his arms. When he saw that he’d gotten Weiss’s attention, he pointed at something.
Weiss followed Albert’s finger. Off in the distance, she spotted a bullhead rising up into the sky. At first she thought it was the same one that Sienna had left on, but it couldn’t be. It was painted an entirely different color.

Ruby asked, “What do you think that’s all about?”

There was a moment of silence, but then Yang shouted, “Fennec!”

Minutes later, Yang was standing at the bottom of the strip mine again along with the rest of her team. She had returned to where she and Blake had left Fennec. However, Fennec wasn’t there.

Yang was a good enough tracker to deduce what had happened. There were the telltale signs of an unconscious body being dragged, and the marks led right up to where the landing gear of a small airship, like a bullhead, had left its impressions in the ground. Fennec must have told some of his followers to stay behind and guard the ship they’d flown in on, and they must have come to his rescue.

Yang said, “Fennec’s a slippery one. I’ll give him that.” She couldn’t keep the bitterness out of her voice.

Ruby asked, “Do you think he’ll try something like this again?”

Weiss said, “It’s unlikely that he can. I doubt many of his cohorts escaped with him. And it will be easy to convince the authorities to hunt for him now.”

Blake said, “I guess what’s important is that we stopped him.”

“Yeah,” Yang said, although she could tell that Blake was just as disappointed as she was. “And if he does try anything like this again, we’ll be there to take him down for good. Right, team?”

Ruby said, “Yeah!”

Weiss said, “We should move on for now. I’d like to get as many people as we can on transports heading back to the city before it starts to get dark. Come along, Ruby. Let’s go tell Albert about his new assignment.”

“Okay,” Ruby said.

Weiss and Ruby started walking away. Ruby reached out and took Weiss’s hand as they went, and Weiss’s fingers curled around Ruby’s.

Yang heard Weiss ask, “Ruby, why do you smell like smoke?”

“Oh!” Ruby said. “Well… I kind of ran into a house that was on fire.”

“You did what?” Weiss asked.

Yang smiled as she watched Weiss and Ruby walk off. She still wasn’t sure that Weiss was good enough for Ruby, but she supposed that she could accept her as Ruby’s girlfriend. For now.

Yang turned to Blake, but Blake looked like she was lost in her own thoughts. It was clear that she was struggling to process everything that had happened today. So many different emotions were dancing across her face that it was difficult for Yang to name them all.
“Hey,” Yang said to get Blake’s attention. “How are you doing?”

Blake glanced up. “I don’t know,” she said.

“We’ve sure been through a lot since we first met,” Yang said. “If you could go back, would you change any of it?”

“No,” Blake said, but only after the word had left her lips did she look like she realized what it meant. Her emotional turmoil seemed to calm. “You once told me that scars are part of who we are. If I’ve collected a few more since I met you, then so be it. For the first time in a long time…I like who I am.”

Yang smiled sweetly. “I like who you are too,” she said. “Just in case you couldn’t tell.” She reached out and gently ran her fingers over the scars covering half of Blake’s face. Then she leaned in and softly kissed her.

Yang spent a moment indulging in Blake’s lips. When she pulled back, she offered Blake her arm and said, “Let’s go catch up with the rest of our team.”

Blake took Yang’s arm and smiled. “Our team,” she echoed meaningfully.

Yang and Blake walked together, following after Ruby and Weiss. Yang had no doubt there were still many more challenges lying ahead of them, but with Blake at her side—and Ruby and Weiss too—she felt like there wasn’t anything they couldn’t do. Let the world try to knock them down. They’d get right back up every time.

**Chapter End Notes**

But wait there’s more! Not immediately of course, but there is one more chapter to this story. Unlike this beast it’s just an ordinary sized chapter, so it shouldn’t take me that long to get it posted. I mean, I guess I can’t promise that (work is still crazy right now) but I sure hope not.

Oh boy…. This was perhaps too ambitious of a chapter for me to write. But I did it anyway! I really hate it when a story or show or movie with an ensemble cast doesn’t have anything for one of the main characters to do during the big finale. Because it’s inevitably your favorite character that gets lost by the wayside.

Honestly, the hardest single part of this for me to write was Yang and Ruby talking about fighting the White Fang’s “bosses”. As I’m sure I don’t need to tell any of you, the world of RWBY partially operates on video game logic. Its denizens would naturally understand how these things work, at least on an instinctual level. But I really struggled with how Yang and Ruby would phrase it. Good thing Ruby’s plays videos games herself. It’s just a shame that Yang hasn’t in this AU. I guess that’s one more thing to blame Raven for.

For the curious, the semblance I came up with for the specialist Yang and Ruby fought is called “adaption”. It was inspired a bit by Maria’s semblance from Volume 6. Not so much in function but in the fact that it’s something subtle yet powerful. The Specialist’s semblance allows her to mimic a useful aspect of someone (or something) she’s fighting, like Ruby’s reflexes or Yang’s strength. It’s really potent, but it does have its limitations.
She can only mimic a single trait at a time, and she doesn’t have any control over which one. It also takes a moment or two to start working, so it’s not very good against sudden dangers. Like gravity. Just as a random example.

Sienna’s semblance (there was no way I wasn’t going to give her one) is hopefully self-explanatory.

Oh yes, and tangential to the topic of semblances, the plural of “ruby”, the precious gem, is “rubies”. The plural of “Ruby”, the person, is “Rubys”. (So believe it or not, that wasn’t a typo.) Names in English retain their base spelling when made plural. Just a little grammar trivia for you.

And now one for the science nerds. I had some fun contemplating the intersection between magic and physics that happened in this chapter. I’m speaking of course about Yang’s mid-fall transformation. The average female golden eagle weighs between ten and fifteen pounds. Which is a lot less than the average, or not so average, female human weighs. So what happens to the good ol’ formula force = mass * acceleration when a hundred plus pounds of mass just vanish into the ether? My answer was that either force would hold constant and acceleration would increase, or acceleration would hold constant and force would decrease. I think we can all agree that the former happening is a lot more fun than the latter.

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.
This Will Be the Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The mounting allegations have prompted officials to send inspectors to other Schnee Dust Company facilities,” Lisa Lavender’s image said from the console on Weiss’s desk. “In many cases, inspectors have reportedly been denied access. When we reached out to the Company for comment, Weiss Schnee, the SDC director of public relations, said, quote, ‘The Schnee Dust Company has nothing to hide from the people of Atlas or any other kingdom.’”

Weiss was watching Lisa Lavender’s news report in her office at the Company’s headquarters. It never failed to amaze her how adept the media was at picking out a single sentence from her press briefings in order to metaphorically put words in her mouth. However, for once Weiss was pleased with the line they’d chosen. It was the first time that Weiss could recall that she and the press weren’t working at cross purposes. It was just too bad the press didn’t know that.

Truth be told, Weiss had been yearning to lay the Company’s secrets bare before the world, but that would have to wait. She was walking an extremely fine line right now between what was in the best interest of the Company and what was in the best interest of the Company’s owners. It wouldn’t do for her to be dismissed from her position before she’d had a chance to fix everything. Even as it was she’d gotten a number of angry calls from several of her fellow directors regarding her promise of public transparency. It had been her great pleasure to feign ignorance of the Company’s crimes and listen to their perpetrators verbally trip over themselves trying to justify their actions.

Lisa Lavender said, “The Dust markets have continued to fluctuate wildly amidst fears of coming shortages. We will have more on this story as it develops.”

Weiss pressed a button, and the image of Lisa Lavender vanished. It seemed that events had finally been set in motion. It had actually been several months since the incident at Creek Basin Mine, but the public had only just recently learned about what had happened there. The mine’s remote location had made the story relatively easy to cover up, and the powers that be at the Schnee Dust Company had gone to great lengths to do just that. Unfortunately for them, about a week ago someone had tipped off the press. The proverbial cat had been let out of the bag, and there was no getting it back in now.

Weiss’s father had been furious when the story had broken, and he knew the only way it could have gotten out was if there was a traitor in the ranks of the Schnee Dust Company. Finding and plugging the source of the leak had become his obsession, much to the displeasure of the Company’s other executives. They were far more concerned about salvaging the Company’s reputation, something that Jacques didn’t seem to care about in the least. Weiss wished her father luck in his hunt, but she knew it wouldn’t do him any good. After all, she’d covered her tracks quite well. She knew she had to be on his list of suspects, but there was no way he’d be able to prove anything.

Suddenly, the door to Weiss’s office began to open. A smile crossed Weiss’s face. There was only one person who Rosalie would let in without asking first—especially with the Company in such a state of upheaval—and that person was Ruby. Sure enough, a moment later Ruby walked through the door and shut it behind her.

“Wow,” Ruby said as she strolled toward Weiss. “Everyone around here is acting like the sky is falling.”
“It might as well be as far as most of them are concerned,” Weiss said. “The Company hasn’t faced a crisis like this since its founding. But in the end it will be for the best.”

“It’s too bad it took something like Fennec trying to kill a bunch of people for all this to happen,” Ruby said.

“It is unfortunate,” Weiss agreed. “However, I’m starting to wonder if anything less would have done the trick. For all their faults, the White Fang were right about one thing. Change like this doesn’t come easily, or gently. But it’s long overdue.”

“So what happens next?” Ruby asked.

Weiss tapped a few buttons on her desk’s console. Her schedule appeared on its screen. “After a great deal of coercing, the board of directors has ‘requested’ that I speak with them. My meeting with them will take place two days from now. Plenty of time for them to sweat it out while the Company’s stock price plummets.”

“Isn’t the stock price dropping bad for you too?” Ruby asked.

“Yes…” Weiss said. These last few days she’d tried very hard not to think about just how much money she was losing, in the short term at least. “Fortunately, I hold more than just Schnee Company stock. I decided to diversify my portfolio years ago. Not all of the board members have had the same foresight.”

“What are you going to tell them?” Ruby asked.

“That I have a plan to save the Company,” Weiss said. “By admitting our wrongdoings, publicly apologizing for them, and vowing to take steps to correct how we treat our faunus workforce.”

“Will they go for it?” Ruby asked.

“Not at all,” Weiss said. “Not at first anyway. But once they get over their shock and horror, they’ll realize there’s no one else they can turn to. Even if Father has a plan of his own, which I’m sure he doesn’t, he’s far too preoccupied by his witch hunt to bail the company out.”

“I know you’ll win them over,” Ruby said. “I just wish there was something more I could do.”

“We’ll both be extremely busy soon enough,” Weiss said. “Once the board comes around, you and I are going to be spending a lot of time touring the Company’s facilities. I plan on personally seeing to it that the Company pays more than lip service to the notion of faunus rights. And I’ll need my bodyguard with me. Just in case someone has an objection they wish to make known through violence.”

“That’d sure be dumb,” Ruby said. “You could probably beat up anyone who tries to hurt you now, even without my help.”

“Perhaps,” Weiss said, although she was secretly enjoying Ruby’s praise. “But don’t think that means you can get lax while on duty as my bodyguard. I expect nothing but excellence from my employees.”

“I know,” Ruby said with a smile. She tapped her foot on the floor a few times. Then, completely changing the subject, she asked, “So have you heard anything from Yang and Blake yet?”

“Not yet,” Weiss said. “I’m sure they’ll report in soon.”
“I kind of wish I’d gone with them,” Ruby said.

“It wasn’t anything they couldn’t handle,” Weiss reassured Ruby.

“I’m not worried about that,” Ruby said. “It just feels like I should’ve been there to help them finish what we started.”

“Being part of a team means that you don’t always get to do everything yourself,” Weiss said. “I’m sure you’ll get used to it. Besides, you have other responsibilities to attend to.”

“Yeah, as your bodyguard,” Ruby said. “I guess it’s not so bad having the best job in the world.”

“Not to disagree with you. But…I was thinking more about your responsibilities as my girlfriend,” Weiss said.

“Oh,” Ruby said. Then understanding dawned on her face. “Oh! Well that too!”

Before Weiss could think better of it, she none too subtly took in an eyeful of Ruby’s figure. Then she gave Ruby her best come-hither look and beckoned her closer.

Surprise filled Ruby’s eyes, but she didn’t hesitate for long. A grin spread across her face, and she closed the short distance between herself and Weiss.

Ruby leaned in for a kiss. Her lips were hovering an inch above Weiss’s when the office’s intercom suddenly buzzed. Ruby paused, but Weiss wasn’t about to have any of that. She placed her hands on the back of Ruby’s head and pulled her in the rest of the way.

An electric sensation went racing through Weiss the moment her lips met Ruby’s. Beyond the simple pleasure of kissing Ruby, it was the danger that excited Weiss, the danger of getting caught there in her office in a compromising position. It wasn’t the first time Weiss had felt such a thrill. She didn’t particularly like her apparent love of tempting fate, but there was no denying the feelings that taking such risks inspired in her. It was one of the many things she’d discovered about herself recently.

Weiss continued to kiss Ruby until her intercom buzzed a second time. When it did, she abruptly pushed Ruby back and hit the button to answer.

“Yes?” Weiss asked nonchalantly, like she hadn’t just been making out with her girlfriend.

“There’s a call for you, Miss Schnee,” Rosalie’s voice said over the intercom.

“If it’s the board, tell them I will be more than happy to answer all of their questions at our meeting. Not before,” Weiss said.

“It’s no one from the board,” Rosalie said. “It’s your sister.”

Weiss instantly felt herself tense up. She wondered for a moment why Winter would be calling, but the answer was obvious. There was no way Winter hadn’t seen the news coverage about the Company’s mistreatment of its workers. It was the very thing that she’d tried to warn Weiss about years ago. Had she called to gloat? Had she called to rub Weiss’s shortcomings in her face?

“Tell…tell her….” Weiss hesitated.

“Weiss…” Ruby said softly.

Weiss sighed. She recognized the tone of Ruby’s voice. “Hold on one moment, Rosalie,” she said. Then she closed the intercom.
“Weiss, she’s your sister,” Ruby said.

“It’s not that simple,” Weiss said.

“Why not?” Ruby asked.

“Because….” Weiss trailed off when she found herself unable to come up with an adequate answer to Ruby’s question.

Ruby said, “I’m sure she just wants to talk to you.”

Weiss closed her eyes. Things with Winter were never as straightforward as Ruby obviously supposed. However, Weiss began to wonder if maybe they were this time. It had been so long since she and Winter had talked. Did she really even know her anymore? And given recent events, wouldn’t it be nice to have at least one member of the Family that she wasn’t estranged from?

Weiss felt Ruby’s hand slide across her shoulders, spreading a warm sensation as it went. “Alright,” she said, opening her eyes. “I’ll speak with her.”

Ruby’s whole face lit up, but she visibly held back her excitement. “Do you want me to leave?” she asked.

“No,” Weiss said. “Father knows about my girlfriend. Why shouldn’t Winter?”

“You mean I don’t have to pretend in front of her?” Ruby asked, sounding even more delighted.

“I’ve never kept secrets from Winter before, and I’m certainly not about to start now,” Weiss said. “If she wants me back in her life she’ll have to accept me as I am.”

“I’m sure she will,” Ruby said with a smile.

“Maybe,” Weiss said, although Ruby’s optimism was starting to rub off on her.

“I love you, Weiss,” Ruby said.

“I love you too,” Weiss said. “And Ruby? Thank you.”

Weiss hit the button on the intercom. She said, “Rosalie, tell General Schnee…. Tell Winter that I’ll take her call.”

There was a noticeable pause on the other end of the intercom. Weiss wouldn’t have been surprised if Rosalie needed a moment to pick her jaw up off the floor. But then Rosalie calmly and professionally said, “Of course, Miss Schnee.”

Ruby’s hand was still resting on Weiss’s shoulder. Weiss reached up and took it in her own.

The console on Weiss’s desk lit up, and a face, hardened by war but still unmistakably familiar, filled the screen.

“Sister,” Weiss said. “It’s…been a long time.”

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The wind rushed past Yang, and the open road stretched out before her. She gunned the throttle on her new motorcycle. Its engine roared loudly. Blake was seated behind Yang on the motorcycle with her arms wrapped around her. She tightened her grip as the bike picked up speed. Yang grinned,
enjoying the sensation. It was moments like these that made life worth living.

Yang was enjoying herself so much that she’d almost forgotten that she and Blake were technically on the clock. Out of all the improbable things that had happened to her since she’d left her tribe, becoming gainfully, and legally, employed had perhaps been the most unlikely of all. Yet there she and Blake were, employees of the Schnee Dust Company. Yang had a regular paycheck and everything now to prove it. She was even paying taxes, although she didn’t see what good that did anyone. However, Weiss had insisted that it was the right thing to do.

The motorcycle Yang was riding had been one of the first things she’d purchased with her newfound income. She’d thought it was the closest thing to happiness that money could buy, but Blake had quickly proven her wrong. Blake had enlisted Weiss’s help to track down the owner of the cabin that she and Yang had hidden out in for so many weeks on end. It had taken some doing, but Blake and Yang were now the rightful owners of the property. In the weeks that had followed, they had patched up the hole in the wall left behind by Yang and Ilia’s little scuffle, and they’d even bought a second chair. The cabin was their home now, and Yang absolutely loved it. She was pretty sure that Blake did too, seeing as it had been her idea in the first place.

Up ahead, Yang spotted a break in the endless procession of pine trees that lined both sides of the road. A trading post quickly came into view, one of many that dotted the roads leading to and from Atlas. It was the only sign of civilization that Yang had seen for miles, and if Weiss’s information was any good, it was Yang and Blake’s destination.

Yang slowed as the trading post drew near. She guided her motorcycle into the station’s parking lot, past a row of fuel pumps, and came to a stop next to the post’s sizable convenience store. Then she turned off her bike’s engine and pushed its kickstand into place with the heel of her boot.

Yang reached up and pulled the motorcycle helmet she’d been wearing off her head. Like her bike, it was also new, as was the rest of her outfit. Both she and Blake had recently gotten new clothes, ones that didn’t mark them as an ex-bandit and a former member of the White Fang. They were proper, upstanding citizens now, as much as the notion made Yang laugh, and they were dressed the part.

Yang had on a brown, short-sleeved jacket over a low-cut orange top, a thick scarf that looped all the way around her neck, and a new pair of riding boots. She hadn’t completely given up on her old look however. Her hair was still in a thick braid, and her dad’s old bandanna was still tied to her leg just below her left knee.

Yang glanced over her shoulder. Blake had taken off her own helmet and was shaking out her hair. Her helmet had been custom-made to accommodate her ears, and Yang thought it looked incredibly cute. Then again, Yang thought just about anything Blake wore looked cute. The outfit Blake had on today, however, went right past cute and straight into dangerously sexy, at least as far as Yang was concerned. Blake was wearing a long-tailed, white jacket over a black crop top with an intricate series of straps, black slacks, and a tall pair of boots that came all the way up to her thighs. It was the boots in particular that made Yang’s eyes linger.

“Yang?” Blake asked. “Is something wrong?”

“Nope,” Yang said, suddenly realizing that she was staring. “I just like looking at you.”

A light blush dusted Blake’s cheeks. She smiled at Yang.

Yang swung her leg over her bike and stood. She glanced at the convenience store. “Time to go do our job,” she said as if it was any great burden. “I still can’t believe we’re getting paid for this.”
Blake stood as well. “I’d say we should thank Weiss. But I think she’s just as happy for the work we do as we are to have it.”

“Yeah she is!” Yang said. “We’re the best, after all.”

Blake chuckled, but she didn’t disagree.

Yang and Blake walked into the convenience store. There wasn’t anything particularly special to be seen inside, just row after row of shelves that were crammed full of anything and everything a traveler might need. Yang found it funny that their target would be hiding out someplace so mundane, but according to Weiss, the trading post’s newest employee was the exact person they were looking for. Yang supposed everyone needed to eat, regardless of whatever grand aspirations they might have. And this place was certainly out of the way. Yang would never have thought to look for a wanted criminal here.

Blake said, “We should split up. We don’t want our target to get away.”

“Good idea,” Yang said. “I promised Ruby we’d have a party when we got back to Atlas. I’d hate to show up empty-handed.”

“Is it a private party?” Blake asked. “Or can anyone attend?”

“Not anyone. But you’re definitely invited,” Yang said. “And maybe afterward, you and I can have our own party.”

“Is that a promise?” Blake asked.

“You bet it is,” Yang said. She leaned in and gave Blake a quick kiss on the cheek. “I love you, Blake.”

“I love you too, Yang,” Blake said.

Yang and Blake both headed off in opposite directions. Yang started walking past the ends of the aisles that ran along one side of the store. She looked down each one as she passed. Despite Weiss’s impeccable track record, there was no guarantee that their target was actually here, but Yang started getting excited all the same. Bounty hunting had turned out to be a lot like banditry. There was the same thrill that Yang had used to enjoy of closing in on an unsuspecting mark. The only real difference, as near as Yang could tell, was that the authorities wouldn’t frown as much on her new line of work.

Yang continued to walk, but then she stopped in her tracks. She spotted a man halfway down one of the aisles. He was obviously an employee there at the trading post, and he was kneeling down, restocking one of the lower shelves. He wasn’t facing Yang, and he had on a drab, gray hoodie with the hood up and over his head. But despite all that, Yang still recognized him. She’d recognize him anywhere.

Yang had to laugh at the man’s pathetic attempt at disguising himself. Even if she hadn’t known that he had an extra set of ears on top of his head, there were two suspicious bumps underneath his hood. It would’ve been like if Blake had tried to hide her cat ears by wearing a big bow. Who would be clueless enough to fall for something like that?

Yang started strolling down the aisle as casually as could be. She paused a few feet away from the man and crossed her arms. He hadn’t noticed her presence yet.

Yang’s lips curled into an evil grin. She said, “Hello. Fennec.”
Underneath the man’s hood his ears twitched. He slowly turned toward Yang, and when he did, his face drained of color.

Fennec stood, his mouth agape. There was fear in his eyes. He took a few steps backward, but the sound of heels clicking on the tiled floor behind him made him stop and look over his shoulder.

Past Fennec, Yang saw Blake walking down the far end of the aisle with her hand resting on the hilt of her sword. Fennec was trapped, and he clearly knew it. His last avenue of escape was cut off. This was the end of the line for him.

Yang cracked her knuckles and started to close in on Fennec. There was no doubt about it; right now life was good.

It was hard for Yang to believe that not so long ago she’d been lost, a stranger in her own tribe, afraid to take that first step out into the larger world. But it was that very step that had set the rest of her life in motion. She’d found Blake, she’d been united with her long-lost sister, and she’d even made friends with the heiress to one of the largest companies in the world. Yang couldn’t explain why, but she finally felt that things were exactly the way they were supposed to be.

Chapter End Notes

And it’s done! For now at least. There still a lot of this AU to potentially explore, and there are many characters that I didn’t have time to check in on. The possibility for a future sequel definitely exists. But for now I’m just happy to have been able to finish this story. It’s easily been the biggest writing project I’ve ever undertaken, fanfiction or otherwise.

So what’s next in the immediate future? Well first I get on the other side of the massive deadline that’s still looming over me at work. Once that’s taken care of I’ll finally have time to get to my long-promised 100 follower special over on tumblr. If you happen to be one of those followers, keep an eye out for more info coming later this month.

Now some of you may have noticed that all the chapter titles in this story (except this last one) were plays on lyrics from the various RWBY soundtracks. And if you hadn’t noticed, well now you know! Just for fun I’ve included a master list at the bottom of this author’s note with precisely which lyrics each title came from. In some cases I had to dig really deep to find something that would match the theme of the chapter, so I doubt anyone recognized them all. I certainly wouldn’t have!

As always, I welcome constructive criticism. Please feel free to leave a comment. And if you like what you’ve read, taking the time to leave a kudos really helps me out. You can also find me on tumblr (electronicyarn) if you want to send me a message or be notified of updates.

**Chapter Title List:**

1 – Tarnished Gold – “Yellow beauty burns gold” – *Red Like Roses* – Vol. 1
2 – Black the Rising Beast – “Black the beast descends from shadows” – *Red Like Roses* – Vol. 1
3 – The Royal Privilege – “Burdened by a royal test” – *Red Like Roses* – Vol. 1
4 – Red Like Scattered Rose Petals – “Red like roses fills my dreams” – *Red Like Roses*
5 – Time to Say Hello – “Now it’s time to say goodbye” – Time to Say Goodbye – Vol. 2
6 – All the Things They Said Weren’t Good – “All the things they said were good” – Sacrifice – Vol. 2
7 – A New Life – “Born with no life” – From Shadows – Vol. 1
8 – Every Dream is Born – “Every dream dies” – I May Fall – Vol. 1
9 – Out of Subjugation – “Into subjugation” – From Shadows – Vol. 1
11 – Eyes Shut Tight – “My eyes are open wide” – Armed and Ready – Vol. 4
12 – Unarmed and Unprepared – “Cause I’m armed and ready” – Armed and Ready – Vol. 4
13 – Past Mistakes Not Repeated – “My past mistakes repeated” – All That Matters – Vol. 5
14 – Never Closer – “Always closer to the emptiness and sadness” – Red Like Roses Part II – Vol. 1
15 – Like Night Follows Day – “I’ll follow you like morning follows night” – Like Morning Follows Night – Vol. 4
16 – Bridges Left to Burn – “No bridges left to burn anymore” – Time to Say Goodbye – Vol. 2
17 – Beware the Darkness Fading – “Beware as the light is fading” – This Will Be the Day – Vol. 1
18 – A Night When All Hearts Will Be Mended – “There’s a day when all hearts will be broken” – I May Fall – Vol. 1
19 – No Place to Rest – “And brings me to the place you rest” – Red Like Roses – Vol. 1
20 – Good Luck Charm – “I’m your bad luck charm” – Bad Luck Charm – Vol. 4
21 – The Truth Will Appear – “And all the truth will disappear” – Die – Vol. 2
22 – All That Never Mattered – “And that’s all that matters somehow” – All That Matters – Vol. 5
23 – A Garden of Despair – “We could live inside a garden of ecstasy” – Bmblb – Vol. 4
24 – Extinguish – “You’ll watch me ignite” – Ignite – Vol. 5
25 – The Lowest Hour – “Prepare for your finest hour” – This Will Be the Day – Vol. 1
26 – A Place Where Everyone Knows – “If you meet me there, no one will know” – Bmblb – Vol. 4
27 – Unsurrendered Pride – “Surrender your pride” – All Things Must Die – Vol. 5
28 – A Point Where it Balances – “There’s a point where it tips” – Time to Say Goodbye – Vol. 2
29 – With No Doubt – “With a doubt in our minds” – Time to Say Goodbye – Vol. 2
30 – Legends Gather – “Legends scatter” – This Will Be the Day – Vol. 1
31 – Heroes in the End – “There’ll be no hero in the end who will rise above” – When It Falls – Vol. 3
32 – This Will Be the Day – “This will be the day we’ve waited for” – This Will Be the Day – Vol. 1

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