Eclipse - Act 1 - The Healing

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Summary

After the defeat of Cinder Fall during the Battle of Beacon, Jaune and Pyrrha find each other struggling to continue their relationship after the events of that night. With the students of Beacon recovering from the horrors of that night, the two will encounter many obstacles in rekindling their love. But never forget...never fear the shattered moon, fear the moon becoming whole...

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
The shrieking howl of a little girl’s voice echoes across the small space of land in the middle of the Mistraalian Mountain Ranges.

“Mom! Moooooom!”

The desperate cries echo from her bedroom, terrified of something that scares her so deeply. The little girl hides under her sheet, her tiny hands clutching onto the edge of the bed sheet, as she stares at the source of her fear. Huge bright emerald eyes watch the dancing skeletons on her wall that give her the nightmares that frighten her so.

The door opens slightly, revealing the expanding column of artificial light mixing and cock-tailing with haunting lunar luminescence across her mahogany floorboards. Like clawed hands of creatures of Grimm, the shadows seem to scuttle towards the tiny girl with crimson red hair. But then there is a moment, a tearing feeling from her fear that is replaced with relief and hope as she spots a tall elegant woman stood in the doorway. She has long crimson hair too, thrown over her right shoulder in a thick woven mess of blood red. Hair messy from waking up in the middle of the night by the cries of the little girl, the late thirties woman rubs her eyes and she grumbles with a sigh.

She steps into her petrified daughter’s room, her curvaceous Mistraalian figure wrapped in a silky violet dressing gown, she crouches down beside her daughter with a yawn. “What is it, my sweet?” She softly whispers, crouched down beside the bed of the little girl who looks at her over her sheets. She holds the covers of her bed right up against her nose from the fear of the very thing she is so scared of. Her mother gently pinches the tented patch of quilt where her dinky little toes had made.

The little red headed girl, with a messy tuft of rich red hair looks up with sparkling green eyes; a shaky finger stretches out in order to point at the source of her fears.

“M-Monster!”

The mother sighs, smiling kindly to the little one. “Oh honey.” She says, standing up and sitting on the edge of her bed, caressing her cheek with her hand. She bit her lip and shuffled close to her daughter’s side, looping a warm arm around her shoulders, resting her mature face in her four year old daughter’s hair. “Pyrrha, sweetheart...it’s not a monster, baby. Look.” She points out the window as she coos to her little girl, showing naught but trees and bushes that dance in the midnight breeze.

But no monsters.

Not even a howl from a Beowulf for miles.

The trees and bushes combined with the lunar glow formed the jagged shadows that looked like the body of a dark monster clawing towards her on the walls and floor. But the little girl named Pyrrha Nikos, however – is not as convinced as her mother.
Stubborn as ever.

“No mommy! Not the twee!” She throws the covers off her tiny body and she crawls over her mother’s lap and she snuggles up against her mother’s chest, pointing past the bushes, her hand shaking. Wearing an adorable bronze onesie, her mother gently wraps one arm around her daughter – almost protectively. Her mother follows the finger of her daughter and tracks it to see what scares her.

She is pointing to the Shattered Moon nestled in the black abyss dotted with stars above them all. “The moon! It’s scawy!” Little Pyrrha coos, still not able to pronounce words properly yet. Her mother smiles as she looks down at her daughter on her lap, still pointing at the moon with a scared look on her face.

“Oh...my gentle little wing...” She whispers as she lies down on her bed with her in her arms as she snuggles up beside her mother. Then she points up at the moon as she explains to Pyrrha. Looking away from the scary sight of the moon, she nuzzles her head close to her mother’s chest to find comfort in her warm embrace, clutching onto her mother’s silky night gown she wears. “The moon is nothing to be afraid of; it is a vigil over us while we sleep. It protects us from all manner of evil things.” She assures with a smile, caressing her hair to calm her down.

Curious as ever, Pyrrha looks up at her mother. “From the Gwimm?” She asks her mother with bountiful eyes, her mother beamed down at her lovingly, pecking a soft kiss onto her daughter’s head.

“Yes...from the Grimm. But also from many other things, like curses or monsters from other worlds. Never fear the Moon, Amica Mea.” She tells her daughter, sounding as wise as ever.

“B-B-B-But it’s big and bwight! It’s bwoked too, mommy why is the moon bwoked?” She nervously asks, still struggling to pronounce words correctly due to only being on this world for only four years now.

Her mother smiles with a soft and delicate laugh. “Broken, honey.” She chuckles lightly. “It’s broken.”

“Oooh...Bw-Bwoken?” Pyrrha looks at her mother for confirmation and her smile speaks volumes to her.

“Exactly.” Another kiss to her hair as she congratulates her with a tickle, making her daughter giggle. Pyrrha remains close to her mother, still staring at the Shattered Moon, and so does her mother. “But...nobody’s really sure why the Moon is broken. Only that we should be happy it is.” She bites her lip, rubbing gentle circles into the tiny Nikos’ hair that still sucks her thumb in her lap.

“Why momma? It’s bad b-bec-it’s bwoked.” Pyrrha mumbles over her thumb, her warming mother gives her a gentle squeeze, looking up at the ceiling to watch the rotating nightlight project warming orange and pink stars onto the ceiling. A simplistic crescent moon with specks of broken fragments orbiting it. She worries her lip and her greener eyes flit down to her tiny babe in her lap.

“Two yellow Crescents will one day make the moon whole.” She breathes a whisper before forcing a smile onto her face, fighting her own fears that battle within her soul. “Don’t worry, my sweet. That’s a story for when you’re older. For now though, get some sleep.” She lays her little bundle down on the bed and tucks her in, handing the infant her plushie bear and planting a soft kiss on her brow. “Sweet dreams my darling Pyrrha.”
“Night mommy.” Pyrrha whispers back, closing her eyes as her mother walks over to her window, looking out of it as she hugs her upper arms. She stares up at the Shattered Moon and bites her lip with trepidation flowing through her bloodstream, before shaking her head and drawing the blackout curtains, blocking out the lunar light.

Not just to spare her daughter of the fears.

But also herself.

She sighs heavily and looks down at her daughter softly as sleep began to claim the little girl, gently sucking her thumb as she drifts away.

“You’ll do wonderful things when your older, my darling Pyrrha. Never fear the Shattered Moon, my dear...” She says as she walks out of the room with a gentle smile as she pulls the door shut with a gentle click.

A shaky exhale leaves her mouth as she finishes that statement.

“...Fear the Moon...”

“...Becoming Whole.”
Aftermath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Pyrrha

The darkness of the night sky watches over the school, the rumbling of crackling flames echoes for miles. The howls and roars of countless Grimm that have crashed into the school. Attacking everything that moves.

Atop Beacon Tower...

Akuou launches straight towards Cinder, and the new Fall Maiden deflects the round bronze shield with her hand. A flash of burning hot fire rebounds the effective shield and it bounces across the ground, whilst she extends her hands. Fire ignites around her body, amber eyes glowing fiercely with spectral flames crackling around both irises. With a deranged grin on her face, she blasts the flames towards her, but Pyrrha rolls out of the way, opening her palm to use her polarity.

Akuou flies right back towards her and clips Cinder in the side of the head upon its return. Cinder grunts with anger from the impact as it nearly knocks her out of her position in the air. The shield returns back to her hand, and Pyrrha paces back and forth, keeping her eyes focused on the Fall Maiden. “Why are you doing this?” Pyrrha yells with anger, but Cinder just snarls with anger. The fact she managed to land a hit just enrages Cinder more and more – that rage acting as a catalyst for the powers that she wields. “I am worthy of the power! Not Amber! Not you!” Cinder screams as she channels fire into her fist and she blasts down towards her, thrusting her fist downwards and creating a powerful explosion. The shockwave knocks Pyrrha backwards, harming her aura a bit, but she still manages to pull off the landing. Pyrrha swiftly lifts her head, her long red wolf tail bouncing from the movement.

Cinder descends down towards Pyrrha with her fists clenched, teeth gritted together and more fire burning from her amber eyes that glow as bright as the stars themselves. The presence of Cinder Fall is intimidating right down to Pyrrha’s core – yet she can sense weakness in her. Desperation...worth...

Like Cinder wants to prove she is worthy of something.

“The worthy? Worthy of what? What are you trying to prove?” Pyrrha questions, even after everything Cinder has done to the school and their friends, she is still trying to understand her enemy. But Cinder is not an idiot, she knows what Pyrrha is doing, and it angers her more that Pyrrha thinks she is weak-minded enough to fall for that.

She lets out a nightmarish roar as she lunges towards the Invincible Girl, forming a pair of swords forged of glass with magma glowing within. She spirals through the air and slashes both of her curved blades at Pyrrha, but the Spartan backs up, standing defiantly as she pushes her shield upwards to stop the blades. The impact of the two swords on her shield shatters both blades instantaneously, then Pyrrha ducks downwards so then Pyrrha stumbles over.

Then she arches upwards and clatters Akuou into Cinder’s stomach to knock her back, using
Cinder’s rage to make her clumsy.

*Remember...fury can force one into making mistakes...use that against her...*

Pyrrha keeps her distance from Cinder, she may be learning a way to get the upper hand against the Fall Maiden – but she must remember – she is up against the Fall Maiden. Cinder is capable of feats that she might not even realise yet, and that makes the situation even more perilous when lacking Milo. Shattered like glass from the hands of her foe, molten down from the flames and discarded away.

But as she paces back and forth, she has to look up at the sky, hearing the whoosh of the wings, the wind passing through the holes in the jet black membrane. The demonic howling roar of the Grimm Dragon reverberates through the clouds around her, using the darkness to its advantage. It banks round and it suddenly erupts from the gloom, snapping its jaws down at where she was stood.

But Pyrrha’s senses are acute and she leapt at the best possible moment, feeling the wind and the scales so close to her as she rolls aside. As the Dragon passes overhead, she turns her attention to Cinder...

Only to find her missing, using the Dragon’s attack to her advantage. Pyrrha looks around, breath erratic and fearful of where Cinder Fall has gone, but she knows that she is still there. “Why do you fight? I gave you the perfect opportunity to flee – there is no shame in fleeing to fight another day.” Cinder says to her, her voice seeming to speak from all around her like she is some kind of spiritual entity.

With only a shield, Pyrrha has never felt more vulnerable during combat, knowing her enemy finally has the advantage. The blades that Cinder uses cannot be affected by Pyrrha’s polarity for they are made from obsidian – non ferrous material. Goosebumps forming across her slender frame and her bones shivering from the icy cold air that surrounds them...she struggles to find an answer. So she goes for the only one that can possibly make sense from her mouth.

“I’m a Huntress! It is my duty! My destiny!” She yells back to Cinder, circling the area of Ozpin’s completely destroyed office. Completely unaware of where he is or what has befallen him. Only a chilling laugh replies to Pyrrha at first, floating around her constantly as she searches for her enemy, along with the sound of the massive wings of the Grimm Dragon that circles the tower.

Awaiting the Fall Maiden’s command.

“Destiny...” Cinder laughs, still hidden in the gloom of night, with Pyrrha struggling to track her down just from her voice alone. “Such a childish idea, one that the people of Mistral like yourself hold so dearly. The idea that you are all destined to do something great some day.” She laughs as she describes the very thing that the Mistraalian Culture have held so dear.

The idea of Destiny.

Pyrrha shakes her head as she stands there, her words are like those of something trying to tunnel into her head. “N-No...shut up...” She stammers as she stands there, feeling so much confusion in her life right now. The idea of destiny being challenged constantly with every single step that she takes.

“So it is your destiny to challenge me? And for what? So then you can sacrifice yourself to die a worthless death? A death that does nothing to save your school or your friends?” Cinder questions with a scoff in her voice, then Pyrrha yells with rage, narrowing down the Fall Maiden’s voice and
launching Akuou straight towards her.

But Cinder catches the shield, stood behind her and the shield lets out a powerful thrum from the impact. Pyrrha pulls with her polarity but Cinder’s grip is too strong, and the Fall Maiden just smirks with sinister intent. “Destiny is a lie, sweetie.” Cinder states with a grin, before she throws Akuou off the edge of the tower and Pyrrha gasps when she sees her only remaining weapon fall off the edge.

Cinder stands before the defenceless girl, and Pyrrha lowers her head, but clenches her hands into fists. “I will not go gently into that good night...” She mutters to herself, as she suddenly leaps at Cinder and smashes her knee right up the Fall Maiden’s jaw. Cinder staggers back from her sudden and unexpectedly aggressive attack, making her stagger away.

Pyrrha spins round and she smashes her fist right into the side of Cinder’s face, landing one hell of a hit against her skull that actually brings her down to one knee. Cinder channels fire through her arm, since that is the only element that she has learned to use so far in her powers and unleashes them right at Pyrrha. She performs an elegant back flip, dodging the attack in one perfect movement and the shell of flames shoots off into the night sky to go and join the stars.

Pyrrha lands down on the ground and she reaches out to a chunk of metal that sits on the ground and she pulls it round with full force, launching it towards Cinder. It crashes right against the Fall Maiden, but she forms a barrier of fire that completely incinerates the chunk of metal after it hits her. The charred embers float around her body and are carried away into the cool night wind.

Pyrrha continues to walk towards Pyrrha, and every single attack that Pyrrha makes sends flashes of memories through her mind.

She screams as she spirals round and nails her in the head with her elbow, sending a memory pulsing through her mind. “You’ll just get in the way.” The voice of Ozpin said, seeing him stare at her after the death of Amber mere moments ago. Every single attack reminds her of every single time she has ever felt so much anger or defeat in her life.

She jumps in the air, and spins round and smashes her knee plate across Cinder’s face, the sharp point cutting through the skin and flesh on her cheek. Cinder roars in pain, staggering back as the sharpened bronze knee pad delivers a scar for her to dwell on. Cinder staggers back but Pyrrha grabs her by the head and thrusts her knee up in her head again. The Fall Maiden roars in pain, but Pyrrha kicks her into the broken desk that belongs to Ozpin.

The act of doing so sharply fires another memory. “You’re not friends! You’re just – just – Opportunists! Freeloaders! Parasites!” The old memory of her own younger voice screaming with a heartbroken ball of emotions. Cinder groans with pain, but her aura immediately heals the wounds given to her by the enraged Pyrrha Nikos.

Cinder blasts towards her and she forms one of her Obsidian Swords, slashing it straight towards her, but Pyrrha ducks down and kicks Cinder in her lower spine. The Fall Maiden collapses to the ground but immediately comes round and throws her sword towards Pyrrha. She gasps and she crosses her forearms over each other to block the blade that soars towards her. The impact of the sword throws Pyrrha across the ground, but the blade shatters immediately as soon as it hit her bronze metal bracer. Breaking section by section into thousands of little pieces.

Pyrrha crashes against the wall from the impact, moaning in pain when she looks at her arm, seeing her aura crackling across her body at times. Her aura’s wearing thinner and thinner with every hit she suffers. Pyrrha looks up at Cinder, seeing her getting back up and cracking her neck. She might be the Fall Maiden now, but her aura can still be broken just as her own can be. “I must
admit Pyrrha Nikos – I have underestimated you.” Cinder confesses as she rises back up, opening her hand and embers form from the dust that surrounds her.

The dust magnetises together and cools, forging the shape of a Bow and Arrow, with the arrow ready to be nock and drawn. “I never expected you to be so aggressive in combat – thought you’d kneel down and die after losing your weapons. Yet you refuse to die.” Cinder says with an impressive look in her amber eyes as she walks towards Pyrrha. Pyrrha presses her hand against her stomach with pain, feeling some of her past injuries from her fight against Cinder begin to flare up again. Like when Cinder blasted her in the stomach with fire or when she was

Pyrrha lifts her head slowly with a scowl, still hearing the Dragon flying around her and landing right behind her on the building. She looks over her shoulder, feeling its wintry cold breath down her neck as she stares at the monster. The six fiery orange eyes staring straight into her soul, the long tongue licking the razor sharp white teeth. Pyrrha then looks back at Cinder whom stares her down, ready to fire the arrow that could end her life right here and right now. But as always, Pyrrha stands up again, staring Cinder down constantly. “I have been ready to face my end for a long time – but in the face of the end – I keep fighting. For him.” Pyrrha states with a scowl and Cinder chuckles with a grin.

“For that pathetic blonde haired excuse of a Huntsman?” Cinder questions with a scoff, pointing down at the ground with her arrow. The words that Cinder dares to utter boils something up in Pyrrha, and she clenches her hands into fists as she lets out a scream of fury.

“Don’t ever say that about him!” She shrieks with animosity replacing her once gentle and regal tones in her voice. She grits her teeth together forcefully and immediately goes to attack Cinder. She jumps at the Fall Maiden and she swings her fist at her, but Cinder catches her forearm and pulls her against her chest, restraining her there. Pyrrha grunts, hearing Cinder’s laughing voice in her ear.

“Wow! Looks like I hit a nerve...what did you promise him when you left? That you will always love him after you go running off to your own death?” She scoffs, kicking Pyrrha in the leg to bring her down to one knee. She stabs her straight through the Achilles Heel in her leg and she cries out with agony as she feels the obsidian arrow lodged through her leg. Blood already pouring from the wound and onto the floor.

Pyrrha collapses, biting her lip in pain as she sees so much blood leaving such a vital area of the body. But out of instinct like an animal she yells, and she reaches out with her hand and the polarity in her semblance wraps around a chunk of metal from the battle that shattered his office. She launches it at the Fall Maiden and it punctures straight through her shoulder, carrying her towards the wall and pinning her there.

Cinder yell in pain, grabbing the metal and she heats it up, melting half it so then she can free herself. She scoffs, fighting the pain in the hole implanted in her shoulder where the blood leaks down. “Guess we’re even.” She scoffs, breaking the metal rebar in half and staggering off it, pressing one hand against it.

Pyrrha groans in absolute agony from her leg, sweat beading off her face now. She presses her hand against it and a sickening hot pain surges across her body from the epicentre of her wound. Cinder walks around her and looks up at the Dragon that watches the event with a smile on her face. “If that is the case – then what did you expect if you survived this? That he would forgive you for betraying him? You might know everything about fighting but you know nothing about people, honey.” Cinder says as she crouches down in front of Pyrrha with a smile.
She winces with pain, but slowly lifts her head to stare Cinder in the eyes. “And what do you know about love?” Pyrrha questions, and Cinder narrows her eyes with anger and they ignite. Cinder suddenly grabs Pyrrha by the throat, and the young red haired Huntress strains, gasping for air as Cinder crushes her throat, staring her down.

“You don’t know a thing – about me. I was never given the same luxuries you are your little buddies had. Remember that.” She snarls, hinting to something in her own past. Cinder then forcefully shoves Pyrrha to the ground, giving her a few seconds to catch her breath as she steps back. “Now tell me – Pyrrha Nikos – would you rather die quick – or slow?” She asks, drawing the bow and aiming it at her.

But then...

Ruby shoots up the side of the tower thanks to the glyphs that Weiss created to get her up there, just as she did when she was fighting the Giant Nevermore in the Emerald Forest. The rose petal of a child lands on the surface of the office and she stares at the two of them. She gasps when seeing Pyrrha at Cinder’s mercy...

Then...

Something happens.

“Pyrrha!” Ruby screams, howling almost which lets out a powerful blast of blinding white light from her eyes. The light is so bright it completely lights up the night sky, and Cinder turns with shocked eyes. Pyrrha ducks down, taking cover instinctively in case if it could harm her as well.

“What?” Cinder yells as the silver light burns across the side of her face and her eye, launching her back as it scorches her skin and her eye. The white flames burns right across the left side of her face, also incinerating a lot of the hair on that side of her face as well. Only burning that side since out is the side that faced Ruby during the event. The fire throws Cinder onto the ground, whilst the white flames seem to go around Pyrrha, and does not actually attack her.

It...

Protects her...

The silver energy continues to burn Cinder, then it passes towards the huge Grimm Dragon. It looks at its wings and lets out a roar of furious rage as the black scales and flash harden into some form of grey stone across its body. It rears back and screeches to the sky as the stone infects and completely encases the giant into stone. The huge statue of the monster that once existed falls silent...

And then...

The silver light fades away, and Ruby collapses to the ground. Pyrrha uncovers her eyes and turns to look at Ruby passed out on the ground, seeing Cinder not moving as well. “Ruby...” She whispers as she crawls over to her.

But then she hears the sound of the stone cracking on the huge creature, and Pyrrha turns to stare at it. The angle it was stood...now gravity is finishing the giant off. The legs snap off from the pressure and it tips backwards slowly. The huge Grimm Dragon plummet off the side of Beacon tower, crashing against the side of one of the smaller towers built around the main tower. As it crashes against it, the smaller tower shatters but so does the wing and side of the Dragon. Gargantuan chunks of stone the size of boulder plummet to the ground and the statue clips the side
of the tower again, breaking off its tail and some spins on its back. Finally the huge titan falls
further, and crashes into the ground with force, so much that it sends a small earthquake rumbling
across Vale. The shaking ground rattles windows and sets car alarms off everywhere.

Huntsmen and Huntresses fighting the Grimm stand ready to fight them, Beowulves and
Deathstalkers approaching. But as soon as that light ignited, as soon as the Grimm Dragon
fell...they all stopped their assault. They all turn and they stare at where the light Ruby set off
came from and where the Dragon fell.

Then...

They flee.

Every single Creature of Grimm flees from the City of Vale and even from Beacon as well. Glynda
looks around with Qrow, who stares up at the tower with fearful eyes – knowing Ruby was the one
who set her eyes off. “What’s happening?” Glynda questions as she looks around at the area.
Seeing Creeps digging their way out of the city and back into the wilds around the city.

“They’re...retreating?” Cardin questions as he looks around, holding his mace in his hand.

Back on the tower, Pyrrha crawls to Ruby, looking at her and shaking her, trying to wake her up.
“Ruby? Ruby?” She mutters, but then the voice of Cinder returns, weaker than before.

“It’s...” Cinder’s weakened voice strains and Pyrrha stares at her, seeing her at the edge. Her eye
completely burned off, part of her hair and her clothing destroyed from the white fire too. Then she
finishes what she was saying. “It’s not over...” Cinder assures with a snarl, before pushing her hand
against the ground and rolling off the side of the building to fall. Pyrrha tries to get up but she falls,
but manages to look over the side of the building.

But she never hit the ground.

She just...

Vanished.

Pyrrha sighs with pain, feeling herself become lightheaded, but all she wants to do is look after
Ruby. Whatever she did has caused her to fall unconscious, she crawls back to her side and she
holds her close, ignoring the blood loss in her leg.

The silence that surrounds her now is incredibly disturbing, so used to hearing the howl of that
Dragon’s wings, and now there is nothing at all. Just dead silence for miles...

Until...

The bright light of a Bullhead’s searchlight shines upon the two of them, causing Pyrrha to look up
as she sees the Bullhead descending with Ironwood behind the cockpit. Glynda inside with Cardin
and Qrow. Qrow jumps down and he runs over to the pair, Ironwood must have shown up at the
perfect time with a Bullhead he acquired to get them down from there. He crouches down and
Cardin runs over as well. Cardin helps Pyrrha up, carrying her – Cardin of all people – whilst
Qrow takes his niece. “Don’t worry, kids – I gotcha...I gotcha.” He assures as he and Cardin take
them aboard the Bullhead.

As Cardin sits down with her on his lap, the blood loss and shock take hold.

And she passes out.
Five Days Later...

Beep

Beep

Beep

The monotonous cycle of beeps echoes constantly from the life support machines that are keeping the wounded Huntsmen and Huntresses stable after the Battle of Beacon. Pyrrha lies in one of the beds provided for them. Nora and Ren both are sat down by the bed of Pyrrha with their hands held together, waiting for her to wake up. Pyrrha has a bandage wrapped around her heel, and it has been fixed up. She will still suffer with a bad limp for a while because of the injury that Cinder had given her, but she is still alive.

In the other beds are three other young women:

Ruby

Yang

And Blake

Blake, unlike the others is actually awake as well. She has a bandage wrapped around her stomach where Adam stabbed her with Wilt and Blush. His whereabouts along with the White Fang are also unknown after the end of the Battle of Beacon. Blake presses her hand to her head as she looks around the room, seeing two of her teammates next to her and unconscious. She gasps, covering her mouth when she sees Yang with her arm missing and a bandage wrapped around her cauterised stump. “Yang...” She gasps as she reaches out for her close friend, and Nora looks over to her.

“It’s okay, Blake. She’ll be okay...everyone will be.” Nora assures with a smile and Blake looks at her with worry in her large feline amber eyes.

“How long have we been out?” She asks fearfully.

“Five days.” Ren answers, and her eyes widen with utter disbelief.

“Five days?” She questions.

“Don’t worry, the situation is under control again...near enough anyway.” Nora sighs as she fiddles with her skirt.

“Wait...where’s Sun and Weiss?” She asks fearfully since she cannot see them here.

“They’re fine, Weiss is currently getting coffee and Sun is with his team, helping secure the school.” Ren promises as he stands up, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, looking down at the floor. They were lucky, yet they have still lost a very good friend of theirs.

“Penny...” Blake softly mumbles, looking at Pyrrha when she remembers seeing her get torn apart by the cables.

“I know...but she didn’t mean to.” Nora says, supporting Pyrrha endlessly. And none of them have
noticed that she is actually conscious now and hearing everything that they are saying. But she keeps her eyes closed, merely because she does not have the strength to do so yet.

“She was a machine – but she seemed so real to us.” Blake says with shortened breath, every single breath is so sharp and hoarse. It is hard for her to comprehend this horror, hard for all of them to comprehend the fact that Ironwood had a machine built to look like a young girl to fit in. But for what? What was the purpose of having a robotic soldier disguised as an innocent little girl – Cinder was right – the Grimm would never be able to tell the difference.

“She never deserved to die.” Ren sadly says as he lowers his head, team J.N.P.R might not have known her for very long but they knew that there was not an inch on her body that was bad. She was good, pure and kind all the way through – and was murdered just to make a statement.

“Gods know how Pyrrha must feel about all this...” Blake sighs as she looks at the floor sadly.

“I know...” Nora agrees.

Finally, Pyrrha’s eyes begin to move as she regains some more strength, and she lets out a soft groan. They all turn and look at her with relief when she sits upright, pressing her hand to her leg for a second when she feels another sharp burst of pain rupture through her heel. “Pyrrha!” Nora cries out with joy. “You’re awake!” She says, immediately wrapping her arms around Pyrrha happily, rocking back and forth.

Nearly turning purple, she strains the words from her mouth. “Hi...Nora...Crushing...Me...” She weakly says, feeling her bones being crushed from the force of one of the strongest beings she has ever come across.

“Oop! Sorry!” Nora squeaks, releasing Pyrrha and allowing the Invincible Spartan to breathe again, feeling the oxygen flow right back into her body. She sits there, looking at her foot and then at the table, seeing the broken arrow that was stabbed into her leg.

“I heard it was a pain getting that out of you...” Ren says, but all of them are beating around the bush. Until Nora does it for them.

“Pyrrha – we all saw the light from up there...what the hell happened?” Nora asks with confusion, desperate for an explanation on what it was that happened up on Beacon Tower. Pyrrha sighs and she looks at Ruby, since she was the reason that the night lit up, and the Dragon was killed.

“Cinder – she was about to kill me, we fought for a while. But she had the advantage – just before she was gonna shoot though, Ruby got there in time and landed to our left.” Pyrrha explains, remembering it like it happened yesterday. “Then...I heard her scream my name...and the night sky lit up...the Dragon turned to stone and she nearly killed Cinder. The Dragon fell, and it caused an Earthquake when it hit the ground.” She explains.

Pyrrha looks out the window to see the sun shining bright in the sky, morning has risen and they are all still in Beacon. “Guys...we’re still in Beacon? What happened?” She asks, since she passed out before she even realised what happened in the rest of the school.

Nora looks at Ren and she sighs. “We...won.” Nora informs her, looking right into Pyrrha’s eyes. The Invincible Girl looks at Blake and she nods her head, clearly she is telling the truth.

“What do you mean? The Grimm invaded the school and Vale in full force.” Pyrrha states, remembering that day and moment very well. The amount of Grimm that stormed into the city was absolutely horrifying.
“They did – but whatever happened up there – with you and Ruby – it killed that Dragon, and the moment it died all the Grimm retreated from the school and Vale. People are still in shock but Weiss has been talking with her father about aiding in the funds of repairs.” Ren explains to her, but Blake sighs when she looks at the ground.

“But lots of students were killed in the attack, civilians too. Many students have left now – not many stayed behind.” Blake explains as she looks at the floor, flinching at the pain in her side.

“Who did?” Pyrrha asks curiously.

“Cardin and his team for one.” Ren reveals.

“Really?” She questions with disbelief.

“He seems like he has changed a lot.” Ren shrugs.

“Team S.S.S.N stayed, same with Team C.F.V.Y. Some other students stayed too and some teachers, whilst we have some exchange students here too.” Nora explains. Then Pyrrha finally drops the question that she wanted to ask immediately but never found the right moment to.

“Jaune? Where is he?” She asks, nervous and worried about him, since the last she saw of him she did send him off in a locker like that. Nora and Ren look at each other, and they hesitance terrified Pyrrha.

“No...He isn’t...” She gasps fearfully.

“He’s okay – but – he hasn’t been taking it well, how you left him like that, Pyr.” Nora explains. “He was here, but he left a few minutes ago to get some food from the vending machine.” Nora explains. Pyrrha – filled with guilt and disdain towards herself for what she did – clutches her bed cover with her hands.

Then the doors open, and to her hopes she expected to see Jaune walk inside, but in fact it was Weiss. She holds a trio of coffees in her hands and she looks at Blake and Pyrrha with a gasp. “Oh thank the gods! You’re awake!” She gasps with relief, walking over to Ren and Nora, giving them their coffees.

“Sixteen sugars?” Nora asks hopefully.

“Of course.” Weiss lies with a completely straight face, winking at Ren. Nora takes a sip of her coffee then her eyes narrow and she stares at Weiss.

“How many are in here?” Nora grills, as always Nora Valkyrie has an unspoken gift – perhaps a second semblance – of being able to lighten the mood no matter what happened days earlier. That gift is in short supply here in Beacon after last night. Weiss smirks before giving the answer.

“Two.” Weiss answers and Nora slouches with a gasp.

“You lied to me!” Nora squeals.

“What kind of diabetic savage has sixteen sugars? I mean Ruby I can handle with six – even if it is plain wrong – but sixteen? That is just unnatural.” Weiss lectures with a shudder, whereas Nora just smiles.

“Oh yeah, I’m unnatural.” Nora giggles, sipping more of her coffee and seeming to enjoy it anyway.
Pyrrha smiles softly, but she still feels an unwavering level of pain in her body and not just physical.

“My father has agreed to fund the repairs of the city and the school – no doubt because it could attract investors for the company – but I don’t care. I’m doing it for us.” Weiss explains to them.

That pain in Pyrrha just seems to block everyone out, assuming that they all hate her and in her head they should. She killed Penny Polendina, gods knows how poor Ruby must be feeling right now, and she lost one of her closest friends. Perhaps her best friend of all time, the one that was always there for her and vice versa.

But it wasn’t her fault.

It was Emerald.

But Pyrrha refuses to look at it that way, making her situation even worse. Due to her grief and poor state of mind her aura is not operating the way it should be either – meaning the tissue regeneration and healing in her leg is not going as quickly as it should be. Instead of taking a few days to heal, if her state of mind does not improve it could take weeks, maybe months.

Then...

The door opens and she gasps, feeling her heart stop for a second and the blood drain from her face when she sees him. “Hey guys, Vending Machine was acting up but I got us some – stuff.” He slows down when he sees her looking into his eyes, tears welling up in her own with guilt overcoming her soul. “Y-You’re...up...” Jaune nervously yet awkwardly says to her, looking right at her.

Blake winces, pressing her hand to her side. “I’m gonna go and get some air.” Blake says, giving the two of them their moment after what happened. She walks over to Weiss who checks Ruby’s temperature with the back of her hand first. She is stable, and Yang is too. She sighs and she walks out with her, along with Nora and Ren in tow.

Leaving only the two of them in the room together.

Never in her life has Pyrrha felt so...at fault for something in her entire life.

He should hate my guts for what I did to him, Cinder was right...I kissed him, essentially confessed my love to him, and then ran off to fight a battle I knew I couldn’t win.

It wasn’t brave of me...

It was cowardly.

She looks downwards, unable to look him in the eye, it is like she is feeling her leg throbbing again and again every time she looks at him. All because of how that night went between the two of them. She touches her arm as she sits there, and the silence between the two is painfully long. “J-Jaune...I-I...” Struggling to even form words to the man she loves so much.

But Jaune...even he can barely even look at her. “Why? Why did you do that to me?” He questions as he sits in that chair, looking down at the floor. Voice broken with the voice of betrayal – like someone has just rammed a razor in his ribs.

“Jaune...” Still trying to speak to him but nothing is forming, just every word nearly brings her to tears.
“I thought you trusted me, Pyrrha. I could have helped you, we could have taken down Cinder together – why couldn’t I?” He couldn’t say anymore, it was too much for his kind soul to bare. He really thinks that she never trusted him in that way, even though she had been training him for so long, she still sent him off like that.

But then...

He exhales, realising that after everything he cannot be so antagonistic towards her. “Are...are you okay?” He asks her, looking at her leg where Cinder had stabbed the arrow right through. She looks at the bandage and she touches it.

“It’s...” She sniffs, rubbing a tear from her eye as she fights the sorrow in her soul. “It’s getting there...I think I’ll have a limp for a while.” She croaks with sadness, but not over the damage done to her leg.

Then the silence returns.

It has been days since the event happened, she has been out of it for five days. Yet it only felt like it was a couple of seconds for her, still disorientating. But then Jaune takes the heartbreaking decision to tell her what it is that sits in his mind. “Pyrrha...listen...I umm.” Jaune sighs heavily before sitting upright to face Pyrrha. “I’m gonna be honest with you...I dunno how to continue where we left off. I don’t even know if it’s even possible.” Jaune’s voice cracks, their relationship tainted by the choice that Pyrrha made.

Pyrrha nods with her eyes gazing down to her legs with tears constantly blurring her vision. “O-Of course. I understand.” Pyrrha whimpers, looking frailer than she has ever looked. Completely vulnerable with tears streaming down her cheeks with sadness. It crushes Jaune’s heart to see her like this, devoid of happiness and joy...ever since Ozpin forced that choice upon her.

He must answer for the things he has done.

“I-I mean...I started to...what I’m trying to say is...” Jaune huffs and rubs his brow with stress building within him. “I started to feel things for you, Pyrrha – it started at the dance, we got closer and closer...finally we kissed.”

“We did.” She lets a small smile curve her lips, the memory of kissing him warms her heart.

“But then...in the moment it actually mattered, you pushed me away, into that locker. It hurt me so, so much and...” He sniffs and thumbs his eye to rub the tears away to hide his heartbreak. “...I...right now, I...I can’t deal with that right now.” Jaune looks up at her eyes with plead for his forgiveness. But then he sees them sink with agony over his words.

“I-I understand.” She whispers, afraid if her voice were any louder she would burst into tears.

“So umm...I think it’d be best if we just stay...friends.” He confesses and Pyrrha shut her eyes, tears stream down the side of her cheeks.

“Oh...” She replied but the word came out sounding more like – O-ay – as her gentle quiet voice cracked. She blew out a breath and stared at her feet where she sits. “C-Can we still...spar? O-On the roof?”

“I...I don’t think that’s a good idea right now. I’m struggling...just being in the same room, feelings wise. I have been by your side every day...and it hurts, Pyrrha.” He says to her, speaking honestly but every single word he says hurts both sides. Of course he wants to be with her, he loves her so much – but after what happened between the two, how can he trust her again after that?
Never has she felt so alone than right now.

The others might not have actually meant it but they seemed to be afraid of her after what she did to the lovely Penny Polendina.

“O-Of course...another time.” She croaked. “F-For everything...I’m so, so...” She quivers and whines, thumping a sleeve swallowed fist into her thigh as she eyed the ceiling, blowing out a heavy breath. Jaune looks at her with eyes full of sorrow. She lowers her watery gaze to him, his face nearly a blur from them.

“I’m sorry I pushed you away.” She breathes slightly.

“I know.” Jaune says as he picks his sword up and reattaches it to his belt. There was once a time when they could walk around the school grounds without the need of their weapons on their person at all times. But after the Battle of Beacon, tensions are still high and the Grimm are still near. Jaune rolls his shoulders, looking at the shadow of Pyrrha’s former self. With a soft sigh he walks over to the woman he loves and gulps his nerves telling him to leave her alone.

Due to being unconscious, that memorable scent she always had has faded – that of infused lilac and cinnamon replaced with just nothing. Only adding to the depression and emptiness that infects her soul like a plague.

One he is also responsible for.

“Pyrrha.” He scooches closer to her, dragging the chair up to her where she sits with her hands wrapped around her knees. She looks into the blue eyes of the love of her life that she could never have with red raw eyes filled with her own tears. Unless they work at their relationship – and perhaps there is a chance of reconciling that love which was lost due to the battle. “Welcome back...I guess...” He softly says to her, gently brushing her red hair from her eye. “Even though I don’t know what to do with...this...” He presses his hand to his rapid heartbeat, swallowing dryly with an audible click. He smiles lopsidedly, giving her upper arms a squeeze. “...I’ve...missed you.” He gently says with a smile.

A smile she loves.

But she wants more, always wants more...for him to love her...for him to forgive her. But in her eyes that might never come. “C-Can...I know I’m overstepping my boundaries here, but...can I have a hug?” She timidly asks him with tears streaming down her eyes. “Please?” She asks, just wanting someone to hold her after what happened up on that tower. After how it all ended.

Her desperation for human contact can be sensed by Jaune, and thus he catches onto her loneliness. He worries his lip and nods, wrapping his arms stiffly around her back. It was an awkward hug, one that felt as cold as steel and rock – no warmth to it at all. Totally different to any hugs that they had shared in the past before the Vytal Festival’s end and the Battle of Beacon.

He pats his fingers against her back and lets go, clearing his throat. “I-I gotta go...I’ll see you later, okay?”

“Y-Yes...of course.” She whimpers, and he opens the door to leave her with only two unconscious girls. Who should soon be waking up, but none of them make her feel accompanied like he does. “Jaune?”

“Mmm?” He looks at her, almost through as he struggles with the twangs that pulse in his heart.

“I’m so sorry.” She hoarsely whispers.
“It’s okay, Pyrrha...just...g-give me some time to think about this, okay?” He meekly says to her, just as hurt and confused as her.

“Oh-okay.” She whispers, sitting on her bed, sniffling and wiping tears from her eyes. He steps back and claps his hands together in front of himself, before thumbing to the door over his shoulder awkwardly.

“I’m gonna go find Ren and Nora. I’m sure they’ll need my help repairing the school.” But before he leaves, something comes to his mind. “Could you...keep an eye on Ruby and Yang, please? I heard their dad is gonna come by and take Yang home...and he’ll ask Ruby how she feels. Professor Goodwitch is the new Headmaster now, she said she will have a talk with the students here at lunch. I hope I see you there.” He gently says to her.

He knows her just as well as he knows the back of his own hand.

She always wants to feel valued or at least like she belongs. And by hoping she would turn up to an assembly or keeping her eye on Yang and Ruby is enough to keep her from collapsing into her depression. Yet it still hurts, as she licks the salty tears from her lips and she nods. “O-Okay...I’ll try.” She sniffles.

Jaune smiles and he leaves the room and the door closes with a click. The awkward air hangs on both sides as he presses his back to the wooden door and thumps the back of his head against the door, shutting his eyes with regret. Every time he pushes her away it hurts more and more.

What he doesn’t know is that she is doing the exact same thing, she managed to get up for a bit, despite limping on her ankle and she leans against the door. Desperately trying to be close to him again. She groans and runs her fingers down the curves of her cheeks, until she cupped them over her mouth and closes her eyes to sob with heartbreak, sliding down to sit against it. He can hear her cries, and it brings him to tears too.

“I still love you...I can’t stop.” He breathes softly.

“I love you so much...” Pyrrha says too.

And neither hear each other.

**Glynda**

The new Headmistress of Beacon Academy...

She is sat down inside of one of the hospital wings at Beacon, where Professor Ozpin lays. He is completely knocked out in a comatose state, with cuts and bruises across his entire body...it seems Cinder must have buried him inside of the Vault when they had their battle. They could hear the quaking booms from within when that battle took place, it was enough for the ceiling to come down on top of him.

His cane rested atop his chest constantly, he refused to release that cane during that battle and even when in a coma his hands still grip them extremely tight. The new Headmaster looks at him then she turns when the door opens and she sees Ironwood enter, looking at her with a heavy sigh. Stood beside him is Qrow Branwen with his sword in his hand. “Things seem to have calmed down.”
Glynda says with a heavy sigh.

“Grimm activity is still high around the school and the city, Glynda. I don’t think they are done...” Ironwood states, using his tactical mind to his advantage.

“C’mon, tin-man. Let’s just enjoy the peace shall we?” Qrow asks with a sigh, taking Glynda’s side in this debate.

“Enjoying the peace is what lead to this happening in the first place, Branwen. Now how are we going to approach the situation? All of my ships in the fleet I brought with me are down and I have my best men scavenging what they can from the wrecks before the Bandits do.” Ironwood explains, staring out at the many crashed ships that landed across the Kingdom of Vale.

“And that Torchwick guy was on your ship, right?” Qrow asks.

“I didn’t see any escape pods when it crashed.” Glynda states, remembering the sight of the vessel crashing hard into the ground.

“We cannot risk the increase of panic, but for once I also agree with you General.” Qrow explains with his arms crossed.

“How so?” Ironwood asks.

“Because the school is weak right now, and we suffered heavy losses and the students who stayed and especially the civilians are terrified right now. We still have exchange students here from the Vytal Festival who are willing to help rebuild the school and the city from the attack. Lots of repair teams are already here, too.” Qrow explains as he looks out the window beside Ironwood, seeing the scaffolding already being set up in different places around the school.

Ironwood sighs, turning to him. “We need soldiers to keep the place safe, James.” Qrow says.

“I know – that is why I have my men searching for a Radar Dish on one of the ships that still works. We built these into every ship and gave connections to each kingdom in case of crisis to retain contact even if the C.C.T is down.” Ironwood explains to him, turning back to the ships in the distance.

Like old ribs sticking out of the ground the long metal prongs protrude around the city of Vale where some ships crashed. Along with Dropships and Bullheads that crashed into the buildings when the White Fang attacked and the Atlesian Knights turned against them. “How did Cinder Fall and her allies gain access to the Atlesian Knight Network?” Glynda asks, the obvious question too.

Then Ironwood thinks and remembers back to when Ruby said there was someone in the C.C.T Tower.

“Wait a minute – that girl Ruby mentioned, that must have been Cinder. It could have been then, the only way a virus like that could be implemented would be through the C.C.T Network.” He states.

“It’s possible.” Qrow shrugs. “I guess we could check the place out later.” Qrow states.

Glynda approaches the window and she stares at the forests that surround the school, seeing the dark clouds that congregate there. “The Grimm – are waiting.” Glynda says with a sigh.

“We need to keep the students positive, all the fear and negativity is what keeps them close. All it takes is a small amount of panic and they will attack again like sharks when they smell blood.”
Qrow explains as he stares at the darkness.

“I am going to have an assembly in the Food Hall later on today since we have it...relatively rebuilt now.” Glynda says to them all.

“Good...the children here...need some hope after that.” Ironwood says.

Glynda stares at the shattered remains of the Dragon on the ground and she narrows her eyes. “She used her silver eyes.” Glynda says softly and they both nod their heads.

“She certainly did...and I don’t think she even knows.” Qrow sighs.

“Taiyang is coming to take her sister home isn’t she?” Glynda asks.

“And Ruby if she wants to.” Qrow adds.

“If she chooses to stay...can you tell her about it?” She asks him.

Qrow smiles and nods.

“Sure.” He agrees.

“Good...she deserves to know.” Glynda states, staring out at the Academy of Beacon. “We need some hope around here.”

Chapter End Notes

Author Note - First official chapter uploaded! Yay! So we both wanted this to be the new intro with a different Pyrrha Vs Cinder fight since it would be cool and explain some stuff. I also wanted to add a few things with the Battle too, in the fact that when the Dragon died the Grimm retreated but are still staying close by. All it will take to spark another attack like that is a small amount of panic due to the amount of dread in the air.

Also I wanted to give the dragon a good death.

And poor Arkos - but as you all asked, I am not changing much and the Arkos stuff is staying relatively the same only with a few changes that are not major.

What did you think? Please review, follow and favourite!

(Side not, wow I was not expecting the story to blow up as quickly as it did. Already at 60 follow, 41 favourites and 9 reviews in just the Prologue alone. That is already more than I have for Act 4 and that has been out for ages! Crazy, huh?)

Thanks for the awesome support!

Stay tuned for the next chapter - Recovery

- Matt
Recovery

Ruby

A heavy blasting cascade of wind roars through her mind as she hears the distant roars and screams in the distance. The darkness in her eyes finally clears when she sees the expanse of a lifeless landscape; huge shards of glowing purple dust protrude up from the ground. And the Shattered Moon floating overhead, constantly watching over them like an eye from the gods.

Her heart pounding a hundred times a minute, she slowly looks around at the mysterious Sanctum she has found herself in during her nightmare. The feral growls of Beowulves emerge from around her and she gasps, reaching to her back to find Crescent Rose...

Only for her beloved weapon to not be there after all.

Her heart sinks, knowing she is completely defenceless against the prowling Grimm that approach her with saliva drooling from their razor sharp gnashers. Eyes glowing bright red and the flaming energy trails from their skulls as they skulk ever closer with snarls, ready to tear her flesh from her body.

The Grimm claw their way ever closer with a growl, and Ruby backs up fearfully as they get closer, until they all flinch from something that explodes in the distance.

A sheer bright white light ignites at the summit of a small mountain in the centre of the Sanctum and Ruby’s eye widen with fear from what she sees. The bright light shoots a beam of energy up into the sky and towards the opening in the broken moon. With disbelief the moon slowly moves, each chunk that broke away begins to reverse and return to whence it broke loose. Every single piece that crumbled away from the shape of the satellite that protects the world of Remnant fuses back to the moon.

She staggers back with fear, then something in the Grimm changes, as their eyes glow even brighter and they seem to also become more aggressive than ever before. They roar immediately at Ruby and leap towards her, and she screams. But just as they do...

Time stops...

And she slowly opens her eyes, looking up at the frozen in place Creatures of Grimm that float above her right now. “The end is coming...small soul.” A chilling female voice speaks from behind her, with a tyrannically regal voice, getting Ruby’s attention. She slowly turns round and her eyes widen when she sees her stood there. Tall with a black dress around her pale white body etched with glowing purple and red markings and a black stone between her flaring red eyes.

Ruby freezes, her blood turning to stone when she sees her staring right at her. “W-Who are you?” Ruby whispers fearfully, and a smirk grows across Salem’s face.

“I – am Ozpin’s Reckoning.” Salem states, snapping her fingers and Ruby turns with a scream as the Beowulves land on her. She screams with desperation and agony as they claw into her, biting and tearing chunks from her as she wails, and Salem smirks as she turns and walks away as Ruby is devoured alive by her creations.
As she struggles, there is one last haunting image that Ruby sees...

A face...

With no human features.

Just a metal grill and a pair of green eyes staring straight into her soul.

Then she jolts awake with a gasp, her hands pressed to her stomach with horror in her blood as she pants, it felt so real when the Beowulves started to rip her apart like that. There was so much blood from her body...it nearly makes her sick to imagine how painful that would have been. But she has so many questions...

*Who was that?*

*What was happening to the moon?*

*What was that place?*

However before she can even ponder anymore questions in the back of her mind from that terrible nightmare, all fears are relieved when she hears her voice speak up. “Ruby?” Pyrrha softly speaks with a similarly comforted voice, Ruby turns and she gasps with happiness, a smile growing across her face.

“You’re okay!” She cries out with joy, going straight to Pyrrha and wrapping her arms around her gently. Pyrrha yelps as the little rose immediately squeezes her, but not as extremely as Nora can – she is not as ridiculously strong as her teammate is. Pyrrha smiles, some happiness finally entering her system as she puts her arms round Ruby’s body with a smile.

“Yeah...thanks to you.” She thanks with a smile, warming both their hearts. But when Pyrrha opens her eyes, she realises that Ruby might not know about what has happened to her big sister. “R-Ruby?” She gently says, but Ruby shakes her head, since she remembers seeing Yang unconscious on the ground when she found Weiss with Sun and the rest of Pyrrha and Jaune’s team at the Evac Site.

Before the Dragon died and the Grimm fled the school immediately.

“I know – I saw her before I came after you and Jaune.” Ruby explains and Pyrrha’s face fills like a jug with worry.

“You...came for me?” She asks.

“Yeah – Jaune didn’t tell you?” Ruby asks as she tilts her head curiously, always been aware of the relationship growing between the two friends of hers. Pyrrha shakes her head as Ruby lets go of Pyrrha and she sits down on the edge of Pyrrha’s bed.

“Jaune and I...we’re not really on good terms right now.” She hoarsely informs Ruby.

“What? Why?” She asks her in a worried tone, unaware of what Pyrrha did, Jaune never really did inform Ruby or Weiss at the time about what happened. He just begged them both to save her from Cinder before she would kill her.

“Because...I made a mistake...a stupid selfish mistake.” She admits as she hangs her head low, nearly beginning to tear up at the mere mention of how she sent Jaune away so then she can march off to what could have been her death. A death where nothing would have changed, the world
would be unaffected and she would have been tossed aside like a pawn – forgotten with the rest of the dead.

“What do you mean?” Ruby asks, sounding as sweet and innocent as ever. Pyrrha blows out a breath as she focuses her thoughts onto that night, when she kissed Jaune. Feeling his hand move round her waist was everything she ever wanted, feeling his lips on hers and the warmth of his touch.

“We kissed – it was one of the best moments of my life for a couple seconds. But when we broke the kiss I forced him into a locker and I sent him away. And I went after that woman – Cinder – alone.” Pyrrha explains, able to remember the sight of watching that locker with the love of her life being carried off inside it. And all she wants to do now is to go back and tell herself to get inside it with him so then they could both go back.

Ozpin was right.

She would have just gotten in the way.

Ruby is not stupid, she can tell where the rest of this story will head, so she sighs as she says the rest of it, able to deduce the reason now behind why they are not on great terms. “And for that, Jaune is mad at you...isn’t he?” Ruby presumes, and Pyrrha just nods her head. Ruby looks over at the Invincible Girl, but then she gasps in pain as she touches the side of her head where her eye is. The movement catches Pyrrha’s attention, and that is when the memory comes to her, seeing Ruby ignite those white flames from her eyes...

She killed the Dragon.

Almost killed Cinder too.

“Ruby...” Pyrrha begins, and she shakes that strange pain off. “What did you do...up there on the Tower?” Pyrrha asks with concern in her voice, because that was unlike anything she has ever seen. And Pyrrha cannot help but run through any possible explanations in her head, just for her own sake.

Was it a Semblance? No it couldn’t have been, her semblance is the Petal Dash.

Aura? It could explain why she collapsed...but I have never seen anyone do that before.

Ruby looks over at her friend, and the look of worry in Ruby’s large beautiful silver eyes is apparent, just as apparent as the reflection of Pyrrha’s in her eyes. “I...I don’t know...” Ruby admits.

“I know.” The voice of Qrow unexpectedly appears by the doorway, making them both gasp when they see him stood there with a flask in his hand. Pyrrha can remember this man well, he was there when Ozpin and the rest of his...Inner Circle...showed her the Fall Maiden.

Amber.

Ruby looks over at her Uncle with a sweet smile on her kind face. “Hey...Uncle Qrow.” She gently greets, in which follows with a slightly concerned face from Pyrrha who looks at her. She never even knew that this drunk Huntsman was her Uncle – yet as Weiss said, seems her recklessness comes from somewhere. Qrow smiles and he takes one more swig from his flask before shoving it back into his pocket, he steps aside when Taiyang rushes in and sees them both.

Relieved to see both his daughters alive, he sighs with relief, immediately hugging Ruby as tightly
as he can. “Thank the gods your alright.” He whispers as he holds her closer, Ruby holding onto him with her tiny arms in comparison. Ruby buries her head into her father’s shoulder happily, always able to find immense comfort in his embrace.

“I’m okay, dad.” She assures with a soft voice, but even then Taiyang becomes the overly protective father he always has been. But whilst this all happens as Taiyang continuously checks his baby girl for any signs of damage from the battle, Pyrrha is left with so many conflicting thoughts in her head. And so many of them seem to surround her friendship with Ruby.

How can she like me?

I killed Penny, tore her apart and revealed what she was to the world! She should hate me right now, and I would never blame her for resenting me.

I do not deserve this...

“Dad! I am fine.” Ruby giggles playfully as she pushes her father’s hand away from her and Taiyang sighs – but Tai and Qrow both know her very well. And they know when she is hiding her real torment, just like any pet would when it is in pain. She hides her negative emotions from people because she does not want them to worry.

She is so selfless it could one day cause major damage to her mental stability.

“Ruby…Qrow told me everything – I saw the Vytal Festival…what happened.” Taiyang explains, giving Pyrrha a glance for a second which causes her to look away.

“It wasn’t her fault.” Qrow reminds.

“I know it wasn’t, I could tell. You saw something…like Yang and that girl, Coco?” Taiyang asks her, and Pyrrha stammers as she remembers, seeing all those blades forming above Penny’s face. The real dread that she felt course through her body, realising that she felt so selfish in that moment to preserve only her own life. Opposed to the life of such a sweet and innocent little girl that died in the process.

Pyrrha stammers so then she can answer the question. “Y-Yes…Penny…I saw hundreds of swords appear around her…but as soon as I used my Semblance they all vanished…and…” She stammers as she pictures it all happening again, the heart wrenching gasp that Penny made as she felt those cables slice clean through her metal skin and wiring.

“It’s okay, Pyrrha.” Taiyang assures, placing his hand on her knee to calm her down, she lets out an exhale, then notices Qrow pondering on that fact that she had a hallucination just like Coco and Yang.

“Interesting…” Qrow mutters as he paces back and forth, tapping his chin with his finger, getting their attention.

“What?” He asks, then catching on immediately since he knows Qrow’s mannerisms as well as his own. “You’ve figured it out, haven’t you?” He asks.

“Funny how for Coco and Yang’s hallucinations, that green haired red eyed chick – Emerald – was at both of them. She was against Coco and she hallucinated, and then Yang said she saw Mercury attack her. Then she magically came running to Mercury’s aid.” Qrow deduces, piecing the puzzle together.

“Yeah…you’re right it does seem a little coincidental, doesn’t it?” Taiyang agrees.
“My thoughts exactly, pal.” Qrow agrees with a nod, before turning to both Ruby and Pyrrha. “Do either of you remember seeing her before your match started, Pyrrha?” Qrow asks them, and Pyrrha is filled with some confused thoughts. She was hardly even focusing at the time after being informed on the Maidens and her destiny being affected by what Ozpin and his Inner Circle had placed on her shoulders.

But Ruby...

“I saw her...” Ruby says, and Pyrrha’s emerald eyes widen and turn to Ruby with disbelief.

“She was there?” Taiyang asks.

“Yeah...before I went to investigate, I saw her in the crowd. She stared me down for a second and then I saw Mercury and we started fighting.” Ruby explains, remembering those moments extremely well. Qrow chuckles, rubbing his hands together with what seems to be excitement.

“Oh baby, it’s all coming together.” He chuckles, loving it whenever the pieces fit in a puzzle.

“So what? Emerald’s Semblance is to mess with people’s heads, or something like that?” Taiyang presumes.

“Must be – Ironwood said he wanted me to go with him to Atlas to check things out. They have plenty of spies out there that can keep an eye out for any signs of Emerald. If we find her, we find Cinder. And hopefully whoever is behind all this.” Qrow explains to them all, sighing as he stands there.

Taiyang turns his attention to Yang, and he walks over to her bedside, sitting down beside her. He gently brushes her long blonde hair from her eyes to look at her face as she lays there. He sighs heavily, pressing his head to her shoulder. “She still hasn’t woken up.” He says.

“Well – she’s stable. And she can be taken back home to Patch, I’m sure she’d rather have a comfy bed than this thing.” Qrow states as he gestures towards the bed that must feel like it is sandpaper in comparison to her bed back at home.

“Will she be okay?” Pyrrha asks, and Taiyang sighs.

“She’s too strong to let this stop her.” Taiyang states, before sniffling and wiping a tear from his eye – feeling the pain that a father should never have to suffer with as he stares at the stump where her arm used to be.

“You can go with her, Ruby, if you want.” Qrow says with the shrug of his shoulders. Ruby sits there and she looks at Pyrrha who looks at the floor with saddened emerald eyes. She sighs, and she pats her friend’s knee.

“I wanna help in any way I can...but I will visit. We will...right?” Ruby asks Pyrrha with a smile, getting her attention. Pyrrha awkwardly stutters before pulling a smile on her face.

“I’ll be sure to drop by.” She admits as she gracefully tilts her head. Taiyang smiles gratefully.

“Thank you.” Taiyang says, he turns back to Yang and he exhales with a trembling breath, picking up his daughter and carrying her with her head resting against his shoulder. “I’m gonna take her home...hopefully she will be awake soon.” Taiyang says with a smile, walking past Qrow. He just nods to him, and Qrow nods right back as Taiyang closes the door. Ruby sits there and she sighs, sitting forward and pushing her hand through her dark hair.
“This is a mess.” She sighs.

“It could have been a lot worse...if it weren’t for what you did.” Qrow states, and Ruby raises a brow before she looks up at him.

“Huh?” She asks with confusion.

Pyrrha glances at Ruby with shock. “You...don’t remember?” She asks.

“Remember what?”

“Seems not.” Qrow chuckles.

“Guys! What are you not telling me? What happened?” She asks nervously, gripping her arm with her hand. Qrow turns and blows out a breath, reaching over to a chair under a desk and he pulls it out to sit down on it, crossing one leg over the other.

“What’s the last thing you remember, pip-squeak?” Qrow asks her with a slight smile, this conversation would feel far more traumatising if it all panned out differently. Ruby thinks carefully back to that night when it all ended – somehow in their favour.

“Weiss made glyphs that I could use to get to the top of the tower – and when I reached the very top...I saw Pyrrha...and Cinder...” She growls when just picturing Cinder’s face and imaging her voice on its own. “Then everything went white...” Ruby states, slowly looking at Pyrrha with awe to see she is actually alive. “I thought I failed you...” She gently says, and her tender voice makes Pyrrha smile to see such kindness.

“You...saved me.” Pyrrha tells her with a smile, and not even exaggerating either.

“What do you mean? I passed out, didn’t I?” She presumes.

“Yeah...but not before you unleashed a power your mother once had.” Qrow tells her, this time both Pyrrha and Ruby stare at Qrow with shocked expressions. Not only does Ruby have no idea of what either of them are talking about – but she has the power her mother had?


“Pyrrha told me...and we all saw. The night lit up and all the Grimm stopped what they were doing and stared at the light in fear. Then when the light faded, we all saw that Dragon fall and shatter on the ground.” Qrow explains, causing Ruby’s large silver eyes to widen with utter disbelief in her irises. “Then all the Grimm fled the school.”

“No...You’re lying.” Ruby shakes her head with disbelief.

“It’s true.” Pyrrha states, getting her attention. “Cinder was about to kill me...but you screamed and it is as he said. These...white flames...burst from your eyes and they protected me. Nearly killed Cinder and froze the Dragon to stone. Cinder rolled off but she never hit the ground...must have had a way out somehow.” Pyrrha explains, in which Qrow has a few ideas of what could have happened.

“But...we were evacuating people to a safe zone.” Ruby stammers, then Qrow stands up and he leans against the wall by the window.

“Look out the window, kiddo.” He says, so Ruby stands up and she walks over to her Uncle and she stares out the window with shocked eyes. Some Airships are around the school providing help
wherever they need it.

“But...it fell...” She stammers.

“It has been five days, Ruby. Ironwood has made sure that all repairs are made to both the school and the city of Vale.” Qrow explains, just adding to the disbelief to her, but there is still something she is not clear on.

“Wait...you said...I have the same power my mother had. What do you mean?” She asks, so he walks past her and he pats the side of the bed for her to sit down as he leans against the wall.

“First day you met Ozpin – what was the first thing he said to you?” He quizzes, and the young Huntress stammers.

“I – I dunno...I think it was something about –”

“Silver Eyes.”

Ruby stares at him with a shocked expression and he continues. “That’s a very rare trait.”

“So?” She questions.

A smile grows on her Uncle’s face as he looks up at her. “You’re special, Ruby. And not in the Daddy loves his Special Little Angel kinda way.” He explains, looking over to her again, before reaching into his pocket to reveal the photograph of Team S.T.R.Q and placing it down at her bed for her to see. “You’re special just as your mom was.” He reveals, pointing at her silver eyes.

Ruby...looks befuddled at best.

He looks over at Pyrrha who is listening too, since all of this is new information to her as well – and since she knows about the Maidens then she has a right to know about this too. “Remnant’s full of legends and stories, some of them true, some made up. But there’s one that ol’ Oz told me a very long time ago. Back before Huntsmen, before Kingdoms – it was said that those born with Silver Eyes would be destined to lead the life of a warrior.” Qrow explains to her, causing Ruby’s eyes to widen with shock and mouth to gape open.

And Pyrrha...hearing the word Destiny again gives her chills...since she has felt shaken in her beliefs in that idea since Ozpin and Cinder entered her life.

But Qrow is not done just yet.

“You see the Creatures of Grimm – the most fearsome creatures mankind had ever encountered – were afraid of those Silver Eyed Warriors. They were the best-of-the-best! It was said that a single look from one of these warriors could strike a Grimm down. Heh, it’s a ridiculous story.” Qrow admits as he shakes his head, but Ruby as sweet as ever just looks at him.

“And...You think that I might be...” She stammers softly.

“Well, that huge Dragon on Beacon Tower is dead and all the Grimm fled at the mere sight of your power. And now we’re all safe and sound...well...more or less.” He says with a sigh, standing up and walking back to the window, looking out to the forests around the school.

“What do you mean?” Pyrrha asks.

“The Grimm...they are still near...we can see them.” He states, able to see the thick layer of black
smog from the forests where the Grimm have congregated.

“They are still here?” Ruby fearfully questions.

“Yeah – they are waiting...all the negative emotions around the school right now seem to keep
them near.” He explains.

“Then...what are they waiting for?” Ruby asks.

“An opportunity – it won’t take much to spark another attack. We need to be careful.” Qrow tells
them.

“Then, how do we do that?” Pyrrha inquires, and he turns to both of them.

“Well for starters – both of you get your butts down to the cafeteria and get something to eat. Gods
knows you need a good meal in ya after how long you’ve been out. And just stay positive, all we
need to do is recover and eventually all the positivity will push the Grimm away from the borders.”
Qrow tells them with the shrug of his shoulders.

He walks towards the door, but then he stops and looks back. “Besides – you all still got homework
to catch up on, remember.” He jokes with a smile.

“Catch ya later, girls.” He resigns with a smile, leaving the room with the two inside.

Jaune

The White Knight lazily walks into the cafeteria of Beacon which has been partially repaired, with
a few holes in the ceiling which workers have done an incredible job in repairing. However it is
still unfinished since only five days have passed, however there are construction workers taking
their lunch break down here as well with the students. Jaune looks around at the bustling table of
reunited friends. Conversations overlapping constantly into an indistinct howl of Human and
Faunus voices, along with the occasional laugh from some of the students.

But the aftermath can be felt merely in the raw emotions of the people in the room, still scared after
the terrifying attack that took place that night. Overall though, the mood is quite pleasant despite all
of that, and it is nice to see the people with smiles on their faces again. He firms his upper lip,
sadly struggling to carry these emotions along with the other students in Beacon Academy. He
strides towards the table that his friends are sat at, the school has always had some sort of
unspoken rule about where everyone sits – and everyone respects these rules.

They may not respect homework but they respect that one unspoken rule.

He looks up from his stupor over love issues and slaps a smile on his silly face again at the simple
sight of Team R.W.B sat prodding their food with their silverware.

“Hey guys.” Jaune smiles, sitting down next to the girl that was once his crush before Pyrrha –
Weiss Schnee – as Blake and Ruby look up at him opposite. He crosses his arms on the table top
and leans his chin onto his wrists with worry. “How’s Yang?” Jaune inquires with concern in his
voice.

“She hasn’t woken up yet...my dad took her back home so then she can be comfortable. But she is
stable.” Ruby explains to him, since he and the others were not there for that talk. Jaune looks at Ruby and he can see the fearfulness in her eyes, unaware of the fear that she has for her own eyes and what she is capable of. One such a bright and happy rose has now become a dimmed and wilted version of herself. But as always, she hides the truth of what her secret power is – for the only other person that knows is Pyrrha. “I’m scared for her though...she has never been hurt this bad before.” She states.

“She’ll be okay, Ruby. Yang is a tough egg.” Jaune assures as he reaches over the table and squeezes Ruby’s hand softly with a smile.

“Yeah, remember that time Roman punched her in the Paladin? She destroyed him after that, she can come back from this.” Weiss assures with a smile, filled with so much faith in her friend in the hopes to help out her friend.

A small smile graces Ruby’s face as she looks at her good friend. “I hope so.” Ruby admits as she shrugs her shoulders, fiddling some bits of broccoli with her fork.

“How’s Pyrrha? Have you seen her?” Blake asks Jaune, and the sudden question breaks the air like a mirror being shattered by a rock. Blake sighs and pushes her plate of fish away, lost her appetite just from the memories, Jaune lowers his blue eyes and his smile fell too.

“Umm...Yeah...she’s okay. I’ve seen her, yeah.” He coughs into his clenched fist, sitting up straight, sighing heavily before lowering his head back down to bury it in both hands. “Love sucks.” He mumbles sadly.

“Huh?” Weiss snaps her eyes to him like magnet drawn to something she finds ridiculous.

Jaune huffs, with his head still stuffed into his open palms. “It’s...Pyrrha.” He says as he pulls his head from his own grasp. “We’re umm...having a few issues.” He admits.

“What does that mean?” Weiss sternly grills, her narrowed blue eyes glaring at him, still the Ice Queen she always was.

“I told her we – uh – should be friends.” He answers with a huff, and Weiss slaps her forehead with her palm and groans.

“Oh Jaune...”

“Well I’m sorry Weiss but she literally ran off t-”

“Yes to face a foe and fight to save us all, how very selfi-”

“Let me finish!” Jaune erupts like a volcano with an uncharacteristic rage in him, he has always had freak outs but they found them funny. His yell was much louder than he actually wanted it to be, travelling straight through the cafeteria. One of the students in the horde of them turns round, he has gelled up purple hair and stares right at them with a rather – suspicious expression. Weiss licks her lips and straightens her back as she clears her throat and raises her stoic chin.

“Okay...I’m sorry – go on.” She apologises, and he sighs.

“Me too...I didn’t mean to yell.” He replies to her, and the silence eventually fades back into the conversations in the food hall of students and construction workers. He scratches the back of his neck as his heart pounds with butterflies swarming in his ribs over the story. “She kissed me, Weiss, okay? We were told to go and get help by Professor Ozpin, before whatever that woman did to him. We got outside and she looked up at the tower and she was focused on going after her.” He
He leans forward and rests his forearms on the table with his head lowered to face the table. “I told her no, told her it was suicide! Th-That girl – Cinder wasn’t that her name? She has left Ozpin in a critical condition, and she still went after her even after defeating the Headmaster.” He explains.

Still not bringing up the truth of the source of Cinder’s power from the Fall Maiden and the Vault, since only Pyrrha actually knows the truth. Jaune has so much lingering anger towards Cinder but a lot of frustration towards Pyrrha as well. “But no, she had to do it! Had to live up to that stupid...damn title of hers! Invincible Girl? Well guess what, it’s a crock! It’s a name, and funnily enough, you aren’t invincible Pyrrha!” The man is fuming like a Volcanic Spring found in the Vacuo Volcanic Chain. Even shouting now, directly at his own reflection on the table of his own face, as if he is yelling at her.

Everyone looks back at him, that Purple Haired Boy staring directly at him with a slightly clenched fist.

“Jaune...” Ruby whispers gently as she reaches out to touch his arm with her delicate hand, before he started up thrashing again, Ruby quickly retracting her hand back.

“She kissed me, and it was amazing, but for some reason, in her head, she knew it’d be our first and last. How could she do that to me? Sh-She...I felt something for her in that moment I’d never...at peace...at home...loved.” He says, looking at Weiss when he says that last word, which actually makes her look away with some grief. Hearing him say those things really hits a chord of realisation for her when she realised that she just shunned him constantly.

She’d be lying if she claimed that she didn’t regret being so cruel to him. “I had that feeling for her for a grand total of about three seconds before she shoved me in that goddamn locker and sent me away so then she could die alone?” He questions with anger.

“Jaune...” Weiss breathes, hand over her chest as his eyes began to sting more and more with hot tears.

“I-I mean what was the point of it all, huh? All that training, all that build up, all that telling me I was not a failure and was becoming a better fighter. And the one time it actually would have mattered, for me to have her back through everything, and she just shoves me away in a locker and ditches me to fight Cinder on her own? You know how...gods...how worthless I felt? How weak, and worst of all...how I was going to live the rest of my life without her, knowing I could have saved her and couldn’t?” He sniffs, wiping his eyes with the heels of his palms.

The cafeteria falls deathly silent, not even the usual sounds of the clinking of cutlery and plates fill the air that Adam Taurus was once stood inside of. The choked air was tight with tension over seeing Jaune like this, some students even start giggling at him. This sends Jaune over the edge, his blue eye twitching with rage. “What are you all looking at, huh? What? Oh look it’s that wacky Jaune Arc kid up to his usual tricks! Making scenes and drawing attention! How about you all just mind your own damn business!” Jaune snaps as he stands from his chair, chest heaving as everyone turns back to their plates.

The girls that started to giggle at Jaune freeze when the lead of them feels her shoulder squeeze as a much larger hand grips onto her. She turns and in the corner of her eye she sees the person behind her.

It’s Cardin.
“You laugh at his pain again – and you’ll regret it.” He whispers, before patting her shoulder and walking past her to his team with his lunch on its tray. The girl quivers with fear and Cardin looks at Jaune, smiling and nodding to him.

How things have changed.

Jaune calms his fury down eventually, and he falls back into his seat, pressing his hand to the side of his head, picking his fork up and poking some boiled carrots. “So yeah – to answer your question? Pyrrha’s fine, just frickin’ peachy.”

“Oh...well...” Weiss flits her shocked eyes to Blake’s and then to Ruby’s. “Umm...ch-chin up?” She winced, gently patting his head.

“That’s all you’ve got?” Ruby hisses with anger. “He’s not a dog, Weiss!”

“Well I’m sorry, but emotions are not my strong suit!” Weiss huffs as she crosses her arms.

“Yeah, we noticed.” Blake mumbles, licking her lips and tucking a black lock back into place, her ribbon and bow totally devoid of her hair. Her cat ears fully uncovered but she doesn’t even care anymore, no longer afraid of what others dare think of her being a Faunus. Even Team C.R.D.L have changed, since none of them say things like that anymore, they learned their lesson, especially Cardin.

“Jaune?” She rasply speaks.

“Mmm?” Jaune looks up over his wrists, wiping a stream of tears from his eyes.

“I blame myself for what happened to Yang. Yeah Adam was the one who cut her arm off...but he was there because he wanted to get to me. And Yang? She was there because she wanted to save me from Adam...and he nearly killed her. I’m...not good with this kind of stuff...I usually run a mile at this point, and I did consider going home to mom and dad, but...” Blake explains before she looks at Weiss and Ruby with a gentle smile. “But my friends need me...and I need them. I can see my parents some other time.” Blake admits.

“Maybe we can meet them!” Weiss squeaks.

“Sure, why not. I know my mother would love to meet you some time.” Blake admits with the shrug of her shoulders.

“But no, Jaune. I-I’m not running, not this time. Sure, I need time to clear my head, to make sense of it all, but who doesn’t? The point is, Jaune...we need each other so much right now. The last thing we should do is push one another away, especially the people we love.” She explains and also concludes, completely crushing his anger down as Blake looks over at Sun who gets some food.

“Whoa...” Jaune looks over at her with widened eyes. “Blake...I...”

“So listen to her, you dolt.” Weiss elbows him softly as she tells him that, lacking any venom in her tone this time. This time she sounded so calm and tranquil which gave them all the chills. “Be there for your team. Sure, be upset with her and sure put feelings on hold. But...as their leader? Be there for them. For her.” Weiss says to him.

Like she is allergic to it, she just couldn’t resist. “Don’t be a boob.”

“There it is.” Ruby giggles.
“I tried.” Weiss shrugs as she eats a piece of broccoli – most people would be offended by that but since it is Weiss – it feels alien when she does not.

“I...” Jaune looks downward guiltily. “Yeah, you’re right. Urgh, I’ve been a jerk.”

“Of course I am.” Weiss beams as she crosses her arms, flickers her tail of her and holds her chin high with a gorgeously smug smile.

“You’ve just got to be their friend and leader right now. Ren and Nora have always been like super strong so they’ve always had each other. But Pyrrha?” Ruby huffs and shuts her large silver eyes when thinking of her. “She was...manipulated in the Vytal Festival, she was manipulated to...” She begins to tear up when picturing Penny and hearing her voice in her own head.

All she wants is to hear that adorable little – salutations – she always did. “P-Penny.”

“Hey, shh, it’s okay Ruby.” Jaune leans over to grab her tiny hand and give it a soft squeeze.

“I-I’m not hungry anymore.” Ruby sniffles as she pushes her tray away and wipes her eyes with her black and frilly red sleeve.

“I don’t think anyone is.” Weiss says as she drops her spoon, looking around at many others. Seeing Cardin not even touching his food which is obviously strange since he could eat at the speed of a beast. She then stares at the food with a heavy sigh. “Especially not when they are serving this slop.” Weiss states.

“Well in fairness the school is still under repairs, they are trying their best.” Blake states.

“Sure, good point.” Weiss agrees. “Doesn’t make it taste any better though.”

The misery is suddenly lifted when they hear a welcoming voice booming from next to Weiss. “Hey guys!” Nora explodes, and Weiss screams, covering her mouth in shock from how scared it made her. Nora guffaws with laughter and it makes Ruby giggle into her hand and Blake smiles to see Nora. The girl that somehow is always able to lighten the mood no matter what happens. The world would end and she could still make someone laugh.

Ren takes his seat next to Blake, opposite Nora. The Valkyrie soon caught onto his absence beside her and her eyes water in hurt. “R-Ren!”

“I’m sat right here, Nora.” Ren says as he holds out his hands beside Blake who looks at the Kuroyurian with a smile. But Nora’s lip begins to quiver and her huge cyan eyes fill with fake tears like a puppy that has been shouted at. Everything that Nora displays before him just makes Ren feel bad more and more. “Nora!”

Finally...

He gives in.

Nora always wins.

He gets up with a huff and he walks over to her side, taking the seat beside her, and a huge smile grows across her face. “Yay!” She squeaks with joy, bouncing up and down on the bench. “Always works.” She grins at her giggling friends, and Ren just huffs at her, since he never wins against her.

“It won’t always.”
“Oh yeah it will, silly.” Nora adorably squeaks.

He sighs defeatedly. “Yeah it will.”

Weiss and Ruby giggle away at the joyous entity that is Nora Valkyrie, Jaune finally was filled with a bright smile and Blake was chuckling into her palm. “Ooh, hey Ruby! They got cookies up there! Why ain’t ya got any?” Nora gasps exaggeratedly into her palm. “You’re not...cutting down on sugar are you?”

“No! No of course not! Where!” Ruby’s head snaps her head towards the front of the cafeteria in search for the food she has an addiction to like a drug.


“You’re amazing, Nora.” Jaune smiles across the table at his friend, head resting in his palm, propped up by his elbow. Nora shrugs and wolfs down a handful of fries.

“Yes she is.” Blake brightly smiles, for the first time in quite a long time.

“She’s something. Jury’s still out on what exactly.” Ren smirks as she looks at him, scandalised by his words. He simply wraps an arm around her shoulders and pulls the orange haired girl into his side, feeling something dig into his ribs. He reels out of the embrace.

“Oh yeah.” Nora realises before reaching into her grenade pouch and pulls out a long chocolate bar and sets it down onto the surface of the table. “Okay! Hugs now!” She squeaks.

Ren chuckles and pulls her back to his side, smiles adorning their lovely little faces for the first time since the Battle of Beacon came to a close. Finally the feeling of being at home washes across them all in that one moment. Not only did Weiss manage to convince her father to help fund the repairs for Vale and Beacon, but also to stay at Beacon to continue her studies and stay with her friends. Blake almost took a boat out to Menagerie but decided to stay with her friends and help her partner recover. For the first time ever she had people that truly needed her.

Jaune has not even been to see his parents yet, in which he should probably do so at some time. They need to know that he is okay, but he may need their comfort to help him recover from everything that has happened. His sisters might outnumber him but like a group of penguins they provide a cushion of happiness for him when he truly needs it.

Although despite all of this, he laughed for the first time in weeks, a proper, genuine laugh created by the very presence of Nora Valkyrie. And being around his friends all the time it just makes him feel better and better – especially when he sets his eyes on Nora shoving a bunch of straws up her mouth to impersonate an Atlesian Walrus. The act of doing so has literally brought Ruby to tears with laughter when seeing her almost rolling around on the table making the brutish sounds. Even Blake had tears in her eyes from laughter, a sight to behold for the people to see since they never see her laughing that hard. Weiss giggles with hiccups at one point too.

All thanks to Nora.

But then...Jaune’s smile fades away and his heart sinks as he looks over at the edge of the double oak doors that lead into the Cafeteria Hall. Still clad in sweats and hair not even tied back anymore, Pyrrha walks inside, rubbing her hand up and down opposite her other arm. People murmur indistinctively and the laughter silences as soon as the Invincible Girl makes her appearance here. Never has she felt so vulnerable then right now, hundreds of eyes all glued to her.
She blows out a breath and tries to ignore the forest of eyes that watch her every move as she moves up to the front of the Cafeteria and grabs a tray, talking a handful of carrot sticks on a plate, some soup in a small bowl and a small length of battered fish.

Might be the most normal thing she has done since she woke back up, since it is not that different to what she always ate. She clears her throat and the hall echoes with it, walking away as she paces to the far end of the hall to the emptiest table that she could find. She sits down and rests her cheek in her palm when propping her arm up with her elbow as she sits there, sticking a carrot stick in her mouth and biting a piece off.

She never lifts her eyes, not even to her friends.

Weiss and the others all look among themselves, unsure of how to proceed right now...but Jaune. His heart aches so bad when he stares at her, like there is a lump lodged inside of his heart. To see the girl he loves with all his heart in such solitude and upset broke his heart like a window being shattered. He remembers the thing he told her, about how she has always been so lonely in her life...and now she is back to that stage.

So against his pained feelings, pushing aside his issues he has with loving her...and even anger towards that selfless act she made...he stands up and he walks towards her. “Jaune?” Ruby asks.

“Nah, this isn’t right.” Jaune mutters, exhaling with a steely breath and paces towards her with bold shoulders, which slack as his nerves grow and his doubts creep in. But he tosses them aside as he stands over her. “What are you doing?”

Pyrrha pauses mid chew and looks up through her fringe at him. “U-Um...I’m sorry?”

“You’re not gonna come eat with your friends?” He asks her, the light behind him illuminates his blonde hair like some kind of angelic halo ring around his head. Pyrrha swallows her bite and wrings her hands together.

“B-But...I t-thought you all hated me?”

“You’re not gonna come eat with your friends?” He asks her, the light behind him illuminates his blonde hair like some kind of angelic halo ring around his head. Pyrrha swallows her bite and wrings her hands together.

“B-But...I t-thought you all hated me?”

“What? Why ever would you think that?” Jaune asks her softly. Pyrrha bites her lip and shrugs, itching her cheek with her sleeve engulfed hand.

“I...ki...I killed Penny.” Pyrrha sniffs, Jaune’s eyes fill with sorrow at her in this state of self loathing. “I don’t blame them...because right now, I really hate me too.” She whispers with a broken voice, Jaune sighs and takes her tray of food. “Hey!” She squeaks.

“You want it? Come eat, with your friends. Cos...we need you.” Jaune smiles, Pyrrha looks over at the eager smiles at the far table, and her heart lights up for the first time in ages. Then a laugh escapes her lungs when she sees Nora staring at her with those straws sticking out her face, utterly bewildered by what she is doing. She gingerly gets up, stepping out of the bench and walking around to pace over beside Jaune. Slowly her hunched and small stature begins to – if minutely – return to its old bold and stoic posture.

“Pyrrha! You finally came with me!” Ruby beams, since Ruby left to go to the Cafeteria before Pyrrha had. Since Pyrrha claimed she wanted to stay there and rest her ankle for a bit, but it is clear she wanted to be alone for a while.

“Hello!” Weiss beams.

“Hey P-Money. Sorry, Yang has been trying to get me to use that for a while – please don’t tell her.” Blake begs, knowing that when Yang comes back she will never let her hear the end of it if
she hears about it.

“Oh! It’s capital “P” followed by capital “Y”, iiiiiiiit’s...PYRRHA!” Nora explodes with joy, energetically jumping up and down and getting people’s attention, including that purple haired boy again.

“Hello Pyrrha, come have a seat.” Ren pats the bench beside him with a smile, as supportive as ever for his team. Pyrrha blushes hard and a hand flights up to her chest, never has she felt so loved.

“Oh! W-Well...hello everyone.” Pyrrha smiles brightly – finally – and she sits next to Ren, Jaune sets her tray down before her. “Forgive me for my bad hair.” She blushes. “A-And laze attire.”

“Oooh, Pyrrha’s back, she’s worrying about her appearance. That’s a good sign.” Weiss winks at her. “Here, have a drink.” Weiss slides a juice box down to her hands.

“Th-Thank you, Weiss. Thank you everyone...thank you Jau...” She looks over her shoulder but he is gone. He has sat on the far side of Weiss but still leaning over to smile at her. She gives a weak smile back, it hurts but it must have hurt so much more for him. She knows she needs to give him time...but by all the gods does she hope it is not too long.

Ruby

The family of warrior friends all stay with each other, have always been inseparable even before the aftermath of the Battle of Beacon. Pyrrha has had an irremovable smile on her face for the first time since she woke back up after the battle, finally feeling she can re-establish her place amongst her friends.

And even Jaune.

Jaune smiles at her across the table just as the familiar clacking of Professor Goodwitch’s heels echoes through the cafeteria. She trots up to the front of the cafeteria, a thick notepad cradled in one arm, flanked by Professor Port and Doctor Oobleck.

Jaune nudges Weiss gently with his elbow and before she could slap him so hard across the face that it would break his neck, her eyes fall onto Glynda as she clears her throat.

“Attention students!” Goodwitch’s voice echoes through the food hall, everyone falls silent and a sea of multicoloured pairs of eyes land onto her. Most would be intimidated by having so many people staring at them, but she has become so used to it after working with Ozpin for so long. “Now first of all, I want to thank everyone for how brave you have been. The Battle of Beacon has indeed left a scar on us all. But I am proud to see you have all returned to your studies...as best as you can...anyway.” Glynda begins with a smile on her face.

It gives them the chills to see her smile.

“Your fighting skills have been extremely impressive, but as you all know that there is more to improve on. That is why you have stayed, and those who left...I can respect their decision.” Glynda states as she bows her head. “However...I am afraid that some students have not returned, and I am not just saying that they left the school...we lost many good people during the attack. Many of
Many students look shaken or hurt by the words, for clearly some of them know of friends that have not been uncovered yet. "Unfortunately, we must find their bodies if they were killed – because if we do not we risk the threat of Secondary Disaster – disease." Glynda explains to them all, a cold and stark reality to an attack of this scale. That many dead in one area would draw diseases for miles and thus they must find them all to deal with their bodies.

"Professor..." A student speaks up, getting her attention.

"Yes, sweetheart?" She replies.

"What – what will we do with their bodies?" She nervously asks, and Glynda squints her eyes shut.

"I am afraid that due to the threat of Secondary Disaster – we will be forced to burn them." She tells them, and a few people gasp, and the emotions in the room drop with heartbreak. Sun looks at her and he sighs, pushing his hands against the table, since he and his team also joined R.W.B and J.N.P.R, with Neptune looking up at him. Glynda looks to the one who is usually a trouble maker, never expecting him to be the first to volunteer for something so terrible.

"I will help out in any way I can." He assures.

"Me too." Neptune agrees.

"Count us in – it’s the least we can do." Cardin volunteers as well, surprising practically everyone in the room as he stands up. A smile grows on Glynda’s face as she looks at them.

"Thank you." Glynda says to them all, Blake looks up at him and he smiles, sitting down beside her. He slides his hand under the table and finds hers, giving it a gentle squeeze. She blushes and she rests her head on his shoulder, closing her eyes. Neptune looks at Weiss and smiles, making her blush too.

Glynda then continues. “Now I want to address a few issues that some students have brought to my attention this morning. Number one obviously being the damage done to the C.C.T Network, so your scrolls will be of no use in calling long range until it is repaired. Luckily General Ironwood has provided plenty of workers to repair the damages – many thanks to you all.” She says to some of the workers having their lunch.

“Yeah!” One of them cheers in the silence, creating a few chuckles.

“The next on the list is that Professor Ozpin is currently in a comatose state after the battle, but he is recovering from it. So for the time being I shall be running the school until he wakes back up.” Glynda explains to them, and she never expected the reaction.

Everyone claps and applauds her, warming her heart when she hears Sun and Scarlet blow whistles in her honour.

“Thank you...that really means a lot.” Glynda thanks with a coy smile, making the two teachers smile too.

“You deserve it! Whoo!” Sun cheers as he whistles again, but she still must show herself as the hard teacher she always is.

“Okay, hush now, quiet please.” She requests, and the entire cafeteria falls dead silent. “The next item is the Celebratory Dance, since I know everyone has noticed that black smog around the
borders of Vale...well I will not lie to you...that is the Grimm. They did not stray far and they are
staying near because of the fear we all have – so it would be a nice idea to have a dance instead,
have some fun. Positivity pushes the Grimm away, and soon they will disperse – but we must be
certain to refrain from any panic.” Glynda explains to them all, risky considering everything, but
everyone wants to make sure they do not want a repeat of what happened that night.

“Awesome!” Coco cheers.

“Yes! I’ll have to order a load more doilies!” Weiss rubs her hands together cunningly with a
maniacal grin on her face, making them chuckle.

“What’s with your obsession with doilies?” Ruby asks.

“I like them.” She replies.

“And the final item is...” She looks up to the table that houses Pyrrha. “...is the return of Pyrrha
Nikos, I am happy to see you awake again, my dear. And I would like everyone to give a round of
applause for Pyrrha and her bravery in the battle. She took a burden no child should ever have to
endure and she deserves every inch of support she can get for how she challenged Cinder Fall. She
is the symbol of what it means to be a Huntress.” Glynda kindly says with a smile as she looks over
at Pyrrha.

Soon after the entire room jump up from their seats with a roar of applause completely focused on
Pyrrha. Her eyes widen with disbelief when she sees how many people are so happy for her, Team
Nikos and everything that she did for the school and everyone here. She blushes adorably and
looks down with a smile, as Scarlet claps and nudges her with a smile. She looks over to Jaune with
a smile as he claps...almost forcefully, a sombre and confused look on his conflicted face.

But either way.

He still supports her.

So she smiles softly to him.

The applause eventually dies down, and Glynda continues. “Now, give every single one of
yourselves a round of applause. I think we all deserve it.” She chuckles, and a third round of
applause emerges.

As Jaune looks around...

He notices that one student is not even applauding, he never did during the clap for Pyrrha either.
He just stares straight at her with stern eyes and he narrows his eyes at the student with purple hair.
When the claps die down, the students all sit down.

Except for him.

“Are you serious?” He questions with disbelief, staring at Glynda who looks right back.

“I’m sorry?” She questions.

“So that’s it, huh? We just forget everything that she did in the Vytal Festival?” The student
questions.

“I’m sorry, who might you be?” Oobleck inquires curiously as he steps forward.
“Oh me? Now you wanna bother asking?” He scoffs.

“I asked you a question.” Oobleck states, sounding pretty stern too. The boy glares at him with a slight tick in his hand that twitches.

**Challenging you...**

“Fine – name’s Jaymes Ickford.” The boy introduces, charismatically bowing before the entire group of people. At his side there are two girls that appear to be his teammates. One of them is shorter with long silver hair and large green eyes, wearing a corset that is blue with white stripes across it and around her skirt. The other girl has short blonde hair and bright yellow eyes, looks more timid than the other girl but also just as pretty.

“Okay then, Jaymes. What exactly are you trying to say here?” Port questions with his fist slightly clenched, something that Jaymes notices.

**Against you...**

His fists tremble at his side, he flicks his head to the side so then his spiky purple hair waves from his violet coloured eyes. A colourful looking man and apparently a cold personality. He wears a black and purple jacket over a grey t-shirt with a pair of gauntlets strapped round both wrists. He also wears a pair of black trousers too with a few dust mags loaded to his belt as he stands there. Weiss can tell from here that they were manufactured by the Schnee Dust Company.

He finally speaks. “She killed another student! Penny Polendina! Tore her apart in cold blood!” He yells with anger, pointing straight at Pyrrha, so fast and hard that it actually felt like it hit her in the chest. Pyrrha drops her head into her hands and squeezes her eyes shut with tears pouring out already. Ruby clenches her hands into fists with her teeth gritted as she stands up.

“That is enough, Ickford!” Glynda yells.

“She’s a murderer!” He roars, then Ruby suddenly breaks from her sweet little girl act and she grabs her plate and smashes it on the table, making Pyrrha jolt with shock.

“Shut up! She was my friend!” Ruby screams with rage, then the almost glowing eyes of Ickford focus onto Ruby and he peers round some of the people sat down with a scoff.

“Ooh...the little rose wants to prove herself, huh? Then why the hell are you defending her? She murdered your friend.” Jaymes states with a growl, keeping his finger stretched out towards Pyrrha.

“You can’t kill a robot.” The voice of Cardin unexpectedly says, snapping all the eyes to him as he sits there. Jaymes glares at him with confusion, and Ruby looks hurt from his words. But when he turns slightly she can tell that he is trying to defuse the situation by putting the hate on himself. Everyone gasps as they stare at him. “What? I’m sorry but she was. We got hearts and a soul, but that’s just fancy lights and wiring replicating life. I’m sorry...and I know...I’m an asshole for it. Hate me if you want, but don’t pin the blame on her. How was she meant to know?” Cardin questions as he glares at her.

“Wow...would you look at that...the big bad bully Cardin Winchester has grown a heart!” He scoffs as he challenges him.

Cardin slowly stands up and he towers above Jaymes, his shadow looming over him, and Jaymes steps back fearfully. “Oh trust me...I can be your worst nightmare if you piss them off.” He warns – looks like Cardin has become the bully to scare bullies, but still wanting to atone. But despite the
threat Cardin just made towards Jaymes, the boy does not relent from pointing the blame at Pyrrha.

“It changes nothing Cardin, she should answer for what she did!” Jaymes argues.

“She IS!” The booming voice of Jaune roars as he snaps, also standing up and Pyrrha looks at him fearfully to see him also getting involved. His fists shake with so much rage in him as he storms towards Jaymes and he boy steps back.

*Attacking you...*

His fists pale white from how hard he clenches them, and everyone sets their eyes on the boy as he storms towards Jaymes. Both the same height he glares right into the student’s violet eyes with anger. The girl with the blonde hair behind him reaches over to him, like she wants to defuse the confrontation. “Jaymes, please sit down.” She begs.

“Stay out of this, Peony.” Jaymes demands as he pushes her hand away, she turns and stares at her silent partner.

“Rouge! Help!” Peony begs, but she just looks afraid, her head sinking down into her shoulders.

Jaune snarls and he looks back at Pyrrha, seeing her looking down at the floor, not even touching her food and it just adds fuel to the fire. “Look at her! She’s paying the price every single day since! We need to stop pointing fingers and help her! You think she meant to do it? Did you not hear that woman’s voice?” Jaune questions but Jaymes just snarls right back, fronting him.

“Changes nothing – everyone must pay the consequences for their actions.” Jaymes growls, making Jaune scoff.

“Then you’re a bigger idiot then I thought. Penny was kind and we all loved her, but she died because of Cinder! Not her! So leave her alone.” He demands.

“You think defending a murderer makes you tough? What next, pal? You gonna let her kill again? How about me? You gonna let her murder me too?” He questions as he backs up and smacks his hands against his chest.

“Keep it up and she won’t need to.” Nora growls as she transforms her grenade launcher into its hammer form, ready to attack him, until Glynda suddenly raises her voice.

“Silence!” She roars, and everyone but Ickford stops in their place. He just slowly turns and glares at her. “I want to speak to you in my office, Ickford.” She sternfully states, walking down the hallway. “Everyone enjoy your lunches...I will handle this.” Glynda assures as he takes Jaymes away from the poor people.

Pyrrha sits there with tears down her face and Cardin growls with disgust. “I was like that once?” He scoffs.

“No – he was worse.” Jaune assures, and that actually makes Cardin smile with a bit of relief.

Jaymes keeps walking as he hears his conflicting thoughts in the back of his mind.

*She’ll do it again...*  
*She’s gonna kill you.*  
*She’s gonna kill everyone.*
Jaymes Ickford

Jaymes

He taps his fingers on the metal desk in a rhythmic tune constantly, almost anticipating for something to happen. His violet eyes stare downwards at the table as he glares at his own reflection, waiting for Glynda to return with the files and her mug of coffee. The erratic rhythm he plays is somewhat like this:

Ra-ta-ta-ta – ta-ta – ta-ta-ta

And it just repeats over and over again with his finger on the metallic table, anxiety through the roof as he sits there. His eye twitching and skin crawling every single second with his thoughts jumbled as he keeps thinking and thinking about everything that comes to his mind. He continues that little tune with his hand, staring at his reflection.

That’s when he sees Glynda walk up behind him, and she grits her teeth with fury, slashing towards him with her Crop to kill him. He gasps with shock and spins round.

Nothing...

All in his head.

Anxiety eating away at his mind like a swarm of carrion flies that find dead flesh. Jaymes shakes it off, looking away from what he thought he saw, shaking his head and scratching the back of his neck. Always feeling these deranged itches across his body – feels like it has been hours since Glynda had gone.

She’s not coming back...she doesn’t care about me

Afraid of me

Wants to hurt me

The door opens, and this time it is real, he lifts his head sharply when Glynda looks at him with a file tucked under her arm and in her right hand is a warm mug of coffee. Her green eyes meet his violet coloured ones as she approaches the table and carefully sets both her coffee mug and file down onto the table. She pushes her glasses up her nose slightly before taking her seat in front of him.

She exhales as she sit down, staring at Jaymes who looks like he is really struggling at the moment. She then turns to her file and she licks her finger to turn the pages with ease, landing onto his file.

Name: Jaymes Ickford

Age: 17

Birthplace: Vacuo

Taught at: Sanctum Academy before moving to Shade Academy
However, despite how Glynda views the way he yelled at Pyrrha and berated her on what happened with Penny Polendina, she is not unreasonable. So she wants to evaluate him herself to understand him better – no bully acts without reason from their own past. “Jaymes Ickford...” She begins as she takes a sip from her coffee, looking right at him now, leaving the tapping boy anxiously waiting for what she wants to speak to him about. “I was hoping we could talk about what happened earlier in the Cafeteria.”

He twitches when she says that. “Why would you care? You seem to only take the side of that murderer.” He snarls viciously, like an animal on defence after attempting to lick its fresh wounds.

“No, I want to hear your side of the story. We all have our own personal struggles after an event like the Battle of Beacon – so I want to understand you more, Mr Ickford.” Glynda explains as she sets her hands onto the table, looking at him.

He slouches down, his eyes looking away from her and his hand begins tapping that little rhythm of his again. Every beat made echoes through the room as he sits there, feeling his mind slipping away whenever he doesn’t do it. Glynda quickly notices the little rhythm however she just bats it away for now as just a little thing he has stuck in his head. “Now then, to start Mr Ickford – you came from Shade Academy, correct?” She asks him, and he continues to tap away before he answers. “Jaymes?”

“Yeah – yeah whatever.” Jaymes answers, still tapping and tapping away, drowning the ticks of the clock out, his eyes staring straight at it now. Almost like that is what he has been trying to do, hoping to block out the repetitive ticks of that mechanism. “Came from Shade, yeah...miss the heat.” Everything he says actually sounds like he is just agreeing with her so then he can get out of here quickly, his eyes scanning everything in the room for threats of any kind.

Glynda smiles when he makes the comment about the Vacuo Heat. “Really? I would have thought coming here to Vale would have been a nice change of pace.” Glynda says as she crosses her arms and looks at Jaymes rather curiously at his comment.

“Cold’s bad...makes my bones hurt.” He swiftly answers, barely even going into detail either. He seems very different to how he was acting back in the cafeteria, anxiety levels appear to be through the roof and the tapping has not stopped at all.

So now she has to ask him.

“What’s with the tapping?” She asks him curiously.

He stops for a second, his finger shaking as he sits there, lifting his eyes to look at the professor. Almost as if he is deducing whether or not he should tell her, erratic eye-movement like he is dreaming even though he is awake. “Coping mechanism...my doctor back home taught me it.” He answers as he pats his fingers constantly on the table, so then Glynda looks at his file and then back at him.

“Back in Vacuo?” She asks him.

“Yes.” He agrees.

“Well by the looks of it you started in Sanctum Academy, then moved back to Mistral...surely then
you must have known Pyrrha in the past?” She presumes, down to the fact that they are the same age and both went to Sanctum Academy. It all points towards it from the data that her files are giving her.

“I didn’t know her...we hardly ever interacted.” Jaymes replies.

“Well...it says your fighting skills are exceptional...despite being erratic and unpredictable even for your teammates.” Glynda says to him as she reads some of his past reports from other teachers.

“Well...if my teammates can’t predict it then neither can my enemies.” He states with a stammer, still tapping his coping mechanism on the table again and again and again.

“Is it something to do with...this anxiety you are displaying?” She asks him.

He stops and he stares right into her eyes.

And it gave her the message she needed.

She does not bother him with any further questions on this matter, since she can tell that it could bring more harm than good. “Okay then, Mr Ickford – I am going to be straight with you.” She says as she leans across the table to look him in the eyes. “The behaviour you displayed earlier today was completely unacceptable, and I will not tolerate it any further.” She warns, then he stares straight back at her with a scowl.

“You’ll defend her? A murderer?” He questions with a growling voice.

“She didn’t murder anyone, all the evidence points towards her being manipulated by another individual who had a helping hand in what happened here.” Glynda tells him, obviously talking about Emerald Sustrai. Jaymes chuckles menacingly as he sits there, his tapping slowing down as he laughs before he looks at the Professor again.

“So her tearing Penny apart wasn’t murder? It wasn’t callous? It wasn’t a violation against the law?” Jaymes questions with a scoff in his voice.

“It was no her fault, she told me what she saw. She saw a hallucination of something that forced her to defend herself – how was she to know about...what Ironwood did?” Glynda questions in return, still defending Pyrrha relentlessly. It is not lie that the Acting Headmaster of Beacon Academy had a soft spot for her – Pyrrha is a kind, powerful and all around generous human being, that does not deserve this.

Or what they forced on her.

But Jaymes is not convinced. “Fine, but what about what her actions wrought? The attack on Beacon was her doing! Hers and Yang Xiao Long for the things that they did.”

“That’s enough.” Glynda coldly reminds, with a scowl on her face, no longer trying to reason with him.

“No! It’s not enough!” He yells with rage as he springs up from his seat.

“Sit down, Mr Ickford.” Glynda demands.

“No! The Grimm charged in here and killed so many people! Friends! My cousin!” He reveals with a scream.
Glynda stares up at the boy, seeing the glistening tears in his eyes as he stands there, so she just exhale through her nose sadly. She was right...

Every bully has a reason for the ways of which they torment their victims.

And clearly he is no different.

The anguish in his eyes is so clear after the loss of his cousin and it could be why he has been so irritable and so anxious constantly. Glynda’s voice changes to kindness as she looks at him, taking a gentler approach this time. “Your cousin?” She asks him.

Like a shy child he hangs his head low and just nods his head slowly. “What was his name?” She asks him.

“Forest.” He answers.

“I’m very sorry, Ickford.”

“Why would you be?”

“Because you are all my students...your welfare is my priority.”

Dejectedly he scowls at her viciously. “Well I can safely assure you that you failed.” He snarls, and Glynda stares at him.

“That’s not fair, Jaymes.” She says to him, and that seems to cause something inside him to snap.

“Fair?” He yells. “I’ll tell you what’s not fair! Watching helplessly as your cousin you swore to keep safe get dragged away by a Beowulf and into a destroyed building. I dug as fast and as hard as I could to get to him...and I will never...never forget the sound of his screams. They devoured him, tore him to shreds to make him suffer!” He roars with rage, his violet eyes begin to glow with a crackling effect across his body and in his purple hair.

“I had to scoop what was left and throw him in a bin bag...so don’t you dare tell me it’s not fair on you.” He snarls with anger.

Glynda falls silent from his words, feeling nothing but guilt for him, and she can now understand why he has so much hatred towards Pyrrha. She may not agree with him, but she agrees with him.

He sniffles and he forcefully rubs his tears from his eye as he stands there, hand shaking erratically. “C-Can I go now?” He softly whispers as he looks at the floor.

Glynda sighs. “Okay...” She agrees, so he turns and he walks away from her office and opens the door, until she stops him with her voice. “But Jaymes...”

He stops and turns back to look at her. “I do not want another incident, I am sorry for what happened – but do not blame her for it. Blame the people that manipulated her.” Glynda requests.

Jaymes’ answer is worse than she hoped.

Because he doesn’t even answer.

He just walks away and the door slams shut.
Jaune

Unaware of the revelation that Glynda has found from Jaymes Ickford...

Jaune jogs down the halls of the Dorm Block, since Pyrrha went straight here after the incident in the Cafeteria with Ickford. As he moves he hits the ground to a halt, teetering on one foot before the door to their room. He sighs at the muffled hiccupping sobs that come from within their room. He scans his scroll through the lock and he goes to open it, but thumping his face into the door instead in the process as it refuses to budge open.

“Huh?” He grunts before he scans it again, seeing it flash green, but once more the door remains firmly locked in place. But when he tries to push the door open again he sees it...the black magnetic aura surrounding the metal locks..sighing and resting his head against the wooden surface of the door.

“Pyrrha...please let me in.” He softly begs.

“No, go away.” He cries with a broke voice, despite all the love and kindness she got from the people in there...all it took was one toxic voice to break her heart. Jaune hates the sound of hearing her cry...the sound of her once calm and regal tones replaced with shaky and broken ones, just like when she heard her sob when he went to her and she told him about destiny. How the scratches and dents in his armour were delivered when she accidentally used her semblance on him.

“D’you want me to push? Cos I will, you know I will. Or at least I’ll try...or dislocate my shoulder in the process.” He jokes, muttering at the end since he knows that it is entirely possible. Hoping to hear her laugh...but instead he only hears her sobs in return. So he sucks his upper lip and closes his eyes, cool wood heating up against his forehead. He stammers and gapes, the words unable to teeter off his tongue.

“...For it is in passing we achieve immortality...” He breathes, and he can hear the uncontrollable sobs pause amid hiccups and sniffles. “...th-through this, we become a paragon of virtue and glory to rise above all. Infinite in distance and unbound by death, I release your soul and by my shoulder protect thee.”

“By my shoulder protect thee. You hear that? I’m not going anywhere, Pyrrha.” Jaune licks his lips and keeps his eyes closed. “It was when you unlocked my aura, remember? Cos I do...never forgot them. I thought those words had taken you from me. I...” He feels his lips quiver and a seep of salty hot water pushes through his eyelids. “...I don’t want to release your soul just yet, I don’t want you to be unbound by...d-d...” He cannot even bring himself to say the word, choking on a single gasping sob. “Or infinite in distance...I want...I...”

He staggers back as the door opens up, Pyrrha standing right before him, her chest heaving heavily. Eyes red raw and wobbly with glossy tears, which stream down her firm cheeks. She sniffs at his water blues, longing for him.

“What do you want, Jaune?” She softly asks him with a desperately broken tone, hiccupping a sob. Jaune breathes and blinks.

“I want you.” He manages to croak, unable to keep his aching heart under control. He steps over and instantly wraps her up in his warming embrace, both of them sobbing uncontrollably. “I don’t know what to do with my feelings, Pyrrha.”
“I know and I am so, so sorry!” She cries out, stinging tears soaking into his collar and wetting his neck.

“All I know is...I still care about you, so, so much...and...I want to be with you...but...I’m so scared!” He cries out, tightening his arms around her back. “For about twelve hours I thought you were dead. Nobody would tell me anything, I couldn’t find Ruby, I...I...” He lets out a loud ugly sob wrack his body. “Do you know how horrible it was to think you were gone? Th-That I’d have to live in a world without you?” He whimpers.

“I’m so sorry, I – did that to you!” She cries as she hugs him as tight as she can, as if she would crumble and blow away in the wind otherwise. “I wasn’t thinking rationally, we thought Ozpin had died and...” She sobs a guttural wail – yet she still manages to keep the legend of the Maidens under wraps.

He would not understand.

That is for Ozpin and his Inner Circle to explain.

“...I know – I could never challenge Cinder in combat, but I was so focused on my destiny that I never took a second to think about..about you...” She whimpers softly as she stares into his eyes lovingly.

“Oh Pyrrha...” Jaune cries into her neck, hugging her as tight as he can, hands balling up the hoodie she wears. “We’re a mess.”

“Yeah we really are.” Pyrrha softly giggles within her sobs. “But, despite the tears...th-this is the nicest feeling I’ve felt...since...y’know.” She softly says, thinking of when they finally kissed.

“Mmm...I know.” Jaune hiccupps as he holds her warm body flush to his, finally pulling his head up and blowing out a breath. He wipes his eyes before kicking his foot back to shut the door behind him, now firmly sealed in the isolation of their dorm room. Jaune lets go of her and properly dries his eyes with his hands. Pyrrha snuffs and uses her hoodie sleeves to swipe at her eyes.

“My...my eyes are so sore...Urgh, I’m sick of crying.” She mutters, never sounding so depressed before. “I’m so tired.”

Jaune nods and walks over to the radiator on the wall, turning the dial up a few clicks to warm the room up. Pyrrha watches as she sheds his armour and belt, sword clattering on the floor and he walks back over to her and takes her hands, getting her to pad over to his bed, where he lays back against the headboard and pulls her down atop him.

“J-Jaune, what’re you –”

“Shh...don’t think about us, or our issues for a minute, and just rest.” He whispers as he runs his fingers through her soft red hair, Pyrrha humming at the contact and snuggling up into his chest. “Shh...Shh...” He softly repeats to her, continuing to stroke her hair lovingly. His loving embrace helps die down Pyrrha’s hiccupping gasps all the way down to low breaths and murmurs, her puffy eyelids slowly dropping over her eyes.

“Thank you...” She whispers with a truly grateful and happy smile.

“Anything for you.” He mumbles, stroking her hair, admiring the girl currently folded up into his embrace. He continues his ministrations of stroking until she finally was sound asleep, pawing at his chest, gentle steady breaths leaving her partially parted lips. He smiles contently and shakes his head to himself immediately, scolding himself on what is happening right now.
“What are you doing, Jaune?” He asks himself. Pyrrha hums in her sleep and shuffles slightly atop him.

*What’s the alternative? Ignore it? Hope the feelings go away? They won’t, and you know it. What you felt for Weiss was infatuation. But this? This is more. It’ll only make the both of us miserable if we fight it.*

His thoughts tear rampantly through his mind like the cascade of a monstrous storm which tears an entire habitat apart with ease. Until the warmth and pleasant weight of her on his stomach and lap make his eyelids grow heavier. He murmurs and lets his had fall back against the pillow, as sleep claimed him too.

**Ren**

It was not much later on that Ren walked in, tossing a pack of pamphlets on P.T.S.D onto the desk by the door, rubbing his face with a tired groan. He opens his magenta eyes and locks onto Pyrrha and Jaune, it shows how well he knows Nora when all he does is hold out his open palm, and the Valkyrie walking in and her mouth sealing into his palm, only to scream a muffled squeal of glee into his skin.

“This is happening, Ren!” She whisper shots, excitedly. Ren smiles at the pair on the bed, both asleep and finally not crying.

Pyrrha has wrapped her arms around Jaune’s neck in her sleep and tugs herself up to his body so her lips would flush with his cheek. She breathes steadily into his skin, her legs having stretched out alongside his. His own arms have in turn wrapped around her waist, warm smiles on both their faces.

Ren beams and looks at Nora.

“It’s not the end of their issues, and they have a lot to discuss...but...it is indeed a big step in the right direction for their relationship.” He deduces deeply.

“And, it’s super duper cute!” Nora beams joyfully, eyes wide as saucers with hearts for pupils. “They’re so perfect for each other, I hope they figure things out, Renny!”

“They will...they both need some time to readjust and most of all...talk.” Ren shrugs before sitting down onto his own bed. Nora sits down next to him and sighs heavily.

“It’s just...cruel...how all that happened to her..to them...I just...” Nora fiddles with the hem of her skirt. “I just want them to be happy.”

“I know you do.” Ren sighs, pulling her into his chest and kissing her orange hair, smoothing his hand up and down her back. “Me too.”

Pyrrha mumbles in her sleep, and her pouted lips pressed to Jaune’s skin. The edges curl up and they saw those lips press firmer into his cheek, before closing again and nuzzling her face into his. Nora smiles and looks up at Ren, before kissing his chin, sliding her fingers up to threat within his.

“Yeah...they’ll be fine.” Nora smiles.
Not everybody is able to spend the night peacefully like Team J.N.P.R are, for Team S.S.S.N are spending their night helping Team C.R.D.L search the area for any bodies that are left unaccounted for. The stench of a past battle fills the terrible air, even five days after the damage is still as present as ever. Sun walks across the destruction, carefully making every step onto pieces of rubble on the pile where a building had collapsed when a Goliath smashed against it.

The roars of that thing’s trumpeting trunk will not be leaving their memories for quite a while. The chunks of concrete crumble under his trainers beneath him, and he jumps off, rolling the landing as the rockslide moves down the side of what remains of that building. He pushes his palm against the floor and looks back at the building. Who knows if anyone is trapped inside but it will take them forever to check.

Sage, Scarlet and Neptune catch up to the Monkey Faunus who just sits down with a sigh, pressing his hand to his head. Neptune looks at him and turns to his two friends. “Keep looking, I’ll talk to him.” Neptune says to them, Sage and Scarlet both nod and they walk ahead to search for any bodies.

Secondary Disaster is a very real threat to the world after a battle like this, because disease can kill more people than even the Grimm can. And the last thing they need is an epidemic spreading through the school because of some bodies that became infected because they were not uncovered. Even though that is messing with Sun a bit, it is not the reason for him not being his energetic self at the moment.

And Neptune knows his best friend, sitting down on the rock beside him with his hands on his lap. “You still thinking about Blake?” Neptune asks his friend, and Sun sighs.

“You know me so well.” Sun sarcastically replies, with his head held low as he says it.

“Sun...there wasn’t anything you could have done to have stopped that guy...Adam...” Neptune states, shimmying around the name of Adam Taurus. Neither of them particularly know who he is, but they already can tell that he is a messed up piece of crap that has a bloody history with the love of his life.

“Wasn’t there, Neptune?” He questions, receiving a confused look from his sapphire blue haired friend. “I could have helped her – could have protected her from that scumbag and he wouldn’t have hurt her...wouldn’t have cut off Yang’s arm.” Sun says as he loathes at himself, sat down pondering on all the things that could have been.

He would do anything for Blake.

“What does it matter? It happened in the past, buddy. Let it stay there, at the end of the day we can’t change that. But we can make sure we make it right – Yang is strong she can come back from this...and Blake?” Neptune says, getting Sun’s attention as he lifts his head. “Well you told me how she acted when she revealed who she really was – but she didn’t run away this time, did she?”

“No...I guess not.” Sun agrees softly.

“And she is still here.” Neptune adds.
“Yeah...” Sun also agrees, but sounding more confused.

“Then go talk to her about it – tell her how you feel maybe.” Neptune says, which responds with a surprised expression from Sun.

“You’re giving me girl advice?” He scoffs after the whole Weiss thing that happened during the dance. Neptune chuckles at that.

“Yeah well, do as I say, not as I do, right?” He chuckles, making Sun chuckle as well. They both give each other a fist bump and then both stand up, looking around at the destroyed wasteland that was once an area in Vale that they walked through.

“Guys!” The voice of Scarlet calls and they all turn to see him stood by a collapsed building.

“Oh no...” Neptune groans and he and Sun jog over to their friends by what they have found. They both slow down, desperately hoping for there to not be a dead body – but alas – they are sadly wrong. There is a corpse partially buried in the street with the chunks crushed into his body. Chunks of metal rebar lodged through his body and blood everywhere, looks like the collapse of the building was what killed him.

Maybe a Goliath did this.

The silence in the air is only broken by the caws of crows and the squeaks of rats that scavenge off their corpses in the streets. Sage snarls as he swings his sword at the air where one of the crows was stood, and it flies away from the scene. “Goddamn it...I don’t even know who this is.” Sun sadly says as he stares at the body.

Scarlet crouches down and searches through his pockets, getting a disgusted look from his teammates. “What’re you doing?” Neptune questions.

“Calm down, I’m not looting him. I haven’t fallen that low yet.” Scarlet states as he keeps searching, then he finally finds his wallet. He takes it out and flips it open, finding his driver’s licence when he stands up. “His name was Roger Phillips, he was thirty one...had a couple of lien cards on him and there’s a damaged scroll...” He mumbles as he opens the scroll, finding a message on it.

It breaks his heart.

“Hey sweetie – just gonna head out and buy us and the kids some sweets.” Scarlet reads out as he stands there, sighing from how sad this all is.

“He died for some snacks...that’s not even fair.” Sage snarls with anger, staring at the black smog in the forests around Vale and Beacon where the Grimm are still congregated. They can actually see some of them patrolling the edges, their red eyes glowing through the shadows in the treeline, some Ursas and Beowulves all growling.

“He deserved better than this...I want to collect all their names so then we can give them proper graves...even if we cannot bury their bodies.” Scarlet explains, getting a pat on the back from Sun.

“Sure thing, pal.” He assures with a smile, Scarlet smiles back followed with a heavy sigh. He takes out a pouch he has on his person and he puts the I.D into it so then they remember his name. They push the rubble from his body and carefully pull the pieces of rebar from his corpse. Sage crouches down and he picks up Roger, lifting him onto his shoulder as he stands up.

“I’m so sick of this.” Sage snarls as he stands tall, carrying Roger to the carriage that Team
C.R.D.L are by as well.

“We did sign up for it.” Sun says.

“Yeah...well...I didn’t expect it to come with sleepless nights.” Scarlet replies.

“I doubt anyone is sleeping soundly tonight.” Neptune says as he walks with them towards Team C.R.D.L, also with masks on to prevent any disease getting into their systems. Cardin carries a body and he places her down gently onto the pile, turning to Team S.S.S.N walking over as Sage placed Roger onto the carriage.

“Hey guys...how many did you find?” Sun asks him.

“Ten.” Cardin gruffly answers, even they look shaken – but no matter how tough you may act you will never get used to carrying corpses around to burn them.

“What about you?” Russel asks.

“Six.” Neptune marks with a sigh.

“And we’ve barely even scratched the surface.” Sky groans as he leans against the side of the carriage with a grown, his eyes sinking shut as he thinks about it.

“We’ll get there...” Sun assures.

“I hope so...and I really wish the damn Grimm would piss off by now.” Scarlet states as he stares at the smog that surrounds the Kingdom.

Waiting for the prime time to strike.

“C’mon...let’s take the carriage back...and burn them.” Cardin sighs.

This is the dark side of war they never expected to experience.

The Aftermath of War.

Blake

She walks down the halls of Beacon’s Dormitories with Weiss and Blake – Team R.W.B – and they approach the familiar door of their home. Their dormitory that they essentially called their home...and Ruby gently presses her hand against it. The black scorch marks on the door is not a good sign, since the explosion from Ironwood’s Ship crashing sent flames into many buildings. Their dormitory included.

She slowly opens it and both of them gasp with shock from what they find inside.

Everything is destroyed, the beds have been burned to ash and the carpet is covered with dust and scorch burns. The window has been shattered and their bunk beds collapsed – not like they were sturdy to begin with – but the sight is heartbreaking for them. Weiss’ desk is smashed to pieces from chunks of metal that were thrown from the explosion of Ironwood’s Atliesian Vessel and through the window, her pens broken and all her books burned too.
Blake gasps as she limps in, hand pressed to her still healing wound in her side. She crouches down with widened eyes, tears welling up in them as she stares at the charred books she held so dear to her. Not just her secret admiration that was Ninjas of Love but even the Man with Two Souls and the book named Destiny of Remnant, Knights of Grimm, Ragnarok...so many books she loved to read...

Gone...

Burned and taken all her memories away with them. “No...” Blake sniffls as she picks up the burnt remains of the Man with Two Souls, feeling the pages crumbling. Her sorrow turns to anger as she throws the book onto the floor. “It’s all gone!” She cries out, and Ruby walks over to the beds, crouching down as she sees the books she used are also burnt.

Nothing seemed to survive the fire.

“This is horrible...” Weiss softly says as she looks at the devastation, for even she never came close to seeing this place...

Too scared to do it without her team.

The posters are torn and burned down too, but as they look around, they hear footsteps approaching the open door. Ruby and Blake turn to see Sun and his team, covered with grime and some ash as well. “Sun...” Blake softly gasps, immediately getting up and wrapping her arms around him gently. He looks at her with a firstly surprised expression, which changes to a grateful smile...embracing her too.

The same occurs between Weiss and Neptune.

“Are you guys okay?” Ruby asks them, since she can see the awe in their eyes.

“Y-Yeah...it’s just...seeing Vale like that...it’s gonna take some time to get used to it. Even after it’s all fixed.” Scarlet states, then the girls release their crushes and they let them enter. They all look around at their dorm with similarly shocked expressions from how destroyed their room has become.

“By the gods...” Sage mutters as he looks at it all – another side affect of warfare...the destruction of memories as well as their surroundings.

“I-I know...it’s all gone.” Blake stammers as she looks at the floor where her books were burnt.

“Even our beds.” Ruby says with a sigh as she points at them.

Sun turns to his team, and they all already have the same selfless idea on their minds as they nod. So Sun turns to the three girls with a proposition. “Y’know, you girls can crash at our place till we fix up your room.” Sun offers with a smile.

“What? No, we couldn’t do that.” Weiss argues.

“Yeah, and where would you four sleep?” Blake asks them.

They chuckle. “Please – it’s Team S.S.S.N, we can sleep anywhere.”

“Yeah, Scarlet did manage to fall asleep between a radiator and a couch once.” Sun chuckles.

“How did you even get in that position?” Ruby inquires.
“Not a clue.” Scarlet replies with a chuckle.

“Don’t worry, we even have beanbags and those are comfy as hell.” Neptune assures with a wink.

“Thank you! Really, you have no idea how much this means to us!” Weiss thanks as she wraps her arms around Neptune and kisses his cheek. Blood flushes into his cheeks and he nearly passes out with nervous joy from feeling her kiss him like that.

“C’mon, let us show you the grand tour.” Scarlet says, and they all follow.

Except for Blake and Sun.

She remains crouched down by her books with soft tears trickling down from her eyes. Sun walks over to her and he crouches down beside her. “You alright?” He asks her.

“Mhm. Fine.” She answers, but Sun knows her.

“What books are they?” He asks her.

“What? No, no – you already are letting us stay in your room, I can’t expect you to –” Sun presses his finger to her lips with a smile, silencing her.

“What books?” He repeats with a smile, and she gives in, lowering her head with a soft grunt.

She begins to list them all and Sun collects them all in his mind as she does so.

He would do anything for her.

Jaymes

The door suddenly bursts open into his dorm, leading to a yelp from Peony who stands by her desk, pressing her hand to her chest with widened eyes as she stares at him. She literally jumped up when he did that, and he storms into the room with fists clenched. She immediately follows him whilst Rouge is sat down with her eyes gazing out the window at the Shattered Moon.

“Did you take your meds?” Peony instantly questions.

“I’m about to.” He coldly replies to his teammate as he reaches up into the cabinet and he picks up the container of Clozapine Tablets, popping the lid off and taking one out. Peony instantly fills up a glass of water and gives it to him.

“Drink your water...” She gently says to him, but he unexpectedly lashes out at her.

“I can do it myself, mom!” He yells, sarcastically calling her mom since she must have acted in a very similar way.

“I am trying to help you!” Peony argues as he swiftly drinks the water after putting the tablet on his tongue.

“I don’t need your help! I am not a child, Peony!” He shouts right back, most people would recoil from the way he yells at her – but she clearly can take it. Whereas Rouge is just staying out of it.
“I know you’re not, but what the hell was that in the cafeteria, huh? You were acting like an asshole! You are not an asshole.” Peony reminds as she points at the doorway, since she was there when it all went down.

“Forest is dead because of her.” He snarls, storming away from her and sitting down on the edge of his bed. Peony walks around, pacing almost in front of him with her hands on her hips as she stares at him.

“Really? I don’t remember seeing Pyrrha stabbing him.” She scoffs, in which reacts with him suddenly lunging at her, and from his bracer forms an axe that presses the blade right up against her throat. The mechanical axe locks together around his hand, and he stares straight into her eyes. But she is not afraid of him...and then the drugs seem to calm him down, he steps away from her and that anger fades away as well.

She touches her neck where she was pinned against the wall from, feeling a little cut but nothing serious. “You calmed down, now?” She asks him, and he sighs, acting very different already – no ticks by the looks of it either.

“Y-Yeah...I think so.” He agrees.

“It’s getting worse, Jaymes.” She warns.

“I know it is...” He sighs. “But what happened to him...I...I can’t...” He stammers as he presses his hands to his head, even with the pills in his system he is struggling to keep it together. “Gods I can’t keep it together! What’s his dad gonna think of me?”

“You’re not the only one struggling, okay? Rouge hasn’t said a word since what happened to Forest – she was close to him too.” She reminds, looking over at the shy girl who has fallen silent with sadness and almost guilt.

“It’s not the point...you haven’t met my dad...my uncle...they’re as bad as each other.” He stammers, touching his arm where he feels the bruises and the cigarette burn scars. His hand shakes at the mere thought of his father and uncle.

She quickly walks over to him and holds his hands as she crouches down, like his own personal carer. “Shh...calm breaths.” She whispers to him. “In...and out...in...and out.” She repeats to him with her soft spoken voice. He does as he is told now, breathing in and out carefully and slowly to calm down from the bad memories that flow through his mind. “They’re not here, just me and Rouge. And trust me if he lays a finger on you I’ll break his jaw.” She assures with a smile.

He chuckles at the idea of seeing her do that. “I wouldn’t be against seeing that.”

“Oh I know.” She chuckles.

She pats the side of his head with a smile as she gets up and she walks over to her bed.

But as they lay there...

Rouge was glancing over at the cupboard where his pills were being stored.

Then quickly looking away.

Peony switches the light off so then they can all go to sleep...if they can after everything that has happened.
But as he tries to go to sleep.

The voices...

They never leave.

*Poisoning me...*

*Betraying me...*

*Killing me...*

*Against me...*

*Enemies all around me...*
Sanitatem

Pyrrha

The suffering of her nightmare strikes through her mind during her sleep...

The agony of the arrow stabbing straight through the ligaments of her Achilles Heel, the wound that could have killed her on its own. The glass arrowhead plucking through each of the ligaments like a hot knife being rammed through individual ribs. She can remember the sound of her own pained scream, voice cracking at the octave. She slumps forward to hands and knees, heart palpitating in a cocktail of fear and regret.

All over what she had done.

With Cinder drawing the bow her memory flashes painfully as she sees her glowing amber eyes staring directly into her emerald ones. The anger and the rage from whenever she mentioned her worth or whatever she has to prove.

The scorching orange eye stared straight into her soul, her words that she said to her burned into her memory. “You don’t know a thing – about me. I was never given the same luxuries you and your little buddies had. Remember that...” Cinder’s seductive voice spoke, still sounding as clear as it did that night. Hearing her voice gives Pyrrha the chills, causing her to coil up when snuggled up to Jaune.

But in her dream she remains on her knees, waiting for that glass arrow to be shot into her heart. Cinder drawing it back with a smirk on her face, flames burning around her irises. “Now tell me – Pyrrha Nikos – would you rather die quick – or slow?” The voice of Cinder slowly spoke in her memory, about to release the bow.

But this time...

There is no blinding white light from Ruby, there is no scream and there is no rescue. There is just the arrow, shot from the bow which lodges straight into her chest. She gasps with shock and pain, recoiling back when she feels it puncture straight through her sternum, blood pouring down her chest with red embers of aura trailing from her wound that she has suffered. Ragged desperate gasps for air leave her mouth, feeling her lungs pierced open from the arrowhead as blood fills her chest, choking her from the inside.

The pain of death...it is nothing like she could ever imagine.

Before the end Cinder smirks as she touches Pyrrha’s cheek with her fingers and there is a flash...

And it all goes black.

Until she feels the pain flashing into her mind again, flashing images of her fight with Cinder like all her memories. Every mistake she ever made.

A pair of glowing red eyes staring straight into her own are the last things that she ever sees.
Pyrrha gasps, jolting upright as her nightmare springs her from her dream, eyes bursting wide open on the dark room. She pants as her eyes scan the room, heart drumming heavily against her ribs...and someone else’s. With groggy and furrowed brows, sweat beading from her skin due to her nightmare, she blinks and feels the warmth heating her side where she was slept. Where she still feels the band of warmth across her back where his arm gently caressed around her curves to keep her close.

As her eyes adjust to the dark that surrounds her, she sees him, fast asleep...

There is a sense of relief at last, really knowing that all of that was nothing more than a terrifying nightmare...a nightmare which showed what could have happened if Ruby did not get to that tower in time.

Pyrrha blinks and looks down at her hand that still sits on his shoulder out of some form of instinct...and she slowly takes her hand away from him. Her head was nestled under his chin and her legs intertwined with his own – it might have been the best night sleep she has ever had...until that nightmare. Seems even her mind wants to interfere with the very things that she so desperately wants.

She sits forward and sighs as she rests her arms on her legs with sunken eyes, mind of content souring all because of what she saw in her nightmare. The wishes fill her body for Cinder to stop being a part of her life...but she will always be there, like a tumour she will eat away at her joy until her dying day. Unless she can learn to live with it.

Her eyes are fixated onto Jaune and she reaches her hand out to Jaune to caress his cheek, then leaning forward to kiss the same spot firmly. She feels like she has said the words a thousand times yet every single time it never feels like it is enough. “I’m so sorry...” She softly whispers to him, caressing his messy blonde hair. She has always loved him for that, most people always put so much work into everything that they have on them. But Jaune? He never cared, either because he is always too lazy to give a damn or because he cared not what people thought.

She always admires that about Jaune.

Luckily her voice and the touch of her naturally colder hand did not wake him, due to her poor circulation in her body that makes her body a little colder. Opposed to Jaune who is like a scorching sun on a Vacuo Summer Day.

Pyrrha shuffles her way of the bed, being as careful as ever to not wake up Jaune, or Nora and Ren. As she moves off, she looks over to Nora, who is fast asleep in her bed with her eyes dancing behind her lids. Dreaming constantly, and Pyrrha cannot help but to wonder what she could possibly be dreaming about.

*I bet she’s dreaming of pancakes or something like that.*

“Yummy pancakes...” Nora mumbles in her sleep, making Pyrrha giggle slightly at how perfect her guess was.

*I know her too well.*

Pyrrha then turns to Ren who is asleep too on his bed, sleeping ever so peacefully – he is a master at sleeping after all. The man is like a machine, he is awake to do stuff and keep Nora from destroying the world by drinking lots of coffee, and when he isn’t he just powers down. He has
always made it clear that he loves to sleep.

She glumly nods to herself, knowing she needs to do something other than remain here, once she has a nightmare like that she has to find something to do before going to sleep again. She reaches down to her bag so then she can go to the Gym and just work out the stress that exists in her muscles like a knot to be untied.

As she searches for her water bottle and towel, she brushes her hand across something icy cold and metallic, and she stops. She grips the object to lift it from her bag, revealing it with her emerald eyes staring at it with an element of fear. Gold reflects the lunar light that glows from the partially opened curtains were the Shattered Moon watches over them. The emeralds swing from their chains as she picks the circlet up, staring at it endlessly.

A scowl deforms her face as she squeezes the circlet in her grasp, bringing a form of anger upon her as she throws it onto her empty bed. Luckily not throwing it at Jaune and waking him up – that would be a very awkward conversation. She takes all her armour out, armour that makes her feel sick to her stomach opposed to the shirt and shorts that she wears. The dents and scratches in the bronze metal and the blood that stains the boot and leg plates that she wore in that fight after Cinder stabbed the arrow into her heel.

She has literally just left all the pieces of her armour just shoved into the corner, to be forgotten by herself and hopefully even by the others. She cannot even look at it, the armour just serves as a constant reminder at how she nearly abandoned the man she loved to live in a world without her in it. The armour she wore when Cinder Fall almost killed her and sent her into the void to never be remembered.

How can she wear the armour again?

She even doesn’t put her hair into the ponytail it always has been in for the past few months, she just lets it hang. Channelling her Inner-Jaune Arc of just not caring anymore. But for her it seems wrong for her to not be doing this, not wearing makeup or having a ponytail or her armour. Everyone struggles to see her as Pyrrha without all of this, not through malice but with concern.

All except for Jaymes by the looks of things.

She takes her gym gear and with a sigh she walks away from them all, walking towards the door to get to the building. She continues down her path to the stairs that lead to the door that goes outside. She carefully steps down each step with her towel over her shoulder and her water bottle in her hand. Pyrrha looks around when she walks outside, the bitter cold air of Autumn brushes against her body – the coming of Winter is near. She can feel it in the slowly freezing over air.

Pyrrha knows the way to the gym, and surprisingly it is one of the least damaged buildings in the entire complex. Some storage areas are untouched, which is where most supplies have been stored for safe keeping, protecting them from the weather. And from any thieves, it is entirely possible that Thieves and Bandits will attempt to rob them whilst repairs are under way.

The Grimm are not the only threat to the school now...

She continues to walk through but as she walks she feels her foot bump against something, and when she stops she slowly looks down. She could feel the metallic clang when she hit it, and she stares at it, seeing her own reflection in the visor. It is a destroyed, and a little rusted Atlesian Knight from the Battle of Beacon. The sparks have stopped bleeding from the severed cables and ruptured pieces of hardware.
The Atlesian Scientists have been working extremely hard to rid the network of the plague that infected their servers. Infected their machines, their weapons and their ships, crippling their military completely. The effects can still be seen on the faces of these machines, imagining the red glow of their visors...all because a virus was uploaded into the C.C.T. The Black Queen could have more effects than they even realise, a second reason to get rid of it before booting the C.C.T Network back up.

Things...

Are still on shaky ground, the Valerian Council has become severely at odd with the Atlesians, even despite their aid in repairing the damage done to both the school and the nearest portion of the city to the school itself. With hundreds dead, a war breaking out would not be crazy to presume – especially considering how it looked like a terrorist attack. Things are bad, and they need to be extremely careful.

Both because of the Grimm and each other.

As she stares at the Atlesian Knight, her sight extends to the reflection of her own face, seeing the one that wrought this destruction. If she had not killed Penny during the Vytal Festival and the Tournament itself...maybe...maybe this never would have happened. And a war would not be so perilously close as well.

She shuts her eyes with a sigh, storming away from the destroyed Atlesian Knight that has been shattered on the ground. She keeps walking and walking, completely alone in the night with her hands crossed over her stomach with vulnerability. The Shattered Moon watching over her as she approaches the gym, the doors open up before her as she walks in.

It is really weird, when she goes in it is silent, usually there is music playing, yet there is none. As she walks inside though, the air conditioning is still online. She approaches the many things inside, looking around to see the treadmill that she wants to use. She sighs heavily as she walks to the machine, her emerald eyes glancing up to the clock on the wall, by the window where the Shattered Moon watches her. The crumbling chalk white moon just floats so peacefully above this chaotic world that has peace crumbling away just as its form does.

Pyrrha has never forgotten what she heard her mother say when she left her room when she was little. That the Moon protects them...and that they should fear it becoming whole.

The question is, what does that even mean?

She huffs when she stares at what the time is. “4:37am? Gods Pyrrha...what are you doing?” She sighs as she glances over to the clock on the wall. She sets her emerald fields onto the treadmill controls and she bolsters her mind, quitting her self-moping. “Alright, snap out of it Pyrrha. Do something productive with your time.” She says to herself.

However before she even gets started on the treadmill...

She hears a collection of punches against a punching bag with heavy and aggressive grunts and even yells from a young man. She raises a brow with curiosity as she steps off the treadmill and she walks towards where she heard the punching bag taking a few hits. She slowly approaches the source to see who else is here at this time of night, and it was not who she was expecting.

Scarlet David, or maybe even Jaymes Ickford – but it is Sun.

He has his shirt off as he smashes his fists over and over again against the orange punching bag,
with bandages wrapped around his knuckles. Sweat sprays off his body with every swing he makes in the attacks, grunting and yelling with anger. His muscles toned across his body and throwing powerful slams into the leather bag. He presses his hand against the swinging bag to stop it from hitting him in the face, sweat dripping from his blonde hair.

His blue eyes turn when he senses that someone is looking at him, seeing Pyrrha stood there with her hand gently touching the pillar behind him. He sighs with laboured breath, exhausted, he must have been here for a while. “Hey, Pyrrha.” Sun greets to her, exhaling as he releases the bag and squeezes his sore wrist from how hard he has been punching that bag.

“Hello, Sun...what are you doing up so early?” Pyrrha softly asks him, and he chuckles.

“I bet my reason is the same as yours.” Sun states, turning to look at her, rubbing the sweat from his brow.

She sighs as she walks over to the tap on the wall to refill her bottle of water. “Can’t sleep either?” She presumes.

“Gods no...” He groans, having to sit down. Pyrrha fills up her bottle, and being the generous soul that she is she offers it to him. Since he does not have one in sight. He looks at the bottle curiously and then smiles, accepting the offer. “Thanks.”

“Did you have a nightmare?” She asks him, wondering if he is suffering in the same way.

“Nah...you’d have to fall asleep in the first place. I mean Team R.W.B are okay, we let them crash in our dorm till theirs is fixed up. But it wasn’t the floor that was keeping me up.” Sun explains, holding his shaking wrist, his heart palpitations are through the roof right now.

“What do you mean?” Pyrrha inquires.

“Well...Corpse pickup work is not as glamorous as you might think.” He sarcastically says to her with a nervous chuckle. Pyrrha softly chuckles too but more for his expense. “Some of the people we found...we found one dude dead from a building collapse. He was just out to get his kids some snacks.” He sighs.

Without him realising this does hurt Pyrrha, because she already has been blaming herself for everything that has happened. Penny’s death and the attack that followed straight afterwards. It may have been all part of Cinder’s evil scheme to destroy the Academy but it does not make it any less painful to hear about how some people died during the attack. She looks at Sun, the boy that has always displayed such joy and adorable stupidity – now looks so tired and broken.

Pyrrha crouches down beside him as she looks at him, she has not really known Sun very well since they have not always been very close. They are both opposite ends of the spectrum but she knows a good person when she meets one. And he is one of the purest of all of them, all he cares about is helping his friends, and never expecting anything in return. “Then...why did you volunteer for the job?” Pyrrha asks him, and he sighs.

“Because it’s my duty.” He answers, looking over to her, and he squeezes his eyes shut. “You may blame yourself Pyrrha...but you’re not the only one with blaming to be pinned on.” He reveals, getting a raised eyebrow from the red headed girl.

“What do you mean?” Pyrrha asks, and he presses one hand against his head with self resentment.

“During the battle...I should have been there to help Blake...I could have helped her take on that Adam guy. But I wasn’t there for her, the one time I let her handle something herself she nearly
died, and Yang lost her arm...maybe if I was there to help...Yang wouldn’t have been amputated...and Blake wouldn’t have been stabbed.” He sighs as he continues to dwell on this matter, pushing his hand through his messy blonde hair.

“That isn’t your fault, Sun. You were defending the school with everyone else.” Pyrrha reminds.

“They could have held it without me – I was hardly any difference against those Paladins anyway. It was Weiss and Velvet that destroyed them in the end, not me. I didn’t land a hit, it was all them. And whilst I was stood there, Blake got stabbed and Yang lost her arm.” He sighs, and when he says it like that Pyrrha can see why he feels this way. It is not the same to her form of self judgement, for this is about not doing enough...and Pyrrha’s is about doing too much.

“So yeah...there’s that.” Sun says as he stands up, cracking his neck to start punching that bag again. He just pictures the masked man with every punch he throws at the back, imagining the mask breaking from each punch. Bloodying his face for what he did to the girl that he loves, how he wants to rip this man apart.

Pyrrha is no fool, she can see it with Ren and Nora and she feels it for Jaune...he loves Blake with all his heart. “Have you...talked to her?” Pyrrha asks him.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t matter. Nothing anyone can say will make me view the situation any differently...she nearly died because I failed to act. I won’t make that decision again, and I will do whatever I can to atone. And if that means a bunch of sleepless nights and days of dirty work? Then I’ll take it.” Sun states as he raises his fists up to punch the living hell out of a bag again.

Pyrrha sees his pain, but she also knows how he fights and that he is quite a competitive dude. And thus an idea comes to her head along with a sneaky little smile on her face. She puts her towel beside the bottle Sun had placed by the bench and she taps Sun’s shoulder to get him to turn. She raises her forearms up and she circles him. “C’mon, show me what you’ve got.” Pyrrha challenges, getting a surprised look from Sun.

“Uh...Pyrrha? You do know I’m not above hitting a girl you know?” He asks her.

“Oh I know, I saw the N.D.G.O vs. S.S.S.N fight.” Pyrrha assures with a smile on her face, something few people have seen in quite a while. However the reason is simple, she is able to connect with someone who is also suffering from a similar form of grief that she does. A friend she has never really given the time to getting to know.

Sun smirks, cracking his neck before his knuckles. “Alright then, Pyrrha. Let’s see what you’ve got.” Sun challenges in return, holding his fists up as circles Pyrrha, ready to dodge any attack that she will make. Pyrrha watches every single move he makes with her emerald eyes, from the footwork to the very way he looks at her. His face scrunches and she prepares since she knows that is the first sign of someone preparing to attack.

Sun swings his fist at her, but she ducks down and she thrusts her arms up into his forearm and bicep, sliding round and swiping him off his feet with her legs. He yelps as he falls over, landing on the floor on his ass, looking at her as she rises back up. “Try not to give away your attacks, gives your enemy the upper hand.” She advises, and Sun chuckles.

“Where’d you learn that?” Sun asks.

She smiles but it is not a full smile, since she does not have overly fond memories of her mentor. “My father.”
“Your father trained you?” The voice of sun echoed as she remembers, whilst still sparring with the Monkey Faunus.

“Yes...I enjoyed the training...but he was not a perfect man.” Pyrrha remembers, as her memory begins to form from the embers of time itself.

“What was his name?” Sun asks.

“Anaximander Nikos.”

Her memory forms the landscape of which she trained – the Nikos Estate – with trees of blooming red flowers around the garden of which where they train. Mannequins made from straw and wooden skeletons stand around the area in different locations along with wooden swords and plastic shields.

However those training weapons have gathered dust since then, abandoned since her training has improved. Fall has come, but the little girl has no idea of what comes for her life soon. The sun glows in the sapphire Blue Mistralalian skies, reflecting off the glossy windows of the mansion she lives in. With mahogany wood comprising the building, it stands tall with outstanding architecture.

The silence of the morning however is broken by the screech of a wild animal.

“YAAGH!” The little red headed girl yells as she throws her discus shield over arm at her opponent. The shield spins through the air like a Frisbee, just about to clatter him right in the head. It whistles in the air as it shoots closer and closer towards him, slicing through the blue flesh of sky. The much larger Greek-Looking Spartan of a man held up his bigger shield which dwarfed her own, and it bounced right off, but still made him stagger.

He staggers back with a hearty chuckle, looking to his small daughter. “Atta girl! Vast improvements made since!” He cheers with a grin, rolling his arm and massaging the ropes of muscle in his shoulder. But the training is not over yet, for she charges towards him before he raises his shield, which follows with another proud laugh from the huge man.

He dwarfs the little girl with his massive appearance, that of a warrior. A long red silken robe wraps around his neck and cloaks over his right arm, bare chest beneath which reveals his broad muscles of a warrior. A leather pteryges skirt covers him down to his thighs, then his bronze greaves. His left arm bares a bronze gauntlet, which normally his Hoplite shield would attach to. He’d obviously just gotten back from a dangerous hunt from some of the signs of environmental weathering on his clothes.

Yet here he stands, training his daughter with full strength.

A bushy red beard attaches to his long wavy Slick backed Vermilion locks. Said beard and moustache curls up at the edges as he lays his eyes on his daughter, hazel eyes filled with warmth.

But in this moment of training, he is ready for anything as Pyrrha charges towards him. She jumps at him and she lands on his shield, leaping straight off to throw her spear at him, in which he smashes aside, running towards where she comes to land. However as she floats through the air, she lands onto one of the pillars which hold the large balcony out above the garden. She thrusts off the pillar, rolling the landing off as she catches her smaller version of Milo and uses her polarity to pull Akuou right back onto her arm.

Anaximander laughs as he sees her pulling off that landing, and he rushes towards her, swinging
her with force, but she rolls across the shield and his back to attack his aura. He grunts, but swiftly spirals back round with his shield and smashes it into the ground where she was stood.

The fighting looks like they are trying to kill each other, but they know their limits and will never keep fighting if they get too close to the point of breaking each other’s auras.

Pyrrha rolls out of the way, stumbling for a second as well as she raises her shield to stop his attack with a metallic boom. But then she gasps when she feels his blade pressed to her belly. She looks at the blade with widened eyes, realising she left an area unguarded where an enemy to could attack her.

“I loved my father...but he was difficult.” Pyrrha narrated to Sun as they spar.

“How so?” Sun curiously asks.

“He was raised by warriors, and so fighting was the only thing he really knew. It was how he grew up and learned...and so that is how he raised me. My mother didn’t overly agree with it, but she never argued with him.” Pyrrha continues to narrate.

“Did he...hurt her?” Sun nervously asks.

“What? No! No...not at all, he loved my mother. It’s just he can be very persuasive, and that he wanted me to be better. To always be better...I never really understood what he meant by that.” Pyrrha explains.

“To be better at fighting?” Sun presumes.

“I think so...but he is always so good with riddles.” She sighs as she explains to him. “He...struggled with raising me outside of training, which was my mother’s job after all. I guess what I’m trying to say is...whenever I think of my father...I just see a sword and shield, not a teddy bear like most people.” Pyrrha continues.

Anaximander takes her shield and he smashes it against her chest, knocking her over, the way he always would during combat training. “You still need to improve on your defence.” Anaximander reminds as he points her shield at her.

Little Pyrrha huffs, taking her small spear and stabbing it into the soil as she crosses her legs and stares at the floor. Anaximander calms down, snapping out of his training mode so then he can try and be more like her mother. He approaches the little thing and crouches down beside her, lifting her chin up with his finger. ‘Gentle Little Wing...what’s wrong?’ He asks her, calling her by her sweet little nickname that his wife had given her when she was born.

She rests her crossed wrists atop the weapon as she sits there with a frowny face, staring at the shield in her father’s hand. “Sweetheart I know the shield is a hand-me-down at the moment but we will have a new one made for you when you are ready. And your own Triple Changing Spear.” He promises.

Milo and Akuou.

However the man is just as Pyrrha describes, he would only focus on the simple things like this when it came to raising her. A weapon or a style of training, but he could never see when there is something else on her mind. Something far more personal than a trinket.

“And he never believed that friendship was important in my training.” Pyrrha states to Sun.
“What?”

Little Pyrrha sits there, slowly lifting her head to look to her father, with the beating Mistralian Summer Sun illuminating the vivid pink flowers which hang overhead. It transforms them into their own form of pinkish lanterns of beautiful light.

The scent of lavender fills the air – a hay fever sufferer’s nightmare.

“It’s...not the spear or the shield.” Pyrrha softly says to her father as she sits there, and Anaximander raises an eyebrow.

“Then what is it, my dear? Is the armour too tight?” Still not noticing that it has absolutely nothing to do with armour, weapons or training.

“No! Gods why is it only fighting with you that matters?” She snaps, standing up so suddenly and getting a shocked look from her father as she storms around the garden with a grunting sound.

“Pyrrha...what is on your mind?” He asks her, and she stops staring straight at his hazel coloured eyes.

“The fact that I have nobody to spend my time _outside_ of training with.” She softly says to him, and he obnoxiously rolls his eyes when she says that to him, standing up with a strained groan.

“This again?” He questions, and little Pyrrha narrows her eyes.

“Why do you not care?” Pyrrha weakly says with a broken voice, staring up at her father.

“I do – and that is why it is better for it to be this way. Trust me on this.” Anaximander demands.

“But every day at school is a struggle! Nobody talks to me and whenever I try they only seem interested in what I have. Nobody likes me.” She sniffles, sitting down on the sandstone step of the Nikos Family’s Private Estate that they own. She hugs the bronze plating of her knees, emerald eyes darting to the sand as it washes gritty warmth over her bare toes and sandals.

“Jealousy is an ugly colour.” Anaximander sighs as he stares down at her.

“And yet I wear it oh so well!” She sarcastically grumbles, rolling her emerald fields at his statements. Her father seats himself beside her with an aged groan, looking out at the lush green gardens over the top of the stone walls that encase the impressive Estate. Where the sandy colours meet the hazy blue skies. “If anyone’s jealous, father...it’s me.”

“Why ever so?” Anaximander leans on his knees, Pyrrha raises an eyebrow at him sceptically.

“Because they have what I don’t, father?”

“And what don’t you have?”

“Friends! Happiness! Jokes that they all get, balls to catch and play with...people they love.” She sniffs.

“What did I tell you? Those friends will come in time, and that your training _must_ come first for you to excel. I want you to have a bright future, Pyrrha.” Anaximander tells her.

“And in such isolation the future looks so dark.” She softly says in return. “I cannot wait to leave Sanctum.” She huffs, looking up at the lilac buds which hang over their heads. Anaximander sighs heavily, lacing his fingers together and tapping his thumbs.
“Do you believe in Destiny, Pyrrha?” He asks his daughter. She lifts a brow and listens intently on his words. “Yes, well, I suppose the issue with Destiny is a loaded question. Nearly everyone wants to believe in the concept. Of course, like everything, there are people who believe that there are no gods watching over us all. No purpose...no point to life...but it’s incredibly tough living that philosophy in the day-to-day problems that we endure.” He huffs.

“You have grown into a wonderful young woman, Pyrrha. Blossoming with wonderful potential! I have never – ever – seen anyone fight like you do at the young age of fourteen. It’s incredible, you have a heart of pure gold...you clearly get that from your mother and not this old brute.” Anaximander chuckles as he pounds his own chest, usually that would make Pyrrha giggle but she utters not a sound. “We all have a destiny, Gentle Little Wing, and I believe you will take flight one day. You will bring great things upon the world.”

He stands up and picks up her weapons. “But before you can...”

She sighs because she knows what he is about to say.

“You must improve.” He states, holding her shield out to her.

“Again.”

Back in the present...

Pyrrha ducks underneath Sun’s punch and she delivers a skilled counter attack which is a strike straight to his chest to knock him back. Sun yells, jumping up in the air to kick her in the head but she rolls underneath him, and when she rises back up she kicks him in the back of the leg. She spirals round and swings her fist downwards at him, but Sun stops her fist with his forearm.

The Monkey Faunus goes to swipe her over with his tail but she instantly detects his plan and jumps over the tail, landing down on the other side and she goes for a roundhouse kick attack on him, but Sun ducks underneath her boot, and he rushes forward, going to slam into her side. But she slides round him like a worm and she stands firmly behind him.

Sun jumps and wraps his tail around a piece of the ceiling above him, swinging round to kick her with both feet. She rolls aside again, and he lands with a crash, spiralling round to hit her with his tail, but she stops his fluffy blonde tail with her arm, grabbing his tail and pulling him round to punch him in the face.

But then...

He rolls and lands the dismount, and he swings his fist right at her, and that time he hits her, and then pins her to the wall. “Gotcha!” He cheers, until he feels the water bottle press to his chest.

“Good thing it’s not a blade.” She reminds with a smirk, and Sun chuckles, releasing her, cracking his neck.

“Damn...you really are good. I’d hate to challenge your dad.” He chuckles.

“I know, I doubt I could take him even now.” Pyrrha softly giggles with a bright smile on her face.

Jaune would be ever so grateful for Sun being able to make her happy just by sparring with her. She stretches her arms as she wipes sweat from her brow, stood tall with muscular definition in her body just as Sun does. Despite the fact she looks so much smaller in comparison to him. “Well...I
guess you’re the teacher now. I was taught by my mom and dad before I went to Haven...but I’d love to do this again.” Sun says with a smile.

It warms her heart.

Because finally.

She has her friends, people that want to learn from her and be around her. And Sun will always be there for his friends.

“I’d be happy to oblige.” Pyrrha kindly assures with a smile, and Sun nods to her.

“Thanks...really made my day.” Sun assures, since it has gotten his job off his mind for once.

“You too.” Pyrrha kindly replies.

Because so did he.

Jaune

He sighs as he lays there, staring endlessly up at the ceiling, and thinking about Pyrrha now that she is unexpectedly not here. His fingers drum constantly atop his chest as he lies there, wondering what she could possibly be up to or simply where she is. He can already presume that she has been suffering with night terrors, it would not be a huge surprise if she has been. She did nearly die on top of that tower only a few days ago.

That would give anyone night terrors.

But with the sun beginning to rise and the moon sinking behind the horizon, he pulls out his new scroll after he smashed the other one when he yelled with anguish after thinking he will lose Pyrrha from his life. He opens the scroll and he opens up his BeaconBook account that he has made, connecting him with all the students of Beacon, and seeing any new pieces of news that has appeared.

Velvet Scarlatina – Four Hours Ago

Oh my gosh, please can you all have a look at my Photography Portfolio? I hope you’ll like it, I wanted to capture all your faces for the Vytal Festival! Heart you! : ) xx

Attached Comment from User: Coco Adel

You best like them or I’ll break you, love ya lots!

4 likes 8 shares

Jaune chuckles, seeing the comment by the almost Split Personality comment by Coco there, so then he decides to have a look, he doesn’t wanna get shattered by Coco after all. As he opens the portfolio, he sees the many stunning shots that Velvet got of them all for the Vytal Festival. There’s Sun sticking his tongue out with a grin and Neptune peeking over his shoulder about to scare him.

Pretty sure Sun bit his tongue after that.
Then there is Yang...with both arms...something that is heartbreaking to see, but all the love seems to be surrounding her and hopes for her to get well soon. She has Ruby in a gentle headlock, and only Ruby would be smiling in that scenario. Stood next to Yang with her arms crossed and a shocked expression is Weiss, about to yell at Yang probably. Then on her right is Blake, who just smiles at the camera, completely ignoring the sisters next to her.

The next picture shows Cardin with him trying to bench press his entire team, and from the motion blur in the next picture it is clear that it didn’t end well. Jaune cannot help but admire her for this, since she and Cardin have not really had the best track record. But it is clear that both Cardin and his entire team are turning a new leaf over. They were already doing it before the Battle of Beacon, but after the Battle?

They have changed very quickly.

He keeps scrolling through and he looks past her portfolio now to other posts that have been put on there.

But one...

One makes him sick to his stomach.

A link by Glynda with some...angry to say the least...text above it.

*Look at this disgusting campaign! I will not have this!*

It shows a campaign started up by random people across Remnant, not Jaymes either. It does seem like his moment of yelling at Pyrrha seems to be down to some form of condition opposed to him just being a jerk.

*Pyrrha Nikos – The Killer – Must be Punished!*

*Invincible Girl? Let’s see how long that lasts in prison after she butchered that poor little girl. We are starting this petition to make sure that the red headed bitch gets put behind bars for the rest of her life.*

*Is this what we can expect from the Valerian Government?*

*She must pay for what she did!*

*Who’s with us?*

*120 signatures*

It makes him sick to his stomach to see there are one hundred and twenty people across the world that want to make this girl suffer so much. He squeezes his phone tight with anger, nearly crushing it as he stares at it. He gets up forcefully from his bed and he storms out of his room, opening the door and leaning against the wall, closing his phone as he tries to get his anger out.

But everyone is asleep.

He doesn’t want to wake them.

He looks around and he turns when he sees a yawny Weiss Schnee wandering down the hallway on her own, wearing her dressing gown that is made of white fluffy cotton. Her hair is messy and loose as she wanders down the hallway. She rubs her eye and then she looks at Jaune with a gasp,
feeling indecent. “Oh! Jaune! I’m indecent!” She yelps.

“It’s fine.” Jaune assures as he leans against the wall, still thinking about that disgusting petition to put Pyrrha behind bars. Weiss instantly latches onto the fact that Jaune is clearly struggling right now. She approaches him and she looks up at him curiously.

“Jaune? Are you okay?” She asks him gently.

“I was...till I saw this.” He says, handing the scroll to her without even looking at the petition. Her large blue eyes scan the text and he watches as her eyes seem to ignite with anger, her face scrunching up by the mere cheek of these people to try this on Pyrrha Nikos.

“Are you freaking serious?” Weiss ignites, about to yell with rage but Jaune covers her mouth, and so then she does not wake anyone up.

“Just because we can’t sleep doesn’t mean anyone else should wake up.” He whispers to her, and she rolls her eyes.

“Fine.” She whispers. “But how dare they? She never meant to, and I knew Penny! Argh, this stuff angers me!” She whispers with a yell.

“Trust me, I know.” Jaune assures as he stands there, closing his scroll and shoving it back into his pocket. He looks over at the Schnee Heiress. “Y’know, you look good with your hair loose like that.” He compliments with a smile, and she raises a brow.

“You’re not trying to flirt with me again are you? Because I will smack you.” She warns, making Jaune chuckle.

“Ooh no, I wouldn’t wanna step on Neptune’s turf.” He jokes and her eyes widen and she blushes shyly.

“Huh? I dunno what you’re talking about.” Weiss stammers nervously as she looks away from him.

“I’m just pulling your hair.” Jaune assures, and she narrows her eyes.

“You better not be.” She warns.

“Just a figure of speech.” He defends, making her softly giggle. Jaune sighs as he stands there, crossing his arms as he leans against the wall. “So...how are you three doing? Heard Team S.S.S.N let you crash at their dorm till your room gets fixed up.” Jaune asks her.

“Yeah...it was really nice of them to do that.” Weiss says with a smile, thinking of Neptune and how he let her use his bed. “I felt bad for taking Nep’s bed though.”

“Eh, guys can sleep anywhere.” Jaune chuckles.

“That’s exactly what they said.” She states.

“It’s a gift we have.” Jaune assures with a smile.

“Blake as upset that her books were burnt, our beds were destroyed, window...everything.” Weiss sighs as she pictures the destruction in their room again.

“Well, we’re all here for each other, remember.” Jaune assures.

“Thanks...I noticed Sun wasn’t there when I woke up though.” Weiss says to Jaune with concern in
her voice.

“Well, considering the job he and his team volunteered for...I doubt he can sleep well either.”

“I doubt anyone can.”

“Yeah...hopefully this all changes soon.” Jaune sighs heavily.

Hopefully the light will shine again.

And the Grimm will leave.
The Mistralian Phoenix locks up the gym with a sigh, and walks away down the halls of the Dormitory Block, a solemn look in her eyes. She is still upset, sparring with Sun has helped her a lot though, not only because it felt normal, but also because she could relate to him with his problems. However it was not enough for her to get over her depression that she feels, and with the world turning against her and forming petitions to put her in solitary confinement...

...getting over what happened is not gonna be easy for her.

It feels like that everything she has ever done in her life, all the good she has done for people and everything she has sacrificed to protect innocents is worth completely nothing. For hundreds of people just brush everything she did before and even after what happened in the accident off and judge her for one mistake that she made.

Every day she waits to hear the Atlesian Police Force to arrive, and will take her away and lock her away in the Black Gallows. The Black Gallows is the most feared prison on Remnant where the worst of the worst are taken away. Or Rogue Huntsmen are captured and are kept there.

No one leaves the Black Gallows.

And that is what frightens her, waking up to see the Storm – the Black Gallows Police Force – black armour plating with deep red visors staring into her soul. Enough reason to be terrified, because they are more dangerous than any Huntsmen or Huntress because they will always find them. Many even believe that they have their eyes on all Huntsmen at all times, either the Black Gallows or Atlas – or maybe even both.

Pyrrha massages her temples as she arrives at the door to her dorm, shaking her fears of the Black Gallows from her body. She scans her scroll gently and she opens the door, a long sweeping arc of artificial light floods the dark room. She quickly steps in and shuts the door with a click, sighing with relief that nobody woke up.

Especially not Nora, because she is demonic when woken up mid sleep.

But one of them is awake, but not by her. “Are you okay?” Jaune speaks; his voice emerging from the dark startles her. She stares at his bed with wide eyes as he rolls over from the wall to face her. He had tried to get some more sleep after waking up, as did Weiss, but clearly he has been struggling as well.

“Oh! I’m so sorry, Jaune, d-did I wake you?” She adorably asks him with guilt in her voice.

“No.” Jaune assures as he sits up, rubbing his face.

“Oh. That’s good then, I’m just going to –”

“You didn’t answer my question, Pyrrha.” His sapphire oceans harden as he frowns, Pyrrha huffs and shrinks under his gaze.

“I umm...went to the gym, I couldn’t sleep.” She answers softly with saddened eyes.
“You were asleep earlier.” Jaune mutters, Pyrrha’s eyebrows suddenly pinch downwards with anger.

“Yes. Then I woke up. People do that sometimes, Jaune.” She snaps uncharacteristically, immediately filled with so much regret from the tone she chose with the love of her life. Jaune sighs, with a humourless smile as he shakes his head.

“Okay.” He scoffs, nodding and going to lie down again.

“What do you mean...okay?” She challenges as she tilts her head, trying to keep her voice as soft as she can to not disturb Nora and Ren.

“I said okay.” Jaune shrugs as he eyes the ceiling, but Pyrrha scoffs and chews her lip.

“I know what you said, it was the way you said it.”

“I just said okay, jeez, people do that sometimes, Pyrrha.” Jaune snarks, Pyrrha returns with a deeper scowl.

“That was unkind.”

“Mhm, so’s not answering my question...again.” Jaune quips.

“Oh I’m not playing these games with you Jaune, just...go to sleep.” She sighs, pinching her brow as she moves towards the bathroom. Jaune scoffs a forced dry laugh at her order.

“Yeah, just...go to sleep, right? Close your eyes and the sandman’ll take ya.” Jaune sits up and he stares at her as she stands in the doorway of the bathroom. “It ever occurred to you that I’m – oh, I dunno – worried about you?”

“Don’t be...nobody else does.” Pyrrha mutters from the bathroom door with saddened eyes, and Jaune scoffs.

“How can you say that? Everyone has your back!” He defends.

“Because there is nothing to worry about! I can handle my punishment when it comes for me!” She yells, expressing her fear of the Black Gallows coming to take her away from her family forever. She grips the doorframe as Nora and Ren stir, she looks at the other two as they begin to rise up and she tries desperately to correct her mistake of yelling. “Oh, no! J-Just go back to –”

“What’s going on?” Nora rubs her cyan eyes, Pyrrha drops her head into her hands with her stress building and building like the pressure in a can.

“Is everything alright?” Ren asks, yawning into his hand.

“Pyrrha, will you just talk to me, I thought we had a pretty good heart to heart yesterday?” Jaune asks softly.

All the voices.

All the questions.

It grows to a crescendo that causes Pyrrha to snap, quite explosively as well. “Just shut up! Shut up and leave me alone, all of you!” Pyrrha screams, collapsing to her knees in the doorway, sobbing into her palms uncontrollably. Nora stares at Ren, eyes wide with worry and concern, Jaune immediately springs up from his bed and he pads over to Pyrrha, kneeling down beside her and
“No. You shut up.” Jaune says, rubbing her back in soothing circles to calm her tearful rage down. “You’re not okay, and you’ll continue to not be okay unless you let us help you.”

“Why do I matter so much?” Pyrrha looks up at him, eyes filled with glossy tears in the dark room. Jaune breathes out a heavily, icy pain gripping his warm heart.

“How can you say that?” Jaune blinks. “How – after everything can you say that?”

“Because...I’m a mess...a failure...I can’t sleep, and when I do...I see her...about to kill me. I wish she did so this pain would be over.” She sniffles, before feeling his hands touch her face and lift her head up so her eyes meet his.

“Shut. Up.” Jaune snaps, silencing the muttering pair beside him, Pyrrha blinks at his anger. “Don’t ever say that to me or anyone ever again, do I make myself clear?” He states like an order, yet one that is all for her betterment.

“Wh...”

“Pyrrha!”

“Y-Yes...” She mutters, eyes clearing as she blushes. “I’m sorry...I...”

“You’re only human Pyrrha.” He hugs her to his chest as they both remain sat down in the doorway to the bathroom, cold tiles on one leg, warm carpet on the other. “You need to remember that, there is only so much you can do.”

“Mmm.” She balls up his hoodie in her hands, sniffling into his neck. Jaune looks up at Ren and Nora and he gives a small smile to comfort their worries.

“Hey...” He gently smiles as he strokes her red hair that she has tied into a ponytail after her session training with Sun. “You’re hair’s tied up again. I missed that. I always liked your warrior wolf tail.” He grins as she gives a mixture of sobs and giggles at his kind words. He soberes and kisses her hair.

“Well...I was sparring with Sun, thought it’d be better if I tied my hair up instead of it being in my face all the time.” She says to him, and he looks surprised.

“Sun? What’s he doing up at this time?” He inquires.

“Same reason as us.” She says to him sadly, since of all the people they both had hoped that Sun would be the one who would be able to brush what happened aside. But when you have to collect the corpses of people you once knew and then burn them to prevent the spread of any Pathogens...that is enough to mess with anybody’s heads.

“Nightmares?” Jaune presumes.

“Mhm.” Pyrrha softly nods as she leans into his lovingly warm arms. “Having to collect all the dead...it’s been hurting the poor guy. So I sparred with him...guess we both are going through the same thing.”

Jaune smiles, even when she suffers like this she still does whatever she can to help other people. “Y’know you really should think about yourself for once.” Jaune chuckles, admiring her kindness.
“So should he.” She giggles.

“Well...maybe we can always be there for each other.” Jaune reminds as he looks at her, and she looks up at him and she sighs.

“Yeah...maybe you’re right.”

Jaune

Sunlight begins to well over the horizon in hot tears of pastel orange and inky pink, Jaune wakes to the frustrating screaming of his alarm clock. He goes on muscle memory and just swats the button to his right to silence it, yet he finds nothing but cool air instead. He opens his sleepy crusty eyes, noticing how the first thing that he can see is the edge of Ren’s bed and how distant his alarm sounds right now.

It is on the edge of Ren’s bedside table, not on top of Jaune’s.

He looks around and sees he is sat and leaned against the bathroom doorframe, then feeling her shift and wiggle in his embrace still. Feeling her arms tighten around his waist, her movements engage his eyes to look downwards to where she has snuggled up to him and still sound asleep. She hugs around his middle and curls up against his lap, nestling her head into the crook of his left elbow.

He sighs and strokes her red hair from her closes emerald eyes; her gentle breathes painting arm spots over his hand. He gingerly extradites himself from her grip, laying her gently on the carpet as he pads over to the alarm so then he can silence it with his hand. Jaune rubs his face as Nora and Ren begin to stir from their slumber.

He pads his way back over to Pyrrha, gently hooking an arm under her legs and around her back, bridal style. If she were awake then she would be imploding with glee to have him carry her like this, feelings she will never forget from the prom dance. The Arc Knight hefts her upwards gently to not wake her, and he paces over to her bed in order to softly place her onto the crisp bedding, but to find it covered in her strewn armour. He huffs, knowing she cannot even look at her armour even now...so he decides to place her down onto his bed, before heading to the bathroom and to empty his bladder.

Content, he brushes his teeth and ruffles his hair in the mirror before rejoining the slowing awakening team. “Say...Ren?” He asks the awakening Kuroyurian. He grumbles as he sits up, rubbing his knackered eye with his fist.

“Mmm?” He grumbles as he blinks his magenta eyes at him.

“When do classes start up again?” Jaune asks as he arches his back, a few pops echo out from the crunches. Ren taps his chin, pondering as wisely as ever.

“In a weeks’ time I believe, but I doubt it will be the same. So much damage to the school, we all need to help the workers as best we can.” Ren says to him as he shrugs his shoulders, throwing his covers off his body and yawning into his palm. Nora still slowly returns back to the land of the living, sitting in her bed and hugging her sloth, eyes fluttering shut again. Ren huffs and he walks around his bed to poke her nose, waking her with a squeak.
“Boop. C’mon, we gotta get up.” Ren reminds her, and the grumpy and sleepy little Valkyrie sighs.

“Okay...okay Renny.” She yawns as she throws her covers off and slumps onto her feet, walking like a zombie towards the bathroom to take a shower and to brush her teeth. Jaune looks over to Pyrrha, noticing she is still sound asleep on his bed. He kneels down besides her, stroking the hair from her eyes yet again, smiling as she gently breathes slow and languid breaths. He stops himself, flinching his hand away and furrowing his brow at the hand like it had done the heinous act on its own.

“What’re you doing, man?” He sighs to himself, getting up and rubbing his face up and down, shaking his head to the ceiling.

“Jaune. You err, gonna shower, or...” Nora asks, almost hoping for him to say no so then she can go first.

Her wish is granted. “After breakfast, you go ahead.” He assures.

“Thanks Jaune! You’re the best!” Nora sings as she shuts the bathroom door with a click.

“Nora! I’m still in here!” Ren’s muffled voice yelled with shock.

“Oh you’ve seen it all before, stop being a baby!” Nora giggled, and Jaune can just picture poor Ren having to awkwardly cover his eyes.

Jaune chuckles and massages his chin thoughtfully and he looks at the armour on Pyrrha’s bed. He sets to work on organising it better – because it looks like an animal had just thrown it there. Ironically that is one of the clearest signs that Pyrrha is still in there, because she is not as neat as she usually should be. Which surprises Jaune greatly with how regal she always seemed and perfect.

But when it comes to organising her clothes?

It is a mess.

At least some things don’t change.

He stacks the plates on one another, corset at the head of the bed and resting her circlet on the pillow. He folds up her sash and he sets the fabric down at the side of the armour set, before opening his bedside table’s drawer, fishing out a notepad and pen, scribbling a pen.

Hey Pyrrha,

We’ve just gone to breakfast, let you sleep in. Y’know we figured you needed it and deserved it...and I’m scared of you in the mornings.

Please don’t ever think like that again, though...in all seriousness...we need you so, so much. I need you.

Missed your Wolf Tail, warrior.

He sets it down onto the table but then he chuckles as he comes up with a jokey little P.S Note he can add.

He scribbles it down at the bottom of the page.

P.S – I cleaned up your bed too, you filthy animal XD
Ruby

Ruby holds onto her tray of breakfast and she sits down on the bench with her three teammates and Team S.S.S.N who look just as tired as they do. Scarlet groans as he pokes his broccoli with his fork, tired bags under his eyes as he sits there, and Sage sits down beside him, his sword still sheathed onto his back, ready just in case if something goes wrong. Sun and Neptune walk over too, and as always the only one here that is trying to lighten the mood is Neptune Vasillias. He has a tray with a bunch of food on it, practically everything and Weiss’ eyes widen when she sees how much food is there. She almost gags from just imagining having to eat that much in comparison to her tiny adorable plate with little bits of food on it. “How much food?” She questions, and Neptune looks at her and shrugs his shoulders.

“What?” He questions.

“That is enough to feed a small town.” Weiss comments.

“Or a big town.” Blake adds with a soft chuckle as she eats a spoonful of peas. Neptune chuckles as he digs into his breakfast, whereas Sun is a little less energetic. Something that Blake can notice very quickly, he may have had some help thanks to Pyrrha last night but it hasn’t cured his nightmares and lack of sleep.

Neptune leans back as he eats a bit of bacon and he looks over to Weiss, seeing her still with a shocked look on her face. One eyebrow raised and her mouth partially open as she glares at him. “Look – I’m a big boy I need a big breakfast.” He defends, nearly poking Sun in the eye with his fork.

“Whoa!” Sun exclaims, rearing out of the way of the metal fork.

Oops.” Neptune retracts with a choked face.

“How are you able to eat that much though and still...move?” Ruby asks curiously.

“And stay in shape?” Weiss adds, somehow managing to make it sound like a compliment as well.

“I’ve wondered that myself.” Scarlet agrees and Neptune chuckles.

“It’s a gift.” Neptune chuckles and Sage shakes his head.

“Please don’t encourage him.” Sage begs as he scratches the side of his cheek. Neptune continues to dig in and Weiss starts to eat her tiny plate of food, and Ruby looks over to Sun, feeling the urge to say it again.

“Thank you, guys...really it means the world to us what you did.” She kindly says to Team S.S.S.N and Sun smiles, for all he ever wants is for people to be happy around him. Whether that includes him doesn’t matter, because if they are happy then so is he.

“It’s what friends do, right?” Sun says with the shrug of his shoulders.

“You three are silent sleepers too, Sage on the other hand...” Scarlet hints as his eyes pan over to
the huge green haired man. Mid eating his sandwich he stops with it in his mouth, wide eyed as everybody looks at him. He chews it slowly and takes it from his mouth before swallowing.

“Okay...I know I snore.” Sage begins until Scarlet completely interrupts him, slamming his hands against the table.

“Extremely loudly!” He exclaims, before slumping down and groaning. “For years...”

“Alright, alright – if we’re gonna do this then how about the time where you sneezed so hard in the night your eyeball popped out?” Sage asks him, follows by Scarlet creating a monstrous gagging sound from the horrifically disgusting memory. Sun sighs, putting his fork down, totally put off his breakfast now just from that memory of when he did that and Weiss covers her mouth and Blake just pushes the image from her head.

Neptune and Ruby both just laugh though.

“Thanks for reminding us of that, Sage.” Sun sighs as he crosses his arms over his chest, but Sage just shrugs his shoulders as Scarlet gags into a bin and coughs.

“Everyone stop...” He groans.

“Man...I take it you guys have been together for a while.” Ruby presumes as she looks at Sage and Scarlet, clearly able to tell that those two are closer to each other than the rest.

“Yep – four years.” Sage answers with the firm nod of his head.

“How did you two find each other? Can’t imagine it being your families knew each other or something.” Blake asks curiously as she looks at them.

“Man I wish.” Sage chuckles.

“Grimm Attack.” Scarlet answers.

“Oh no...” Weiss softly gasps as she covers her mouth.

“If you feel bad for the Grimm then you should because luckily nobody got hurt. Pretty funny story actually.” Sage chuckles.

“I grew up in a fishing town in Western Anima long before I actually left to go join Haven Academy; I originally wanted to be like my father. A Pirate that fought for good out on the open seas – but one day when I was sailing with my captain and crew...we got attacked by a Leviathan Grimm.” Scarlet explains to them and Ruby’s eyes widen with shock when she pictures the beast.

Leviathans are extremely rare, like huge serpents with massive pincers on their heads that grab onto anything they see and pull them into their jaws. One of the most dangerous forms of Grimm in the seas, and just the name gives Neptune the shivers due to his fear of the open sea. From the monsters that lurk down there, it is understandable for his fears. “It attacked the ship and we ended up beaching on the shores of one of the beaches. And as it turns out Leviathans don’t give up without a fight. It grew some limbs from its body and came after us.”

“Stubborn thing.” Sage chuckles.

“To put it mildly.” Scarlet chuckles. “We fought on the beach for ages; it was my first ever battle as well – hell of an initiation I guess. It nearly ate us until Sage showed up with his friends – he joined Sanctum before I did and he had better skills.”
“Yep, we helped them out in the fight against the damn thing – but I doubt you’ll know what killed the Leviathan in the end.” Sage chuckles.

“Surprise me.” Weiss says as she leans her head on her hand, listening.

“A seagull.”

Silence fills the table with total disbelief by that answer.

“Nuh-Uh – you’re messing with us.” Ruby shakes her head, even Blake looks bewildered.

“A Leviathan killed by a Seagull?” Blake questions with utter confusion.

“Uh-Huh, when we were fighting a Seagull flew into its eye and it panicked and fell onto the broken mast of our ship. Stabbed it right through the neck and killed it.” Scarlet answers, and the silence still remains of utter disbelief that a Seagull was the cause of a Leviathan’s death.

“No way, I don’t believe it. You’re making this up.” Ruby shakes her head and crosses her arms.

“No I’m dead serious.” Scarlet defends.

“So...what made you change your mind on your career choice?” Weiss curiously asks him as she eats a piece of egg.

“This guy.” Scarlet answers as he points his thumb at Sage beside him and he smiles to the shorter red head.

“He ended up going with me back to Sanctum and we trained together, eventually met Neptune and then finally Sun came barrelling in.” Sage states as he looks over at Sun, who raises his brow.

“You make it sound like I was a cannon ball.” Sun chuckles.

“You might as well have been.” Scarlet chuckles.

“Yeah well, if it got the tension between you two to finally release then that’s fine by me.” Sun reveals and Ruby catches on.

“Oh! I didn’t know!” She gasps.

“That I’m into guys? Wow I’m better at concealing it than I thought.” He chuckles.

“Why would you conceal that?” Blake inquires curiously as she looks over at him.

“Because not everyone understands.” He says as he shrugs his shoulders, and Blake looks down at the floor.

“I once had a friend who was attracted to girls, and she had the same problems. Not sure where she is now, been a while.” Blake says as she thinks about that girl’s face. Scarlet looks at them all like he is waiting for them all to start bombing him with questions about his sexuality.

But none of them do.

They just accept it as friends should.

“Wow – that might be the most natural response to me telling my friends I’m gay I’ve ever seen.” Scarlet chuckles with awe as he looks at them, revealing some sad past as well behind his little
secret.

“Really?” Neptune asks, since obviously they would have known. “I...I didn’t know we were different.”

“No, no I don’t mean it like that. You guys were fine with it because I can tell you two knew about me and Sage. I mean in general...most people don’t really react...well to it.” He sadly says as he looks down sombrely at the floor. Sage pats him on the back, as he looks over to him, clearly this must be a pretty touchy subject for him.

“Did people...bully you?” Ruby softly asks him.

“Yeah – called me some pretty harsh names and would try and beat me up. Worked for a while until I joined up at Sanctum though...those bullies changed their minds after I broke their jaws.” Scarlet explains with the shrug of his shoulders – a statement that would worry them normally if it were not down to the fact that they hate bullies with a passion. He looks over at Cardin as he sits down at a table with his team and he sighs. “But clearly some bullies can change.”

“Yeah...he’s surprised me a whole lot recently.” Weiss admits as she looks over at the Winchester.

“And then others.” Blake snarls softly as she stares at the doorway as Jaymes Ickford enters the Cafeteria with Peony and Rouge, his hair as purple as ever and that look in his eyes. Like he is watching everyone and checking for any move that they are about to make. Even though they are all just eating their breakfasts right now.

Not long after Jaymes and his team of two alongside him entered the cafeteria, Jaune steps into the cafeteria and he sighs to himself. “Seems like all I do is sit in here.” He shakes his head and as he walks inside he sees them at the same table as last time. Team R.W.B and Team S.S.S.N sat down enjoying their breakfast. And as always Ruby waves her hand to him to join them – every single time.

But before he does he walks with Nora and Ren over to the food bar where all the breakfast meals are available. He approaches it and he scoops some baked beans, a few slices of bacon and a bunch of scrambled eggs onto his plate. The smell of the bacon almost makes him salivate all over them, whilst Nora creates the thickest sandwich anybody has ever seen. Filled with sausages, bacon, salad, egg and beans.

Weiss looks repulsed as Nora makes this abomination of a sandwich, her inner cleanliness and polite nature when eating utterly horrified by the girl. “I thought the amount of sugar she has in her coffee was bad but this is something else.” Weiss whispers to Ruby as she stares at Nora with horrified ice blue eyes, and Ruby just giggles at the difference between the Heiress and the Valkyrie. Ren though gets himself some vegetables and a few rashes of bacon as he follows Jaune and Nora to their table.

Jaune smiles to his friends, setting his plate down and his butt down next to Blake, looping an arm around the Feline Faunus’ shoulder, startling her from her book she was reading after finishing her breakfast. “Morning Blake, Ruby, Ice Queen.” He greets to all of them, and Weiss rolls her eyes with an audible groan as he lets his arm drop from Blake’s shoulders.

“Ugh – are we gonna keep calling me that for the rest of our lives?” Weiss groans.

“Maybe.” Nora giggles as she takes an enormous bite from her sandwich, the beans and the sauce dribbling down her chin. Like a shockwave of horror, Weiss’ eye twitches and she shows an utterly abhorred face as she stares at her.

“Didn’t err...have a good night’s sleep.” He shrugs, and Sun lifts his head and looks at Jaune. “You? You guys err...sleeping okay?”

“Not really.” Sun sighs as he shakes his head, eating some of his peas with his spoon in his hand. The other three shrug and look at him in unison.

“Had better.” Ruby huffs, Jaune nods and he looks over to Sun, seeing the exhaustion in his eyes. But he knows better than to ask why, because he is not a fool – collecting the corpses of the fallen is not going to give anyone a good night’s sleep.

“So, what are you guys having?” Jaune curiously asks.

“I am having some lovely salad and this Oatmeal...which I think was made during the Great War.” Weiss sticks her tongue out with a groan, repulsed by it as she lets the sloppy sludge slide from her spoon and back into the bowel of milk. “Honestly, what I’d give for some simple Atlesian Toast right now.” The Heiress huffs, crossing her arms almost stroppily.

“Just eat your nuclear oatmeal Weiss.” Ruby adds as she shoves a spoonful of the sludge from Weiss’ bowel and into her cheeks...then she shows a disgusted grimace. “On err...on second thoughts...yeaaah, don’t.”

“I did tell you Ruby.” Weiss frowns, her eyes dart over to Jaune. “What’s wrong?”

“Huh?” Jaune immediately snaps back to reality, dropping his fork into his delicious beans. One bean lands on Sun’s finger and he flicks it, and it flies straight onto Weiss’ nose. It slides down and she has a narrowed pair of eyes directed onto Sun.

“I will kill you one day.” She warns, but Sun laughs.

“Bring it, Ice Queen.” He challenges.

Jaune chuckles but he decides to answer her question. “Oh sorry. Just uh...thinking.”

“About” Blake asks as she shuts her book, stunning amber feline eyes focusing on Jaune. He smiles at their support and he shrugs.

“Ahh, you know...just how things are at the minute.” Then his eyes widen, licking his dry lips. “Hey did you guys see that frickin petition that has been posted?”

“On BeaconBook? No.” Weiss leans over to see as Jaune fishes out his scroll and he opens the app, scrolling through the timeline until he finds it. He grits his teeth as he shows the petition to get Pyrrha put in prison – the Black Gallows as well. Weiss’ eye twitches with rage...then it gets worse.

A new like has appeared.

Jaymes Ickford

Weiss snaps her head round when she stares directly at Jaymes and she sees him putting his scroll away, as does Rouge for second as well. They all glare at the young man with hatred as he sits there with his back turned to them all, and Weiss clenches her hand into a fist. “Oh that’s it! He’s
dead meat!” She snarls, rolling her frilly sleeves up – but only for them to roll back down to the same point they were at beforehand. She stands up from the bench and she goes towards that table, until Ruby stops her by catching he arm to stop her from starting another incident.

Glynda wasn’t kidding, they cannot risk causing a scene because of the risk of panic.

It will not take much to trigger the Grimm Explosion.

“So yeah, once again, he’s doing more damage to Pyrrha. Honestly I swear if he does one more thing I am gonna hit the bastard.” Jaune snarls with fury, tensing up at the mere sight of him.

“Hit who? Can I help out?” Cardin asks as he walks past their table, stopping and turning to them curiously. They look surprised by his kind nature towards them, like a bully for hire to bully other bullies. Weiss looks up to the man who wants to change, so she answers him, since he is not the same person he was.

“Jaymes Irkwood.” She snaps.

“Ickford.” Sage corrects with a soft voice.

“Who cares? He’s despicable and I hate his guts” Weiss frowns, crossing her arms over her chest.

“What happened?” Cardin asks, turning to glare at him across the room from him. So Jaune takes out his scroll and opens it to reveal that same Petition, and Cardin growls with anger as he glares at him again. “That...BITCH! Oh he’s dead.” Cardin growls.

“On that we can all agree.” Weiss snarls with Cardin as they both deadpan at Ickford.

“If he was on fire, I would not care. I’d let him burn.” Blake murmurs and Jaune snorts beside her.

“Uhh, Jaune...out of interest – totally unrelated – what’s the earliest time we can check out our weapons, and where is he?” Nora curiously asks despite knowing exactly where the young man is sitting.

“Guy is a real douche.” Ruby adds with a growl in her gentle and tender voice, whilst picking some of the crust from her sleepy eye. “Like, doesn’t he see it was an accident?”

“Mmm, not everyone is as amazing and as understanding as we all are.” Jaune says as he gives a meek smile to his friends who beam back with touching smiles. “Ah whatever. That Petition won’t get anywhere, Goodwitch already knows and is working as hard as she can to get rid of it.”

“She will. Ironwood would probably help too, he knows it was all an accident and because of Emerald.” Weiss shrugs as she drinks her mug of coffee, but then she stops when she sees him stand up and walk around the tables.

Towards theirs.

Weiss and Ruby both glare at him as he starts to pass by their table.

“Speak of the pig and he’ll roll in the mud.”
“Huh?”

“It’s a saying.”

“I’ve never heard of that one before.”

“I MADE IT UP JUST NOW!” Weiss explodes, making Ruby giggle.

Jaymes walks past them, but Cardin just stands right in front of him with a cold scowl on his face. Jaymes stops right in front of him and turns to the teams that sit at the table, all of them glaring into his eyes with fury. He scoffs as he stares at them, still holding that infuriating personality as always. “Oh look who it is – the protectors of the Murderer.” He scoffs.

Weiss clenches her hands into fists and grits her teeth. “That does it!” She yells, springing up from the bench and she wrenches her arm from Ruby’s.

“W-eiss don’t!” Ruby winces with fear, hoping this will not cause panic. Heart pounding a thousand beats a minute.

“You!” She yells as she stands besides Cardin, totally dwarfed by the massive student who holds his tray with beans and oatmeal on it. Jaymes narrows his eyes as he glares at the Ice Queen.

“What the hell do you want?” He questions, defensive towards his own safety as always as well.

“Get. Out.” Weiss growls each syllable slowly so then he can understand it as clearly as he possibly can. The whole room falls silent from the words of Weiss Schnee and all eyes fall onto the spectacle.

“What?” Jaymes challenges.

“Get out, or we will force you out.” Weiss warns and Jaymes scoffs.


“Oh you’ve done plenty.” Cardin scoffs as he chuckles at his stupidity.

“Oh you’re one to talk – big man.”

“LEAVE!” Weiss suddenly shrieks, defending Cardin as well as challenging Jaymes as well. Jaymes glares right into her eyes and he scoffs at her, rolling his violet eyes.

“Pfft, whatever Schnee. Think you’re all so special because of all that money? Big deal you flat-chested bitch, you’re about as important to me as the dirt on my shoe.” Jaymes snarls, and Cardin clenches his hand into a fist. The whole room gasps at his harsh words towards her, and he pushes past them all, and stops by Jaune. “Defend her all you want – but she will end up in the Black Gallows just like every other lunatic.”

Someone taps his shoulder.

He turns and meets the knuckles of Weiss Schnee which makes its impact smashed right in between his eyes, and he falls onto the floor, his hand held over the welt which has formed over his right eye and the other covers his bleeding nose. Weiss shakes her throbbing fist, uncoiling it and straightening her back, clearing her throat and becoming prim and proper once more.

“You dare treat Pyrrha like that again and this will be a blessing in comparison.” Weiss threatens.
“What the hell are you talking about?” Jaymes questions with a snarl.

“That petition asswipe! You frickin voted on it!” Weiss shouts with anger, and Nora stands up with her fists clenched, glaring down at him with furious eyes.

“You’re lucky I didn’t hit you, buddy. Because you wouldn’t be breathing otherwise.” Nora snarls with fury.

“Or me.” Cardin agrees, nodding to Nora and for once she nods back.

“What Petition?” He questions as he stares up at them and Weiss narrows her eyes as she glares at him.

“You know what.” Weiss growls, and Jaymes begins to push himself back up to his feet, glaring right at her with hatred in his violet eyes.

Using you...

Hating you...

Afraid of you...

“I don’t have a damn clue about what you’re talking about, but if someone has made a petition to get her in the Black Gallows then maybe I will sign it! Because that murderer belongs in there with the rest of the scum!” Jaymes yells with rage, and Peony springs up from the bench and she runs over to Jaymes and grabs onto his arm.

“Jaymes! What the hell are you doing? Just walk away! Their just bitter because of last time.” Peony states as she tries to pull him back. She pulls him back and he snarls, ripping his arm from her grasp, and he points straight at Weiss.

“How can you all be okay with this?” He yells, now to the entire room of people. Even some workers stare at him as well, having their breakfast before getting back to it. “She’s a murderer! Tore another student apart! How long until she kills again, huh? Maybe she’ll kill me, or you!” He yells as he points directly at Velvet to pin it on her, causing her team to stand up with anger, but Cardin is the one to push him back.

“Shut the hell up.” Cardin snarls.

“I wouldn’t stop her from killing you.” Nora growls, not realising this is feeding into his problems.

“What kind of people are we if we do not punish the guilty?” He yells.

“She isn’t guilty! She was manipulated!” Ruby screams with tears streaming down her face as she stands there with her fists clenched and Sun stands up too, as does Jaune and everyone who cares for Pyrrha.

“She has blood on her hands! Blood that can never be cleaned, only the Black Gallows can!” He yells, until Jaune roars and swings his fist right into his face again, and he staggers back into Peony and she falls to the floor, with him as well. He crashes down to the ground with a grunt and Jaune stands above him with an almost feral look in his eyes.

“Shut up! Just shut up! She cannot sleep because of you!” He bellows, wanting to beat his head into the pavement. Jaymes lays there with a groan, tears welling in his eyes from the pain, and as Cardin stands above him he scoffs, pouring his breakfast onto his head. The oatmeal sloshes across
his purple hair and down his face, dripping onto the floor. His hands begin to shake fearfully.

*He’s trying to drown me...*

*Trying to kill me...*

*Killing me!*

“Oops, guess I slipped. Oh well, *accidents happen, huh?*” Cardin says with extra venom to let those last words and their hidden meaning sink in with the oatmeal on his skin. Team C.R.D.L explode with laughter at Jaymes as they point at him, and Jaymes presses his hands to his knees, his eyes eye up the knife on the floor.

Suddenly he reaches out and grabs the knife, jumping at Cardin and stabbing the steel blade straight into his chest with animalistic fury. He screams with indistinct words, stabbing him over and over again, in the neck and in the chest, spilling blood everywhere. Screams fill the cafeteria as he murders the poor Huntsman.

Until he returns back to reality, staring at the knife with the vision in his head of what he wants to do to him. But the soothing voice of Peony calms him as he lays there, his face throbbing due to the punch he got. “Don’t listen to them...its okay...just think of a garden, the tweets of the birds.” She gently whispers to him, her tones in her voice move through him like a gentle babbling brook of water.

She gently caresses her hands around Ickford and she helps him back up, picking up a cloth and wiping the sludge from his face to calm him down as she takes him away. “You people are all animals...how dare you start on him like that.” Peony snarls with disgust at the table.

“Start on him? He signed the damn petition!” Weiss yells with anger.

“He never signed it!” She yells back, taking him away. “Come on, Jaymes.” She whispers to him, but Sun is not as easily convinced. He stands up and he pushes his sleeves up, staring Jaymes and Peony down with furious eyes.

“She’s right! You should go! It’d be a shame if I had to beat some sense into you too!” Sun yells, feeling an urge to get his own anger out on him. But Jaune grabs Sun’s shoulder and pulls him back.

“Sun...stop...” Jaune begs. “He’s had enough.”

But Jaymes stops in his tracks and Peony’s eyes widen fearfully as she tries to pull him away from the scene. Seeing slight crackles of violent purple and red electricity across his hands as he stands there. He slowly turns to stare directly at the Monkey Faunus with gritted teeth and tightened fists. “You could use a beating.” Jaymes reminds with a snarl.

“Jaymes...” Peony whispers whilst Rouge watches.

Sun smirks as he steps forward before Blake can stop him. “Oh yeah, and Ickford? Kiss this while you’re at it!” Sun yells, as he bends down and points his ass at him.

Jaymes snaps and he charges towards Sun, pushing Peony away and he swings his fist straight at Sun. The Monkey Faunus ducks down and he thrusts his shoulder upwards to knock Jaymes back. Sun immediately jumps up and smashes his knee into his jaw and some people begin to scream with terror.
Panic...

And the mere scent causes nearby Grimm to sense the small amount of Panic. And like sharks to blood...

A small pack of them come charging towards the cafeteria.

Jaymes roars with fury as he punches him repeatedly in the face and then in the chest multiple times, fighting with great speed and agility. Sun crosses his forearms over each other and stops one of his punches from meeting him, before opening them and swinging his head forward into Jaymes’ to push him away.

But before Sun can attack any further, Blake tackles him to the floor, holding him down to stop him from making it any worse. “Stop. Now, Sun.” She sternly hisses into his ear.

Jaymes growls as he storms towards both of them, but before he can make his attack.

A Beowulf leaps through the glass of the Cafeteria and lands on one of the tables, letting out a monstrous roar as he arches its back and holds out its arms. Drawn by the panic and it causes people to panic further, screaming as they flee.

“Don’t panic!” Jaune yells.

But before that Grimm can make any further damage, a spear suddenly comes flying through and stabs the Grimm through the head. And the small group of Beowulves who make the attack get crushed by levitated debris by Glynda who is with her. Pyrrha stands beside the Professor and holds her hand out, using her polarity to pull the spear back to her hand. It is not Milo but a spear that she just found outside, let behind during the Battle of Beacon.

Silence fills the cafeteria.

Glynda looks out the window and she glares at the other Beowulves that skulk about outside, but they eventually turn and retreat from the calming emotions.

Glynda frowns as she stares at both Sun and Jaymes.


“Now.”

Another Battle of Beacon almost ignited.

Over a small fight.

They were lucky but if it happens again?

It could be much worse.
Punishment

Glynda

Sat inside of the detention room are Sun, Weiss, Jaune and Cardin, for they are the main perpetrators of the fight that occurred earlier at lunch. The small attack from that Beowulf Pack has really shown a bright light over how dangerous this situation really is, for a tiny brawl was enough to draw those Beowulves into the school and attack. It could have been so much worse, so...so...much worse. Sun has his head held low, because he knows that he is really in trouble for starting a fight with Jaymes in the first place, whereas Jaymes is in another detention office.

Glynda bursts in, the door swinging right open and they have never seen her this angry before, the angriest they have seen her before now is when Ruby and Nora pranked her with an ice bucket over her door. That was when they almost lost her and she threatened to send them to another dimension as a punishment for that. Glynda’s face is steaming red as she approaches them like a pissed off bull in a china shop, ready to unleash her anger. “What the hell were you thinking, Mr Wukong?” Glynda thunderously exclaims, slapping her notebook down onto the metal desk at his fingers.

He retracts his fingers swiftly as a reaction, his eyes wide and heart pounding, just as the others are as well. Cardin looks up at her with his hands held together and his mind dancing over the many possibilities of how this conversation might pan out.

_We could get expelled..._

_Or she could let us off the leash?_

_Community Service?_

_Or gods help us...what if the police come after us for this little incident? We nearly triggered Battle of Beacon 2._

Sun sighs with shaky breath, and he looks up at the Standing Headmistress of the Academy of Beacon. “I’m sorry, I really am! But he was talking shit about Pyrrha! Our friend, how could I stand by and let him do that to her?” Sun questions, still standing by his selfless case, but she shakes her head.

_“Sorry isn’t gonna cut it this time Sun.”_ Glynda gravely informs him with stern green eyes staring through her crooked sunglasses. “Have any of you even checked your scrolls today?” She asks them all, so Weiss immediately pulls her one out and she opens it, met with an unexpected update.

_Cross Continental Transmit Service is operational_

_“The C.C.T Tower is back online?”_ Weiss asks her.

_“Yes, and it was online when this fight happened, the cameras recorded all of it. And the Black Gallows saw it.”_ She reveals and the name sends a shiver down their spines of real fear that crackles across their bodies. They all know of the Black Gallows, every Huntsman and Huntress, damn near every person has heard of the Outfit and the mysterious Black Ops Operations that they run.
“W-What?” Weiss fearfully asks with widened blue eyes.

“They have informed me that they have sent the Storm Guard and the Atlesian Special Forces division to Beacon at this very moment. They are on their way to examine the situation...and decide what your fates will be.” Glynda tells them, sounding very hurt when she actually says it too. She clearly does not want any of them to be taken away by the Black Gallows and the Storm Guard that runs it...but this is beyond her control.

Weiss sits there and when she hears that the Special Forces are also on their way...a slither of hope hits her and she gasps. “Winter...” Weiss whispers to herself, perhaps she could help them or at least soften their punishment for what happened here.

But if she knows Winter...then she will be quite angry with what transpired here.

“Can’t you help us? You know why we did it!” Jaune begs desperately, hoping that they will not be taken away.

“I’m afraid the real danger surrounds Sun Wukong and Jaymes Ickford, for they are the ones that were fighting. However the three of you are all still viable targets to them – I cannot protect you from them. This is beyond my jurisdiction.” Glynda explains to them all as she stands before every single one of them, and Sun falls forward and buries his head in his hands.

What have I done? I haven’t even gotten the chance to tell Blake how I feel...I can’t be taken away by the Black Gallows...

“What do you mean this is beyond your jurisdiction? You are standing as the Headmistress! Tell them to leave us alone and forget about this.” Cardin defends, desperately trying to help his friends around him.

“Do you really think that Ozpin had his hands on all the buttons? The Black Gallows have more power than you realise, they have eyes everywhere and have been able to take down entire governments in the past. What makes you think I can keep them from coming here? I’m afraid the only thing you and Jaymes can hope for is that they will be merciful.” Glynda explains and the situation just seems to get worse and worse for them.

The Black Gallows is so mysterious that nobody really knows where they are based, they have hundreds of facilities across Remnant so then they can get there as quickly as possible...meaning they could get here today. But their headquarters is unknown, even to some of the most powerful people in the world – even kings have people with more power than they do. The ones that whisper into their ears to control the way things go and prevent any further destruction and wars beginning.

Yet many believe that they have even started a few wars in the past to get their way.

Either way, they have taken hundreds of thousands of people away from the eye. Some people are criminals and deserve to be taken away, others have found things out that they shouldn’t have and are locked away or killed. The world told a story of what happened to them, fairy tales to keep them from staying awake at night. And there are countless others that vanish for unexplained reasons, or are Huntsmen that go rogue.

Only to either turn up dead from mysterious causes or vanish from the map altogether.

But it all points towards them – the Black Gallows.

“We...we can’t just let the Black Gallows take Sun away!” Jaune argues as he stands up, but then a pulse of purple energy forces him back down into his chair, nearly knocking him over. Glynda
glares at him with gritted teeth.

“And what of Jaymes Ickford? Do you not care?” She scoffs with disgust. “I thought you were better than that.”

“The asshole has been feeding into Pyrrha’s depression – I could care less about what happens to that prick.” Jaune snarls, but Glynda just shakes her head with disappointment on her face as she stands at the end of the table.

“You know – of all people – I would have expected you would at least understand that things are not as black and white as people like to believe.” Glynda states with a sigh, for she knows that there is more to this student, reasons behind his actions that they do not understand. Because he looks very unstable, but before she leaves, she stops and looks back at them. “Did you even know that his cousin was killed in front of him by the Grimm?”

They all stare at her silently.

“Yeah...that’s what I thought.”

She slams the door shut behind them and walks away, leaving them to ponder on that statement that she said. Jaune sits there with guilt starting to form in his eyes, he was so focused on Pyrrha that he never even took the time to wonder why Jaymes does all of this. Glynda leaves the students behind with Port and Oobleck watching them, for they still have fifteen minutes left of detention time before they are even allowed out.

As she walks out, she finds the others sat outside, talking with each other and she sighs, walking towards the door that Jaymes is currently sat inside of. Peony, the only one here that is not a friend to Jaune, Weiss, Cardin or Sun stands up and she stops Glynda, looking at her desperately.

“Please...please do not send him home, Professor.” She frantically begs her with wide eyes as she clasps her hands together in the pleading position.

“I cannot promise that Peony – the Black Gallows are on their way to decide.” Glynda states, but Peony pushes her hand against the door, getting the attention of the others from the slam. Ruby stares at Peony as she whispers to Glynda.

“He cannot go home...he just can’t.” Peony repeats with serious looking eyes, no longer pleading her to help. Glynda immediately catches onto the way that she says that, and now her curiosity has been piqued.

“Peony, what are you getting at?” Glynda asks her as she stares straight at the young woman, worried about whatever she is trying to say. Peony stammers, trying to answer but something holds her back, until suddenly Russel stands up with angered eyes and clenched fists. Glynda and Peony both glare at Russel as he stands there.

“Are you serious? You’re seriously defending that little prick?” Russel yells with disgust in his voice like he has just eaten something so foul.

“Russel – sit down.” Glynda sternly demands with a cold voice and her eyes staring straight into his.

“He has been bullying Pyrrha! Is this really how you treat bullies?” Russel scoffs, getting a stern response from Peony.

“You’re one to talk.” Peony reminds as she stares straight into his eyes.
“Oh yeah? You wanna talk? Why don’t you just protect your asshole boyfriend some more?” Russel challenges as he walks towards Peony, but Glynda presses her hand to his chest and pushes him away from her.

“I said – stop.” Glynda slowly speaks again, her anger at their attitude building and building.

“I get it, we were bullies once. But I regret those weeks we made Jaune’s life hell! Made Velvet life hell! Because we were punished! Why isn’t he?” Russel yells, and then Nora stands up too, joining in the argument towards Glynda. Pyrrha sits there with concerned eyes, hating how so much of this surrounds her.

“Yeah! She’s our friend and you’re taking the side of the bully?” Nora shouts alongside them, more of them all begin to join in. Glynda grits her teeth and she lets out a monstrous yell of fury, so powerful it is like she cannot even control her own emotions.

“THAT’S ENOUGH!” She explodes, blasting a powerful pulse of purple aura across them excluding Peony which knocks them all onto the floor. In the distance some of the Grimm turn their heads as they sense the negative emotions from that building, growling and licking their lips as they taste it like blood. But it is not enough for them to attack yet, they are waiting for the right moment.

Glynda cools off, her eyes glaring at them and her teeth gritted together with so much anger towards them. “I will not have this behaviour in my school – I understand your anger towards Jaymes but things are not as they seem. You all have been gunning for him after that one outburst of his – but I can tell there is more to it than him being a trouble maker.” Glynda explains to them all, sounding so ashamed of every single one of them.

Ruby looks at Glynda with afraid silver eyes. “Get out – all of you. I am going to contact any family members you have to sort this situation out. But I want all of you to stay away from Jaymes – have I made myself clear?” Glynda questions with her narrowed eyes glaring at all of them. Russel scoffs as he shakes his head, turning and walking away from Glynda, shoving the doors open, his team following him out the door.

Slowly they all leave, one by one, and this time they realise that they have been the ones acting out of line. Yes Jaymes’ views on Pyrrha are not great but they are understandable – he lost his cousin because of the attack that followed what she did to Penny. From his eyes...that looks like it is all her fault.

Glynda sighs when Ruby leaves the lobby and walks outside, and the Headmistress turns to Peony, now that they can actually talk about what she was hinting at. “Now...Peony...what do you mean about him not going home?” Glynda asks her, Peony looks through the glass in the door slit to see Jaymes sitting there, tapping away and looking worse and worse, even though he has taken his Clozapine.

Peony looks right to Glynda. “I think maybe...you should ask him.” Peony states, even though she was going to say for him.

“I don’t think he will.” Glynda states, remembering how short their last conversation was.

“He will – he heard what you just did for him. He knows he can trust you.” Peony assures with a small smile, turning and walking away from Glynda.

She may not be his girlfriend, but she might as well be – she has always looked out for him.
Glynda sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose.

*This situation is not getting any better.*

**Jaymes**

He taps his fingers against the cold metal table, finding himself trapped back inside the same room again. It feels like he was here literally a few minutes ago, when it was only a day. He keeps tapping that little tune away to himself, until the door opens up and Glynda enters the room. She holds her clipboard in her hands as she looks at the young man, and he looks at her with nervous violet eyes.

His face drops down, staring at his own reflection again, feeling the whispers in his own head, because he did hear the confrontation outside.

*I'm in danger...*

*They’re gonna hurt me...*

*Try to kill me.*

Glynda is much calmer towards Jaymes this time, for the first time she was more on the side of Pyrrha and Jaune. However this time their behaviour was out of order, for they did start this fight on him – they may have had their reasons but it was stupid and actually quite selfish. She sits down at the end of the table where he has his elbow propped on and his hand holding his head as he sits there, tapping his other hand against the steel table. “I was hoping we could talk – about what happened.” Glynda requests, and Jaymes looks at her with confused eyes, because Peony is right.

He did hear Glynda defending him outside.

But he is still quite a cagey person when it comes down to his personal feelings, he does not tend to show much emotion at all. Apart from either aggression or misery – but rarely any signs of happiness or joy, just negativity. “About what? My arrest?” He grumbles with a sigh, for he heard that as well.

“How much did you hear outside?” She asks him, and she notices him start to scratch his forearm pretty viciously after taking his elbow off the table and lifting his head up. The grating scratches are louder than normal, like it is some kind of pain inducing method for him. *A pretty worrisome sign of some kind of depression perhaps?*

“The Storm Guard are coming to take me away?” He asks her with a fearful voice, but Glynda shakes her head.

“That has not been decided yet – emotions are running high at the moment, and it seems that you have formed a bit of a rivalry with Pyrrha’s friends. A rivalry I hope gets solved soon, I had hoped they would be better than that.” She sighs as she stares at the door where they were stood, now only Peony is sat down waiting for Glynda to come out with Jaymes.

“I deserve it I guess – I just...can’t...” He struggles to even speak, pressing his palms either side to his temples as he sits there, trying to speak but it is like there is an intense pain in his head.
“Jaymes? What is wrong – I have seen plenty of conditions in my life, I can help you.” Glynda promises but he shakes his head vigorously.

“Nobody can help me – not even myself.” He whispers to himself.

“You’d be surprised how having friends that back your corner can help you.” Glynda assures with a smile, her thoughts actually going to the ones she was angriest at. “Take Pyrrha and her friends for example, or Blake Belladonna. They both had been struggling with socialising, whether it be by identity or by lack of trust. Yet when they let people understand them, they helped them improve.” Glynda explains, thinking of Sun and Blake, along with Pyrrha and Jaune. At the end of the day those two boys did help the girls that they love get over their problems without really realising it.

Jaymes looks through his own eyes at Glynda, the tears of confusion smudging his view until he rubs them away. “Jaymes – have you been having troubles at home?” Glynda asks him as she clasps her hands together and she leans forward, looking right at his violet eyes. He stammers, lifting his head up to look at the Professor.

“Huh?” He asks her, worried eyes widening as he stares at her, for she acts so much calmer to him than she just was with the others. But that is simply because she knows something is wrong with Jaymes, something is acting as a catalyst for the way that he behaves, and Peony’s comment is enough to give her that idea.

“Before I entered Peony asked me not to send you home, and before that you mentioned that your father and uncle are not...kind people.” Glynda explains, remembering everything that he had told her in detail. He stammers, his mind beginning to frighten him more and more. He even looks over his shoulder, as if he expects to see his father and uncle stood behind him to deliver punishment.

“I...I asked her not to...” He stammers.

“Please don’t be mad at her, she is afraid for your safety...and I think she may have good reason. But I can only know for certain if you tell me, Jaymes.” She requests with a softly spoken and kind voice, her hands resting against the table as she looks over to him. Jaymes stops tapping his fingers, his lip quivering fearfully.

“Will...you won’t tell anybody, will you?” He nervously asks her.

“Do you not want anybody to know?” Glynda inquires.

“No...They won’t understand.” He stammers.

“Okay – this conversation will be strictly confidential.” Glynda promises, taking her glasses off as well as she gives him her undivided attention. Jaymes lets out an extremely shaky breath before beginning.

“I...there’s a reason for the way I act...my coping mechanism you asked about? Well there is more to it than that, I take Clozapine for...” He stammers as he finds the words, hearing voices growing in his head constantly, even seeing the metal on the table shimmer like water for a second then. For some reason, a hand rises from the water and reaches out at him, and he gasps with fear, pulling his hands away but when he blinks it is gone. Glynda stares at the table but there is absolutely nothing there to frighten him, not even a small spider.

That’s when she figures it out as he says it. “I suffer with Paranoid Schizophrenia.” He reveals with a trembling and fragile voice, nearly breaking down when he just said the words. Glynda sits there with a surprised yet understanding look in her green eyes. Then she searches through her
documents with confusion, straight onto his file and the area that would show where any medical conditions would be detailed.

Name: Jaymes Emeric Ickford

Age: 18

Born in: Vacuo

Moved to: Mistral and Haven Academy

Medical Notes: N/A

Nothing, nothing at all mentions the fact he suffers with Paranoid Schizophrenia. Confusion sets in immediately on Glynda after she takes her glasses and holds them over her eyes to read better, yet that is exactly what it says. She sets her glasses back down on the table and looks at him with confusion. “But...your file...we would have included this, Jaymes we have top of the line medications for this kind of thing.” Glynda assures with a trusting voice.

“I know...there are a lot of factors at play – the first being I heard that all Huntsmen and Huntresses had to be sound of mind, using weapons and protecting people and all.” He explains nervously to her, but Glynda shakes her head.

“That was before – when the Academies were not as well funded. However now things have changed, we now accept anybody as long as their scores in their Combat Academies were high enough. Jaymes we could have helped you instead of you having to worry about purchasing your own Clozapine.” Glynda explains to him, starting to feel ashamed of herself for not even realising that one of their students was suffering and nobody even realised.

“Well...that wasn’t the only reason...” He states, and Glynda leans forward across the table.

“What else is there, then?” She asks him.

He sighs, his hand shaking and he grabs his wrist to stop it, breathing out slowly to calm himself down. “It’s...my father.” He tells her with fearful eyes, just saying that makes him so scared that he thinks that his father is standing right behind him. He turns but there is nobody there.

“It’s okay, Jaymes – it is just you and me.” She promises with a smile.

He exhales, calming his palpitating heart down slowly. “What has your father got to do with all this?” She asks him softly and he looks at her.

“My father was not always a bad person – he used to be a Police Officer in Vacuo...I know weird right? A division was formed but not long after it all fell apart, so we moved to Mistral soon after and I joined Sanctum. My mother was with us but she was starting to pass away from Cancer around this time.” He reveals, and Glynda’s eyes sink with sadness.

“I’m very sorry.” She apologises, but he shakes his head.

“Happened a long time ago – ancient history now.” Jaymes assures, doesn’t detract the truth that it has clearly affected both him and his father. “One day though – my father was with the Mistralian Police Force and they were busting a Drug Ring. Apparently it all went fine, until the manufacturer of Mist detonated his dust supplies.” He explains with teary eyes and Glynda looks at him with worried eyes. “My father survived but nearly every other officer was killed in the explosion, and he lost his legs in the process. We couldn’t afford cybernetics for his legs with mom dying from
Cancer – so he was discharged from the Force and was having to live with plastic legs that are a pain to move around in.” He explains.

Glynda can already tell what he was about to say. “He became so angry that he could not find a way to take it out – and when mom died...he used me as the source after the walls were not enough.” Jaymes reveals and Glynda closes her eyes sadly. “Some days he would come home furious...storm into my room and beat me bloody just so then he could take out his rage. And my Uncle? He didn’t help – he always hated me, not sure why...but I think he and dad had always had some bad blood between each other. My Uncle feeds my father’s worse side because he likes seeing him fall – and now that my cousin Forest is dead...”

He pauses, unable to go on with his tormented soul being stretched thin, but Glynda is smart enough to fill in the blanks. “You’re scared to go home, because you’re afraid your Uncle will kill you. Aren’t you?” She asks him, and the scared young man sighs, nodding his head.

“Yeah...” He sniffles, rubbing his tears from his eyes as he sits there, explaining the truth to her, at a cost of his own soul being tormented by his terrible memories. “My father – he never believed I was suffering with Paranoid Schizophrenia, but I think it was more that he never wanted to believe it. I think deep down he still loves me...but my Uncle...Gods I want to kill him for what he has done to my father.” Jaymes snarls with fury, clenching his hand into a fist. Purplish red lightning crackles across his hand, showing his semblance that he has.

“So your father faked the documents?” Glynda asks him.

“No – I did...” He states.

“But...why?” She asks him, and he sighs.

“When you have been living around a lie for so long, demanded to tell the same thing to others – it becomes easier to live in the lie.” Jaymes explains with a sigh, his hand shaking. Glynda looks out the small slit in the door where the thick bullet proof glass protects their voices to see Peony sat there waiting.

“How did Peony learn about this? What about Forest and Rouge? Have you ever told either of them?” Glynda inquires.

“Rouge knows – she has always been quite close to me, and Peony is clever she figured it out on her own. Forest and I have been friends since we were kids, he hated his father so much...but now...” He stammers as he pictures the face of his cousin.

“It’s okay – you don’t need to say anymore...I understand now.” She promises with a smile. “Your Clozapine, is it working?” She asks him.

He looks at her and he stammers. “I think so...it just...I think it’s the stress, it may be forcing it back.” He states.

Glynda does not pry further because it is clear that even he does not know – but that is not how it works when medication is taken. “Thank you, Jaymes...I think you are allowed to go now.” She assures with a smile as she takes her glasses and puts them back on.

“You...you won’t tell anyone will you?” Jaymes nervously asks her, and Glynda taps her nose with a smile, assuring him.

“I promise.” She assures with a smile. Jaymes walks to the door and he approaches Peony who smiles as she puts her arm round him and walks away. Glynda stands there, until one last question
is on her mind, an important one too. “Jaymes?” She calls and Jaymes turns to her. “Did you sign that petition?” She asks him.

And the answer is very important.

He shakes his head. “No – I only heard of that petition when he challenged me.” Jaymes answers, and Glynda nods her head as she thinks.

“Thank you.” She says to them. The two of them walk away/

Glynda closes the door softly and she sighs...

She knows when a student is lying and he most certainly was not – at least not about the petition. He told the truth about almost everything.

The Clozapine...something must be wrong with it, because his symptoms are clearly getting worse.

Jaune

Jaune sits at the table still with Weiss, Cardin and Sun as they wait to be released by Goodwitch. Cardin has his arms behind his head and his legs stretched out onto the table, whistling away as he waits. Whilst Sun looks afraid of the Black Gallows coming here after the fight he started with Jaymes, and Weiss taps away on her scroll.

Whereas Jaune cannot get the last thing Glynda said to him out his head.

He lost his cousin? I didn’t even know that...

But...he signed that petition...

Jaune shakes his head, finding so much confusion rattling around in his head. “Guys – you saw that he signed that petition, right?” He asks them and he gets mixed reactions, Cardin seems to take his side whereas Sun and Weiss do not. Weiss glares at him with an annoyed expression whereas Sun just glances at him.

“You know that is not true, Jaune. The fight we started caused a slither of panic, and that slither drew the Grimm in. Maybe we should just keep our distance from Ickford and his friends.” Weiss explains with a sigh.
“Or maybe the asshole should be punished for abusing Pyrrha.” Jaune argues.

Even Cardin is against him now, after hearing Weiss’ statement. “Jaune...they might be right, I was on your side at first...but...” He sighs before pressing his hand to his head. The Arc Huntsman sighs, standing up from his chair and pacing around, until the door opens and Glynda enters the room.

“Nobody is to challenge Jaymes Ickford any further – do you understand me?” She questions with her green eyes staring to all four of them. Jaune stares at her but she sternly repeats herself. “Do. I. Make. Myself. Clear?”

“Yes.” They all agree in unison.

“Yes what?”

“Yes Professor.”

“Good, now go on. I need to prepare for the arrival of the Black Gallows – and hope I can soften the punishment.” She sighs as she lets them all walk past her. Jaune keeps moving ahead but Glynda stops him with her voice. “And Jaune.”

He stops and turns to her. “Do not let your affection for Miss Nikos cloud your judgement – nobody is simply good or bad in this world.” Glynda reminds and Jaune sighs, nodding and walking away from her, following the others to the door that leads the way outside.

A few hours later...

With an eventful lunchtime and detention dealt with, Jaune finally returns back to his dorm room, along with Weiss, Cardin and Sun returning to their respective rooms. Or at least Sun and Weiss go to the same one where Ruby and Blake are waiting for them both to return with Neptune, Sage and Scarlet. Jaune opens the door to his dorm room and closes it behind him with an exhale of relief that it is over. She turns to see Pyrrha stepping up beside Jaune with a smile.

He tilts his head with a gentle grin. “What’s up?” He chuckles lightly.

“Dooooo you like my wolf tail?” She flicks her long bushy red ponytail back and forth merely with the swing of her head. Jaune’s eyes widen, acting as the puppeteer, pulling the strings of his rising grin.

“Yeah! Looks great, Pyr. Nice to see you getting back to your old self again, gods know we missed it.” Jaune smiles softly, admiring her natural beauty only multiplied by the gorgeous makeup she has put on her face.

“Mmm, believe me, recovery is a long road. I’m making my way down it though...you?” She asks him lightly, and Jaune sighs.

“Yeah...same.” He forces a smile, until they hear a knock on the door, getting their attention. Jaune looks at the door.

And it is a voice he has heard quite a lot today.

“Miss Nikos?” The voice of Glynda speaks, and Jaune looks at Pyrrha nervously. They have not really had the best day today, but Glynda no longer sounds as stern. Sounds more like she has calmed down. “I am not angry with any of you anymore – I would like to speak with you.” Glynda states, Pyrrha looks up at Jaune and he nods.
She reaches her hand out and grabs onto the doorknob and opens it to see Glynda standing there with her hands behind her back. She looks at Jaune and she nods to him, and he nods back. “I apologise for the day you two have had, wish things could have turned out differently. But with the Black Gallows on their way things have made me...a bit stressed out.” She apologises with a sigh.

“I understand, Professor.” Pyrrha sweetly assures with a professional smile, and Jaune nods to her.

“Well – I did not only come here to apologise, I have actually come here to discuss something with you.” Glynda states as she stands there. Pyrrha steps aside so then the Professor can enter their Dorm room, and with Nora and Ren currently helping with the reconstruction of the school, they have all the time in the world.

“Okay then...what would you like to discuss? I do hope it has nothing to do with Jaymes Ickford...I have heard enough about him for one day.” She sighs as she rubs the back of her head awkwardly.

“No, no – do not worry it is not to do with that. I have already spoken with him, so if you all just keep your distance from him I hope that the Black Gallows will see this as a simple misunderstanding.” Glynda assures with the nod of her head, that is if they do not decide to just take them away for their own mysterious purposes.

“Oh-O-Okay...so what is this about?” Pyrrha inquires.

“Well...” Glynda begins as she walks over to one of the chairs at the two tables that they have at either side of the door and she sits down. Pyrrha and Jaune both sit down next to each other on the foot of her bed. “It has been brought to my attention that after the Battle of Beacon – you no longer have a weapon.” Glynda says to her.

Pyrrha jolts just at the mention of her weapons, and how she does miss them – even if she cannot even look at her armour properly. “Oh. Y-Yes Ma’am. I lost Milo and Akuou in the tower.” Pyrrha glumly says with a sad look on her gentle face. “It’s a shame, I adored those weapons...they...” A warm smile fills her being. “They used to be my mothers.” She says, filled with so many happy memories of her mother – someone she has not seen in quite a while now.

She must be so worried, and so must her father – the question is for what reasons?

“Oh! Combat classes are starting up soon aren’t they? I...I don’t have anything to fight with.” She stammers nervously.

“Well I’m sure you could challenge anything Port has to offer.” Jaune chuckles, getting a playful slap on the knee from Pyrrha.

“Quiet you.” She giggles, creating a warm smile on Glynda’s face.

“Well...” Glynda takes the suitcase she has had in her hand the whole time – and they never even paid mind to it – and she rests it down on the floor at her legs. She unhooks the latches and opens it up, revealing the round golden shield inside surrounded by foam, along with the broken shards of Milo. She gasps, seeing what remains of her weapons. “The construction teams who have been slaving away day and night to get the C.C.T Tower restored recovered them from the battle.” Glynda assures.

“Akuou! I...you...how?” She gasps with excitement, picking up the round Spartan Shield in her delicate smooth hands, a pair of hands Jaune stares at – admiring their perfectness. She runs her finger across the scrapes and bumps across its battered surface after her clash against Cinder inside of the tower. She rests the shield against her lap, looking at Jaune with an adorable smile.
“We managed to gather the shards of Milo as well – I’m afraid it did not fair very well.” Glynda informs sadly, and Pyrrha stares at the remains of Milo tucked away inside of the foam insides of the suitcase she brought the herein.

“How Milo – you’ve looked better.” She huffs.

“I’m fairly certain Adhara’s Blacksmiths in Vale can fix your spear up. The school will cover the costs.” Glynda says as she leans back in the chair she sits in.

“I...I cannot thank you enough professor, even after everything that has happened...”

“Pyrrha – please stop blaming yourself. I know I was angry today, but that does not change the fact that you are all my students – so you may as well be my children.” Glynda kindly says to them all and Jaune smiles.

“Thank you, Professor.” Jaune says, even after the argument that they had with each other – luckily it has all been forgiven already. “And sorry for getting mad at you.”

“Please – I like a good argument.” Glynda assures with a smile, it may not have seemed it at the time but it seems she still admires them.

“How can I repay you, Professor?” Pyrrha desperately asks with a smile as she looks at her. Goodwitch smiles softly and stands, walking around the table to sit on the lip of mahogany, hands in her lap as she almost maternally eyes Pyrrha. “You can smile like that, more often.”

Pyrrha blushes and lowers the fragments in her hand back into the box, neatly putting them exactly where she found them. Mostly because it looks comfy in there. Jaune looks at both of them and he can easily tell that Glynda wishes to speak to Pyrrha on her own – and luckily he has a few ideas of what to pass the time doing. He picks up Crocea Mors and he smiles. “I’ll leave you two alone.” He assures with a smile and Pyrrha looks at him, returning the same smile.

“How have you been? I mean I can tell your friends are definitely looking out for you – but how are you coping? It has been a few days since it all ended.” Glynda says to her, curious to see as she crosses her arms and raises a brow over the rim of her glasses. Pyrrha sucks her lip thoughtfully.

“I think I’m getting better. Jaune and all my friends have helped me tremendously. Thank you for the concern, I’m just tired Professor. Constantly...” She deflates, eying the shield still sat atop her lap.

“Mmm, I’m sure your tired of hearing people tell you it’ll be okay. And that you shouldn’t carry the weight of the world on your shoulders.” Glynda says to her, and Pyrrha bobs her eyebrows in agreement, fiddling with her fingers and her wrists resting across her knees. “But it will make it worse...and you must let others take over for the time being. Give yourself a break, girl.” Glynda suggests with a small laugh, for she still admires her courage to carry all of that on her shoulders.

Pyrrha looks up softly to the previously stern and angered well kept teacher and she sighs, letting a woebegone expression cloud her usually vivid green eyes. The teacher bends down to one knee and places a comforting hand on Pyrrha’s, giving the pale fleshed teen a gentle squeeze, green fields meeting.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Nikos.” She softly apologises, and getting a confused look from Pyrrha.

“Huh?” Pyrrha raises an eyebrow to the teacher. Glynda lets her lips unturn in a wry humourless smile.
“Whether Ironwood, Qrow or even Ozpin say otherwise, I know that we forced a horrible burden onto your shoulders. You should never have had to deal with all that.” Glynda frowns to herself, and Pyrrha’s eyes widen. Pyrrha bites her lip and her mind begins to race.

“I-It’s okay.”

“No it isn’t, my dear. Being a Maiden is not a burden a young girl should ever have to bare. And...To throw all of that at you at such a stressful time in your life was not professional in the slightest. I am truly sorry for what happened.”

Pyrrha however beams and sniffs, before wrapping her arms around the teacher and Glynda stiffens and her eyes widen behind her glasses from the loving hug. Pyrrha’s warmth radiates through her, and she gives in, gingerly patting the teen’s back, a small smile on her lips.

“I forgive you Professor.” Pyrrha smiles, reeling out of the hug. Glynda smiles back and she stands, brushing off the creases in her skirt and clearing her throat.

“V-Very well. That’s all I wanted to talk to you about, Miss Nikos. Remember to take your shield and your...umm...” She looks at the shrapnel in the case. “Spear?”

“Of course.” Pyrrha giggles with a smile, still with her beloved shield on her lap and the remnants of her spear are picked up with her hands. She sets them inside the underside of the shield, using it like a bowl. She shivers at the weight on her hands and a flash of memories hits her like a truck, the arrow impacting the edge and fragmenting into embers, rolling around and to form anew on the other side, but she dodged that one before the end of their fight. The real nightmare is the one that Cinder manually stabbed into her leg.

One that she still has a bit of a limp from.

Pyrrha blinks and takes the shield and places it down beside her on the bed as she sits there.

“And Miss Nikos?”

“Yes Professor?”

“If you ever need to talk, talk in a way you cannot with your team, or with Jaune...my door is always open.” Glynda promises kindly as she gives a small shrug. “I might not be a trained psychiatrist, but I’ve been a professor long enough to know how children tick.”

“I...” Pyrrha huffs. “Thank you, I appreciate the support.”

“Of course, now off you go. Have dinner and get to bed early.” The stern teacher became systematic all too quickly but Pyrrha smiles to hear her go back to how they are used to. Pyrrha straightens and nods, picking up her bag of fragments she has collected and she heads out to the door.

Pyrrha

Several hours have passed in that time.

Pyrrha stores the bag of broken spear and her shield in her locker, dinner has been eaten and stored
in her belly. People have shared gentle conversation until bedtime rose from the darkness, R.W.B declare “goodnight” and shut the door to Team S.S.S.N’s room, whilst C.F.V.Y and C.R.D.N continue the search for any bodies for tonight. As Pyrrha decides to grab her weapons from her locker and store them in her room, she wants them to close the door first, and when they do she checks all the pieces of Milo are still in the bag.

At least that is what she tells herself.

The truth?

The truth is that she misses the feel of her shield and spear, their combined weight either on her back or grasped in her hands. Even the bad memories that they produce from the battle against Cinder Fall inside of Beacon Tower, she at least wants to try and at least face them head on.

What better way than with a Shield and Spear?

Nora lies on her stomach, humming a tune as she kicks her legs back and forth behind her, flicking through a magazine she found. With her chin propped in her palm, she flicks her eyes up to the Dorm’s door opening. Red hair filed in, Nora beaming like sunshine.

“Hi Pyrrha!”

“Ah” Pyrrha startles with shock, stumbling into the room, her shield leaving her fingers to cartwheel across the room and bonk against the side of her bed. She looks over at Jaune with resting eyes and a neutral face. “Nora. Pleeease stop doing that.” Pyrrha breathes heavily, hand over her heart.

“Oopsie. Oooh, hey what’s in the bag?” Nora shuts her magazine with a clap and throws herself off her bed and onto her feet in blinding swiftness.

“Oh. Well...it’s my Spear.” She shakes the bag and they just hear the rattling. “Was my spear.”

“Ah. Wait did Glynda give you that?” Nora points a sceptical finger at the bag then the face down shield. “For realsies?”

“The cleanup crews find them on the tower, that was nice of them.” She smiles, setting the shield down against her nightstand, bag O’ Spear plopping down on the bed by her armour.

“I’ll say. Bet ya glad to have ‘em back, huh?” Nora skips across the room, resting her chin on Pyrrha’s cardigan shoulder, smiling and Pyrrha chuckles. Always able to lighten the mood no matter where she is.

“Actually, I am. I’ve missed training with them. Sure, I have to get Milo rebuilt, but Professor Goodwitch has already said that the school will cover the costs. I can afford it, but...still it’s nice she cares.” Pyrrha says to her.

“Of course she cares!” Nora gasps, playfully slapping her arm. “Mmm-hmm, Ren’s making pancakes! Want some?” Nora jumps into the small space between Pyrrha and her bed, the Invincible Girl reels back from the sudden blurry mass of cyan and orange that filled her vision. “C’mom, you know ya do!”

“Pancakes sound lovely.” Pyrrha hums, looking at her strewn armour. She worries her lip and her brows pinch, Nora catches onto the action.

“You okay?” The Valkyrie tenderly asks her. It was not very often that the softer, calmer and less
hyperactive hamster side of Nora would appear. Jekyll breaking free from the mental Hyde that lives in her most of the time, but it is always there inside of her tiny frame. If anything, it is refreshing to have such a chipper and sometimes crazy element to the group, smiles and laughs seem to be massively contagious around her.

“Have you seen Jaune at all?”

Nora bites her lip, shrugging. “Yeah.”

“Well, where is he?” Pyrrha takes the note one her pillow, smiling at his handwriting and giggling at the funny little P.S he out at the bottom.

*Filthy animal?*

She giggles at the funny little comment and sets it down. Nora’s eyes flit out the window to the rooftop above C.R.D.L’s room, where they are currently out of to collect the bodies. Pyrrha puts the note in her drawer and lets her brow curl in confusion. “Nora?”

“Training?”

A few minutes later...

“Alright Jaune, just like we practiced.”

Pyrrha stops herself from stepping any further, her hand pressing to the cool and lacquered texture of the double doors. She pauses and listens to the voice...her voice. A perplexed crease overcomes her features, before pressing her ear to the cold oak.

“Follow these instructions.”

Pyrrha presses her ear deeper into the wood, muffling all but what she was trying to focus on, her pulse drumming a rhythm in the foreground of her mind. The cherry haired girl hears a long drawn out scraping of metal, followed by a swish as a sharp blade swings gently, cutting through the air. She knows the sounds that blades make, she’d spent her whole life around them, studying them because he father demanded she did. She swallows thickly, hands pressing deeper into the now hot and clammy oak.

“Shield up...”

Pyrrha’s eyes widen, pupils constricting as a swallowed gasp squeezes out of her throat, like a clenching fist around a house. That is definitely her voice...

*Keep your grip tight...”*

Jaune watches the training video she made for him...before it all came crashing down. Before the Fall Maiden, before Penny and Mercury and Yang...before the Battle of Beacon...

...Before Cinder.

*Don’t forget to keep your front foot forward.”*

Pyrrha lightly chuckles under her breath, still trying to deeply concentrate on the sounds he was making. From shuffling boots on shelling concrete to creaking leather gloves. She knows he always forgets that one, curiosity gets the better of her, a shiver running down her spine as she
gingerly creaks the door open enough to peer round it. Cold air licking an icy path down her exposed cheek.

She could see him, stood in his armour sword in one hand, shield raised in the other and his stance finally perfect. Balanced on the coping stone with the backdrop of the new rebuilt C.C.T Tower, glowing green again and still with scaffolding covering most of the school and areas of the city. And leant there, is his scroll, the screen emitting a gentle blue hue, matching the sapphire in his reflecting eyes.

“Ready? Go.”

With a battle cry of cracking vocal cords, Jaune lunges forward in a surely death inducing stabbing motion. A gust of wind irradiates from the steel top of Crocea Mors’ shimmering blade, the lunar light glimmers across its contours.

“Again!”

Jaune reels the sword back in, throwing the almost four foot long blade over his shoulder to pool momentum in his shoulder and elbow. His voice hounds in, before erupting in a yell on the outward swing, slashing with all his might, staggering slightly as the blade’s weight tugs his succumbing body.

Bless him, he must have been out here for a whole by now.

“And again.”

Jaune pants but yells yet again as he turns around to swing downward in a slash that would without a doubt cleave flesh and shatter bone. He heavily pants, lactic acid pumping course through his body. Pyrrha’s eyes sting at how hard he’d been training, even when she must have been unconscious, and maybe even after that. Because he promised a long time ago to never give up, to keep trying even when she was not there. He has taken everything she has told him truly to heart, to better himself and all to help those around him. He is the best leader she could ever ask for, her eyes welling with compassion and adoration for the young man. She pulls her hand back behind the door, eying her feet and chewing her lip.

“Okay...now assuming you aren’t cheating...” Pyrrha’s very own training video laughs, but she does not. “...We can take a break.”

Pyrrha behind the door was not laughing, by the gods she has missed this so much, missed him and everything that they had together. She could not look at her armour without feeling horrible flashes of violence, of impending death and annihilation upon the school. Staring at Cinder Fall and accepting her impending death, a death that never arrived thanks to Ruby unleashing her Silver Eyes on the Fall Maiden. So much guilt across Pyrrha continues to flow, about Penny and how she shoved Jaune away, only to live and suffer the consequences.

But what nobody else ever seems to realise is that the pain she feels moreover is the idea of staring into the abyss of the end itself, embracing it and accepting that her tale ends there. Only for the arrow from that darkness to miss her and give her a second chance, a chance she felt she never deserved after what she had done.

Pyrrha flits her eyes back up and peers round the door once more as Jaune stands up tall with pain in his azure eyes, watching would could have been the last thing he had left of her if she never returned.
“I know this can be frustrating...and it can feel like so much effort to progress such a small amount...but...I want you to know that I am proud of you...”

Pyrrha bites her lip and closes her eyes, steeling herself to just open them enough to see him. See the way he stares at her in the recording, the way it pains him so much. Knowing that this video was surely made after she had decided to become the fall Maiden, and definitely at least twenty four hours after her battle against Cinder.

He stands there, so much pain in him, just like her, and yet here he stands, still training. Wearing his heavy metal armour, swinging his heavy sword, fighting through the negative emotions that torment him, to fulfil that promise he made.

“I’ve never met someone so determined to better themselves. You’ve grown so much since we started training...”

Pyrrha stands up with a new found determination and walks away, back to her dorm with a fire burning her green eyes. Back on the Balcony though, Jaune stares at the video screen of Pyrrha speaking directly to him in a way he hadn’t since before it all fell. Before their relationship fractured and scattered like ashes in the wind. He knows those pieces are still in reach somewhere, he just needs to man up and find them, piece the complicated puzzle of their love back together. His sapphire pearls flit back to the screen, sword in one hand, and shield heavy in the other.

“And I know this is just the beginning.”

He stands exactly where she filmed this recording for him, and it looks almost the same as it did then, only with scaffolding covering the damaged buildings.

“Jaune...”

She says and his eyes close, biting his lip at the soft regal tones saying his name, taking what he always thought was dull listless and making sound like forbidden fruits. Oh how he feels their relationship become exactly that – Forbidden.

“I...I...”

Very little does Pyrrha ever stutter, very rarely did something overcome the regal and self sure young woman. But that is exactly that, she has never been self assured, she is insecure to her deepest core. Pyrrha Nikos – the Invincible Girl – was self assured because there was an image pandered to an audience held grater. But Pyrrha herself? His gentle innocent Pyrrha who sleeps with her socks on at night because she has bad blood circulation to them, his Pyrrha who slept with the light on till she was eight because she was scared of the moon.

His Pyrrha whom fumbled her words when in his presence because he was too blind till too late to see that she loves him.

His Pyrrha is just a girl – a girl who desperately needs his help.

“I want you to know, that I’m just happy to be a part of your life.”

On the screen, her gloved hands come up to cup over her heart, an adoring smile on her face as ever. He heavily sighs, resting his sword wielding knuckles on his brow, as he realises that this was what she assumed may well be her last chance to convey her feelings towards him. She never thought she’d have the courage to kiss him in what she assumed were her final moments.

“I’ll always be here for you Jaune.” She smiles before the video ends, before he rewinds his back
to the start again with the small control in his gauntlet he wears. It pauses at the start, and he steps forward and bends down, clinking the blade as it lies low on concrete, freeing his hand to play it again.

The glow it emitted vanishes and leaves his face dark and eyes cloudy, staring at his reflection in the glass.

“So umm...partner?”

Jaune’s eyes widen to hear her voice and he turns around, bulging further and his sorrow curved lips upended into beaming smiles. Before him stands Pyrrha, clad in her armoured attire once more, red sash billowing in the gentle night breeze. Circlet proudly donned atop her head and she smiles. Akuou in one hand and a training sword in the other.

“Dooooo you want a training video, or the real thing?” She playfully smirks, lifting up her shield and raising the grey training blade.

Jaune grins eagerly to see the woman he has grown to love back again.

Now?

Now the healing has begun.

**Glynda**

Now that Ozpin’s Office has been rebuilt with a new desk and everything just as he left it, she stands at the observatory, pacing back and forth as she has her scroll to her ear. “Yes? Thank you Winter – they will need as much support as they can against the Black Gallows.” Glynda says with relief in her voice.

Winter hangs up and Glynda lowers her arm with a heavy sigh. She searches through her scroll for others. “Neptune Vasillias...what family members do you have?” Glynda mutters.

She comes across the names of his parents:

Roland Vasillias and Lavinia Vasillias

She calls their number, but waits for ages, either because they are not present...or do not wish to pick up their scroll.

So she keeps searching...

Until a familiar name comes to mind.

“Eryka Vasillias...I hope you’re still out there, you’re little brother needs you.” Glynda whispers, dialling her number into the scroll and waiting for her to respond.

The other end picks up.

“Hey, what’s up?” The female voice speaks. “Who’s this, not trying to sell me anything are ya?”

“Eryka?” Glynda speaks. “This is Professor Goodwitch from Beacon Academy.”
“Goodwitch? I recognise that name, you a teacher? Homework isn’t due is it?” Eryka playfully and sarcastically wonders and it makes Glynda chuckle.

“Afraid not – we have a situation here...have you heard of what happened at Beacon?” Glynda inquires.

Eryka’s persona suddenly shifts from playful banter to a serious tone of voice.

“What happened? The Mountains have no signal, what happened?” She fearfully asks, and Glynda sighs.

“There was an attack – don’t worry we’ve secured the situation for now but they are near. I have been calling relatives to come by if they can...your brother needs you...can you come by?” Glynda inquires, and then Eryka responds swiftly.

“On my way.” Eryka assures, before hanging up immediately.

Glynda sighs.

“Just like her brother.”
The Falconess

Lunar light pours over the land, skeletal shadows dancing in the breeze. A dusting of stars speckle the nightly abyss, like sugar on dark silk. Shards of crumbled moon scatter over the Mistral skyline, amber lamps and paper chandeliers casting a warming contrast against that cold crisp sky.

Two mountains reach to the heavens, spear tips puncturing the night. Their shadows ebbing and flowing as the moon slowly looms across the planet of Remnant.

The silence shatters to the echoing cry of a circling Altum Eagle, eclipsing the moon, white light dancing along it's ruffled feathers.

The same white light catches the pink buds dripping from the courtyard's bountiful trees, igniting them in an almost neon glow.

The eagle's head twists, a golden eye glowering down at the land it circles. A manor of huge oriental architecture, it's sprawling gardens and gravel paths patrolled by suited henchmen.

A silhouette clambers up the steep shingles, onto the apex of the roof. As the Eagle's eyes glow, so does the silhouettes own, her womanly figure before the moon.

An armoured guard looks up, eyes squinting at the figure above, a bow to her hip, a sash billowing at her waist. As another yawning henchmen steps across his view, she vanishes to the night.

His mind playing tricks? Perhaps. A long shift'll do that. With a few blinks, a slap to his cold and numb cheeks, he decides a coffee run is needed.

The silhouette grins in the dark, bending her leg and thumbing the coloured cartridges from the loops on her thigh high boots.

A flick of her wrist and the bow's cylinder drops to the side. Six shells thumb into the respective slots, another flick of her wrist snapping the cylinder back up into the bow.

Her eyes flit up to the sky and the Eagle overhead. Finger and thumb sit atop her bottom lip, and she blows.

A loud whistle echoes out, and the Eagle responds with a cry. Immediately the guards become highly alert to the still echoing whistle, and the huge Eagle folds it's wings back and dives towards its prey.

Several pounds of raptor slams talons first into one of the guards on the catwalk, sending him screaming down to the gravel below.

Hearts pound in the Henchmen's ears, rifles raised to the surrounding walls. Then the woman leaps over the wall, bow string pulled back as she eclipses the moon.

The shell in the chamber extends, like a telescope, arrowhead opening out into a flat and sharp hard point. The tail end clicks into the bow string and she releases her grip, letting it fly towards her targets.
Four rifles end up skewered to the opposing wall by the arrow, startling the henchmen and sending their gazes down to count their respective fingers.

She lands in a tuck and roll, rising up behind one Henchmen. Her bowstring is around his neck and the bow is twisted to create the needed loop, choking him into submission. Four others startle and fumble for side-arms, much to her chagrin. He's blue in the face and out cold by the time their pistols are raised.

Releasing the bowstring from one end of the curved wood, she swings around and lassos the wrist of the nearest guard, a firm tug pulling him toward her. The tips of the Henchmen's boots dragging through the gravel, he has no time to even yelp as her fist has squashed his nose and knocked him out.

Shots are about to ring out as the other three squeeze the triggers, the tightening muscles in their throats telling of their impending yells. She jumps forward and presses the thickness of her upper arm against the barrel, muffling the shot and taking her aura down in one fell swoop with a bright blue crackle.

Her Eagle companion simultaneously slams talons first into the other two guards, heads jerking back and falling flat onto the ground, guns scattered across the dirt.

She muffles a scream and grits her teeth as blue light dances over her body, before lifting her leg and stamping her heel down onto the Henchmen's knee, snapping his leg backward. A gloved hand covers his mouth as he screams into the fabric, tears trickling down his face. One firm punch puts him out cold.

The other two scramble for their guns, One receiving a high heel kick to the face, while the other grabs his gun and raises it to the woman.

A loud crunch echoes and the Henchmen looks to the arrow embedded in the dirt beside him, gun receiver skewered by it. His eyes look to the handle in his shaking hand.

She lowers her bow and lifts her boot to silence his voice, stamping on his face.

A quick tidy up, bodies stacked in the supply closet and door firmly closed to keep them in there. She huffs and blows the blue hair out of her eye.

“That... could've gone better.” She huffs, looping the bow over her chest. Standing away from the door, she turns to admire her handy work... as the hinges give and door falls in front of her with a deafening bang, unconscious guards tumbling everywhere.

She visibly winces with a flinching dance on the spot. Her finger quickly covers her lips, eyes ablaze.

“abllfsSHHHH!” she stutters quietly at the inanimate object. She lowers the gloved finger and surveys the private courtyard.

Silence. Phew.

She steps out from under the covering, looking up at the eagle perched above, it's head cocked to the side.

“Oh what, I didn't see you coming up with anything better.” She frowns. “C'mere.”

She holds out the brown padded leather sleeve over her right arm, letting the Eagle land heavily
upon her. The Eagle hops up her arm to her shoulder, Talons digging into the puffy padding.

“Here we go.” She huffs, a gloved hand lifts to ruffle the feathers across the Eagle's belly. With a calming breath, she turns and walks across the empty courtyard towards the huge overlooking manor.

The oriental architecture casts shadows across her body as she hops up the stone steps, wincing at the clacking heels.

At the front door, she bends over and fishes a thin knife from her belt, slotting the silver metal into the latch and gently feeling it around until it clicked. A grin slides over her dark skin, retracting the knife and sliding the huge wooden door open.

She gives a click of her tongue and flits her eyes up to the ornate woodwork outside. The Eagle flies up off her shoulder to the wood, perching atop it.

With that, she walks into the grand atrium, and makes her way to the kitchen. She moves through the house like she'd memorized the layout, no wrong turns at all.

Her heels lightly clack on the tiled floor, eyes scanning up and down the dimly lit room. The sharp smell of spices clawed her nostrils with every inhale, the seasoning rack to her left.

She saunters across the room, hand on the swell of her hip. Her head snaps to the side and her eyes find the fridge. That large chrome container, gently humming. Her stomach gurgles loudly, begging for sustenance.

Her hands are on the handle before she knows it, swinging the door open and bathing the room in murky white light. Saliva drips from her lolling tongue, eyes bugging out with love hearts. When was the last time she'd had a sandwich?! Like, a real sandwich, with cheese, and ham, and pastrami and tomato and whatever else was in the fridge?!

The soft bread is punctured by her teeth in seconds, holding the thick ham and cheese slice in her mouth like a carnivore at a kill. Her free hands grab at a bottle of milk, and the other at a wedge of chocolate cake.

“Ahem?”

Her eyes snap wide, dropping the cake and milk on the fridge's shelf. She spins round and embeds an arrow from her bow in the wall beside the intruder before the taste of the cheese in her sandwich has hit her tongue.

A floppy sandwich hangs from her snarling teeth and a bow still emptily aims at the shadowy foe. Said silhouette sighs and looks at the arrow.

“I just had this room decorated, Eryka.” She huffs in her nightgown. Eryka slings her bow across her back, tearing the sandwich in her teeth, greedily chewing the epic chunk.

“Well, Musht've been minutesh after Neptune left for Haven, bet you couldn't wait to cover up the childhood memoriesh.” Eryka says around the food in her mouth, her edge softens as she pulls the arrow from the wall. Her bright blue eyes roll as she turns her back to the woman.

“Oh behave, you know your father photographed every moment you two measured each other by the doorframe. Those pencil marks'll live forever in pho-“

“Yeah.” Eryka gulps the bite down. “He did. Where were you again? Oh yeah, that's right...
selling WMD's to fanatics.” Eryka spits, pulling a stool out from under the breakfast island, perching atop it. Her sandwich lost another chunk.

“That's cold, and massively misinformed.” Her mother frowns, flicking the lights on and casting away the shadows Eryka chose to sit in. Now she sits like a scolded child again – for but a brief moment.

“I don't sell weapons to fanatics, I give helpful tools to people trying to liberate their homelands, their freedom.”

“Is that seriously what you think? No, like for real? You actually believe the shit coming out your mouth?” Eryka sat up with a scoff. “You gave chemical weapons – no, shut up a sec – you gave chemicals to the White Fang. They placed a bid, you fatten your pocket, hundreds choked on violent air.” Eryka says slowly, trying to sink the truthful knife into softer meat.

“I sold helpful bio fuel to an organisation trying to free their homelands from dictatorship.” Her mother slowly speaks, pushing that knife out. Eryka slumps her shoulders, scoffing to the ceiling as her head lolls back in disbelief.


“It's pointless trying to talk to you. I really thought in your time travelling you'd have grown up a bit, seen the world for what it is.”

“Oh I've seen. It's in a dire bad shape, and all you're doing is adding fuel to the fire – almost literally.” Eryka laughs darkly. “I'm glad Neptune never saw the truth, saw this side of you. And I don't care if I'm telling him a lie, hell I'll keep lying and telling him over and over that you're a lawyer and that Dad's an accountant. Because he is pure, and perfect, and I will not let you taint him.”

Her mother stays stock still, back to her daughter. “You're the one who turned your back on family. Went gallivanting off across Remnant, filling scrapbooks with forgotten photographs of places that don't matter. I have been the glue that holds the Vasillias name together! Neptune may not know the truth, and you can tell him as many lies as you wish – I won't tell him. But do not hold yourself above me, when all you've done is squander your studies, in light of meaningless adventure.”

“One white lie to spare Neptune grief.” Eryka speaks coldly. “You know, one of these days, you're gonna slip up. One of your deals is gonna go south, and the black gallows will be waiting in the shadows, cuffs ready.” Eryka spits, squaring up to her mother. “Oh, and by the by, I wasn't off squandering. I studied hard. I got rejected, because I'm a... I'm...” Eryka chokes. “... I didn't even get my foot in the door before they slammed it shut on me.”

“The Black Gallows? Please, they don't go after small fry like me and your Father. Mistraalian Cartels barely gain the interest of Huntsmen and less so of the police. They're lining their stomachs in doughnut batter. In reality? The Black Gallows, their sweet tooth is hungry for Huntsmen. Like your brother. Like everyone who follows that suicidal path.” Her mother snarls. Eryka blinks, stepping back and scratching an itch above her eye.

“Not anymore, people across the Remnant have started disappearing, Non-Huntsmen. It's their signature move.” Eryka explains, but Lavinia scowls.

“Then they are being just as suicidal as the rest of the Huntsmen.” She states.

“It may be suicide. In your eyes. But to them? It's standing for what you believe in. I applaud that. I
mean, have you not seen the news?” Eryka shrugs, grasping the Holo-monitor's remote off the island and aiming it to the side, illuminating the room in blue light and Lisa Lavender's shrill voice.

“-Beacon's cleanup crews continue to work around returning students, showing the world that the Huntsmen of Beacon academy are not done, and not laying down without a fight.”

Eryka looks to her mother, and the blank expression on her face. “That's what the Black Gallows cares about. Not me.”

“There was an attack. Your son was there. And all you can think about, is the Black Gallows coming after you?” Eryka almost whimpers, seeing past her mother’s repeated statement. Showing her real fear. “You raised me, you raised Neptune. How, did he turn out so perfect?”

Her mother looks at her with hard eyes. “In the eyes of the beholder.”

Eryka almost draws her bow, her scarred knuckles paling. “As much as I enjoy these chats... I'm just passing through, thought you might like to know that Beacon's in a deep shit pit. Goodwitch – the headmistress – she called me. Funny, she could reach me in the mountains, but not you, in the middle of Mistral.”

Her mother's eyes look up to the Eagle perched on the open window ledge, cool air filtering through his chestnut feathers. She grimaces.

“G-Get that disgusting creature out of my house.” She snaps. Eryka scoffs, whistling through her teeth. Huge wingspan spread, the several pound eagle drops onto the marble kitchen counter with a clack of talons. He steadily hops across the counters, slipping occasionally on the weird alien surface.

The graceful yet clumsy bird soon finds comfort on Eryka's padded right sleeve, hopping up her arm to the consolation of her shoulder.

“His name is Dulcis, he’s an Altum Eagle. And, I look after him – in fact he's probably cleaner than me – and most kitchen worktops.” Eryka smirks, swiping her fingertip over the marble counter and examine the dust on her digit.

Her Mother steps to the side, gesturing to the doorway. “You can leave. And don't come back. Your Father wouldn't want to see you.”

“Is he here? Or is he hiding behind your shadow as always?” Eryka challenges.

But Lavinia just glares right into her daughter's eyes.

“Well, you know what they say? Pick a wound, it'll get infected. Time to heal.” Eryka sighs, stepping past her Mother with her chin held high, and Dulcis squawking in her Mother's face. “He's a good judge of character. Take care of yourself, Lavinia. I'll make sure Neptune's okay, don't worry. Tell Dad I was here.”

Eryka steps into the hall, stopping and sighing, lilting her head to her shoulder, dare not to look back. “I know you don't want to do this work forever. Once you wise up, once you ditch all that this dirty money has raised. You come find us, and you'll have a family again.”

Eryka looks to the scroll on the worktop. Her fingertip presses the icon.

“You have four missed messages from Glynda Goodwitch.”
“Think on that. Mom.”

Lavinia, rubbing her arm with wet closed eyes, looks up blearily to find the hallway empty, but a single feather on the moonlit floor. As the message plays, she bends down with a groan, picking up the feather betwixt finger and thumb.

“Hello? This is Glynda Goodwitch. Your son, he needs you at this moment in time. I hope you can reach us. Soon. Thank you.”

She looks up out the window to the huge oriental architecture at the end of the courtyard. The womanly silhouette on the roof looks over her shoulder, back to the house. The Altum Eagle named Dulcis takes flight across the shattered moon, as the woman leaps and disappears behind those foreboding walls.

On her way to Beacon.

**Ironwood**

The white expanse of ice stretches out for as far as the eye can see from the bordering walls of Atlas, the thick blizzard blowing across the entire city where people in thick puffer jackets retreat inside to their warm homes to relax. However the man looking over the city is far from relaxing, stood inside of his new ship with his hands behind his back, wearing his new white suit he has after the destruction of his old one.

He gropes his metal arm with his hand, feeling it starting to play up slightly, joints and gears twitching violently as he stands tall. He stares out at the expanse of completely unknown wilderness on their continent – known as the Atlesian Wildlands. These Wildlands are completely uncharted because nobody ever returns from the expeditions, machines get destroyed and the storms are so thick that no camera can examine the place, either being torn apart by the winds or the feed back to base is cut off. The concentration of Grimm in the Wildlands is also unknown, but the beasts that must lurk in there must be haunting.

For nobody to ever return, there must be thousands too.

Even the great courageous James Ironwood looks pretty worried as he stares out to the Wildlands where none have ever returned. With multiple documents splayed out across his holo-table, he sighs, lowering his head down to stare at them. All of them focusing on the three individuals that were spotted at Beacon and were confirmed responsible, along with a few pictures of Adam Taurus as well. Emerald is the one he mainly has his eyes set on, for she is the reason that the Vytal Festival fell apart, the reason that Yang snapped Mercury’s leg – allegedly – and now the death of Penny Polendina.

Both Mercury and Emerald have the most documented footage, however Cinder Fall is the one that he has very little of. Only a couple of photographs of her in the school uniform, then the dance and a few shots during the Vytal Festival. When attending the Vytal Festival Tournament, she wore gray pants and boots; a beige leather, sleeveless jacket with light-beige details; brown gloves, a sarashi tied around her chest and another around her hips, and a pauldron on her left shoulder. She also wore a belt around her waist, which had multiple brown pouches attached to it.

He cannot help but beat himself up about how the three of them managed to trick him so easily, he
was so focused on the idea that a chaotic thief was the one behind all of it. That he could have been the one working for Salem all along, but now he knows that he was just a pawn, and one that fulfilled its purpose. It is no hidden fact to them that the Grimm are controlled by Salem, meaning she could have killed him right then and there to cut off a loose end.

After the Battle of Beacon, Ironwood’s appearance is slightly less pristine. He has grown stubble and his hair is slightly messier. He wears a white, double-breasted tailcoat with dark blue and black accents, most notable at the cuffs and shoulder pieces. The coat is belted at the waist. Underneath, Ironwood has a black collared shirt and a red tie. Ironwood also now wears two white gloves, in contrast to wearing only one on his right hand. His formal pants are no longer tucked inside military boots but instead hang over black boots.

A knock on the door gets his attention and he turns, to see Specialist Winter Schnee standing there, with her eyes looking over to him. Winter Schnee is a tall young woman, with a fair complexion, white hair and slate blue eyes. Her hair is tied up in a bun at the rear left corner of her head, causing her bangs to fall towards the right side of her face, and leaving a small curled lock of hair that reaches below her left ear. Her attire is blue, white and gray coloured. It consists of a white coat with a red brooch, exposed upper arms and black gloves. Her pants have garters incorporated into them.

“General?” She softly speaks, actually sounding slightly nervous opposed to her normally sharp and proper demeanour she has. Ironwood closes up the document on Cinder and he turns to look at her, crossing his arms.

“Specialist Schnee – what can I help you with?” Ironwood asks her curiously with his arms crossed. She quivers her lip, worried as she walks into the bridge where he stands.

“Well – if it isn’t too much to ask...” She worries, and he raises a brow, caring for one of his best specialists.

“Of course not – speak your mind, Winter.” Ironwood requests as he leans against the table, ready to hear whatever it is that lingers on her mind. However he knows Winter, and despite how much she tries to hide it, she loves her baby sister like a mother would love their daughter.

“Well – I just have been thinking about what happened at Beacon...and...I need to know if my sister is okay.” She stammers as she fiddles with her fingers, however from the look on Ironwood’s face, he clearly already knows about the fight between Sun Wukong and Jaymes Ickford. With the C.C.T up, he saw the fight take place and Glynda already called him moments before she even called Winter to inform her on what happened.

He chuckles as he pushes his hands against the table, scratching the back of his head. “Clever move, Glynda, clever move.” He chuckles, and Winter looks at him with a confused expression, an eyebrow raised.

“Sir?” She asks him.

“Glynda? She called you to come didn’t she? Funnily enough she just contacted me as well – she knows that the Black Gallows are on their way.” Ironwood explains to her, but Winter looks increasingly confused.

“But...why are we here, then?” She asks him.

“Two reasons – first is I am waiting on Qrow to inform him on some news I have on his hunt for Emerald Sustrai, Mercury Black and Cinder Fall. The second? I am waiting on this ship to be
fuelled up.” He explains, pointing to the long pipeline that runs from the ground and all the way up into the underside where it feeds into the fuel cells of the huge aircraft. The long pronged wings at the rear of the vessel splayed outwards to allow for perfect flight. However Winter also knows the top speed of these ships, and unfortunately it is not as advanced as the Black Gallows ship that they have.

The Shadow of Broken Promises

“Sir – this ship will never get there fast enough before the Black Gallows get there, they could already be over the ocean by now.” She explains, and he sighs.

“We’ll have to hope for the best then.” Ironwood states.

“Or...” She begins to suggest, and he lifts his head curiously at her idea.

“Or...what?” He inquires, and she turns to the port where her Fancy Specialist Ship is currently landed, with the long sashes drooping down the side of its four long and sharp wings around its body, slender and sharp in design. Shaped like a Mosquito, the landing gear has been folded out from the lower wings, looking comfortable where it has set down on the pad, finished being refuelled.

“My Airship, it might be smaller but it is faster than these ones. It will be able to overtake the Shadow of Broken Promises faster than it can blink. We can get there and prepare before the Black Gallows even show up.” Winter explains, for she must have had plenty of time to analyse the flight speed of the ship that they speak of. A jet black Atlesian Airship, one with advanced engines and weaponry – even if it never needs it. It is also massive in comparison to its Atlesian Counterparts.

Ironwood nods his head slowly and he stands tall, rubbing his cybernetic wrist as he forms agreement with Winter. “I like your thinking, Specialist Schnee. When Qrow arrives, we will make our departure with some of your men.” Ironwood explains, but Winter groans aloud at the mere mention of the drunken fool, getting a glance from Ironwood. He has not forgotten their little skirmish in the Courtyard of Beacon.

“Qrow...” She mumbles to herself with annoyance.

“Winter – try not to start another fight. With how jumpy the Black Gallows have been lately, I don’t wanna risk them coming down on us as well.” He explains to her with a heavy sigh, scratching the top of his head with his hand.

“Well they didn’t show up last time.” She defends almost childishly, crossing her arms as she stands tall, prim and proper just as her sister.

“Winter...” He reminds as he stares at her, then she backs down and holds her hands up with a sigh, stepping back.

“Forgive me, General...I will act on my best behaviour from here on out.” She promises, and the General nods his head to her.

“Good – I don’t want to risk anything else, especially with how things are at Beacon right now. From what Glynda informed me of – Sun Wukong and this Jaymes Ickford boy engaged in a fight in the cafeteria. It drew a pack of Beowulves in and they attacked the cafeteria, but luckily Miss Nikos and Goodwitch managed to stop the situation before it got any worse.” Ironwood explains to Winter, he may as well since she will be joining her, however Winter knows of these events as well.
“I know, sir – Glynda told me as well.” She assures, and he nods his head.

“Well – did she also tell you that she has extreme concerns over this young man, Ickford?” he asks her, that is what strikes her as interesting.

“No...by what do you mean?” She asks him.

“She has told me the boy has Paranoid Schizophrenia and that his Clozapine Pills do not seem to be working. She has asked me to bring extra supplies from Atlas, stronger medicines to make sure that they work. He does not know and we hope we can just switch his meds round without him even realising.” Ironwood explains to Winter, however even he sounds pretty puzzled and uncomfortable with this plan, something Winter agrees on.

“That’s...a pretty risky plan. What if he catches us changing them? Couldn’t it trigger some kind of outburst?” She asks.

“That is what I asked her...I’m worried about Glynda, Winter. She is acting irrationally – she snapped at the students who were just protecting their friend. This Jaymes Ickford has been abusing Pyrrha Nikos for what happened during the Vytal Festival – and I understand that his paranoia is mostly responsible for all of this happening in the first place. But the way she has been handling this situation...without Ozpin at her side I worry about her abilities to run the school on her own.” Ironwood illustrates, expressing his feeling and worries to Winter, who unfortunately agrees with him.

“I can see this – Vale has always been arrogant but I never expected Professor Goodwitch to act like this...” She states.

“She is afraid that panic will follow – but her attempts to prevent it are stressing her out and soon even she could snap. All it takes is a drop of blood in the sea and the sharks will come for it – the same goes for panic and the Grimm. I do not agree with most of Ozpin’s methods, but I know that in a situation like this – decisions must be made wisely.” Ironwood explains as he stands there, sighing when he massages his brow with his finger and thumb.

“Well – let’s just hope that these meds will help this young man improve – but how could he have even gained access to the Academy with a health issue as serious as this? Or why has he not been expelled as a danger to the other students?” Winter inquires, since the way things are handled at Atlas Academy are very different, no flexibility at all in these rules, just rules. Many see that as uptight, however in a situation quite like Beacon’s, strict rules are probably best to keep the peace as long as they can.

“I don’t know – I believe she is trying to keep suspicions from getting worse, but I know these students. If that boy is not dealt with...Ruby Rose, Jaune Arc...all of Pyrrha’s close friends will defend her. And could cause a second fight...a worse one. We need to keep a close eye on them – all of them.” Ironwood explains, then without warning Qrow walks into the ship.

“Knock, knock.” He audibly speaks as he taps his knuckles on the doorframe when he enters the room, shoving his flask back into his coat’s internal pocket.

“Qrow – finally you showed up. Winter and I are returning to Beacon soon, a situation has developed. But I have some new documents for you of where to track down Emerald and Mercury thanks to my little birds out there.” Ironwood explains as he tucks the many files away into the folder he has, and he slides it over to him. Until Qrow’s hand slams down onto the file, stopping it there, staring straight at the General and Winter glares at him.
“What kind of – situation, general?” He questions pretty sternfully, worried for the safety of his niece.

“Don’t worry – your niece is fine – there has just been a fight and a few Grimm were drawn in...and it was enough to bring the Black Gallows in to deduce what to do next.” Ironwood explains to him, then Qrow shoves the files back to Ironwood.

“Then I’m coming, I need to be there for Ruby.” Qrow states, but Ironwood shakes his head.

“No you won’t – Winter and I are going there now to try and sweeten the punishment, make sure that they do not get taken away – to wherever the Black Gallows take people.” Ironwood explains, but Qrow continues to disagree, shaking his head with anger.

“No! I need to be there for her!” He argues.

“What you need to do is follow these leads! I can handle the situation there, so can Winter. And Glynda has called the relatives of students to come by and keep the situation in check over there.” Ironwood explains and Qrow raises a brow as he steps back.

“Tai?” He asks with concern, since he needs to look after Yang.

“I doubt it – Yang is still recovering from her wounds from Adam Taurus. But Miss Rose is strong, Qrow – if we do need you then I will call you. I promise – C.C.T is working again after all.” Ironwood explains as he waves his Scroll a little in the air. Qrow sighs, walking back and forth as he ponders on this, then he grabs the file on the table and he flicks through the pages inside.

“What did you find?” He asks the General.

“Well I found out that Emerald and Mercury fled Beacon without Cinder, she stayed behind to fight Ozpin and I noticed she tried to break into the Vault and find something. But she went to the tower to try and gain access to his systems – until Pyrrha Nikos arrived and stopped her. Good thing she did too, the fight caused the Dragon to attack and it smashed the tower apart, keeping Cinder from unlocking the entrance to the Relics.” Ironwood explains to Qrow and the Huntsman nods his head.

“Good – last thing we need to worry about is Salem getting access to the Relics.” Qrow agrees.

“Where did they go?”

“The last recorded footage of them was of them getting onto a train, looked like they were headed to Mistral.” Ironwood explains.

“Mistral...Haven is there...maybe they were waiting for Cinder to show up? But never realised that Ruby did what she did?” Qrow wonders.

“Very possible – Salem could be trying to cripple the Academies before going for the Relics. Meaning we need to be ready.” Ironwood explains. “Beacon especially.”

“Alright...be on your way – I’ll investigate this.” Qrow assures as he nods his head to Ironwood. Qrow turns and he walks towards the door, but then he stops, hand on the edge of the door. “Make sure my niece is okay for me, won’t you?” He asks, and they both nod to him.

“Promise.” Ironwood assures.

“Thanks.” Qrow replies, as he walks away, and then they see the Crow flapping away from the ship, most likely towards the Airship Port to book a flight to Haven to search for Emerald and
Ironwood sighs with relief. “That went better than I expected.” Winter says as she rubs the back of her head, looking at where Qrow was stood. “I was thinking we’d have to have more of a fight about it.”

“Qrow knows what’s at stake, but I don’t blame his frustration.” Ironwood states, and she turns to him again.

“So...shall we get moving?” She asks him.

“Yes – call your men and order them to your ship. We’re leaving.”

**Eryka**

During her journey to Vale...

The Falconess finds herself stopping at an Inn at a Crossroads, the night has become dark and the clouds are settling over the starry sky. Ready to bring a storm by the flashing lights in the thick greyness above her head. She walks towards the tavern and she whistles to Dulcis who circles around the Inn, waiting to see which room she purchases to sleep in for the night. She pushes her hand against the warm wooden door, sensing the fireplace inside from here. With a few bikes, a couple cars and some horses outside, there are definitely some people here.

She enters the Tavern and she looks around, there are people at tables eating their dinners and drinking their beverages – Human and Faunus alike. However some of the Faunus look quite shrunken down, due to the nature of how they get treated all the way out here in Mistral. Here the Faunus are treated very poorly most of the time, seen as animals – or at least in the city. But out here in the countryside, they are treated just as well as any other person.

Just another soul trying to survive the Anima Countryside.

Tired from battling Grimm on her journey from time to time and the ceaseless walking, she finds the need to sit down. She approaches the bar, and she pulls out a stool to sit on, with a few other customers sat there two, speaking indistinctly with each other. Clinks of glasses and the scrapes of cutlery repetitively resounding inside like the song of a band playing their instruments to an audience.

The Bartender approaches her, and like some of the customers here, he is a Faunus. He fills up one person’s glass with some Whiskey, so Eryka scans through the brands that he has on offer.

*Yellow Passion Wine*

*White Starlight Vodka*

*Grape Nightfall Laga*

*Vasillias Whiskey*

Her eyes focus onto the Whiskey of which her surname is branded onto it – curious to how that could be possible. But then again she has not seen her parents in quite a long time, could be very
likely that they have purchased a Brewery and started a business there to launder all that blood money, drug money and other versions that they have gained over the years. She sighs, tempted by it and she looks to the Horned Faunus Bartender. “Vasillias Whiskey, please.” She requests with a smile, waiting for her drink that she has earned after today.

One of the men looks over at her curiously, clearing his throat before he speaks. “Long day, huh?” He asks her curiously, with a voice only her brother and his friends would recognise. She glances over to the young man with his drink in his hand, also Vasillias Whiskey. He is a tall young man with partially slicked back while unkempt at the front grey hair with similarly coloured grey eyes. He also wears a slate gray and black two-tone partial-zip jacket that covers his upper body. He also wears a single notched belt with what appears to be a sash or bandana draped over it. Protecting his arms are sets of rerebraces and vambraces.

She might not know who he is, but those at Beacon do.

It is Mercury Black.

His hair is messier than before and he looks exhausted from being on the run all the time, in hiding after the end of the Battle of Beacon. Seems the life of a Villain is not as glamorous as he first thought it was.

Eryka just sighs as she waits on her drink, seeing the glass get set down, then he pours the whiskey into it. She picks it up and downs it in a single swig as she throws her head back, hardly even flinching from it. She does not tend to drink often however she can most certainly hold onto it whenever she needs to. She sets her glass down and she slides it back to the Bartender. “Yeah, you could say that.” She agrees, after her tense confrontation with her parents and the fights she has had against the many Creatures of Grimm along the way. Mercury chuckles as he rubs his eye and yawns.

“Yeah – my partner and I have been on the road a while now.” He agrees with a sigh, scratching the back of his neck. He looks over his shoulder to see her sat down at a table, her arm stretched out across the circular wooden surface, eyes watching both Eryka and Mercury. She is a young woman with medium-brown skin and dark-red eyes. Her hair is a light, mint-green cut with a straight fringe and bangs, as well as two long locks on each side, in the back. She wears two bronze-coloured rings on her middle fingers as well as a pair of high-heeled shoes. She wears an olive coloured crop-top and has a pair of green revolver scythes sheathed on the rear end of her belt round her waist.

Emerald Sustrai.

The two people with bounties on their heads after the disappearance of Cinder Fall, a pair of individuals that Eryka Vasillias has never heard of. She is not a Huntress and definitely not a Bounty Hunter, she is something else entirely. “Why’s that? On honeymoon or something, seem a little young to be married.” Eryka comments with a sarcastic tone to her voice, making Mercury chuckle.

“No, no – nothing like that. We’re old friends, our home was destroyed by the Grimm not very long ago. We’ve been trying to get to Haven to join up, make it right. Know how to get there?” Mercury explains with a question at the end, telling a complete lie to her – a pretty good one as well. However Eryka is no fool, she can tell when someone is acting shady and he cannot hide that from someone who has the eyes of an Eagle. But at the same time, she does not know what their plan is – so she leaves her answer vague.

“Sorry, man...never been to Mistral myself. Lived in the mountains most of my life, never made
the cut to be a Huntress. But the place is pretty big, if you follow the roads you should come across it eventually.” Eryka explains, not giving anything away yet still giving something to them. And most of what she said was true, except for never being to Mistral. She has been there just not much, she never needed to – always found peace and serenity in the Mountains of Mistral.

Mercury nods his head, looking Eryka up and down at her shapely body and her pretty face – but he can quickly tell that she is not to be trifled with. She may not be a Huntress but that does not mean she cannot kick his ass. “Well – thanks for the info, but we should keep moving. C’mon, Em.” He says to her, and she nods, standing up from her table and following him outside through the doors.

She sighs as she sits there, heating the doors close shut, until her bright sapphire eyes are caught by the glass of Yellow Passion Wine is set down before her. She narrows her eyes and furrows her brow in confusion, looking at the Bartender curiously. “Uh, sorry I think you got me confused for someone else.” She says to her, until the Bartender answers.

“Woman upstairs? Black hair and red eyes? She said you’d like that one on the house.” The Bartender describes and Eryka stops when she hears the description, able to describe her – because very few people would remember that she loved Yellow Passion Wine but rarely had any because of how expensive it was. She scratches her back where the Raven Tattoo is imprinted, then she sighs, picking up the glass as she rises from her stool.

“Did she now? Many thanks.” Eryka obliges as she steps away from the bar and walks away, her seat immediately taken by another customer who sits there and orders his drink. She keeps walking, knowing that some guys are checking her out, so she winks at them with a playful smirk. She steps onto the wooden stairs, making her way up each step until she reached the second floor, setting her blue eyes upon the person who gave her the drink.

She wears a shallow cut black and red dress, five necklaces with an assortment of beads, a red girdle-belt, and a pair of matching gauntlets. An object that looks to be made from feathers hangs from the right side of her skirt. Under her leggings, she wears black boots, which have red high heels and soles. Sat on the table by her right hand is her most distinctive feature is a fearsome, full-face mask that resembles the face of a Creature of Grimm. The mask has four eye slits, further enhancing the character's inhuman appearance. With ravenous black hair with red highlights inside, Her hair is loosely done up in a ponytail, tied by a red shawl, with the ends resembling curved black feathers. A cowlick can be seen protruding from the top of her head, similar to that of her daughter's.

Of all people, Eryka Vasillias knows her well.

Raven Branwen.

Yang Xiao Long’s mother who abandoned her many years ago, when she was born. For completely unknown reasons. Eryka stares at her as the shimmering light from the lantern on her table shines across her pale complexity. “Hello Eryka, been a long time hasn’t it?” Raven asks her with a soft smile on her face, one that does not look cruel at all. Eryka approaches her table with her Yellow Passion Wine in her grasp.

“Hey, Raven – surprised that you’re taking my presence so well...after everything.” She chuckles as she approaches the table, pulling a seat out and sitting down, Raven slowly pushes her mask aside to the wall so then it is not between them.

“I’m not mad at you for leaving, Eryka – just sad that it ended on such poor terms.” Raven explains with a sigh as she hangs her head. Something clearly happened to them, and Eryka also lowers her
head as she brushes the brim of the glass with her thumb.

“Well – you gave me a roof over my head when nobody else would. I’ll never forget what you did for me Raven, and I am sorry for the argument.” Eryka says with a chuckle, making Raven chuckle too.

“Don’t be, I like a good fight.” Raven shrugs with a smirk.

A pregnant silence ensues, one that Eryka breaches with an awkward clearing of the throat as she holds her glass up, staring at the fluorescent yellow wine inside. The scent of passion fruit with the alcohol is tempting her constantly. “Anyway – what’s up?” She asks her curiously, tilting her head.

“What? A lady can’t just catch up with an old friend?” Raven inquires.

“She can, but I know you Raven. You wouldn’t get my attention by giving up fifty lien for a bottle of Yellow Passion Fruit.” Eryka explains before she inevitably takes a sip, staring at the bottle in the middle of the table that Raven picks up and pours some into her own glass as well. Clearly both of them like Yellow Passion Wine as a fun drink to have every now and then – even if it is quite expensive. She sighs with pleasure as she gulps it down her gullet, setting the glass down and opening her eyes as the ecstasy of that drink flows through her body. “Worked though – but...what’s on your mind.”

Raven sighs as she holds her glass in her hand, taking a sip as well from it before setting it down on the wooden surface on her table. “Do you know who that guy was you were talking to?” Raven asks her curiously, so Eryka looks back at where he walked out then looks to Raven again. She shrugs as an answer.

“Well – those two are Mercury Black and Emerald Sustrai – two disciples for the one who orchestrated that attack on Beacon Academy.” Raven explains, then Eryka’s eyes widen and she stands up to go after them. But Raven grabs onto her hand, and shakes her head with a sigh. “Don’t bother – they’re long gone by now. Not like we could do anything to stop them.” Raven explains.

“Damn it...on my way to help my baby brother at Beacon and I just had a chat with someone who helped bring it all down?” She scoffs.

“Well my brother is hunting them, so he will probably catch them some time.” She explains with a heavy sigh, drinking some more of the wine. Eryka sits back down and she holds her glass up for Raven as she holds the bottle in her hand. Raven kindly pours some into her glass so then she can have some more. “So you’re going to Beacon, huh?”

“Yeah, this teacher called Glynda Goodwitch called me to be there for my little bro, Neptune.” Eryka explains, then Raven ponders curiously.

“Is he the one that is scared of water?” Raven wonders.

“I only have one brother, remember? And yes to answer your question.” She sighs, getting a chortle from Raven, and she immediately goes to defend her brother for his phobia. “Oh come on, it’s a real fear, his name has nothing to do with it.”

“I know, I’m sorry. The irony is just too good.” Raven chuckles as she drinks some of her wine, and Eryka cannot help but chuckle as well.

Raven sets her glass down and she sighs, getting to the subject at hand that concerns her. “Eryka...the reason I wanted to talk to you...I got a ping last night from my brother. And I know
what that means – something bad is coming.” She warns her with her red eyes staring right into Eryka’s blue ones.

“Something bad is coming? What the hell does that mean?” Eryka questions.

“I can’t say too much, because I don’t know. But people need to be ready – and trust me when I say to not trust the Black Gallows.” Raven orders, placing her hand on the table.

“Anyone who trusts the Black Gallows are idiots.” Eryka states.

“I know that, but really – they are up to something. Something big.” Raven warns, looking around whenever she says anything. There could be spies anywhere that could send information to the Black Gallows at any time.

“You’re worrying me – can you give me anything else?” Eryka asks.

“No – not because I don’t want to but just because I have absolutely no idea whatsoever. And that is what scares me.” Raven explains, touching her helmet with her hand. Eryka nods her head, listening to the things that her old friend has told her.

“When I get to Beacon, I’ll keep an eye on them.” Eryka assures, and Raven smiles as she nods, picking her helmet up and then her sword. She unsheathes the sword and she slashes it to form a portal, and she approaches it. But then she stops, looking at her with a smile.

“You can keep the Wine by the way.” She assures with a smirk, making Eryka chuckle. But before she leaves, Eryka has one final question.

“Raven?”

She stops and turns before putting her helmet on.

“You said your brother pinged you? Does that mean that Qrow is part of the tribe again? Or are you with Ozpin again?” Eryka curiously asks, clearly has some knowledge on the mysterious headmaster.

Raven stares at her.

And answers.

“I’m not talking about Qrow.”

Eryka freezes with stone cold fear in her body, and she can see the same fear in Raven’s red eyes. She puts her helmet on, and then she walks through the portal, leaving Eryka to her Wine as it closes behind her.

Leaving her alone.

With that knowledge.
Oncoming Storm

Eryka

A few days before her arrival at Beacon Academy...

The small merchant town of Omirato was nestled snugly in the folds of Mistral's mountainous landscape. The sun never baked the red clay shingles for long, before disappearing behind the humongous hills surrounding the village.

Streams of cool clear water ran down the evergreen landscape, and straight through the middle of town; vivid gold Coy fish travelling down the length of the town square. Bright pink lotus flowers bobbed on the surface with every wind pushed ripple.

Rich brown wooden bridges arched over the river, the handrails decorated with twisting green vines, their bright lilac buds falling gracefully to the water below.

People were busy – happily so. Stalls and merchants litter the town cobble town centre, many set up by the stream's edge. Large buckets filled with crisp water sat by the stalls, colourful Coy swimming around within.

The smell of freshly baked dough travelled down the length of the town, the valley acting as a wind tunnel. Other vendors added their own smells to the air; sizzling sausages, vegetable stir fries, a lengthy list of delicious smells drew Eryka deeper into the town.

She followed the gravel paths through the dead Kuroyuri and Oniyuri, and out the other side she soon came upon the small village of Omirato. She'd be lying if she said her stomach hadn't lured her here.

Her huge Eagle sat stoically on her padded shoulder, fluffing his feathers up and preening at them. Her hand came up to his belly, scratching it softly as her index finger slid up his preening beak smoothly.

“Hungry, bub?” She asked, eyes fixated on the town centre. She licked her lips and pressed her hand to her stomach, trying to stifle it's growling. With a sigh she sauntered forward into the crowds. She strut her way between people, on a mission for food. Either she was ignorant to the fowl stares, or didn't care. People's noses scrunched as she passed them, for she did not smell appealing.

She was young, fit, and attractive – the Vasillias genes being very generous to her and her brother. But living in the mountains, surrounded by eagles and their filth, skinning animals and staying in her own sweat, left a scent that contradicted her beauty.

“Soap! Get your soap!” A trader hollered. “Seriously! Soap for sale! L-Like... for half price, wow what a saving! Please, miss... take the soap.”

Eryka frowned, paused her stride and turned to the man leaning over his stall. The outstretched bar of blueish soap. She bit her growl back and blew out a breath.

“Thank you, Shonin.” She bowed her head. “Your generosity is appreciated... “ She smiled brightly, accepting the bar.
“That'll be fifty lien.” He nodded, hand outstretched. Eryka baulked.

“I see... th-that's half price huh?” He nodded. “For this? This thingy in my hand?” She gestured to the soap. He nodded again. “Nah, keep it. That's food money.” She dropped the soap into his hand.

“Hey! Believe me, you need this! So just accept the generous discount and clean youre-”

“Perhaps you'd rather I shove that soap in your mouth and shake you like a maraca! That should wash your filthy mouth out, huh?!” The muscular woman towered over him, teeth gritted and eyes flaring. He soon shrunk down behind his stall. “Honestly. Speak to your momma with that mouth?”

She rolled her eyes and turned away, not before Dulcis could squawk loudly at the trader. Eryka manoeuvred past a few people with a huff. “Besides... I shouldn't be allowed soap. Why'd they make it look like fudge?!! Easy mistake to make right?”

She looked at her Eagle who gave no interest to her mumbling. “… Stomach pumped. Sucks. Stupid.”

“Anyway! Real food!” Eryka brightened up with a toothy grin. “I'm so getting me some smoked salmon – that shit is to die for!”

Dulcis squawked in her ear. “Yeah, you get some too, Hakuna your tatas.” She scratched his belly. Before she got near the deliciousness, her ears caught a noise unlike the rest. A child, crying.

She snapped her head in the direction, hearing more and more clues. Crying. Laughing. Thumping. With a growl, Eryka pushed two people out of the way, storming in the direction of an alley between shops.

She whistled once and Dulcis leaped off of her shoulder, whooping wingspan flapping him up into the blue sky. Eryka blew the blue hair out of her left eye, gravity layering it straight back down. She pushed a garbage can aside, stepping into the alley.


She came to a corner in the alley, peering round it to the dark dead end, and the four teenager height boys and girls blocking the view.

Looking at their feet, she saw the cowering boy on the ground behind their spindly legs. Her pupils shrunk to pinheads. Her lip flared and she growled.

“Hey!” She snapped, stepping into the alley. The teens snapped to look at her. She crossed her arms and leaned her weight onto the wide swell of her hip. “There a problem here?”

“They're not my business!” a spotty teenage boy said, before turning and kicking the kid on the floor in the stomach. He yelped and Eryka's eyes scrunched shut, her fists tightening at her hips.

“Leave him alone...” She said, though it came out low, and quiet.

They kicked him again. “Give us your lien Connie!” Every kick and Eryka shuddered, those fists paling within her leather gloves.

She stepped forward, her heels clacking slowly. Her gloved hand found the spotty boys shoulder, reeling him around sharply. Before he had time to protest, to spit insults, his nose was bleeding and
he was crashing into the bins in the corner.

“You can dish it out... you can take it.” She snapped with a low and sinister growl. He stumbled over the bin, tears in his eyes as he shoved through his frozen friends.

“C-C’mon, let's get outta here! I'm tellin’ my Dad!” He yelled as his spineless friends followed. They took off out of the alleyway with tears and snot down their faces. Eryka sighed, calming down and eyeing her gloved hand, rolling it over to eye the red liquid smeared over the leather knuckles.

She shakily sighed, thumbing it off and blowing out a breath.

“Th-Thank you.” The small boy on the floor wheezed. Eryka bent down, forearms across her knees. She smiled softly and offered her hand. He gingerly lifted his.

Her gloved fingers took his and she gently pulled him up off of the floor. “Tsk, oh look at you, honey. C'mere.” Eryka doted, pulling a handkerchief from one of her numerous waist pouches. She dabbed at his cuts and softly wiped the blood away.

The cat ears caught her eye and she sighed. “Faunus, huh?”

“A-Are you going to hurt me too?” He panicked, falling back on his butt and shuffling away. Eryka's eyes widened.

“N-No! No, kiddo, c'mere I haven't finished.” She dabbed her wet tongue to the white fabric, dampening it and pressing it to the skinned patch of red on his knee. “I have no prejudice against you guys. I bleed red, you bleed red. We're all the same. Just different on the outside.”

“Oh. S-Sorry, I didn't mean to...”

“Hush. Cuts or cracks?” Eryka spoke, looking up through her hair. The ten year old Faunus blushed.

“H-huh?”

“Just cuts, or does anything feel broken? You feel sick? Pale?” Eryka asked. He swallowed thickly, rubbing his brow.

“I don't think so. Just sore.”

“Seem like a good kid.” She smiled that million lien smile. “Up ya get.”

She took his hands and slowly got him to stand. He got his footing, rubbing his head and the dirt off of his brow.

“You... hit him. Hit a kid?” He asked. Eryka sighed, lowering her head and turning away. “Wait! I-I'm thankful! Really!”

She stopped and sighed heavily through her nose.

“It's just... most people would never. They'd walk past or ignore it... at most try and talk them off of me. But you just... “

“I hate bullies, alright? They have shitty lives, so to make those shitty lives better they give people shitty lives too. S'not how it should work.” Eryka huffed, pinching her brow. “I-I mean don't get me wrong, I didn't like hitting him , it's just...” She blew out a breath, biting her lip and eyeing the
blue sky peaking between buildings. “I'm working on my anger, I'm better... some people just bring the worst out in you.”

“Yeah... your worst saved me though.” Connie smiled. “Thanks for that.”

“You're a good kid. Don't deserve this.”

“Maaaybe this kid could... get your number?” He grinned cheekily, even with a missing tooth. Eryka chuckled heartily, turning to him with a smile.

“Smooth, buster.” She smirked. “You're young. You've got the world ahead of you. Don't let people's preconceived notions on what are some adorable cat ears keep you down, kay?”

She closed her eyes tight and when they opened, those blue eyes were gold. An eagle echoed over head, and her eyes distantly danced on the wall in front of her.

“Umm... are you-”

Eryka blinked and her eyes were blue again. She massaged her brow with a groan, before turning to the Faunus boy.

“Take care of yourself, kiddo.” She threw him the handkerchief. With a parting smile, she turned and leaped up the wall, a foot on a pipe as she vaulted up to catch the coping stone. She hauled herself over the ledge and disappeared. The small Faunus boy was left in the alley as a trio of adults came rushing around the corner.

“Where's this woman you were... Connie? Connie what happened?” Two Faunus women ran over to him, on their knees and doting over him. “Did your son do this to him again?! I swear, we'll press charges!”

As the parents argued, Connie looked up to the top of the alleyway, a smile on his face. In his hands was the handkerchief. He unfolded it and written on the fabric in blotchy black was a length of numbers. He chuckled lightly, despite the arguing adults.

Across the way, outside the town, Eryka looked back with a sigh, Dulcis dropping down onto her shoulder, dropping the hot dog bun in his beak into her hands.


Winter

Present Day...

The fierce blue eyes of the prim and proper Winter Schnee gaze out from the bridge of her Airship, her hands held formally behind her back. The smell of fresh perfume, scented with a rather plain perfume since she is a Special Operative in the Atlesian Military. Her tended to washed white hair is tied up in a bun at the rear left corner of her head, causing her bangs to fall towards the right side of her face, and leaving a small curled lock of hair that reaches below her left ear. Her face filled with certainty of her mission, staring across the City of Vale still under repairs, and the huge tower of Beacon Academy’s C.C.T Node piercing through the clouds like the spear in the hide of a Creature of Grimm.
She exhales, lifting her eyes to the sight of the huge Amity Coliseum that just drifts away from the school ever so slowly, the gravity crystal carrying it still holding significant charge even without proper maintenance. Smoke and flames no longer trail but the damage can be seen, and compared to the rest of the damages after the Battle, that is the one location that has not even come close to being tended to. “The Amity Coliseum...it is still in motion.” Winter describes as she watches it with her analytical blue eyes.

Sat down behind her on a bench across the walkway above the many operatives manning the vessel under her command, is General James Ironwood. His hands clasped together, not sitting in her seat either. “Yes – the concentration of Grimm on the station is so strong that nobody can get aboard it to clear them out or shut it down.” James tells her as he looks at the floating mega-structure floating further. Winter closes her eyes with sadness, not overly certain if she wants the answer to her coming question.

“General...how many people survived the evacuation from the Amity Coliseum?” Winter inquires, and James sighs as he remembers the casualty numbers.

“One thousand, five hundred and sixty three...out of nearly five thousand overall.” He sighs, and the reality of what happened up there is haunting to imagine. Because thanks to the White Fang they kept dropping Grimm onto it, and with the Grimm Dragon at their side it only made things easier for them.

“It’s a mass grave...” She stammers with shock and heartbreak, and James agrees.

“Maybe...it’s best to hope that it will just...fall into the sea.” He sadly says as they watch it slowly move across the mountains, and away from their field of view. An entire Coliseum floating in the sky, once sprawling with life.

Only to be snatched away by an attack that claimed thousands of unlucky lives that never made it across. “It’s hard lying to the world about it, that we managed to get everyone off. But we all know that soon all the widows and widowers...the parents missing their sons and daughters – they will figure it out...and we will have an even bigger problem to worry about.” He sighs as their ship moves across the sky towards Beacon Academy. Winter turns and walks over to her chair, looking down to one of the operatives.

“Have we transmitted our authorisation codes for landing?” Winter asks her.

“Yes Ma’am, we should be landing in half an hour if we have no difficulties.” The operative replies with the firm nod of her head.

“Good, keep me updated.” Winter replies, sitting down in her chair, turning it round with a swivel and stopping it with her foot to look at the General. “I’m surprised you wouldn’t want to sit here.”

“I may be your General, but this is your ship, not mine. I wouldn’t dare try and take that from you.” He assures with a smile on his face, the man may have many faults but a lack of honour is not one of them. She smiles back and she bows her head gently as she taps her fingers against her knees. Ironwood sighs as he taps his human fingers against his cybernetic ones, unable to stop thinking about everything that has happened recently.

“Literally three weeks ago...everything was fine – we were all excited for the Vytal Festival – and there were not at least six thousand Valerians...and even others...dead.” He sighs, unable to calculate the problems that have spread across the world. “Lionheart managed to get in contact with me alongside Dorothy in Vacuo – the Grimm attacked the other Academies and Cities as well.” He sighs, getting a worried look from Winter.
“What? What is the situation like?” She stammers.

“Well the people of Vacuo sound like they enjoyed the fight, managed to use the Sandstorm to their advantage. Buried half the Grimm in Sand and their Pyromancers used their flames to melt the sand into Glass. Now there is a huge circular ring of Glass around the Academy. They are working hard to break it down.” Ironwood chuckles, admiring the idea of the people of Vacuo banding together to stop a major attack on their Kingdom. But even the scoundrels seem to be able to drop past issues and work together to stop the larger threat that they all face.

“And Mistral?” Winter inquires, and he sighs.

“Not fairing as well – because the Kingdom is so large the Grimm are still present around the area. Contracts through the roof to kill creatures lurking in the Farmlands. But the walls took a heavy hit – Manticores and other horrible titans attacked with the Goliaths. But they survived – lost many people. But Beacon and Vale suffered the heaviest toll of losses, up to four thousand, one thousand in Mistral, seven hundred in Vacuo and a few hundred in Atlas. Overall? Around six thousand deaths in a few weeks – still some more crop up in Mistral because of the Grimm that stalk the lands.” Ironwood explains with detail, remembering the things that Lionheart informed him on.

“Well – should keep the Huntsmen and Huntresses in Mistral working hard for quite a while.” Winter states as she crosses her arms, then resting one elbow on her other forearm, massaging her brow.

“I am hoping for some light from the darkness soon.” He sighs as he sits there, stressed and tired from all the work he has had to deal with.

“How are the council handling the situation? They don’t blame you for the Atlesian Knights do they?” Winter inquires, and James looks at her curiously of how she would know of these suspicions.

“You heard?” He asks her.

“U-Um...yes, before you called me in after the Battle? When you asked me to help mend your arm? Before I opened the door I heard the call you had with them.” She explains herself, but Ironwood is not angry at the fact she overheard – he has always admired her honesty with him, so he has been honest in return.

“It’s...difficult to say right now.” He says, standing up and walking across the walkway, and Winter turns her chair as he passes by her with his arms behind his back. “They have plenty reason to blame me, I was the one that demanded that we enforce Beacon and Vale with the machines. And then they easily get hacked into and start attacking citizens, all caught on camera thanks to that bastard Mercury Black.” Ironwood snarls as he clenches his hand into a fist, ready to beat the young man to death for what he had his hand in the attack.

“But that’s just it – they were hacked. That is not your fault.” Winter reminds.

“Maybe, but that is not how the people around the world will see it. They have already drawn their own conclusions, so I guess we just have to wait and see what kind of punishment is waiting for me. I know that the Black Gallows have their eyes on me, I’ve had some spies watching my home.” He explains as he presses his hand to the window, staring out at the beautiful green landscape before their very eyes.

“Spies?” Winter asks.
“Yes – Cloaked Watchmen in the darkness watching my every move, not sure what they are planning but I should keep my eyes peeled when they arrive.” He sighs as he scratches the back of his neck. He sighs, letting his head fall forward, hanging down his chest and he approaches Winter again, sitting back onto that bench. No surprise he has been struggling with sleep, the politicians have been hammering him and now the Black Gallows are watching him constantly. “Politics...how tiresome.”

Ironwood exhales and then clears his throat as he straightens his back and looks over to one of his trusted students. “Forgive me, Winter – you must be struggling as well. I am sorry that I sent you away from Beacon when I did, especially knowing Weiss was here when it all happened. That must have been hard on you.” Ironwood sadly explains to her, feeling partially responsible for everything that has happened recently in her life.

“It was tough – but you were right. Weiss is stronger than I thought, I saw some of the footage of her in action...she managed to Summon.” Winter explains, remembering the sight of that massive sword and arm stopping the attack from the Atlesian Paladin under the control of the Black Queen hack.

“I saw that too – was not a whole Knight though.” He comments.

“No, but I am still very surprised she managed to Summon as much as she did – that is not easy, especially for something as large as the Giant Armour.” Winter proudly explains to the General sat before her.

“Giant Armour?” He inquires.

“Yeah...it was a captured Grimm that my father had collected – have you heard of his little collection he has at the Schnee Manor?” She inquires curiously, revealing something very curious yet intimidating.

“I have – can’t say I agree with it but he has the council’s backing for whatever reason.” He sighs as he scratches the back of his head.

“Well she told our father that she wanted to follow in my footsteps, he did not approve of course but I managed to persuade him. I had her train against my Summoned Beowulves at first.” Winter explains, and Ironwood raises a brow curiously of what she means by this, since it sounds like Weiss never trained at one of the Atlesian Combat Schools.

“I knew she never trained at Atlas Academy but I am surprised she never trained at a combat school.” Ironwood states, sounding ever more curious of the family.

“Well she was going to but I decided it would be best for a Schnee to teach her. We are unique since we have a hereditary semblance after all, be best for he to learn with me after the training you gave me.” She explains, and Ironwood smiles with a nod – he taught her how to fight and use her Semblance, but Weiss did not get the same offer.

“Can’t imagine Jacques would be all for giving up some of his prized possessions like that, I know he liked to sell them to people on the Black Market – including the late Doctor Merlot too.” He remembers with a heavy sigh, since some of his Grimm that the infamous Madman used were given to him by Jacques’ collection.

“He wasn’t at first, so I trained her against some of the Summonings I cast, Creatures of Grimm I have slain over the years. But there was one creature I knew she should face, one that was real and when she was ready I convinced my father to let this one go.” Winter explains, surprising the
“Wow, you convinced him?” He questions.

“Well I pointed out that there was no way in hell he would get a profit from it down to how dangerous it was. The Giant Armour, a Geist possessed one of our giant armoured statues and killed many people, but my father devised a scheme to capture it, using forcefield technology to prevent it from escaping. But nobody would purchase it because of the risk being so high.” Winter explains in detail, since this monster was so strong and dangerous its value actually dropped.

“Money will always convince a Businessman.” He chuckles.

“Its’t that the truth? So for her final test before sending her off the Beacon, I had her challenge the Giant Armour. It was a tough battle, and it gave her the scar down her eye that everyone remembers her for, if you skip the fact she is a Schnee and is good on the eyes. But she managed to destroy it – and I sent her successes in her form to Beacon. And the rest is history, she got there – had a red hooded little girl sneeze and explode dust in her face and then got in a team with that same girl.” Winter explains, remembering every single letter her little sister had sent her way.

“I’m glad you and your sister stay in contact.” Ironwood says with a smile.

“As am I – it is amusing to hear her adventures...more concerning to see her living situation though.” Winter remembers, seeing those horrific excuses for living quarters that she stayed in.

“You mean the Bunkbeds? Yes I believe that was Miss Rose’s idea.” Ironwood chuckles, for everyone seems to love Ruby for her adorableness, yet also her devotion to her cause.

“Even before I met her – I always admired her leader, maybe not for her bizarrely sweet personality – but more for her devotion to her team and the cause she fights for.” Winter states as she clenches her hand into a fist.

“Agreed – Ozpin was very fond of her, I guess we will find out what he thinks when he wakes up.” Ironwood sighs as he stretches his arms back behind his head.

The two of them sit comfortably until the sound of a beeping alert comes from one of the Operatives’ screens, getting their attentions. Winter swivels round with her military persona flushing right back into her system as she stares at the back of the head of the operative that is investigating the alert. “Ciel? What is it?” Winter asks her with concern, with everything that has been going down recently they cannot take an alert lightly. The navy blue haired operative turns to her, after examining the alert as best as she could.

“Ma’am, massive energy signature three kilometres ahead of us.” Ciel reports, and on cue they all see it and it strikes terror into their hearts.

The sun appears to go dark, like an eclipse with a ring of light around the crack between dimensions opening. Thick black shadows pour out from within with crackling red lightning sparking out as it emerges from the fog, and their eyes widen on all their faces – even the experienced General Ironwood. A huge black Atlesian Super Carrier emerges from the shadows with red lights opposed to white and blue glowing across its hull, massive cannons able to level cities in seconds build into its thick hull. There is a deep metallic bellow, of the fissures of matter being ripped open like that and the roar of the Super Carrier’s engines thrumming across the landscape.

The black portal of which the vessel emerged from collapses as soon as the rear prongs have
exited, the black smoke swallowing into itself and the red forked lightening sparks as it is pulled inside as well. The wormhole fades away and all that remains is the deep droning thrum of the huge airship that approaches theirs, absolutely dwarfing it in comparison. It moves up, then they feel the engines in their ship just shut off, and it enters Vertical Take Off and Landing mode. Then a long boarding tunnel extends from the bridge of the ship, connecting to theirs as it hovers there.

The airlock opens, and the Atlesians turn to see the doors opening, and they see them. Four heavily armed Black Gallows soldiers – known as the Storm Guard – marching in with heavy metallic footfalls, rifles gripped in their hands constantly and moving more like machines than humans do. Unlike Atlesian Soldiers, their armour is thick and complex, with multiple plates overlapping each other with a long black robe covering over their shoulder and down their back. The unmistakable red visors of their helmets stare straight to the General and Winter.

One of them speaks, yet their voice has been distorted by an Identification Disguiser, mysterious to their very core, for you cannot even hear their real voices. “General Ironwood, Specialist Schnee – Commander Killian would like to have a word with you.” The Storm Guard states through his deformed voice, staring at them with soulless visors for eyes. Ironwood looks at Winter and they both nod, Winter stands up and she looks back to her crew.

“Stay put and be ready, we will return shortly.” Winter assures with the firm assurance in her voice. The two of them look back to the Storm Guard Soldiers standing before them, and they follow them through the open airlock and across the enclosed bridge that has been created. Knowing that they are walking above a few hundred meters of nothing until they meet ground. If this thing breaks then it would be a long fall and a hard impact, one that aura could not save them from.

Eventually they reach the other side and the airlock opens up, and the heavy walking soldiers step round the corner, and they stand back straight against the wall. Rifles held upwards and their trigger fingers kept far away from the curved steel. The two of them walk past the many soldiers inside of the bridge right now, not as conversational as the Atlesians – which really says something too. They both approach the main chair.

The Commander is sat there with a coffee caught onto the hook of fingers, steam trailing from his warm beverage, and he holds a copy of the *Remnant Times* in his hands. Reading the news that has come out, written by countless journalists. They cannot see his face, only his black sleeves and trousers with a black revolver sat on the arm of his chair.

These guys like black apparently.

General James Ironwood is the first to speak. “If you wanted to board our ship, Killian, you could have just asked.” Ironwood states with his arms crossed, and what follows is a deep and pretty chilling laugh from behind the newspapers. Then he slowly sets them onto his lap as he speaks.

“We need to talk.” He announces, as he reaches up to a device that has been fused to his collarbone, with a pair of pipes running into windpipe. He presses a button and there is a pressurised hissing sound as medical gasses are pumped into his system, clearly he has a respiratory issue. The sound is deep and metallic, like a monstrous breath from a demonic monster. He has a dark shadowy beard and a pair of dark onyx coloured eyes, black hair that has been slicked back. He has a scar across his jaw line that clearly has been given by a Grimm.

Voice stern and serious, and very intimidating.

This is the leader of the Black Gallows – Commander Killian.
And it has already been made very clear that the Black Gallows have access to unbelievably advanced pieces of technology, especially that teleportation tech that allows the Shadow of Broken Promises to pass through the portal seemingly unscathed.

Ironwood exhales as he stands beside the much smaller Winter Schnee, who would be lying if she claimed she was feeling brave right now – she is terrified – as any Huntsman or Huntress should be if they have heard the stories of them. The things that happen to them...the mystery of where the rogues go when they are caught.

But now there are people everywhere disappearing for unknown reasons, Huntsmen or not. “Don’t you think it is a bit extreme to bring you guys into Beacon over a scuffle? It was just a fight, they are kids it was bound to happen. Tensions are high.” Ironwood defends, but the Commander glares at him with angry eyes.

“I saw the footage – the boy started the fight yet I have also learned some...interesting information about the young man. Jaymes Ickford?” Killian wonders with a curious expression, but Ironwood stands his ground. “Paranoid Schizophrenia, huh? Why on Earth would Glynda Goodwitch let the boy in for that condition? He is clearly a threat to every student in the school, even before this current situation.”

“Sending an unstable child home to a father who beats him bloody every night?” Ironwood questions. “Do not get me wrong I understand your concerns, I share them too – however what else can she do?” He questions with confusion.

“Send him to a hospital for his illness, or just send him home. Away from the students where he could be a threat.” Killian shrugs his shoulders, hardly even caring about the boy.

“Sending him to an Insane Asylum does not help him.” Winter states with a heavy sigh, but Killian stares at her with cold eyes.

“I care not for helping him...I care for controlling him. The Huntsmen and Huntresses must be controlled, they are all dangerous people if they decide to go rogue.” He explains as he massages his mug with his thumb before taking a sip from it, not even flinching from the heat.

“You’ve made that extensively clear in your career, Killian.” Ironwood growls.

“You speak like I am some kind of monster – but I am the one that makes sure that any Huntsmen and Huntress that goes rogue disappears. And I don’t know about you, but what I saw in that footage is the first sign of it. Believe me when I say, those students you care for so much? They will betray the Academy soon, it could be tomorrow, it could be in a few years time, hell it could be right now. What matters is that we deal with the situation as fast as we can.” Killian explains, setting his mug down and pressing his hands together.

“So what? Your gonna waltz into Beacon and arrest all of the students in that footage?” Ironwood asks him, but then the Commander stands tall and stare the General down with stern onyx eyes.

“No – I am going to oversee the situation. And then I will decide what to do next. Not you.” Killian growls, staring straight into Ironwood’s eyes.

“We’ll see about that.” Ironwood replies, turning with Winter to return to their ship.

But before they leave Killian has one final warning. “Do not stand in my way, Ironwood – I can always find a replacement for your position at Atlas Academy.” He assures with a calm voice.

Ironwood stands still, feeling a chill up his spine.
He looks back at Killian.

“Noted.”

He walks away from the Black Gallows, ending their conversation as quickly as he could, but that is not the last they will see of Commander Killian.

Not by a long shot.

Pyrrha

Incredible to think that a week has passed by now since Pyrrha woke up again after the end of the Battle of Beacon. And it is nearly two weeks now since that battle ended too, and yet it all still feels like it has been only a few days.

Pyrrha and Jaune have been darting around certain topics in certain conversations, such as the topic of where they stand relationship-wise. However straying from these conversations so then they can have them at a later date; they have been mending their relationship exponentially. Hanging out more often and actually training together again on the rooftops of the Dormitory Wing. They may not know how they feel about the topic of whether or not they still feel they are in love with each other – but there is something there, something that they cannot deny.

But they need to be more open and honest with one another, especially with the coming storm on its way. With the Black Gallows encroaching on the Academy of Beacon in their vessel the Shadow of Broken Promises, the horde of Grimm around the school not getting any further and Glynda struggling with the responsibilities of command...things are not looking good in the slightest.

But there are pros to all of these cons, and one of the largest ones is how Pyrrha’s attitude is changing for the better very quickly. She is a lot happier and no longer slouches around the school in her comfort sweats, now she gracefully walks around the Academy in her school uniform again. She is washing her hair again and ties it back into her wolf tail with long fluffy crimson red voluminous locks. Her once grumpy and pale face is vibrant again with stunning emerald eye liner and shadow, with makeup hiding some of the spots on her face that were visible without the makeup that concealed it.

With rosy cheeks and a kind smile on her face that seemed so distant long ago, she walks with the circlet proudly donned on her head.

Pyrrha Nikos is back.

A smile adorns her sweet face as she pads across the campus with her books, emerald eyes glancing to the thick black smog that lurks through the treeline of the forest. The Grimm are still staying so close to Vale and the borders of the school the smoke itself is bringing fear. And the more fear spreads throughout the area, the closer these monsters will come. Everyone has their scrolls on their person, ready to use them if they must call in their lockers in case of an attack from curious Grimm that get too close.

She continues to move down the campus, hugging her books to her chest, humming a happy tune as she steps around a clean-up crew sweeping up stacks of rubble piled up in places. One of the men
smiles as he looks at the young student, tilting his yellow hardhat to her. “Morning Miss Nikos.” He greets to her with a smile, so she smiles back as she hums.

“Good morning, sir.” She replies, walking ahead of them; pass their workshops as they cut up pieces of wood with circular saw. The closer she finds herself walking towards the workshop that the construction workers have set up, the more her hums are drowned out by the scraping of the blade, and she only feels the vibrations in her head. Clanging hammers fill the chorus of power tools that whir and screech, as hard hat wearing builders walk across scaffolding towers, or carry some more poles for the structures being built.

As she keeps walking, suddenly the familiar voice of a friend startles the red headed beauty. “Hey, Pyrrha.” Blake greets with a smile, joining her in the walk she is taking. Blake follows her and she holds her studies under one arm, since the old ones are now charred and ruined she now has some brand new ones.

Along with a new copy of “Ninja’s of Love”, a book she holds so tightly between her fingers.

“Oh! Hello, Blake! How are you this fine day?” Pyrrha adorably inquires with a smile on her face, clear as ever after the sad look she used to have. It is a face that brings warmth to the Feline Faunus’ heart.

“Wow, someone’s happy today, huh?” Blake nudges with an enthusiastic smile – almost alien from her.

“I am, I really am. I finally feel like I am being like myself again, Jaune and I are friends again, in fact everyone seems to be. Even Cardin, which still surprises me.” Pyrrha mutters to herself after her joyous cheer that Jaune is close to her again, maybe not in love again, but they are getting there.

“So...you two...” Blake wonders curiously, massaging the cover of Ninja’s of Love with her thumb ever so gently.

“Well...a few nights ago, on the roof...Jaune and I...we...we...” Pyrrha bites her lip to hide her grin that grows, whereas the imaginative Blake Belladonna’s eyes widen more and more. Waiting to know what Pyrrha is getting at, then the Invincible Girl finally explodes with happiness. “We started training again!”

“Oh...” Blake sags, her secretly imaginative mind disappointing her as she slides her book into the others, hiding it. “So I’m guessing you and Jaune haven’t talked about...you know...where you stand.” Blake waves a free hand before her. “...emotionally?”

“Mmm, well, yes, that conversation is yet to be had, but I am not really thinking about it right now. It’s kinda refreshing actually, not thinking about crushes or love.” Pyrrha steps around a temporary barrier, as a chunk of rubble falls from the scaffolding above them, shattering against the ground. Blake steps round, her ears lower with a slight feline hiss – Pyrrha then notices the cat ears and she smiles.

“I like your ears.”

“Huh?” Blake snaps her eyes to Pyrrha before she calms herself, usually expecting someone to poke fun at her differences to Humans. “Oh, right...yes, well...it’s nice, not caring about what anyone thinks. And...to be honest, nobody’s said anything derogatory.” Blake smiles, touching a finger to a cat ear. “I liked my ribbon and bow, but...it’s nice not to constantly worry about forgetting it or have someone pull it off.”
“Well I think they look cute, so does Sun.” Pyrrha cheekily smirks and causes Blake both to blush and stammer.

“Sh-Shut up.” Blake smiles bashfully as she looks away from Pyrrha into her own shoulder, making Pyrrha chuckle. “But thanks.”

“Fair enough...”

Before they can even have any further conversation, they both feel their hearts sink and eyes widen with horror with what is floating in the haze of the sky. The jet black Shadow of Broken Promises Vessel, and three aircrafts come flying down from the ship towards the landing pads, whereas Winter’s Shuttle lands nearby the area before them. But the Black Gallows have advanced ships that are unlike anything they have seen, they are not Bullheads or the other Airships they are used to.

These are compact, two of them in fact have very round and bulbous shapes to them, black just like everything that they have at their disposal. With glowing red thrusters sending them roaring at great speeds, they decelerate extremely quickly too before landing, the landing gear folding out from within the hull. The middle ship is longer and looks more like some kind of wasp with four long wings that fold backwards when it lands, with four powerful thrusters allowing it have maximum manoeuvrability.

Named the Hornet and the other two are called the Horsefly.

They both land at the end of the long courtyard and the doors open up with long metal ramps setting down onto the ground. Stepping out first from the Hornet is Commander Killian, looking around at Beacon with stern eyes, one of his fists clenched as he walks forward. His many soldiers emerge from their ships whilst the Shadow of Broken Promises floats at almost Stratospheric Heights, higher than any other ship ever built.

It would not be crazy to assume they have a station on the moon somewhere.

Pyrrha feels her heart beat a thousand times a minute, and most of the students stare at the Black Gallows with understandable fear in their eyes, because they are an extremely intimidating presence. Pyrrha’s earlier feeling of joy disappears and she finds herself wanting to flee. “I...I can’t be here...” She stammers with fear, and Blake does not argue, looking at her and nodding.

“Go.” Blake assures, looking to see Weiss running to Winter with relief.

“Winter!” Weiss cries out with relief, and this time Winter gasps and she crouches down to catch Weiss in her arms, hugging her tight.

“Weiss! Thank the gods...” She sighs with pure alleviation in her heart, caressing her little sister’s white hair. Then her big sister mode instantly takes over as she pulls back and she checks her over for any wounds she could have sustained from the Battle of Beacon. “Are you okay? Did they hurt you?” Winter stammers fearfully as she looks her sister over.

“Winter! I’m fine...I have to admit I didn’t expect you to be so...informal.” Weiss giggles, then Winter gasps and her eyes widen as she springs back up to her feet, hands behind her back as she clears her throat, turning to her General.

“Sir! Forgive my unprofessionalism.” She requests, but Ironwood just chuckles at her formality and informality fighting one another.

“Winter, it’s fine. She’s your little sister, have some time together. We’re gonna be here a while,
plenty of time for formalities.” Ironwood assures as he walks past her, and she sighs with relief.

Pyrrha turns and she walks away, relieved for Weiss but now she has her own fears. She may not have been involved in the fight however she played a huge part in the causation of Battle of Beacon, hallucination or not she still killed Penny and started the attack in the first place. She keeps walking away from the scene with her books in her grasp, keeping her head held low with fear.

Until a familiar voice calls out to her.

A voice she never expected.

She turns and she audibly gasps with shock...

“Pyrrha!” Jaymes calls out to her, and she stands there, ready for whatever he has to throw at her. But what he says shocks her even further, as he jogs over to her, looking really nervous and insecure instead of looking proud and dickish.

“J-Jaymes...I...” She stammers, but he holds his hand up.

“I am not here to hurt you...it’s...about that...” He stammers, and Pyrrha looks at him with confusion.

“Huh?” She asks, and the threat of the Black Gallows fades away when she sees him seeming to actually be real with her right now. Of all people – Jaymes the bully Ickford – seems to be nice to her right now? Is this a hallucination of some kind?

He walks ahead, and Pyrrha follows him as he sits down on a wooden bench, pressing his hands to his head as he sits down, fearfully shaking. He could know about the Black Gallows arriving right now and he could be doing the same thing as her – hiding. “I...I wanted to apologise.” He admits, and Pyrrha’s eyes widen extensively with disbelief, emerald irises piercingly bright as she stands there, utterly shocked by this revelation.

“You...what?” She stammers with utter confusion, and he sighs, feeling his hands shaking like he is suffering with withdrawal.

“It’s passed right now...but I swear...the guy you have been seeing...it’s not me...I don’t know how to explain it...but...I am not like that.” He promises as he looks up at Pyrrha from where he sits, and the gentle and kind side of Pyrrha immediately kicks in as she sits down beside him.

“Jaymes...what are you talking about?” She asks him with concern in her voice.

“Rouge...she told me I should say this to you and she isn’t wrong – it would be better for us to try and...understand each other.” He sighs as he presses his hand to his head. “I won’t go into details but...I have a condition, one I don’t like talking about and I’m not gonna. When I get mad and when I forget to take my pills...I get...aggressive and I come up with stupid shit. It’s not the first time it’s happened, I’ve yelled at Peony, Rouge, Forest...I even attacked a teacher once.” He sighs as he scratches the back of his neck nervously, and Pyrrha stares at him with shock.

Because it starts to make sense, he only seems to get angry when either someone starts on him or if he looks stressed. And the first time, he was sweating pretty badly when he stood up. But Pyrrha thought that was all down to him speaking aloud with all those people around him. “I know that no apology could ever forgive what I have put you through...but I am so sorry...”

Pyrrha is speechless...
She never expected Jaymes of all people to apologise for his actions, definitely not expecting him to have a condition. She may not know he suffers from Paranoid Schizophrenia but she does not feel it is her business to know exactly what it is. “But I promise you Pyrrha – I never signed that petition.” He defends as he looks at her, Pyrrha looks at him with confusion.

“But...your name is on it.” She reminds.

“I know...and that is what confuses me – I went on my scroll to read a message I got.” He stammers, and Pyrrha thinks back to when she saw him shove his scroll in his pocket – and it was a messenger app, not BeaconBook.

He is not lying.

“Then...who did?” Pyrrha questions until suddenly there is an inhuman screech between them, and suddenly Jaymes screams with horror as he is pulled up into the air from something. Pyrrha gasps as she looks up to see an Altum Eagle with Jaymes held by his shoulders in its talons, not piercing the flesh but round his arms. He writhes with horror and Pyrrha stares at the graceful animal with disbelief. “Jaymes! Don’t struggle, it’s an Altum Eagle!” She calls.

“Help!” He screams until a loud whistle sees to stop the Eagle, and it descends, releasing Jaymes to the floor. He grunts and crawls back, staring at the Falconess who steps round the corner, she must have managed to sneak through the Grimm to get here somehow, or took a ship.

Probably a ship, there have been some Airships with parents arriving to see their kids.

Eryka steps over and she shakes her head at Dulcis who chirps next to her. “Does he look like the mouse I threw? Huh?” She asks him curiously, and Dulcis replies by spreading his wings out and flapping then with a screech. She snaps her fingers and points with a stern face. “Hey, watch your language.” She softly speaks, never yelling since that would break their bond forever.

Pyrrha and Jaymes both stare at the Falconess with shock, and she smiles with a nervous laugh. “I’m sorry, I threw that dead mouse to feed him but he went for you instead.” Eryka apologises, but Jaymes still looks too shell shocked to even speak.

“Who...who are you?” Pyrrha inquires.

“Name’s Eryka Vasillias. Either of you know my baby bro, Neptune?” She asks them, and Pyrrha chuckles with disbelief.

The blue hair.

Blue eyes.

Crimson colours in her clothes.

Of course she is his sister, but they never expected her to be a Falconess. “Uh...”

“Eryka?” The voice of Neptune ironically gasps, getting Eryka’s attention, she slowly turns her head with eyes bulging from their sockets when she sees him standing there. Same blue hair and widened eyes as he has always had. She gently thrusts her arm to get Dulcis to fly around them so then she can run to her brother. She catches him in her arms and she swings him around with a laugh of pure joy.

“Yes! I knew you’d be okay!” She squeals with happiness.
“Can’t...breathe...” Neptune wheezes.

“Oops! Sorry.” She apologises as she releases him with a smile, looking him up and down to see how he looks, built up and looking very handsome indeed. “Wow...you’ve grown up since I last saw you.” She chuckles softly with a smile on her face.

Then Dulcis lands on Neptune’s shoulder and he jolts when he feels the huge bird land on him, chirping softly as he brushes his feathers against his cheek, clearly knowing he is her brother. These animals are extremely intelligent, for they understand humans and Faunus relations so well that they know when people are actually related. So he treats Neptune kindly as he would Eryka. “Is...is this Dulcis? Wow he’s big now.” Neptune chuckles with awe.

“Oh yeah, fat too.” She chuckles sarcastically, getting a glare from her Eagle. “Get over here, you oversized pigeon.” Eryka says and he flies over to her and lands onto her arm, bouncing around as he gets comfortable, looking around as he chirps quietly.

“We got some catching up to do.” Neptune chuckles.

“Yes we have.” She agrees.

Jaymes stares at the incredible woman and then at Pyrrha. “Are all your friends like this?” He asks her.

“Actually...this is the first time I have ever seen her...didn’t even know Neptune had a sister.” Pyrrha admits.

For once.

They are on the same page.
The two reunited siblings sit at a wooden bench with their hands on the table, speaking with one another to catch up on all the things that has happened in between the years of which they have missed together. Dulcis stands on the table beside his master, or mother figure since she raised him ever since he was just an egg. Neptune looks so much smaller in comparison, yet it has become clear where he has taken so much inspiration from – his hair, the way he acts, even the colour of his clothing.

He looks up to her so much.

He stammers, collecting his thoughts and questions as best as he possibly can, fumbling on letters in his mouth as he speaks. “S-So...w-what have you been doing? It’s been years since we last met, did you go back to the Mountains to that tribe?” Neptune nervously asks his older sister who prunes the feathers of her beloved Altum Eagle.

“Mhm, continued my meditations...wanted to get my anger issues under control, y’know?” Eryka begins to explain as she looks over to him, and he nods his head with understanding.

“How’s that been going lately?” He asks her, concerned curiosity in his voice.

“Better, especially on the journey here – met quite a few assholes getting here. Old me would definitely have broken their noses and jaws, but now I can just shrug it off.” Eryka explains as she kisses the top of her Eagle’s head, stroking his feathery body with her hand. He slowly walks across the table, scraping his curved talons through the wood, his eyes constantly observing the world around him. Searching for prey and any threats that could be eying them from the shrouded lands.

“That’s good...but...I guess the reason you are here is because...Glynda asked you to come?” He presumes, since it feels like with all the other relatives arriving to protect their kids from the sinister Black Gallows, it makes sense she is here for the same reason. She nods her head with a smile on her face.

“Well, not the only reason. I’ve been meaning to see you for a few months now...but with the Grimm attacking so many villages in Mistral after the Battle of Beacon...I couldn’t. But I’m here now, and I have to ask as the big sister I am.” She begins as she leans forward and she uses her senses to check his body for any wounds, anything at all. Staring at the smallest marks on the skin of his arms, the faint bruises on him after the battle. “How are you feeling, little bro? I’ve seen my fair share of Grimm attacks but the Battle of Beacon? That was something else entirely...you can tell me.” She assures with a smile, knowing how he tends to bottle his emotions up all the time. Not wanting to burden people with his problems, selfless old Neptune being himself all the time.

“I...” He sighs, closing his eyes and looking away from her – since he does finally actually open up about some problems he has been having. “It’s been pretty tough...everything seems to be getting worse even when we are trying to make it right. We have been going around the destroyed areas to find any bodies that have not already been uncovered; some people are already feeling pretty sick. Nothing serious though, thank the gods that would be the last thing this place needs after that attack from the Grimm.” He explains, feeling a chill on his shoulder, causing him to turn and look at the
hills where the Grimm still stalk menacingly, waiting for the opportunity.

“I’m sorry buddy, I can help you if you want, take your place for the night? Sure your team won’t mind.” She presumes, then his eyes wide with fear – not for her safety...but out of embarrassment.

He knows Sun will never let him hear the end of how attractive his sister is, Sage had the same thing happen with his older sister. “Nuh-uh, totally fine.” He terribly says, Eryka snaps onto the way he says that immediately, analysing that forced smile on his face.

“Nep?” She questions slowly as her eyebrow furrows.

He gives in, since he has never able to come close to winning an argument with his sister before. She always knows exactly what to say to beat him. “My friend, Sun...I told you about him you remember?” He asks her.

“Yeah, the monkey dude.” Eryka answers, as everyone tends to describe Sun – as the Monkey Dude.

“Well, I haven’t actually told him about you yet.” He sighs, feeling a bit ashamed since she could feel bad, yet she does not. And she can already bet she knows why his reasons are, but Eryka being the devious monster she is – she digs deeper anyway.

“Oh yeah? Why’s that?” She curiously asks him, and his face turns red with embarrassment, shyly fiddling with his fingers.

“Well...'cause...'y'know...” He stammers, then she laughs at his adorable awkwardness, even Dulcis softly chirps at him in a laughing way.

“Glad to see you haven’t changed much since we last talked.” Eryka says with a smile as she looks at her little brother. “I get it, he’ll tease you for having a sister who is smokin’, right?” She flaunts jokingly, batting a strand of blue hair from her eye and sitting back with a grin on her face. They both laugh at the bond that they have with each other, Eryka’s caring nature and the awkwardness of her brother.

“Yeah.” He sighs as his head droops downwards.

“I can handle it, so can you.” She assures with a smile as she ruffles his blue hair.

“Hey!” He complains, rubbing his hair around after she does that, and she chuckles softly.

“So...before all this shit went down, how have you been? Getting good grades? Got a girlfriend?” Eryka asks him, tilting her head curiously with a hopeful smile on her face. Neptune blushes slightly but mostly since he is confused on what the relationship he has with Weiss actually is. They have not committed to anything yet.

“I dunno...” He mutters, Eryka raises a brow with confusion.

“You don’t know if you’ve been getting good grades or you don’t know you have a girlfriend? I think both things are pretty easy areas to figure out.” Eryka comments with a chortle in her voice, confused of how he could possibly be so confused on both matters.

“Girlfriend...” He answers, and she smiles with happiness as she sits back and she looks at him.

“Oh yeah? What’s her name?” Eryka coos as she sits there, listening to every word. The name brings butterflies to his heart, picturing her beautiful face and stunning voice.
“Weiss.” He answers, Eryka pauses and her eyes bulge from their sockets, Dulcis even stares at him with the same expression. As if the two of them share the same brain, they probably do.

“Schnee?” She asks for confirmation.

“Mhm.” He replies with the firm nod of his head.

“Holy shit...well played, bro – never expected you would woo the Heiress of the Schnee Dust Company.” She chuckles with awe to her brother, but not in the aim to insult but just with her being impressed that he managed to get someone as uptight as the Schnees to fall in love with him.

“Well...she actually approached...me...” He nervously tells her, and that just seems to surprise her even further, causing her to gasp aloud.

“We are talking about the Schnees, right?” Eryka asks with confusion, since she would never have pictured a Schnee to be the one to ask the question, she has always pictured their kind as lazy rich people. Neptune nods his head, and he continues.

“She isn’t like the others, I saw her sister once and she is the polar opposite to her. She’s really clever, really pretty...and her singing voice is amazing.” He admits with a preciously smitten voice, and Eryka smiles. “She also is pretty jokey as well, she might not like making a fool of herself but she always has the feelings of her friends first before herself. You wouldn’t think her a Schnee.” Neptune explains, and Eryka keeps smiling happily for him, he deserves someone beautiful.

Yet one thing still baffles her. “How do you not know if you are dating then?” She questions with confusion in her voice.

“Well that’s the thing, she asked me to the dance, and at first I shot her down...you know, my fear of being humiliated and all? And I can’t dance, but luckily a friend of mine talked me into it and I ended up taking her up on it. She forgave me quickly and now...well I don’t know what we are now. We hang out a lot, but both of us don’t really know what this thing we have is.” Neptune explains, scratching the back of his neck with confusion. Eryka always has a simple way of looking at these things, she sits forward and she rests both hands atop the wooden surface of the bench table.

“Tell me, Neppie – does she always seek you out? Talk to you and laugh at your crappy jokes?” She curiously inquires with a smirk, he stammers before answering.

“Yeah...I mean she always laughs at my puns but slaps Yang for hers.” He chuckles, remembering the sound that smack made, made his bones rattle and it wasn’t even him that got slapped. That happened before the Vytal Festival started, when they just returned to school after the Summer Break.

“Does she always wanna hang out with you?” Eryka adds.

Neptune ponders, searching through his memories of the girl he loves, and he cannot help but notice this to be the case – she has been pretty happy to be around him. “Yeah...I guess...she was really happy when we let them stay in our dorm room. Since theirs got destroyed in the attack.” Neptune explains to her.

“Well? If you ask me, she likes you. Ask her out on a date.” She suggests, wanting the best for her brother at all times. Dulcis waddles over to Neptune and he strokes the beautiful Eagle’s feathers with his hand.

“You think?” He asks her.
“Hell yeah, she clearly wants you to ask her out. Just go ahead and ask her, find the right time though. Just suddenly sprinting at her and asking her out for dinner probably isn’t the right moment.” Eryka chuckles as she sucks through her lips afterwards to call Dulcis over to her. He obediently walks over to her and she prunes the feathers, getting some lice out from him. Even birds seem to get them in their feathers.

“Okay...I’ll do it.” Neptune agrees with a smile on his face.

“That’s my bro.” She replies with a toothless smile on her face, before asking him about his school life. “So...how about the grades?”

“Going well, better than last time I think as well.” He replies.

“That’s great, I knew you were smarter than you looked.” She jokes.

“Hey.” Neptune defends, and Eryka chortles a grin on her face. He looks at the stunning Eagle and he chuckles. “I remember when he was just a baby, when you last came here anyway that’s how big he was. Is he fully grown?” He wonders.

“Pretty much, I mean he could get bigger but this is the average size of Altum Eagles. He’s a good boy.” She coos as she strokes him tenderly, he looks at her with a soft chirp, rubbing his head against her palm. The bond between them is stronger than normal falconers, usually their birds would fly off for hours. But Dulcis? He always stays with her and responds pretty much immediately.

“Why did he attack Jaymes? I mean don’t get me wrong the guy is an ass, but did you tell him to?” Neptune wonders, she looks at him and she sighs.

“Did you know he was apologising to Pyrrha over there? I think they are still talking as we speak?” Eryka informs, and Neptune raises a brow.

“How did you hear them talking?” He asks her.

Then her eyes glow gold unexpectedly, and so do the eyes of Dulcis. He gasps when he sees her do that, and Dulcis moves his eyes as she does, both of their souls seem to be bonded, then their eyes both return back to their normal colours. Neptune sits there utterly shocked from this. “W-What just happened?” He asks her.

“A little trick my teacher taught me, since I cannot unlock my Semblance I have learned how to bond to other things with aura. I could bond to already adult Altum Eagles but not for long, because it does not see me as a mother. After some training and meditation, he gave me an egg – that egg became...him.” She explains to him as she gently strokes his wing with her finger.

“You still haven’t unlocked your semblance?” He asks her, she looks at him and she sadly shakes her head.

“Not everyone can, Nep. So I have been making do, my aura is not very thick but I have learned skills to compensate for that. I have also learned to use my aura to improve my senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste...you know all that kind of fun stuff.” She explains with a smile.

“Makes sense, you always have been a Hunter.” Neptune agrees.

“Exactly, but the senses go beyond that. When I joined my aura with Dulcis’ it unlocked an ability between the two of us, an ability that helps both of us see more. I am able to see through his eyes, and he can see through mine when I am not in his view.” Eryka explains, then she reaches down to
one of the shells, that extends into a red arrow with flames engraved into the arrowhead. “We have a few other tricks up our sleeve, tricks you will see some time.” She assures with a smile, collapsing the telescopic arrow back into the shell form and fitting it back onto her bandolier.

Neptune sits there with awe at learning this information, and in his eyes his badass sister has just gotten even cooler. “You know...it’s hard to be as cool as you sometimes.” He chuckles and she smiles.

“I’m touched that you think that of me...not everyone sees me that way.” She sighs, thinking of her mother and father. A mother that is so stuck in her ways that she has driven a chasm between her daughter and her Cartel’s Business, and a mother so weak and cowardly that he could not bring himself to see his own daughter. A man that hides behind the shadow of his own wife, despite that she loves him as any other wife would. Neptune has seen that look in her eyes before, yet he does not know why.

“Why haven’t mom and dad come to see me, Eryka?” He asks, and she feels her heart nearly freeze when hearing his innocent voice ask such a question. For him to find out that she has been lying to him ever since he was a toddler it would destroy him, all he remembers are their faces.

“Well...I think they have got lots going on, the attack at Mistral has brought up lots of cases for Mom, and dad is an accountant and a lot of money has been lost over the years. Mistral has been in debt to Atlas for years, he has had to help many companies, and after that attack? Their jobs have gotten a lot harder – so I volunteered to come instead.” She lies, hiding the fact that their parents are Cartel Leaders and do not even seem to care for their welfare from him. It would break him if he learned the truth that his parents don’t have a shred of care for them. Sometimes lying can be the easiest way to prevent pain.

Neptune’s head lowers with sadness, for he has never ever met his parents and he has so many questions for them. Something he and Yang can relate to on many levels, something that Eryka takes no joy in letting him find closure in.

Eryka looks over at him, seeing the sadness in those blue eyes of his, she stealthily wipes a small tear from her own eye and she stands up, holding her arm out to Dulcis so then he can land on her. “C’mon, bro...Let me meet your friends. I wanna know who these good people are that keep you occupied.” She chuckles.

“Well...they mean more to me than that.” Neptune kindly says, thinking highly of his friends.

Pyrrha

She sits on the edge of the outer windowsill of the building that they are stood by, with her hands at her side, pressed against the brickwork whereas Jaymes is sat down on the floor. She examines him and she can see it all now, the shaking hands, and the sweat beading on his face in places. He clearly is not well and needs some medical attention.

Why hasn’t Glynda sorted this out? For his sake, not just ours?

Maybe I should ask...

“Jaymes...do you ever wonder...why Glynda hasn’t tried to sort this out better?” Pyrrha asks him
curiously, and he looks up at her with confusion in his eyes.

“W-What do you mean?” He asks her.

“Your condition? If you’ve told her then why hasn’t she moved you somewhere away from the Grimm? Maybe back to Mistral or something? It’s clear the Grimm and now the Black Gallows are just making your situation worse. Do you think...I dunno...she doesn’t really know what to do?” Pyrrha inquires, and Jaymes’ eyes dart around as he thinks.

What Pyrrha does not realise is that his Paranoid Schizophrenia is also starting to affect him right now.

They want me gone...

Abandoning me...

Leaving me...

Hurting me...

What if she wants me arrested by the Black Gallows?

She’s against me!

But he shakes the thoughts as best he can, fighting against his own illness with all his might as he struggles to keep one mind in control at a time. But every statement leads to another delusion, a new idea being planted in his mind from his own paranoia. “Uh...I dunno...she has been acting a little strange recently. I mean I am pretty new here, but even still.” Jaymes agrees, fighting against his own mind constantly.

“I think she could be having some extreme problems too...and the Black Gallows aren’t gonna help.” Pyrrha mumbles as she looks around at the place, waiting for a soldier that works for the sinister group to emerge round the corner any second.

He taps his finger against his knee over and over, repeating this coping mechanism that the doctors had taught him to handle the condition he suffers with. But sometimes he feels his hand being pulled away, his mental illness existing like a ghost that tries to prevent him at everything he does. “What...what do you mean?” He asks the Invincible Girl, wondering about her allegations towards Glynda’s stability.

“Before she spoke to you after the fight, she snapped at us. She’s yelled at us in the past but nothing like this, she was furious and I’ve never seen her this upset before.” Pyrrha explains, looking up to Beacon Tower where she has made her temporary abode.

“Well...after everything that happened...it’s no surprise.” He explains, straining on every word like he is being shocked with a taser. Pyrrha looks at him, and it hurts to see someone in such pain from something that they can only see from their behaviour.

“How many of your teammates know about this?” Pyrrha inquires, and he looks up at her.

“They all did – Forest was my cousin so he knew, I told Rouge and Peony was smart enough to figure it out herself.” He explains to her, naming his team perfectly.

“Forest?” She asks him, but just from the look of heartbreak on his face it is enough for her to get the answer she needs from him. “I’m sorry.” She apologises softly as she lowers her head, then
Jaymes sighs as he rubs his forehead.

“No...I should be the sorry one...I used his death, my sorrow...and I pinned it all on you.” Jaymes apologises with a deeply saddened voice, burying his head in his hands. “All because of something I can’t fight.”

“Why don’t you tell anyone? If you told everyone about your condition, explained what you have just told me...they would understand.” Pyrrha explains to him, hoping everyone will be as understanding and perhaps even as forgiving as she is. But Jaymes shakes his head, not sharing her positivity.

“Your friends won’t, they are loyal to the end for you...especially Jaune. He loves you, everyone can see it. And I don’t blame them if they don’t – hell I don’t expect you to forgive me. And I don’t even want you to...I don’t deserve it. I just want you to understand.” He explains to her, and she lowers her eyes.

She sighs. “I don’t know if I can forgive you now...but maybe...in time I will. But I understand how you feel now.” She assures as she looks over to him, he looks up at her with a surprised expression. “I know what it is like...to feel alone.”

Jaymes looks at her, and he has seen that face before, the look of loneliness and desperation for someone to really know what it is that they suffer with. Someone who will finally listen to the things that they say instead of nodding their heads, and then asking for an autograph later on.

He has seen that face before...

...in his own reflection.

Before they can talk any further, they are both joined by the Vasillias Siblings that approach them, the eldest with Dulcis on her arm. “Hey there, you feeling good pal?” Eryka asks Jaymes as she stands behind him, he flinches and turns to look up at her with confusion. Confusion turns to intimidation when he sees the huge Altum Eagle stood on her arm, chirping softly as he looks at the two of them.

“I’m scared of that thing.” Jaymes admits with fearful eyes, Eryka laughs at that as she walks over to the other side of them and stands with her arm still held up.

“Don’t worry about Dulcis, he’s a sweetheart. He wouldn’t hurt fly unless I told him to.” Eryka assures, then Pyrrha raises a brow.

“Then...why did he go for Jaymes?” Pyrrha asks.

“Well we live up in the Mistraalian Mountains most of the time, not many people live there with fluorescently coloured hair other than me. He likes bright colours and tends to fly over to them. Or try and pick them up, like in your case Mr Ickford.” Eryka explains with a chuckle in her voice.

“Is that why he landed on my shoulder?” Neptune asks her.

“Partially, that and the fact that he could tell you’re my brother. Isn’t that right you gorgeous boo-boo?” She coos as she tickles his chin and the Altum Eagle bounces on her arm with excitement.

Pyrrha walks over to the stunning bird with wide emerald eyes, she has always loved birds – found them undeniably beautiful and gentle looking animals. Dulcis looks at her and he chirps softly to her, tilting his beaked head with his large eyes gazing into hers. “He’s so beautiful.” Pyrrha gasps with joy, and Eryka smiles.
“Wanna hold him?” She asks her, and her eyes widen.

“Really?” She asks.

“Yeah, he’s happy to.” Eryka assures, she whistles so then Dulcis takes off and circles around them, a feather dropping down from above as he takes off. She unbucks her leather bracer and she pats the underside of Pyrrha’s forearm. “Lift your arm up, and I’ll strap this onto you. Even with aura up it’s best to wear one of these. They tend to find it more comfortable on these bracers.” She explains, using the buckles so then she can tighten them around her arm.

“O-Okay.” Pyrrha agrees nervously as she stands there.

“Alright then, now just call his name, but not too loud his hearing is really acute.” Eryka explains to her, and Pyrrha nods as she looks up at Dulcis circling above her.

“Dulcis!” She softly calls, and immediately he descends towards her and he spreads his feathered wings out as he decelerates. He perfectly lands onto her arm and she feels the weight from the large eagle bring her arm down a little bit. He taps his clawed feet around on the leather platform as he gets comfortable and then looks at Pyrrha with a chirp, and a quiet screech.

“He says hi.” Eryka tells her, and Pyrrha blushes with amazement.

“Hi...” She replies with a smile, he turns and he ruffles his feathers around.

“Stroke him, he likes it when you stroke him.” Eryka promises with a smile, so Pyrrha slowly lifts her hand towards the large Bird of Prey and she gently strokes him across his soft feathers. The feeling is like rubbing your fingers across a cotton sheet, unbelievably soft and lovely to feel in your hand. And the warmth in the bird is stunning too, but since they live in the snow caps of the Mistralian Mountain Range they would have to have some fat reserves to stay warm up there. Otherwise the Altum Eagles would have gone extinct a long time ago.

“I can’t believe it...I am holding an Altum Eagle...I’ve always wanted to see one of these beautiful animals.” Pyrrha states, with tears welling in her eyes of joy, heart bursting with joy. Eryka smiles, always happy to see someone who she has heard has been suffering with depression lately smile again. She looks over to Jaymes – and the fact that he has been apologising to her and wanting to make things right she immediately has some strong respect for him.

“Jaymes, c’mon. Give him some attention, he’s a greedy little bird.” She whispers to him, and he looks at her.

“Me?” He asks, feeling like he does not deserve the honour.

“Yeah you. Come on.” Eryka requests with a smile, Neptune watches the way he moves and acts and it is nothing like the Jaymes Ickford that Jaune and Cardin stood up to with Weiss and Sun in previous confrontations. He is so timid and broken looking, utterly different from what seemed to be a self absorbed prick who used a little girl’s death as ammunition for his case.

Jaymes approaches Dulcis who looks over at him as he strokes his feathers, and for once they actually see him smile with actual happiness. For once in these few weeks he has not felt his condition in the back of his mind. Just something that can actually make him smile for once.

Pyrrha smiles.

At least there are some good things happening today.
An hour later...

Pyrrha opens the door to her dorm room and she sighs, closing the door behind her. That sigh was a combination of shame and happiness – joy for being able to hold an Altum Eagle for the first time and some shame for how she thought of Jaymes. If she understood his problems ahead of time maybe she could have fixed the situation before it spiralled out of control and into the situation that they are in now.

Pyrrha sets her books down onto the table but she turns when she hears the door to the bathroom opening with a shirtless Jaune walking out. His eyes widen and he blushes, grabbing the towel and covering his toned up body – he has improved his physique since they first met. Pyrrha would lie if she claimed she was not attracted to how he looks physically opposed to his personality and face.

“Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t know you were here.” She apologises.

“It’s okay, Pyrrha. I guess I should have taken the towel with me...good thing it wasn’t Nora. I’d be surrounded by squeaking otherwise.” Jaune remembers, because she likes to jokingly humiliate him when he has his shirt off. No malice in it, just playful friendly banter, slapping his arm with her cold hands. He looks at her as he uses the towel to wipe the water off his skin, then he sees her with that look of actual happiness on her face, before she actually shows the other side. “You look happier today.”

“Huh? Oh yeah...something cool happened today.” She admits with a smile.

“Oh yeah? What would that be?” He asks her. “Seeing me shirtless?”

“Nah, that’s not as cool.” She replies with a giggle as she puts more of her books down when Jaune grabs his white shirt and buttons it up.

“Alright, gonna try not to be offended by that. What was it?” He asks her, making her giggle at his jokey statement beforehand.

“I met...wait for it...Neptune’s older sister.” She reveals and Jaune’s eyes widen with disbelief.

“Neptune has a big sis?” He questions.

“Mhm.” She nods.

“Oh I can’t wait to hear Sun’s reaction to learning this.” Jaune chuckles.

“It gets better – she’s a Falconess.”

Jaune gazes at her gormlessly, completely taken back by what she just said, for he has never heard of a Falconess before. “A what?”

“A Falconess – she has a pet Altum Eagle, uses it on hunts.” She clarifies and his eyes widen with amazement.

“Oh wow, was it cool looking?” Jaune inquires.

“Oh he was beautiful...she let me hold him.” She tells him with a giggle in her voice, actually bouncing up and down on her toes with joy of being able to fulfil one of her life-long dreams. A dream that would never have been fulfilled if not for Ruby saving her life on the tower and ending
the Battle of Beacon.

“Man, he must be really well behaved.” Jaune chuckles.

“Yeah, he was heavier than I expected too. Really soft too.” She describes with a smile.

“Wow...I oughta meet her and her Eagle some time.” Jaune says as he puts on his blazer.

“Well...that’s not the only thing that happened, I mean the Black Gallows are here if you haven’t noticed.” She adds as she gestures to the window where the hazy sight of the Shadow of Broken Promises can be seen in the sky. He looks out and he sighs.

“Yeah I saw ‘em.” He states.

“Mm...Well when I saw them I kinda freaked out and I tried to get out of sight. And when I did...Jaymes came up to me.” She explains, but Jaune’s reaction is as she expected, eyes flaring and his teeth gritting together.

“What? What did he say?” He snarls as he clenches his hands into fists.

“Hold on, Jaune...he followed me...and he apologised to me.” She explains to him, and that really shocks him more than the Eagle and Eryka.

“Wait...huh?” Jaune questions.

“I know...I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone...but he has a problem. He never told me what the problem was but he says it has been affecting him badly.” Pyrrha explains, and Jaune thinks on it.

“But...the petition.” Jaune remembers.

“He swears he never ticked the box, and when I thought about it...his scroll was not even on BeaconBook, he was texting a friend.” Pyrrha explains to him, leaving him in shock.

“Then who did?” He asks.

“Not a clue...but I’m worried. If he never did it then someone must be planning something, wanting this to happen. And now the Black Gallows are here and we have no idea of what their next move will be.” Pyrrha explains.

Knock

Knock

Knock

Their conversation gets smashed apart from the heavy pounding on the wooden door, and they both stare at the frame. Jaune walks past Pyrrha and he opens the door, to see a pair of Black Gallows Storm Guard Soldiers standing there with rifles in their hands.

“Pyrrha Nikos? Commander Killian would like to have a word with you.”

Killian
It appears the Black Gallows have lots of gadgets up their sleeves that the people of the world never realised, especially when it came down to technology. The Shadow of Broken Promises holds large Dropships inside of its hanger, Dropships that carry deployable mini-facilities down into the field when needed. One of these facilities has been prepared, dropped off behind the Library. It is cuboid shaped structure, lacks fancy aesthetics since they are not necessary, only the things inside are.

This facility is used for planning mostly however the Black Gallows have changed things up a bit, turning it into a dark interrogation room since an office could be spied on. Sat down on the three chairs before the metal table are the suspects of which Killian intends to interrogate – Pyrrha, Jaymes and Sun.

The three of them have never felt so small and vulnerable before in their lives.

They are not able to get a word out before the door opens and Killian emerges, holding a cup of coffee in his hand, warming his hand and his onyx eyes stare straight at them. They nearly do not even blink, and he stays chillingly silent as he walks into the room, setting his coffee down on the table. He pulls out a chair as he sets the clipboard with his questions written down. He sits there and he crosses his arms, staring into each of their pairs of eyes.

He is testing them, waiting to see which will break.

But neither do, because they are too scared to even speak, so he decides to start the conversation. “You know why we are here.” Killian states, his cold and commanding voice speaking so harshly that it feels like it cuts deep wounds into their skin. Pyrrha worries her lip, glancing both to Sun and Jaymes at her shoulders.

“The fight...” Sun answers, since he feels responsible for what he did in there – he may not agree with how Glynda defended Jaymes so much, but he does not know the full story as of yet.

“Indeed – you do realise that the situation here is hanging by a thread, don’t you? That the smallest amount of panic could trigger an attack?” He asks them, and they all sigh.

“Yes.” They all answer.

“Then explain to me why this happened.” He snarls with stern onyx eyes glaring into each of their pairs. Jaymes stammers, as he taps his finger on the table, something that Killian catches onto immediately. However he is not as kind as Glynda has been to him, and he puts a stop to it immediately. “Keep that off – and you lose the finger.” He snarls, frightening Jaymes so bad he actually jolts – feeding into his paranoia. He recoils back and hides in his shoulders.

“I...I’m sorry...” He whimpers, and Killian just raises an eyebrow.

“You’re sorry?” He questions.

“I...I was an idiot...I bullied Pyrrha for what happened in the Vytal Festival. It angered her friends...it is my fault.” Jaymes takes the blame immediately, something neither of them expected from him was honesty. Pyrrha’s eyes widen as she looks at him, and she has to be the one to say it.

“Don’t take the blame...if anyone has to accept responsibility here it is me. Whether or not Emerald caused me to hallucinate doesn’t matter, because I still killed Penny. I tore her apart on live television, and triggered global attacks.” She states, and Sun stares at her with confusion of how she is trying to pull the blame off herself.

“Why are you doing this?” He questions, but Killian’s voice silences their chatter once again.
“You’re right, Miss Nikos – it is your fault.” He states, and the words stab into her heart like a dagger, saying it herself is one thing…but a high ranking officer’s words? It cuts deeper than any blade she has ever known. Sun, being the protective friend he is however never backs down from defending her.

“She was manipulated!” He argues.

“She ripped a student apart on live television! If it were up to me she would be sent to the Black Gallows right now for her crime…but the Council demands that she does not get taken away. There is only so much I can do…until I have further proof.” He states with a scowl, clasping his hands together as he leans forward, staring straight at Pyrrha. He really wants these three put away in the Black Gallows.

“Why? Why do you desperately want us locked away? There are so many other implications at play here.” Sun reminds, but Killian scoffs.

“All of this Political Bullshit slows the process down, I am the one that will do what has to be done to help people sleep better at night. But because of the Council and the Press getting involved in our business and making light of it – it causes panic when people disappear. So – I am giving the three of you a chance to atone. But believe me when I say this – if I hear that there is another confrontation, or more Grimm get lured here. Well…either you will wake up on a ship on its way to the Black Gallows, or you won’t wake up at all.” Killian explains, threatening them at the same time.

Jaymes shakes erratically, his paranoia ripping his mind apart as he starts to shame in his seat. Sun however has gone from worried to angry, for this man has just turned up here and threatened his friends. “Sun Wukong, I am going to have my men keep an eye on you. For it is clear that your actions are just as predictable as a moth being drawn to a light. Pyrrha Nikos, you currently do not have official charges pressed against you for the murder of Penny Polendina but I would not hold onto that. Things can change.” He explains, and she gulps a breath.

Finally he glares at Jaymes and there is the hint of a smirk on his face. “And Jaymes Ickford…we will be monitoring you…if you are involved in another incident? You will be on the first shuttle to the Black Gallows.” He promises with a scowl on his face.

“You do this often? Threaten people?” Sun asks, and Killian stares him down.

“Watch your place, boy. We keep things in check from the shadows, make sure you Huntsmen do not get out of control. Make sure dangerous people disappear for good. We make sure that the majority sleep well at night, at the cost of the few suffering the night terrors.” He explains as he crosses his arms, he leans back in his chair as he stares the three of them down.

“Now! Back to business – Pyrrha Nikos I have brought you here for the actions you wrought in the Vytal Festival. I want you to give me a detailed description of this hallucination you claim you saw before deciding to butcher Miss Polendina.” Killian demands, picking up a pen and clicking the button so then the ballpoint tip of the pen is ready to right. He eyes her as he waits to hear her explanation.

It hurts, like a scab being peeled back, she pictures what she saw on that arena floor with clarity. Seeing Penny standing there with her blades folding from her spine, then everything started to blur. Thousands of swords appearing…it nearly brings her to tears to remember what happened next. “I…” She stammers, Killian stares her down as he waits for her response. “Before it happened I was struggling, seeing things…my polarity bending my weapons and losing track of Penny. But when it happened…I saw her swords multiply…to becoming thousands of swords above her head.” She
He writes these things down as evidence onto his piece of paper, impressively keeping up with every word that she says, like a computer when it types. “That was when you decided to kill her?” He asks her.

“No! I swear I never intended to...I just...blasted my polarity to get the blades away from me...I never thought they would wrap around her. They kept wrapping round but the cables were only so long...then they crushed her, they sliced through her body...oh gods...” She begins to cry, covering her teary eyes with her hands. Killian sighs, rolling his eyes as he reaches across the table to grab some tissues and he slides them over to her. She picks them up as she sniffles.

“Thank you...” She softly says to him.

“So it was all an accident?” He asks her out of curiosity.

“Yes...I swear on my life.” She promises, Killian smirks sinisterly when she says that.

“Be careful what you swear onto.” He warns as he puts a full stop at the end of what she said, copying it down perfectly. Word for word, even the same appropriate punctuation. He has been doing this for a very long time now. Pyrrha sniffles but she looks at the Commander with fearful eyes, he almost seems to take pleasure from this job at times.

Just makes him and the rest of his secret Military Group that much more terrifying.

“Then the Grimm attacked, I presume? And Emerald Sustrai escaped with her partner Mercury Black?” He guesses, and she nods her head.

“It’s what Ruby told me.” She says.

“Yes, and this Miss Rose was the same one who unleashed the power of her Silver Eyes, right?” He guesses, and Sun’s eyes widen with confusion.

“Huh? Silver Eyes?” He asks.

“It’s...a long story.” Pyrrha states, remembering what Qrow told her and Ruby about when they both woke up and Taiyang carried Yang away to recover at home.

“On that we can agree, a story that can be explained at a later date. Now onto Sun Wukong and Jaymes Ickford – the fight...Sun Wukong you started it, right?” He asks him, and Sun looks over at Jaymes, seeing him look so small and scared is something that makes him begin to wonder. He sighs, since he has always been a crap liar.

“Yeah.” He answers with the firm nod of his head.

“You challenged him even though he was walking away, correct?” He asks.

“Yes.” He also answers. Killian holds his hands out, expecting a bit more than just a single word.

“Care to elaborate?” Killian requests.

“Why should I? You clearly already know what happened, what is the point of this interrogation?” Sun questions, defying the Black Gallows as he has defied everything that threatened his friends. Killian stares into his eyes and he sets the clipboard down onto the table and he sits forward, clasping his hands together with his elbows pressed to the surface of the steel.
“This interrogation is for your sake, Mr Wukong, not mine. You see this situation is extremely
delicate, with the Grimm Horde still clinging close both to the City and the School, I cannot risk
the panic of three students being taken away...or killed...for their actions. Panic could ignite, and a
second attack would start. And from the damages, it will be much, much worse than the first. The
Grimm have had time to lick their wounds, they are stronger than they were and have doubled in
numbers – so tell me Mr Wukong...why do you think I am doing this?” He asks him, poking the
paper on the clipboard.

Sun stares back and he sighs. “Evidence for our side...right?” Sun presumes.

“Correct – you would remember to show some respect to your – your...” Before he can finish his
voice thins and he begins to violently cough, grasping his chest in pain as he reaches to the device
attached to his chest. He reaches to the knob and he twists it, feeling the medical drugs being
pumped into his systems. The metallic hiss passes through the chambers and through the valves in
his neck, and his breathing quickly improves. He exhales with relief, then looking at them again.
“...your Superiors.” He finishes with a slight cough.

None of them decide to ask him what that was, because they are not blind. He must have suffered
extreme damage to his windpipe during combat, maybe a bullet severed it or he was poisoned and
that device is the only thing keeping him alive.

He looks at Jaymes, but then they hear the beep of his earpiece, and he stops, pressing his finger to
it. They cannot decipher the voice on the other side of the communication device. “Yeah?” Killian
speaks, there is a silence as he listens to what the message is, and they see the look of concern on
his face.

Odd when he was once all high and mighty a second ago.

That concern fades and he returns to his cold and emotionless personality. “Understood.” He
replies, ending the call, then he stands up, picking up his clipboard and looking to the three of
them. “Something has come to my attention, the three of you return to your dorms, and don’t forget
my warnings. Do not make me do something extreme, for you will regret it. The Black Gallows are
watching all of you now.” Killian warns, turning and walking away from them.

The three of them sit there...

Shocked from what has transpired, yet curious of what was so important to pull Killian away from
them. Sun looks round Pyrrha to Jaymes, noticing how he took the blame. “Why did you take the
blame?” He asks him.

Jaymes sighs, looking at him. “It’s the right thing.”

Rouge

Sat in their Dorm Room is the quiet third member of Jaymes’ team – Rouge Daniels – part of the
team that forms into Team J.A.D.E. The team compiles of: Jaymes, Peony, Rouge and Forest,
mostly using the surnames of the Huntsmen and Huntresses. Since Peony’s surname is Azura and
Forest’s was Ecruus, it forms the team of J.A.D.E.

Rouge sits atop a beanbag with a little string doll she has been weaving up herself with her
masterful stitching skills, short silver hair hanging over her ears with green eyes staring down at it as she weaves away. She exhales as she works, spending most of her time inside of their dorm room, hence why she is hardly ever seen outside of the place. With just a hoodie on and some shorts, she is not wearing her combat corset and not using her whips with spikes attached that she used in the Battle of Beacon.

The door opens and her attention is caught, looking up to see the worried face on Jaymes’ face, her eyes widen and she puts the doll down and walks over to him. “Jaymes? Are you okay?” She asks him, speaking for once too. Her voice is so soft and timid with a slight accent, sounds like she is from the higher regions of Mistral. She gently caresses his cheek but he sighs, looking down at the floor as he walks over to the chair and slumps down in it, looking out the window.

The Shadow of Broken Promises constantly in eyeshot.

“Jaymes?” Rouge softly repeats.

“No...I’m not...it’s getting worse and I don’t know why, Rouge...I feel like am going insane...bullying a girl with depression? That isn’t me!” Jaymes screams with horror as he presses his hands to his head, sitting forward. Rouge walks over to him and sits down next to him, looking at him with kind eyes.

“Hey...it’s okay...remember what the doctor told you? Paranoid Schizophrenia can have lots of effects, even personality changers. Some people who were happy have turned miserable are some have turned aggressive. We just need to find something new, clearly the Clozapine isn’t working anymore.” She suggests and he looks at her with a raised eyebrow.

“You think?” He asks her.

“Your body could have gotten so used to it, it no longer gets affected by it. It happens all the time with drugs, and it’s the only one you’ve been taking.” Rouge explains to him, remembering this stuff better than he does. Yet she does not seem to bug him about it as much as Peony does, she does it in a softer and more caring way. Whereas Peony is more like a mother trying to force a pill down her son’s throat.

It doesn’t work.

He sighs, holding her hand as he sits in that chair. “You always know what to say...” He sighs, but Rouge is also no fool.

“There’s something else, isn’t there?” Rouge inquires.

“Yeah...” He answers.

“What is it?” She asks him.

“The Black Gallows...they interrogated me, Sun and Pyrrha earlier. Killian did.” He tells her and her eyes widen with fear for him, that could not have helped his condition at all.

“Are you alright? Did he threaten you?” She asks him.

“Yes.” He immediately answers, rubbing his thumb across the back of her hand, almost lovingly.

“The bastard...” She snarls.

“We can’t fight them...I just...need to get something stronger.” He says to her with a heavy sigh.
“We’ll find something...” Rouge assures.
“I know...this will all be just one bad memory...”

**Somewhere in the Emerald Forest...**

Water trickles down a babbling brook, gently sloshing through the green grass.
But the once clear water turns red, plagued with blood as a corpse wearing Atlesian Armour floats downstream. His throat has been cut open, and in his hand is a bag.

Of drugs used to combat Schizophrenia.
And the bottles have been broken open, and the pills have been washed away and ruined in the water.
The drugs sent for him to make it better have just been destroyed.
And nobody knows...
She is sat down at the desk which once belonged to Professor Ozpin, her hands clasped together, and head held low with sunken green eyes. Her blonde hair swept over the side of her head with her eyes staring down at the documents on her desk. Many names and faces on them, the faces of the dead and one of the faces is Penny Polendina. She did not know the little synthetic girl very well, but she wishes she could have done.

Feeling her heart pounding a thousand times a second with her heart in her mouth, everything seems like it is getting worse. She exhales, lifting her head up to see the hazy view of the Shadow of Broken Promises in the sky. Looking like it is ready to unleash the full force of the Black Gallows from the safety above, reining fire and death from the stars. But there would be nothing they could do if they decided to level the Academy, so she calms herself down – knowing that Killian would never do such a thing.

Or at least she hopes so.

As she sits there, she hears the sound of the door behind her opening, and she turns to see Ironwood standing behind her with his hand resting against the door. She looks at him then sighs with sadness, looking out the window again and feeling worse and worse over this situation. “James…” She softly says, staring down at the desk yet again as Ironwood walks inside with Oobleck and Port at his side.

“Good afternoon, Glynda…I can probably guess you know why I am here.” James says, walking over to her with his voice filled with concern. Professor Port and Doctor Oobleck follow him, and they both stand by the pillars as James approaches her desk and he leans against it with his arms crossed. “The reports I have received, Glynda…they’ve been worrying me.” He admits, trying his best to make it sound as kind as he possibly could. Glynda sighs, looking up at him, and she looks like she has not had a good nights’ sleep ever since the Battle of Beacon.

With exhausted eyes look up at him, bags formed underneath the eyes themselves and her scleras are badly bloodshot from her lack of sleep. “I know…I know, James.” She stammers as she touches the table with her hands.

“A kid with Paranoid Schizophrenia allowed into the Huntsmen Academies? Not excluded after the revelation we learned? I don’t want to jump to any conclusions, Glynda, but it looks like who have been slacking on the simpler rules.” James explains as he lists the strange things that have been happening lately. Glynda gets up from her desk and she walks over to the window, stammering a breath as she approaches it, staring down at the academy where the Black Gallows have infested the infrastructure of like rats. She presses her palm against the window and she lets out a shaky breath.

James stares at her, worried for her mental health, the attack is enough to mess with anyone – hell it has been getting to him as well. “Glynda? I’m worried about you.” He tells her, pushing himself away from her desk and standing behind her. She squeezes her eyes shut with a sharp intake of air, biting her lip as tears trickle down from her eyes. She turns to him and the three of them see her struggles as clear as day in her eyes.
“I don’t know what to do…James…” She sniffs as she stares at him, he notices her hands shaking and her inability to contain her own emotions. He heard about her snapping at the students after the fight between Sun and Jaymes, and he is no fool. She is displaying signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, something extremely understandable after what she witnessed. No matter how hard of a warrior you are, the mind cannot be expected to withstand every horror that they are confronting.

James immediately walks over to Glynda and kindly wraps his arms around her in a warm embrace, she gives in and she holds onto him in return, sniffling through her sorrow. She hugs him tight, showing her weaker side to the three teachers that stand in the office with her. At least she can get the tears out around people she can trust, opposed to it happening in front of all the students during an assembly when she is meant to be giving a heartfelt speech to them all. “Ssh, it’s okay.” James assures as he caresses her blonde hair with his metal gloved hand.

“We lost so many people, James…not just teachers but children too. That boy? Ickford? His cousin was ripped apart by the Grimm in front of him…Penny Polendina, hell nearly Pyrrha Nikos died. It was hard enough losing Professor Peach.” She sniffs, a death that none of the students even know about. The teacher who taught them all about survival and tracking, the same woman who asked them to get the tree sap from the forest of Forever Fall. When bringing her name up, the two teachers here in the office with James both mournfully lower their heads sadly as they remember her.

James holds her close, in a warm embrace with his large hands grasping onto her so then she has someone to cry onto their shoulder. “I’m sorry, Glynda.” He says to her with a soft-spoken voice, showing that despite being the tin man, he does still have a heart. He releases Glynda and she steps away from him, wiping her tears from her cheeks as she stands there. Port and Oobleck both walk over to her, seeing her with so much suffering affecting a woman who was once filled with so much certainty. Now she looks so broken and unable to speak sternly, just a shattered remnant of who she used to be.

“And now the Black Gallows are here, threatening my students and my staff with being taken away to a prison we’ve no idea where it is located.” She adds with her tearful voice, breaking constantly with every cord created as she speaks. She walks over to the window and stares at some of the Black Gallows soldiers that patrol the courtyard, yelling at some students to get them to their lessons or else. One would think that they are machines opposed to real human beings, pointing at them with the barrels of their rifles. James walks over to Glynda and he stares down at the soldiers forcing the students to their lessons as more dropships land down at the courtyard, deploying small bases down in the area. Armouries and other small facilities being used for their own purposes.

The dropships rise into the sky after deploying the structures with their mechanical arms, powerful thrusters blasting them up into the sky to return to the Shadow of Broken Promises. One of the Wasp Ships slowly patrols the skies, scanning the area for any signs of irregularities, but not attacking the Grimm. There are so many that it would be deemed far too much of a risk, it can be seen from all the way up here in the C.C.T Tower…the smog is growing larger by the day. Taking up most of the Emerald Forest and Forever Fall. “It will be fine, it was just a fight. Hopefully Killian will understand that.” Ironwood states as he sighs, scratching the back of his head.

“Will it? You’ve heard the stories about his crew, James. People who cross the Black Gallows never return to see the light of day. Some people theorise that they test on them…find cures for plagues on them or make test weapons on their prisoners. I will not let my students suffer the same fate.” Glynda states with a scowl as she stares at the back Atlesian Vessel in the sky.

“They won’t, we won’t let them.” Oobleck promises, stepping forward with his hand pushing his glasses back up with his fingers.
James looks at Glynda, and he sighs. “I know you’re struggling without Ozpin, Glynda…that is why we are here. Winter and I have both agreed to help take lessons for the teachers who either left…or we lost.” He promises as he places his hand on her shoulder, she smiles as she looks at him.

“I also heard this Eryka Vasillias has offered to take the place of Professor Peach, she is a Hunter and knows how to track.” Oobleck tells them with a smile, that is not happy but more compassionate to their friend.

“I will take on more lessons, more students too. We just need to keep everything calm so then people can be happier – when the Grimm retreat we can have the party. It’s all we need.” Port explains with a smile on his face, eyes hidden behind his thick eyebrows. Glynda turns to them and she smiles.

“When was the last time you slept, Glynda? Go get some rest, I will handle the headmaster stuff for you. You must be exhausted.” He says to her, but she shakes her head, still the stubborn teacher she has always been.

“No…I need to do my job…Ozpin has put his faith in me to do my job. If I can’t do this then what is the point in me being the Vice Headmaster?” She questions as she covers her face with her hand, so exhausted yet so stubborn to give in. James looks at her and he sighs, able to understand her struggles in the way she acts. She has always been one to complete her duty at all costs, she would never fail.

“Doesn’t mean you have to do it alone.” Oobleck reminds with a smile, and she sighs, wiping the tears from her cheeks and eyes.

“I…I know…But…he trusted me.” She stammers, and James looks at her with a smile.

“And he still does, but he wouldn’t want you to fall apart because you are carrying everything on your shoulders.” James explains to her, but she sits down, and sighs, pressing her hands to her head.

“But what am I supposed to do? I know that Jaymes should not be in the Academies at all because of his condition. But it was never on his file to begin with, his father was the one responsible, taking it out…his father abuses him every single day and his uncle is even worse. And his cousin is that same uncle’s son…if we send him home he will be killed.” Glynda explains with worry in her voice.

“But Glynda…if he stays here he could trigger panic, I have read his file too and I have seen what his semblance is. He can form electricity, mix that with Paranoid Schizophrenia and you have a ticking time bomb.” James explains, looking at it from a logical and Atlesian way, but Glynda shakes her head.

“We are a school, what kind of teachers would we be if we did not protect our students?” Glynda questions as she stares at him, her eyes not as wet from tears anymore but she looks angrier again. Something that feels normal in comparison to seeing her broken and upset, yet she is still lost for answers.

“We might want to take care for our students…but also as a whole, Glynda. I hate to say it, but one student’s welfare is nothing in comparison to the welfare of every single student.” He explains with narrowed eyes, but Glynda stares right back with angered eyes.

“Do the world really view the Valerians the way they do because we actually care? You see as us arrogant because we actually want our students to be safe?” Glynda questions with anger, but
Ironwood shakes his head with annoyance at his own failure of words.

“I didn’t mean that, and you know it.” Ironwood states.

“Do I? The Black Gallows are Atlesian and you sound a lot like Killian right now.” She says, insulting the General who stares at her.

“I am nothing like him – that monster would rather just kill Sun, Pyrrha and Jaymes and be done with it. We are lucky he hasn’t just assassinated them already.” He explains with concern in his voice along with disappointment around the fact that Glynda saw him that way. She sighs, massaging her brow with her hand.

“I know…and I’m sorry.” She sighs. The four of them in this room look around as they think on the situation at hand, every conversation seems to surround the Black Gallows lately. “I’m sorry… you’re not like Killian… I just want to help him. The poor boy has had to suffer with so much.”

“I understand, Glynda. But…maybe we can move him to another school. Maybe even to Atlas, it suffered the least punishment from the Battle of Beacon.” He suggests, and Glynda ponders on the idea of possibly moving him away to another area.

But before she can easily answer, the doors open, and they all turn sharply to see them standing there. Commander Killian and two Black Gallows soldiers standing at his side with rifles in their hands. “We have a situation.”

Winter

The body has been found, washed up at the edge of the river away down from wherever it was the poor courier was murdered. With a deep stab wound in the side of his neck, it is clear he was killed by the shock and sudden stabbing, most likely severed the vertebrae with the twist of the knife. Stood above the body is Winter, since Weiss is with her team and getting to her lesson she now has the time to do some of her work as a soldier.

Although she never expected to see this, someone who has been assassinated with essential drugs to deliver to someone who really needs them. She narrows her eyes as she stares at the scene, unable to tell where it happened, but from all the water that drenches his corpse and the fact there are no tracks where he has washed up... he was dumped into the river to hide the scene of the crime.

This is work done by a professional killer, not some thug.

She exhales, turning to the sound of a Bullhead approaching their location in the Emerald Forest, and it descends into the trees, slowly moving towards the ground and its landing gear folds out and sets forth onto the soil. Holding into the internal handles is Ironwood with Port, Oobleck and Killian, since Glynda has been told to try and get some sleep. She really needs it after all, she could barely stand from how tired she was.

James drops down from the Bullhead, and he walks towards Winter who approaches him with concern apparent in her blue Schnee Eyes. “Winter, report.” James speaks, and she nods her head.

“It’s the courier that was supposed to sneak these drugs into Jaymes’ Dorm Room, without raising suspicions. He’s been killed by someone.” She explains, he nods his head and approaches the body
on the ground, crouching down to stare at the wound he has suffered. The blade must have been small, able to fit right underneath the helmet with ease without even scraping the armour plating in any points.

Not only was the attack precise but the weapon was practically designed for this use. Perfectly plunged straight into his jugular, killing him quickly and leaving him in the water. Ironwood turns when he hears the sound of an Altum Eagle calling out overhead, seeing Eryka approaching the scene of the crime with her eyes searching the area. She might be extravagant in the ways of which she does things, but one cannot deny her usefulness in a situation like this. “He wasn’t killed here.” Eryka states, knowing this to be the fact just from looking at his body.

“And who might you be?” Ironwood asks her curiously, rising up to face her. She smiles and extends her hand to him.

“Eryka Vasillias.” She answers, he shakes her hand with a nod.

“Neptune’s sister?” He presumes.

“Good eyes, General. I was called to Beacon to look out for him, but it looks like you have bigger fish to fry at the minute.” She explains as she crouches down and she examines the body, looking for things that the others would have missed. It is as if she can see in a different spectrum to normal people. Able to notice the smallest things on the body that could be possible clues, things that she cannot help but point out aloud.

She touches his skin and clothes, feeling the temperature of his corpse from the water that covers his body. “Water has drenched his body and clothes, turned him cold as ice, his skin has bloated slightly as well. Must have been in the water for quite a while for this to happen.” Eryka describes as she prods his skin, feeling it squelch from the amount of water that has gotten trapped in his body. “But he wasn’t drowned…stabbed in the neck with a razor…right into his spine, managed to part the bones in his neck. Damn good assassin, quick and silent kill, not even a grunt would have been made…no signs of struggle at all.” Eryka explains, Ironwood looks at Winter and both of them look impressed by her ability to see these things. Ironwood looks at her clothes and then at the bow on her back.

“You’re from the Mistraalian Mountains, aren’t you?” He asks her, clearly knowing about the people of which that trained her.

Eryka chortles as she checks over his body. “Checking me out already General?” She asks him, knowing he could have only deduced that from the clothes of which she wears. He sighs as he shakes his head.

“You know what I meant, and I can guess I’m right from that Altum Eagle above our heads. You’re a Falconess?” He asks her curiously.

“Yup, wasn’t raised there though…they helped me fix my path. I used to be a really angry chick, now I’m moderately annoyed.” She jokes with a wink, looking back to the body at her feet. There is more than just the stab wound in his neck, for there are also some slashes across his chest as well. As if he has been attacked by a few swords at once, deep gashes with blood pouring from the wounds. However, they were not what killed him…this could have been from the Grimm.

He is in the Emerald Forest after all.

She swipes her fingers across the soil and feels the things inside. She sniffs it, and she smells the irony scent of blood in the soil, meaning he was still bleeding when his body ended up here.
“Blood in the soil, meaning he couldn’t have washed up far from where he was killed.” She determines as she stands up and looks up the river, looking at the path.

She tracks the river down and notices that the river bends westward, and the body has ended up on the eastern side of the river, so he was washed up on the turn. Meaning he came from uphill, not downhill. “He was killed somewhere up here.” She states, pointing up the hill where the river trickles down. Ironwood looks at Winter and then at Killian who speaks with some of his soldiers, telling them to search the area.

“Winter go with Eryka and see if you can find the scene of the crime.” Ironwood orders, Winter looks at Eryka who whistles to Dulcis and he flies down to her and lands on her arm, chirping as he looks at his motherly master. She then looks down to the completely ruined drugs that have been contaminated in the water, totally useless now and probably dangerous if he took them. Who knows what kinds of diseases he could contract if he took any of these meds.

She stands sharp and she salutes him. “Yes sir.” She proudly assures, Ironwood nods as he crouches down by the body as the Black Gallows soldiers take a body bag out and they prepare to lift the body out of here so then he can be tended to. Winter follows Eryka up the stream as they search for a point of which where the murder could have happened.

Eryka just moves her arm slightly and Dulcis takes off again, searching for any clues himself, clues he would screech to get her attention, whilst they walk up the hill. Eryka looks at Winter and she smirks slightly. “So…Winter Schnee? Specialist in the Atlesian Military? Do they always let chicks in Atlas wear perfume?” She asks curiously, getting a confused look from Winter.

“Excuse me?” Winter questions with a shocked look on her face, mostly at how Eryka managed to smell the perfume that she wears.

“If my nose if correct, that is lavender scented, correct?” She asks her, and Winter sniffs herself quietly to see if she put too much on. “Relax, Wints. I won’t tell him.” She snarks, getting a furtherly shocked look from Winter.

“Him?” She questions.

“The General, dummy. Why else would you wear perfume around him, not like I blame you he is a pretty dapper man. A little older than you though.” She reminds, but Winter scoffs in disgust at her.

“That is my commanding officer, and that would be indecent fraternization. Besides I have never been overly lucky in that department.” She states as she walks with Eryka, stepping up a small incline in the hill with her blue eyes scanning the environment. Eryka shakes her head as she walks with her.

“Sure, sure…maybe that is the case. I dunno though, and to be honest I don’t know if I care. I’m just here to look after my baby bro and the boyfriend of your sister.” She informs with a small grin, knowing very clearly that Winter has absolutely no idea on this matter. Winter freezes with stern blue eyes glaring right at Eryka, and her voice becomes sharp.

“Boy – Friend?” She slowly bites as she glares at Eryka, and she turns with a smirk.

“Oh Oh…you didn’t know?” She teases with a grin on her face. “Well in fairness they aren’t dating, but they really like each other.” She informs, and Winter shakes her head with annoyance.

“I’ve the feeling we are gonna end up working together quite a lot, so please don’t do that again.”
She begs her, getting a laugh from Eryka as she walks ahead, scanning the soil for any signs of a scuffle. There would be signs of this in the ground no matter how stealthy or quick the kill was, two pairs of footprints on the same spot and a depression in the soil where the body was thrown.

“Don’t fret, just teasing you with some playful banter. But the two of them are close, thought Weiss’ big sister should know that. You know, big sister to big sister, right?” She asks her, and Winter cannot help but agree with her, she does not seem to mean anything harmful in what she said. Just being her playful self, and the two of them continue their way through the woods to find where the courier was killed. “I do hope they get together though…for Neptune’s sake.” She sighs as she walks, eyes looking down to the ground.

Winter looks at her curiously, catching onto the tone in her voice, she knows that tone. She has heard it in her family for so long…the tone of fear. “What’s wrong with Neptune?” Winter inquires, and Eryka looks at her.

“Nothing…not with him anyway. The problem is that he has always looked up to me…a failure to the family…someone who could never cut it in the Academies. And for some reason he idolises me – so much that he wants to be me. The hair, the way he dresses…he thinks I’m so cool…and he is afraid that if he is not like me then nobody else will care.” She sadly explains, feeling for him because she thinks that she is the reason for the way he is. Winter nods her head, knowing exactly what Eryka is talking about.

“He’s insecure, isn’t he? About the way people view him?” She guesses, Eryka looks at Winter. “You know what it’s like?” She asks her.

“It seems Weiss and Neptune have more in common than we realised, because I know Weiss is the same. She might say she joined the Academies because she believes it is right and all, and it may be the case now…but I know deep down she only rebelled against her father because I did.” She says, with sunken eyes. “Sometimes I wonder how different things would be if I stayed…would Weiss have developed an eating disorder? Would she have fallen into depression because of our lousy father?” She questions when walking alongside Eryka. The Vasillias Falconess looks at Winter with saddened eyes, never even realising that side of Weiss ever existed.

“I didn’t know…I’m sorry.” Eryka apologises, and Winter sighs as she flicks some of her white hair over her shoulder.

“Ancient history now…I just want what is best for my little sister. Like you said, it’s our job to protect them.” She states with the shrug of her shoulders, and Eryka sighs.

“Ain’t that the truth?” Eryka huffs, walking further up the river to where they come across something very interesting. She stops and her eye swivels round to notice something on the bark of the tree nearby…and there is a bloodied handprint on the tree. Very faint, as if the owner of this print realised they just pressed their hand against it and pulled the hand away as quickly as they could. Then used their sleeve to wipe it away, this must belong to the killer from how it appears. Impossible to belong to the victim, he would have been killed instantly from an attack like that. Eryka follows the trail, whilst Eryka follows and keeps her eyes open. The Grimm are still inside of the Emerald Forest, they are just lucky that they are in an area where there are no Grimm. However, this still raises one very good question, a question that has been eating away at Winter. “Why the hell is the courier out here if these meds were meant to get to Jaymes in Beacon?” Winter questions with confusion, but as they walk further…

Eryka stops so suddenly that Winter bumps into her with a grunt, furrowing her brow. “What the
“Hell?” She questions, but Eryka points at the ground, seeing the point of which it happened. Even Winter can see it, that is how clear it is right now.

“Look…this is where it happened, he was killed here and was thrown into the river to try and hide it.” Eryka explains, crouching down to the point she noticed. There are four footprints, one clearly belongs to the Atlesian Courier, but the other set are so much smaller than his…almost the same size as what would be expected of a Student. The blood has only just started to harden, this happened recently.

But there is also something else…

Something has been buried at this spot, almost so well that nobody would notice, but Eryka could see the mound and the scratches in the soil where someone had dug a hole with their bare hands. “Whoever killed the poor guy was trying to hide something.” Eryka states, digging with her hands…something that totally repulses the prim, clean and proper Winter Schnee. Seeing how she does not even react to getting dirt under her nails really makes her shudder – Winter is not afraid to get dirty, but only if there is either no other way or if it just happens with the job.

Eryka could have used something to dig up the dirt with, but no…she uses her hands like an animal. Eryka pulls the dirt back, and her eyes widen from what she sees…the blade that was used. It is indeed a knife, one with extremely serrated edges with the blood still soaking the blade. “Looks like our killer didn’t have time to think, they could have just thrown the blade in the water, but buried it instead…strange choice.” She says as she looks at the knife. Since Winter is wearing gloves she reaches over to the knife and picks it up, putting it inside a plastic bag.

“We can search for fingerprints with this.” Winter says, but there is something else buried, something Eryka notices at the last second.

“Hold on…” Eryka says, and Winter looks back at her after standing up. She looks over her shoulder to what Eryka has uncovered, curiosity grasping both of them and not letting go.

Eryka swipes the dirt from the lens to reveal a small camera, a built-in camera which was most likely mounted atop the Atlesian Courier’s helmet that he was wearing. “It must have still been recording…” She says, opening the camera to reveal the screen inside. “The killer didn’t take out the memory card in the camera…on purpose? If you bury a camera then you would know that it would have been recording, right?” Eryka presumes as she looks back at Winter.

“You have to rip those things off too, they don’t come off by accident. This was intentional.” Winter adds, able to tell that this must be part of the killer’s sick little game. Meaning that have a scheming killer on the lose right now.

“Let’s see what happened…maybe we can find some answers.” Eryka hopes as she presses the play button and lets the camera start rolling.

*Heavy panting breathing at the very first few seconds of the video are the first things that they ever hear. The camera shaking as he flees from something, looking over his shoulder and only hearing the caw of a bird behind him. Like a Crow or a Raven, chasing him down through the woods.*

*Distant nightmarish howls of the Grimm echo round the soldier that flees, still holding the bag of drugs in his hand. “This is Private Tarkas! I think this will be my final recording…oh by the gods it hurts so much…” He winces in pain, crying as he stammers, stumbling across the grass, hearing the Grimm getting closer around him. He keeps fleeing and the river is not in view yet from his camera, just the trees endlessly stretching ahead of him.*
He coughs, vomiting blood and as the camera lowers down they can actually see his hands pressing onto the wounds. The recording does not show the slashes he got before getting stabbed in the neck by someone. He was bleeding heavily in his last moments, could have died just from his blood loss he suffered from. “Son of a bitch…I don’t wanna die…I was attacked by something when delivering these medical supplies for the Jaymes Ickford boy…but on the way there I was attacked…corralled into the Emerald Forest. I don’t know where I am…but I am going to activate a signal for people to know! I don’t want my girlfriend to not know what happened to me.” Tarkas whimpered with terror, weakly limping across the grass.

The cawing from the bird grows louder and louder.

“Oh gods…he’s coming! Please! I don’t want to go!” He wailed in terror, now the trickling of the river can be heard. “No!” He screeches as something forms in black smoke before his very eyes. That’s when his voice gets cut off by the crunching squelch of a knife plunging into his neck, killing him instantly.

And almost mercifully.

The body collapses to the ground and his head falls towards the ground, but the body is held upright, stopping him from falling. Then the killer silently shoves him into the water, where the man’s legs are standing in as the water rushes around him. The man crouches down and he picks up the camera and breaks it off, holding the lens downwards as he speaks to the killer. His voice chillingly sharp and vicious, like the voice of a monster.

His voice sends a chill up Eryka’s spine. “Good work, now the drugs will not get to the boy.” The man says, the voice is eerily familiar yet Eryka cannot place why. “Leave the camera here, I want them to find it. Make things more interesting.” He chuckles sinisterly, before ending the recording. That must have been when he gave it to the killer and buried it.

“Seems like our killer is not working alone…someone else is in charge of this.” Winter deduces from what they heard, the only things they have on the man is that he wore black trousers and a trench coat. That is about it, all in black but nothing else worth noting. Apart from the fact that there was a metallic sound when he picked the camera up, could have just been the camera…or he has cybernetics?

“This situation just got a whole lot more complicated.” Eryka says as she gives the camera to Winter so then she can store it for safe keeping in those bags that she has. Eryka stands up and walks over to the river, staring at the clean water and the ground beneath it, luckily it is not a very deep river. But either way there are no tracks left behind, whoever it was managed to get in and out of here very fast without leaving any tracks behind.

But the killer?

The killer did.

“Eryka…” Winter says, since even she can see the tracks with her own eyes.

Eryka walks over to her partner and she watches the trail as it stretched out.

Towards Beacon Academy.

“Shit…the killer is in Beacon.” Eryka realises, until suddenly a monstrous roar ignites from behind them, making the two of them jump. A pack of Beowulves have found them, roaring aggressively at the two Huntresses. The pack snarl at them, but Eryka and Winter’s eyes both widen with
disbelief as they stare at the Beowulves. They have changed, they are no longer the tall lanky creatures that they once remembered anymore…

They are bigger, more muscular and vicious looking than they remember...they are evolving. Winter reaches up to her earpiece after drawing her sword. “General! We’ve got Grimm incoming!” She advises. That’s when they hear the gunshots from where the others are currently at.

“They’re already here!” Ironwood replies, firing at the Grimm that have come pouring in from the woods. The smog has not found them but a large contingency of Grimm have located them, meaning they are gonna have to fight their way out. Most likely the hopes of the killer on the loose, that the investigators will be killed, and all this will be pinned on the Grimm. The Beowulves roar, and they all charge towards the two Huntresses.

Winter darts towards them with her glyph forming beneath her feet, whereas Eryka draws her bow and launches an arrow towards one of the Creatures of Grimm. The Beowulf roars with fury, until suddenly the arrow lodges straight through its eye socket and it falls onto the ground. Winter slides underneath the legs of one of the Grimm, slashing her blade upwards and cutting through the legs of the creature. The stumps glow bright red as the beast collapses to the ground, roaring in pain and fury as the thick black smoke pours from its wounds like blood on a Human or Faunus. The Beowulf that Winter amputated still crawls towards her, one of the main reasons that scientists know that the Grimm are nothing like the average fauna.

They act on pure hate and rage, nothing more, driven by a sense of purpose that is almost terrifying. The Beowulf roars at her, and Winter spins through the air, stabbing the blades straight through the skull of the creature howls in agony, twitching in pain as the thick smoke pours from the opening inside its head created by Winter’s curved blade. She twists the blade and rips it through the side of its head, purposefully so then she can slice the other jumping Grimm out of the air.

The Beowulf crashes down into the soil with a growling grunt, staring ahead to see Winter blasting towards it with her Glyph shooting her as fast as a bullet. She rams the blade of her sword right into its chest, so hard she plunges the sword straight through one of the Emerald Trees. The Grimm roars in agony, slashing its claws at her face constantly as she turns to form a glyph and blast icicles towards a Creep that erupts out of the ground behind her. The skull of the Creep shatters like glass, roaring with anger as it breaks away into thousands of ash crystals. The Beowulf still pinned to the tree snarls at her viciously, until an arrow comes shooting past Winter’s head and into the eye of the Creature, killing it quickly.

Winter looks back to see Eryka in action against the Grimm, she sprints towards the pack and she slides under the legs of an Ursa that emerged from the bushes. It roars at her as it swings its huge paw at her, but she nails the dodge, sliding under the creature on its hind legs. She leaps up after passing the creature and grabs onto the bony spines on its back. The Ursae have also changed, looking more like Grizzly Bears now than overgrown badgers. Eryka hooks her bow round the Ursa’s neck and it roars, swinging its huge paws around as it tries to grapple onto her, but it cannot, just stumbling further and further.

Eryka pushes her boot against the back of its neck and she draws her bow back as she aims the telescopic arrow at the creature. She fires, launching said arrow into the back of its head, and the arrow punctures through the point in the armour where it has parted for better movement. The arrow stabs through where the brain would be and protrudes out the back of its head. Thick billowing black smoke pours out from both ends, and Eryka runs round the collapsing titan, and she jumps up and draws a knife that she also has on her person, stabbing it right into its jaw and
with all her might she slams the beast downwards with full force. The Ursa roars and crashes down into the ground, she takes her hunting knife and brings it up, roaring before smashing it back down in between the beast’s eyes.

The Ursa’s body crumbles away into ash and Eryka spirals round, taking her knife and throwing it, mastering the ability to throw knives too. The hunting knife spins through the air and stabs right into the chest of the Beowulf that roared at her, silencing it in immediately. She smirks as she draws another arrow from her bandolier, the arrow extending outwards with the arrowhead opening up on the end too, as do the feathers. She runs towards a Boarbatusk that charges her, roaring as it accelerates and swings its curved tusks at her animalistically. The tusks carve through the soil, throwing pieces of grass into the air along with roots too.

Eryka jumps and rolls out of the way in time, just dodging the large mammalian like beast as it turns, slamming against one of the trees. It screeches as it scrapes its hoof against the soil, preparing to charge. Eryka draws an arrow and she focuses her senses, tracking the wind and the direction, so she aims the arrow up at an angle before firing it, letting the wind carry it. The arrow curves in the wind and punctures the place between the shoulder and the muscle of the beast, making it roar in pain. She then smirks as she presses a button built into her bow, which detonates the arrow.

The white bony armour explodes, breaking apart and revealing the soft black hide beneath with the smoke peeling away from the muscle. The pained squeal from the overgrown demonic pig devolves into fury, as it charges towards her and then enters a rolling frenzy at her. She just moves in time but still gets clipped in the leg from the creature. She spins through the air then rolls across the ground as the Boarbatusk comes to a stop. It snarls and charges her again, until suddenly Dulcis dives down and slashes his talons across the opened wound in its side, making it screech in pain.

It staggers and Dulcis takes off again, leaving the beast confused of what just attacked its now open weakness. Eryka holds her bow and launches a hard-pointed arrow. These arrows are stronger with much bigger arrowheads in comparison to her normal ones, also completely made of metal opposed to them having a combination of minerals. These are used to take down big prey, or heavily armoured ones like this Boarbatusk. The arrow gets caught in the wind once more and shoots down into the side of the creature, killing it as it punctures the heart. The Boarbatusk roars in pain before crumbling away into dust, Eryka gets up and grabs the arrow she just fired, and she nocks it into her bow, firing it towards the Beowulf flanking Winter.

Winter nods to Eryka, swiftly spinning round as she detaches her smaller blade from within her sword, and she launches it across the forest and into the knee of another Beowulf, the beast yelps in pain as it staggers with the sword impaled in its leg. She forms a protective Glyph behind her that protects her from the charge of a Boarbatusk as well. The creature crashes against it, dazed and sliding across the floor. Winter jumps in the air, flipping round as she presses her legs against the glyph she conjures behind her in the air and she blasts off it at great speeds, stabbing her sword straight through its stomach. She drags the beast across the ground and she spins round, turning to see a huge King Taijitu erupting from the forest with a hissing roar. It snarls at her with its long-forked tongue flitting out at their faces, then the white version if its head rises up behind it, staring at her with both sets of glowing red eyes.

Winter’s eyes widen, so she darts backwards to avoid the downwards attack from the creature as it tried to bite onto her with its fangs. She cartwheels away from the second and she grabs onto her other blade still in the leg of the limping Beowulf. She rips it out and quickly beheads the creature right after taking her sword back. She back up as the huge snake slithers towards her, before rearing up with a deep demonic guttural hiss. It lunges forward and shatters a tree as Winter dodges the attack, slashing across the snout of the other. Winter runs straight at the creature and she jumps
onto its spine, sprinting across it and slashing the Black Head across the eye. The Taijitu roars in fury, waving its head around to shake her off, and Winter flies off, only to form a glyph in the air to blast off. She slashes the creature across the side of its face before landing on the ground.

Winter stares up and she blows her hair from her eye to stare at the monster as it coils round with the second head also rising up, whereas the first is still quite injured from Winter’s last attack. But then Eryka launches three arrows into the creature’s side, making it roar in pain as the arrows stab deep into the scales. Winter gets an idea and she looks at the weakest head, and she has a plan for the White Head. “Eryka! Jump!” She yells, and Eryka nods to her, jumping up in the air as Winter commanded.

Winter conjures a platform above her and she lands on it, standing upside down in the air, and she draws her bow and aims one of her explosive arrows at the weakened head as it lunges at her at great speed. “Nightie-night.” She winks, launching the explosive arrow and it shoots straight into the open jaws of the massive snake. The arrow detonates a fiery glow of an explosion from within the skull of the snake, the roar silenced instantly into a cloud of black smoke. The black half of the Taijitu collapses to the ground with an Earthquake like bang. The White Head rises up and it lunges at Eryka too.

The Falconess jumps away from the huge snake as it passes by her, dragging the corpse of its twin behind it, turning round with the flick of its forked tongue. “What about the white one?” Eryka asks Winter as she lands beside her, keeping her bow drawn.

“Give me some time!” Winter replies, spinning her sword through her fingers and stabbing it into the floor as a Glyph forms beneath her feet and another right in front of her. She is beginning to summon one of her fallen enemies she has fought in the past. Eryka nods, and she whistles to Dulcis and he dives down, slashing his talons across the side of the Serpent’s head to make it recoil back with a snarl. Winter keeps her eyes closed as she keeps her mind focused on forming her summon…white energy forming around the conjured entity. Eryka rolls away from the huge snake and launches an arrow from the quiver and into the chest of the Taijitu White Head, and she presses the same button on her bow.

The arrows only become live when they are fired from the arrow, for it sets a certain setting in them when launched, going through the prongs that are used to aim, but also to activate them. Pressing the button just detonates them when they are live. She does so and suddenly the arrow ignites into a sparking lightshow of electricity, causing the huge snake to roar in agony, writhing as it rears back, but the arrow does not last forever. Enraged, the Taijitu lunges fast and smashes Eryka back.

Eryka crashes against the tree, then her blue aura crackles across her body as she groans, falling to her knees in pain. The Taijitu rears up with a snarl, ready to devour her.

Winter’s Summon finally forms, a huge glowing white Beringel pounds its fists against its chest with a howl, before charging towards the huge snake. It grapples onto the dead half of the snake and pulls it back, the White Head roars in anger turning round to see the glowing Beringel sprinting across the corpse of its fallen twin. The snake snarls then roars, lunging towards it, but then the Beringel jumps high in the air with both fists held over its head. It roars monstrously as it jumps towards its prey.

The Beringel slams both fists down into the cranium of the Taijitu so hard that the skull cracks from the force, and it crashes down into the ground. Killed instantly from the attack, the Beringel pants and growls, before it fades away as well into white dust. The Taijitu crumbles away into ash finally, and Winter stands up, looking over at Eryka as she gets up, coughing from that hit. “Eryka!
Are you alright?” She asks her, but Eryka shoves her aside as she stands up.

“I’m fine.” She sharply answers, hearing more gunfire from where they left. She picks her bow up and she sprints as fast as she can, limping with her hand held to her stomach, weak from the attack she suffered. Winter looks at her then realises her aura is already down, she only got hit a few times and that hit from the Taijitu should not be enough to break the aura of a Huntress. No matter how strong their aura is, it never goes down that fast.

They reach the ridge and their eyes widen as they see Ironwood, Oobleck, Port and Killian holding off the Grimm that have ambushed them. Beowulf upon Beowulf charge out from the forest, attacking them. The Black Gallows are holding them back but soon their ammunition will run out. They do not have much time, and as more of them start coming out from the forest, Eryka narrows her eyes as she gets an idea. “Tell your general and his friends to get down.” Eryka orders as she draws an arrow with fire tattooed across it.

“What? Why?” She questions.

“Just do it!” Eryka yells, as she nocks the arrow and draws it back, Winter complies, and she presses her finger to the earpiece on her ear.

“General! You and everyone else get down now!” She yells, and Ironwood looks at her…he trusts her, so he does so.

“Everyone hit the deck!” He orders.

“What are you mad?” Killian yells back.

“Do it!” Ironwood bellows, as he grabs one of the soldiers firing and forces him down to the ground. Eryka exhales, calming her senses down as she aims the arrow at the centre of the group.

“Just like we practiced buddy…” She whispers, then she whistles to Dulcis, firing the arrow towards the group as the huge swarm of Grimm jump towards them. Winter’s heart is pounding so fast, seeing her General about to get ripped limb from limb because of Eryka. But then, Dulcis dives down and he splays out his wings, and grapples his talons onto the arrow, holding onto it tight.

Then...

Fire ignites across the arrow that spreads onto the Altum Eagle and to their aura something incredible happens. The beautiful feathers ignite, then there is a pulse of aura that explodes into a huge Phoenix of fire, dwarfing the eagle he once was. An epic screech emerges from Dulcis as he burns every single Grimm beneath him into ashes, killing every single one of them. The Grimm burn away under the massive fiery feathers that splay out like this, and Ironwood’s eyes widen as the huge fiery entity glides over their heads. He banks round and burns the rest of the Grimm as they attempt to flee from the scene, being wiped out as well.

The fire soon dissipates across his body, the smoke trails from both the arrow and the Altum Eagle as he returns to his master. He goes to land on her, but he turns, and she catches him...completely exhausted from using that ability that he has. Even Eryka collapses from exhaustion, her nose beginning to bleed from focusing that hard with her beloved Eagle. She gently caresses his warm feathers as he snuggles up to her, chirping softly.

Ironwood and Killian stand up with Port and Oobleck...everyone looking shocked at that ability that she just displayed. “That was incredible.” One of the soldiers chuckles with awe, whilst Eryka
recovery her strength and she pulls a tissue out from her pocket to wipe the blood off. She knew she
would get a nosebleed from that, just expected perhaps. Winter looks down at Eryka and she
crouches down beside her, seeing her so exhausted.

“I’ve never seen a semblance like that before.” Winter says with admiration in her voice, but Eryka
stares at her and shakes her head.

“That wasn’t a semblance, I don’t have one.” She tells her, looking back to her Eagle that sleepily
sits in her arms.

“How can you…well…I guess I have to ask. How come your aura broke in basically three hits,
Eryka? Have you not done any training?” She asks her, sounding as harsh as she always has when
it comes down to teaching. Eryka tenses and grits her teeth, glaring straight at Winter.

“I can’t! Alright? I’m not as rich or fancy as you Schnees, or like anyone else. I’m a freak…a freak
whose aura is thin as paper. Understand?” She snarls with anger in her eyes, before she sighs and
kisses the top of her beloved baby’s head.

Winter falls silent and she stands up, closing her eyes.

Not everyone is as strong or as capable as she used to believe, just as how Jaymes cannot control
his own mind.

Nobody is perfect.

Not even her.

Yang

Miles away in Patch…

The blonde-haired beauty that is Yang Xiao Long groans, finally waking up from her long slumber
after losing her arm. She sits up slowly and weakly as she looks around, then gasps with horror
when she sees the stump of her arm at her side. She whimpers with horror, then looks out the
window to see the forests of her home.

And on the branch of the tree outside?

A Raven?

No…

A Jackdaw.
Scorching hot pain…

It is the best way to describe the last feeling before the darkness had claimed her. The agony of the blood red blade slicing straight through her strengthened aura, the skin, the muscle and the bone… then the sensation of all feeling from her elbow down fading away. The shock itself was enough to send her into a deep sleep for many days, the desperation to cry out to her sister never left in her coma.

The darkness seemed to be infinite, filled with distant screams and the sound of crackling wood. The smell of death and brimstone rising high in the sky, heart in her mouth and sweat trickling down from her skin. Wearing the clothes, she wore during the battle, she stumbles around as she looks around. Hearing the whispers, the damned voices never seem to fade from around her. Her skin feels like it is starting to peel, looking around with fearful lilac eyes as she stumbles.

She looks down to her hands, seeing both of them there. She turns them back and forth, hoping to god that she never lost her arm. But then again…is she dead? Did she never make it out of there? She looks around and stumbles, looking at the ground and a gasp leaves her lungs.

The corpse of her best friend – Blake Belladonna – lies on the ground with her throat cut open by a razor-sharp blade. A pool of glistening red blood covers the floor and the side of her face. Yang gasps with horror, nearly collapsing to the ground by the body of her best friend. “No! Blake!” She screams with pure terror, trying to hold her hand but she can’t, so much agony in her body as she sobs. But as she remains on her knees, that is when she hears a chillingly familiar voice.

“You could have saved her.” Adam tells her, his voice dark and sinister voice, telling lies to her, feeding into her own dread. She sniffles, and as she stares at her body on the ground, her clothes suddenly erupt into thick black smoke. The smog crumbles her body down, dissolving her away into dust in her hands. She gasps as she follows the spoke, and she turns to see him standing behind her.

She grits her teeth with fury, eyes flushing red and her blonde hair igniting. Yang rises to her feet with clenched fists, Ember Celica unexpectedly appearing on her arms, loading fresh shells into the chambers. She aims them at the White Fang Commander as he walks towards her with his hand on the hilt of Wilt and Blush. “You…” Yang snarls, not even certain of what his name is. At least not yet, Blake has yet to have actually told her who that was, yet he still approaches her with his eyes hidden behind that mask.

Her nightmare seems to take him and make him look almost supernatural, with glowing red markings across his coat, mask and red hair. The dark presence of his spectral form admittedly terrifies her, yet she stands her ground as courageously as ever. But her fists are shaking, heart pounding a hundred pulses a second, sweating with dread. Then he speaks again as he slowly walks towards her. “No matter what you do, how strong you think you are…you will always fail.” Adam states, Yang snarls and lets out a shriek of fury, blasting Ember Celica behind her as she shoots towards him, her screech echoing for miles.

Adam suddenly slashes his blade across her arm and she gasps, feeling the arm parting from her
elbow, crashing down into the ground. She screams with agony, as the fiery hot pain courses up through her shoulder and neck, blood pouring from her wound. She weakly limps up to one knee but nearly collapses, looking up slowly to see Adam walking towards her with a smirk on his face. “You…will lose.” She snarls at him, weakly.

Adam hauntingly chuckles. “Everything you love will be gone…and you will be alone.” He growls at her, before drawing the red sword.

And slashing it across her face.

Three days before the arrival of the Black Gallows…

Yang gasps, jolting up from her sleep and looking around with horrified eyes, looking around when she realises that she is alive. All that was nothing more than a terrible nightmare…and she sighs with relief. Until she looks down at her arm and her eyes widen, tears forming in her lids as she sees the stump where her elbow and forearm should be. She sits forward, and she thinks about everything that has happened.

She has no idea of everything that has happened, or who survived. All she thinks happened is that she failed to save her best friend from being killed by a High-Ranking member of the White Fang.

Ruby could be dead.

Weiss could be dead.

She could be the only survivor.

However, she is also back home…hopefully she will find her baby sister in her room next door. She sighs as she sits there, then turns her head to see something sat on the branch outside her window. She stares at it, and it is a Raven.

No…

Not a Raven.

A Jackdaw.

It stares at her with red eyes, twitching its head as it stares directly into her eyes, sinisterly as it stands there. Normally she has been able to recognise the Raven that has usually stood outside her window in her life, but this is different.

Very different.

Then it unfolds its black feathered wings and swings them, taking off into the air as it caws, leaving the scene of Yang’s awakening. Yang rubs her eyes with exhaustion with her hand, groaning as she feels faint phantom pains in her arm. She slings her legs over the edge of her bed, her father has clearly gotten her into her comfy clothes like he did once when she was really sick. She looks over to her soft slippers and her fluffy dressing gown, picking it up and wrapping it around her orange T-Shirt and her shorts she wears. She slips her slippers on and she walks slowly, more like limping though.

She stumbles and presses her hand against the wall, expecting to use her other arm to stop herself from falling, but she could not do anything. Her other hand she thought she had was nothing more
than a phantom feeling. She nearly falls, only able to use her other arm to stabilise her fall, looking down the hallway. She walks round and stares into the open room where she had hoped to see Ruby.

Unaware that she is still at school with the rest of their team. She gasps with fear, seeing her room is completely untouched, and she knows her sister. As messy as they come, she could never clean her room to save her life. Whereas her father is a total clean freak and likes to organise her bedroom for her. She whimpers fearfully, terrified that she could have now lost her beloved sister too. “Ruby? Please…no…” She whimpers softly on her knees.

The door opposite to Ruby’s opens and she hears a gasp, turning to see Taiyang with widened eyes. “Yang! You’re awake!” Taiyang cheers with relief, wrapping his arms around his daughter, kissing the top of her head. Almost crying himself, but from joy to see her okay. But her normal fire she used to have has been extinguished, she feels so cold and broken, unable to even smile anymore. Like she has no joy to be alive, because she has absolutely no idea that her sister and the family of friends she has are all still alive.

Well…

Some of them are.

Taiyang holds her close, and he looks at her as he feels her broken emotions reeking from her body. He caresses her long blonde hair and he looks at her. “Yang?” He softly says to her, then notices her teary eyes.

“I…I failed…they’re dead, aren’t they?” She whimpers with a tearful voice. Taiyang’s eyes widen with concern for his little girl, so he lifts her head with his thumb so then she looks at him.

“They’re okay…Ruby and Blake are fine. Blake was hurt but I heard she woke up recently. So is Pyrrha.” She explains to her, and Yang gasps with relief when hearing her sister and Blake are okay.

After that nightmare, it does give her some relief, however it is not enough to fill her broken heart. She just wants to hug him with both arms, but the other hand never appears from her elbow.

What do I do?

Taiyang looks at her, seeing that she does not look better in the slightest to this news for some reason. He tilts his head as he crouches down in front of his daughter who collapsed to her knees in defeat. A defeat which clearly has not left her body yet, and might not for quite a long time. “Yang, honey? Isn’t that a good thing?” He asks her softly, for he had hoped that the news that them being okay would bring her relief. But nothing seems to have changed at all, she still feels so cold and broken.

Then he stares at her arm again, and her question hits him hard. “Daddy…what happened to my arm?” She whimpers fearfully, even though she clearly remembers trying to save Blake, her memory seems to be shot. After being knocked out from the shock and pain as quickly as she did and only to wake up now…it must really be jarring for her. Taiyang sighs, offering his hand to her as he stands up.

“C’mon, I’ll go make you some hot chocolate, huh? Some tea? You’ve been asleep for quite a long time. You’ve gotta be hungry, honey.” He says to her, gently caressing her cheek with his hand. She sniffs, weakly holding onto his hand as he pulls her up to her feet. So much is different, physically than just emotionally with her. She feels so much lighter, most likely from being asleep
for a couple of weeks now and only fed by nutrients from a drip feed into her body.

A good hot chocolate would do her some good.

“I’ll tell you everything…a lot has happened at the school.” He tells her, and she stands up with him, holding his hand constantly. She acts like she has gone back to her days as a little girl, clutching onto his arm with both hands, staying very close to him with scared eyes bulging from her head. She carefully walks down the stairs with him, somehow the feeling of losing an arm makes her feel so fragile. Like her legs could give way at any second, not feeling her hand brushing across the wall, never feeling anything from those finger tips.

It is not a feeling that one can understand.

She gets down the stairs though thanks to the loving support of her father, but as she makes it down an umbrella crashes down behind her when she bumped into it. The sudden loud wooden bang causes her to scream in absolute terror, collapsing to the floor and hugging her knees as she hides in the corner, shaking erratically. She stares at the umbrella but flashing images, like cuts from a horror movie, of Adam’s mask markings glowing red and the slashing whoosh of the red blade keep echoing in her mind.

Agonizing pains rushing through the stump of her arm and the cold steel of the nub on her arm to hide the damage…it all rushes through her again. She grabs onto her arm, crying out in agony from the Phantom Pains returning. She bites her lip as she cries, terrified from her past and the vulnerability of losing her arm in such a sudden way. “Stop!” She cries desperately, Taiyang finds himself helplessly tearing up when he sees her breaking down like this…he has never seen her so broken before.

The pains seem to pulsate like a heartbeat, getting worse and worse with every second that goes by. It is so terrifying because there is absolutely nothing there, just her brain sending pain through her memory into her. It all comes flushing back to her, the smirk on his face, the cry of pain she heard from Blake. It all starts coming back in that one moment, all from the sound of an Umbrella hitting the ground. “He…he cut it off! By the gods…my arm! I had my aura up!” She cries with horror, grabbing the stump and searching for her forearm and hand… Only to find nothing but air.

She cries out in anguish, hugging and burying her head into her knees as she sobs loudly into the floor. Her tears soaking her bare knees. Taiyang stands by her, wiping the tears from his eyes and mustering his courage as a father. He crouches down beside her, and he gently picks her up, carrying her into the lounge and lying her down onto the sofa. She lays there, still grabbing onto the stump where her arm used to be. He walks into the kitchen where he can still see her, keeping an eye on her as he starts to make her a cup of hot chocolate. He has never really known how to handle situations like these, Summer was always better at this.

However, with Yang he knows that a good story always helps him, he searches through his memories to find a time he hit rock bottom like her. Hard, considering it has happened quite a few times in his life. “You know…I might not know exactly how you feel, but I know what it is like to feel lost, Yang.” He says to her, she lays there with her eyes staring at the fireplace where Zwei is sleeping beside. Yang does not respond, she just stays silent as she stares at the adorable corgi.

Taiyang looks at her and his eyes sink when he does not hear the familiar sarcastic reply from her, as any teenager would. Normally she would have thrown an oh really? Or Uh-Huh?

But nothing, just silence interrupted by the odd whimper or sniffle from her depression that has
formed so suddenly from the loss of her arm. But this is the only way he has ever known to help people, to make them realise that there are people out there in the world that understand what she is going through. General Ironwood knows, exactly, what she is going through, in example. “I was on a mission once…back when Team S.T.R.Q was still a thing, when your mom and I were just dating actually. We had a mission to protect a small village because we heard there was a Grimm Attack on its way. So, we headed to the village as fast as we could.”

Yang still does not look at him, but she does listen, and he knows she is. “We got there…and they were all dead. Raven and Qrow tried to tell me that it was outdated information and that there was no way in hell we could have made it. But no…it was my fault.” He says with a sigh as he folds up a towel and sets it down with the others while he heats up the chocolate in the mug for Yang. He also gets out a bowl and puts some of her favourite cereal inside – Pumpkin Pete’s.

Yang raises a brow as she looks at him with confusion, siding with Raven and Qrow on this story. “How can you blame yourself?” She asks him softly, trying to take her mind off a few things. Taiyang smiles as he looks at her, not a smile of happiness but more of guilt. He walks over to the table and he presses his hands against it, she can see the look of guilt present on his face.

“Because it was on my watch…wanna know why it was my fault? Because I felt it could wait a while…so then we could catch a truck with noodles and have a bite to eat. While we were eating…people were dying. And I was so stubborn…so used to winning…that I let it get the better of me. And because of that? People died.” He explains to her, sighing as he remembers that day so well. Yang looks at him, but she struggles to see how that links to her. “Bet you’re wondering what that has to do with you, huh?”

“Kind of.” She sniffs, shoving the side of her head into the cushion he uses like a pillow. He turns to the hot chocolate; an aroma of mouth-watering chocolatey heat rises from the brim as he carries that and the bowl to her. She holds it in her hands, letting the warmth channel through her pretty cold body right now, and leaving the plate on the coffee table in the centre of the room. Taiyang sits down beside her and he gently rubs her knee with his hand.

“Because I know you…and I know how much you hate failing. Blake told Sun and he told me about what happened, about that White Fang soldier who cut your arm off? You were trying to protect her, weren’t you? He hurt her?” Taiyang asks her, remembering the conversation he had with Sun about the whole thing. Since he was there when Blake carried her back to the courtyard even with a stab wound in her. Weiss was there too with some other Huntsmen, Ren and Nora included before Ruby got there with Zwei.

Yang sniffs, then takes a sip of her hot chocolate, getting a chocolatey moustache over her top lip. Taiyang chuckles as he rubs it off with his thumb. “Yeah…” She softly answers with tearful eyes, she was crying when she went to kill Adam for what he did to her best friend.

“You feel like you failed, don’t you?” He asks her, testing her like the teacher that he is. Yang looks at him with bloodshot wet eyes, sniffling as she stares at him.

“I…” She weakly says, unable to speak.

“Let me tell you something…you didn’t fail. Wanna know why?” He asks her.

“Why?” She asks.

“Because she is still here, the school did not fall and so many people are still alive when they should have died that night. You didn’t fail, Yang…if anything you beat them. Because even though he nearly killed you…you didn’t die, because you’re a Xiao Long. The fire of a Dragon
burns in you, now I know it will take a lot of time to adjust to this…and hell maybe we can get you a cybernetic prosthetic sometime. I know Ironwood, and he admires you, even visited you once when you were out.” Taiyang explains, and she looks surprised, especially after everything…but that is also what hurts.

“I…I also caused it, Dad…” She stammers, and he raises a brow.

“Hmm?” He asks her.

“Mercury…I swear I saw him attack me…but he didn’t…I played a hand in that attack.” She sniffles, but he immediately touches her hand as he stares at his little girl.

“Now you listen to me, young lady. What happened there? That was Emerald, not you – we determined it was her because Pyrrha and Coco both claimed that they had their heads messed with by something. Pyrrha’s…well…bless her heart, she has been struggling too.” Taiyang explains, for he has had a few reports. The Battle of Beacon has left many scars, and it will take a very long time for them to heal.

Yang sips more of her hot chocolate gently as she sits up carefully, feeling her phantom hand pressing against the cushion, only for it to not be there. She shudders as she tries her best to ignore these feelings, but it is something that her body will take years upon years to accustom to. Unless of course she gets a Cybernetic Limb in between that time, for that would help her chances of recovery much faster. “But Yang…it was not your fault. It was Cinder Fall and her gang of little shits, nothing more nothing less. Understand?”

Yang nods her head silently as she holds her mug in her hand, feeling the urge to hold it in both even now. “Dad…what happened after…I lost my arm?” She asks him nervously, since she still does not know. The truth of Ruby’s Silver Eyes still has not been unveiled to her, for it is something that will take one hell of a lot of explaining. Taiyang fiddles with his fingers as he sits beside her, tapping them against his knees.

“Well…Pyrrha went to go and challenge Cinder Fall…practically went to die, and she nearly did. But before she did, Ruby got to the top…and…something happened.” He begins to explain, and Yang’s first paranoid thoughts go straight to fear.

“Is she…” She whimpers.

“She’s fine now but she was out too…” Taiyang explains to her.

“Then…what happened?” She asks him. Taiyang chuckles, since he does not really know the full story, neither does Qrow…the Silver Eyed Warriors are an extremely rare trait and very few even know how to harness that power.

“I don’t know…but it has something to do with her Silver Eyes. Because the night sky lit up, and that huge Grimm Dragon on Beacon Tower? It froze to stone and fell, breaking apart and dying right then and there. Ruby passed out after badly wounding Cinder who also fell but disappeared. No body found…Qrow was in a Bullhead when he got Pyrrha and Ruby to safety.” He explains to her, and she finds all this so hard to believe, stammering as she thinks about all of it.

“She…did what?” She stammers with shock.

“I don’t know, Pyrrha just described it as white flames burned from her irises and killed the dragon in one hit and nearly killed Cinder too. Ruby doesn’t even remember, only getting to the top and forcing her mind to save Pyrrha. Then she woke up in the medical wing of Beacon. It’s still being
fixed up…but…” He explains, pausing on the situation with the Grimm, and he does not even seem to know about the Black Gallows yet.

But when they find out where Yang is, they will want a chat with her over what happened. She is far from being exempt after the Battle of Beacon. Yang finds her body frozen, unable to comprehend the news until her father paused. “But what?” She fearfully asks, and he answers.

“The Grimm are not gone, they are staying close to the school and the city. Licking their wounds…waiting…if there is the smallest amount of panic it could trigger a second attack. Things are pretty tense in Vale.” He explains, and Yang whimpering.

Normally Yang would get up and get her weapons.

But now?

She does not even know, she just sits here with fear in her eyes for her friends and her beloved sister…but what can she do? “I…I don’t know what to do…” She sniffs, unable to get these thoughts from her head. Taiyang chuckles, standing up as he takes her empty mug and carries it towards the sink.

“Wanna know what I do when I wanna take my mind off stuff? I think of something I saw, and I think about it a lot. You looked outside right? What did you see out there?” He curiously asks her, she searches through her mind and pictures the Jackdaw on the branch. Might as well use that, it was curious looking with its red eyes.

“There was a Jackdaw outside.” She says to him, looking at Zwei some more…not even noticing that her father has frozen with a look of fear she has never known. Eyes wide and mouth agape, heart rate unexpectedly skyrocketing. “It was weird, it had red eyes like Uncle Qrow…and Mom in that picture Qrow showed me.” Yang explains, remembering the photograph and the similar shades their eyes had.

Taiyang’s fear now has increased to pure dread but he hides it by clearing his throat and washing the mug. “Oh yeah?” He shakily asks her, his hands shaking in terror.

“Yeah…weird huh?” She asks him curiously.

“Yeah…pure coincidence I’m sure.” He nervously chuckles as he puts the mug down, hiding his fear behind a smile. Yang sighs, standing up as she picks up her bowl of cereal.

“I’m uh…gonna go upstairs…watch a movie or something.” She softly says to him as she walks towards the stairs. He smiles as he holds onto the bannister, watching her walk up there.

“You sure?” He asks her. She smiles and nods her head.

“Uh-huh.” She answers softly.

“If you need anything call me.” He begs her with a smile, she smiles back lovingly to her dad.

“I promise…love you daddy.” She sweetly says to him with her head held low as she walks up the stairs away from him. He stands there and as soon as he hears her door slam shut, he suddenly runs towards the door and opens it. His calm demeanor has vanished as he looks around erratically, checking every tree for the Jackdaw. His fear filling his mind as he searches desperately.

But finding nothing.
Until…

A Red-Eyed Raven.

She stares at him, and he stares at her. He knows exactly who she is, and he sighs softly as he stands there. “It’s him…he’s back…isn’t he?” He fearfully asks, and Raven just caws as she takes off and flies away, leaving only a feather behind…with a note in it.

He walks over to the note and crouches down to pick it up.

He reads it and the message is in her handwriting.

_The Jackdaw is Coming._

_Be careful, Tai…_

_Can I see her tonight?_

He turns and sees her standing behind him with her hand grasping onto her forearm softly as she stands behind him. He holds the small note as he walks towards her and a smile forms on his face. “You’ve not changed a bit…” He compliments, and she shyly lowers her head with a blush…clearly, they still have feelings for each other.

“Neither have you.” She compliments back with a similar smile, despite how cold she normally is she still has a lot of warmth towards Taiyang Xiao Long.

“Raven…is it him? Is he back?” He fearfully asks, and she looks completely terrified like him.

She nods, and his heart skips a beat.

“What…what are we gonna do?” He asks her.

“I don’t know, Tai…but whatever he has planned…it will be catastrophic. He’s gonna come for us and will do _anything_ to tear us down.” Raven reminds with fear in her voice.

Raven turns and begins to walk away with her hand on the Odachi. “They need to be ready.” She tells him, but before she can change her form, he speaks.

“I’ll keep her window open tonight when she is asleep…you can see her…if you promise to talk to me later.” He asks her with nervous eyes, and she looks at him with a small smile. She exhales, and nods her head.

“Ohay. Thank you.” She says to him with a smile and he sighs.

“Now go on then, before Yang looks out the window.” He advises, and she nods as she walks towards the edge of the house. As she moves past the wall, he sees the Raven soaring up above the building, gliding round and flying past her tree and window.

The same tree where the Jackdaw had been seen.

Whatever the Jackdaw is…

Or who…

He is dangerous.
Ruby

Present Day…

Back at Beacon Academy with currently no idea that Yang is awake and moving again, struggling as well, Teams R.W.B and J.N.P.R are sat in the Cafeteria at their usual table, right by the windows outside. And funnily enough they are no longer feeling uncomfortable with the likes of Team C.R.D.L sitting so close to them, however they are currently on duty right now. Cleaning the city with the help of S.S.S.N and C.F.V.Y, however they all seem to stay quite close to each other now.

With smiles on their faces now as they happily talk to each other, idle chat rebounding between each of them, they seem to not even care about the Black Gallows watching the school. But everyone feels it, the Storm Guard watching them at every second that they eat, soldiers with rifles of unique configuration at the walls with their visors watching every single one of them. For once Ruby and Weiss understand what Blake had had to suffer with, the feeling of being watched at every second.

They just never expected this to come from other Humans and Faunus – one of the few distinguishing traits about the Black Gallows is the fact that they do not discriminate. They accept any skilled soldiers into their ranks as long as they keep their mouths shut, however that also links into how they treat those they consider their enemies. Whether they are Human or Faunus, old or young, male of female…it matters not. They will all be shot down if they cross the line with the Gallows.

Nora scoffs away at her pancakes, not as good as the ones that Ren makes but she will not be one to argue with free pancakes. It is Pancake Day after all, a day that should be worshipped by all in her eyes. Whereas Weiss still eats her own very healthy set of food, whilst the polar opposite can be said of her partner – Ruby. She literally shoves an entire pancake down her throat, getting a disgusted wince from Weiss.

Pyrrha giggles. “What are you?” She questions, and Ruby turns with syrup caking her mouth and cheeks.

“Wuh?” She blurts out foolishly when staring at her friend by her side, Weiss narrows her eyes and sighs. She cannot help it, she grabs onto a fresh cloth and rubs her face to get the syrup from her disgustingly adorable face. “Ah!” She squeaks as Weiss rubs her face and gets the sticky cinnamon syrup from her face.

“It’s like looking after a baby.” She sighs, and Ren chuckles.

“Tell me about it.” He chuckles as he looks at Nora with a cheeky smirk, Nora double takes and gasps. She plants her hands on her hips as she stares at him, sticking her tongue against the inside of her cheek.

“Hey!” She squeaks.

Ren chuckles, always able to smile whenever she gets defensive because it is just so easy to make her double take. She then cannot stay mad at him for long, and suddenly squeezes him in a tight hug, rocking back and forth in the embrace. Blake shakes her head with a smile, looking over to
Pyrrha since she is looking much better and wearing her circlet again. “So, how did it go, Pyrrha?” Blake asks her, clearly asking about Killian. She is no fool, she knows that Killian got her to be interrogated with Jaymes and Sun, and she has been quiet about the subject since.

She worries her lip, setting her fork and knife down onto her plate as she scratches the back of her head. “Well…it was quite frightening…he doesn’t sugar coat things. He literally said that he thinks that the three of us should be imprisoned immediately…or killed.” She admits with a fearful voice, and Jaune’s eyes narrow with anger when he glares at one of the Black Gallows soldiers. He might be impulsive, but he is not stupid, and he knows better than to attack a Black Gallows Storm Guard out in the open.

They may not have semblances unlocked, but they do not need them. They have been trained to take down Huntsmen of any kind, armour with technology loaded inside to knock them down in seconds. And if that doesn’t work, they have the skill and firepower to put them down if they have to.

“He threatened you?” Ruby questions with shock in her voice, silver eyes wide with disbelief and also disgust.

“Yes…he was testing us, getting us to give out our stories so then he has it as evidence. But…he cut the interrogation short.” She states, never forgetting how he just got up and told them to leave because another matter came to his attention. Jaune looks confused by that, as they all share that same expression.

“He…just left?” He asks her with confusion/

“Uh-huh. Just said something more important came up and we should go. So, we did…I don’t know what it was, but it must have been really important.” Pyrrha continues, picking her fork back up and poking her pancake with it, leaving them all pretty concerned, not just over how much of an ice-cold prick that Killian is…but whatever it was that got him to leave early.

Little do they know that the reason all comes down to the fact that the drugs meant to be delivered to Jaymes and to help his condition flatten…were destroyed. Someone is making a play against them on the great chessboard that is good vs. evil…and who knows what their next move will be.

Because soon the king shall be toppled if they do not fight back.

The group of seven friends all finish up on their food and they prepare to get back to the library where they can study and just hang out together. They hand over their empty trays to the front of the food hall where the cleaners can wash them up and get them ready for later on at dinner. Jaune catches up to Blake, talking to her about a book he was reading that she might like. Weiss, after finally finding her scroll, texts intently, either to Neptune or her Sister. Most likely to Neptune since they are continuing the tough job of cleaning up the city with other workers and finding as many corpses as they can.

They’ve still not scratched the surface, the damage that the Goliaths had brought to the structures levelled the roads with rubble, burying their cadavers under heavy weight to be forgotten. Unless they can find their bodies before it is too late.

Nora leaps up onto Ren’s back a’la piggy back style, giggling into his neck as he rolls his eyes with a smirk. The group all move through the halls of Beacon Academy towards the Library which is still being rebuilt – and luckily most of the books are all intact. But as they all walk through the halls, Ruby walks beside Pyrrha. The two walk in an awkward silence as a heavy weight seems to drag the very air around them.
Ruby bites her lip, and looks up to the warrior goddess, before flitting her eyes to the others walking ahead. With newfound bravery, and a need to spill the beans that slush around in her mind, she grabs Pyrrha’s pale arm softly which startles her. Emerald’s reflect silver, confusion knitting her brow.

“Ruby? Wh-what –”

“Well umm…c-can we talk?” Ruby asks her gingerly, Pyrrha nods and takes a step to the side of the hallway so then they can speak. The other students file out of the hall past them, and Pyrrha crosses her arms under her chest.

“What’s wrong, Ruby?” She softly asks her in a concerned voice. Ruby sighs and swirls a hand in the air around her head.

“We umm…we’ve managed to tiptoe around each other since we woke up after the Battle, haven’t we?” Ruby winces, Pyrrha’s eyes widen slightly and she bites onto her lip, nodding to her shoes. She is not stupid, she knows what Ruby is on about, and she is not wrong, they have not really taken the time to talk about it.

Now they will. “We have.”

“I just…I wanted to talk about-”

“Penny.” Pyrrha nods sadly, it hurt to say her name without picturing her face and the kindest voice she has ever heard. “Ruby…I am so, so sorry.” Emerald eyes glisten with tears as she deeply stares into the wide silver eyes of Ruby Rose. Ruby softens her gaze and sighs, knowing it was not her fault.

“It wasn’t your fault, Pyrrha. When I said it to Jaymes I meant it, and everyone knows that. It was not you.” She states, speaking slowly at the end in the hopes that it will land deep in Pyrrha for her to understand. Ruby rubs her arm as she shuffles her boot into the carpet. “I don’t blame you, I don’t, pinkie promise.” Ruby smiles, holding out her smallest finger to the taller woman. Pyrrha warmly smiles to her friend, chuckling minutely, lifting her own to loop it round the Rose’s little stem.

“Thank you, Ruby. I…I still feel so much guilt over what happened. I-It was still me who did it, after all.”

“With your body? Yeah. But not this.” Ruby taps the side of her head gently. “You had no intent in there, you were…tricked. By Emerald…we all were.” Ruby snarls with anger, remembering how many times she was so nice to the green haired red eyed menace. And she and Mercury…and Cinder…managed to play her like a fiddle with ease.

“Mmm. After all that, after being friendly to them both…they were helping Cinder. And we fell for their lies…I hate liars.” She snarls with tearful emotions echoing in her soul. Pyrrha does not even notice that her grip on Ruby’s finger has tightened pretty hard and Ruby winces.

“Ow.” She winces in pain, as Pyrrha’s finger tightens around her tiny little digit. Pyrrha gasps and releases Ruby.

“Oops! I’m sorry.” She apologises, releasing her. Ruby shrugs her shoulders and chuckles with a smile on her face.

“S’okay.” Ruby assures, until noticing that Pyrrha looks like she is seething from something, something clearly is linked to her hatred for liars and traitors. Ruby raises one of her eyebrows.
“Wait…are you okay?” She asks her friend with concern and Pyrrha raises a brow and lips part slightly.

“Hmm? Oh…yeah I’m…yeah.” She stammers, but Ruby knows when something can bring up bad memories. Just seeing a girl with their mother is a way for her to feel the same way, and just her mentioning the word liar seems to have brought something back.

“Pyrrha…you’re one of my best friends…you can talk to me.” She promises with a smile on her face. “What’s wrong?”

Pyrrha stammers, then she sighs as she leans against the wall and lowers her head. “I…I hate liars…I was surrounded by them back at Sanctum. Liars that smile through their teeth at me…or liars that would just…use me for their own fun.” She snarls with a heartbroken voice, and Ruby looks more and more concerned.

“I don’t understand.” She says to her.

Pyrrha huffs.

“Well…I trust you. C’mon, sit down.” She says to her, as they walk into the other room in the Library and finding two comfortable seats for them to sit down on. They both get comfortable and Pyrrha rubs her knees with her hands. “It all happened when I wasn’t much younger than you.”

Pyrrha

Years ago…

Young Pyrrha once woke with a smile on her face, brushing her teeth and hair after a very quick shower, she seemed to be bouncing with joy. She quickly dressed herself in her school uniform to get ready to go to school, nearly tripping down the stairs. “Oof!”

“Pyrrha! Are you okay?” Juno asked from the kitchen, sighing with relief at the waving hand as it raised over the top of the oak cabinet.

“I’m okay, sorry!”

“Stop apologising for doing nothing wrong!” Juno sang as she clicked Pyrrha’s lunchbox shut and handed it to her, the teen daughter smoothing the creases out of her skirt. “So…why so chipper? Usually you’re like a bag of rocks in the morning.” Juno chuckles, hands on her womanly hips before reaching out and playfully rubbing her daughter’s head of red hair. Pyrrha squirms as she puts her hair back, then shrugs, drumming her fingers against her box.

“No reason. I just…I’m going to try and make some friends today. Father gave me a few tips on how. I just need to…take some initiative I guess.” She smiled, Juno kisses her forehead and smiles.

“There’s my gorgeous girl.”

“Mother!” Pyrrha blushed. “I’m going to be late. I’ll see you later!”

“Have a lovely day, sweetheart!”
“Thank you!”

So, soon the lithe athlete arrived at Sanctum, her smile replaced with a nervous curl as she paced into her class, sitting in her usual seat of her own. Though to her surprise the four usually empty seats around her slid out and were filled with beaming girls. “Hi Pyrrha!” They all said, scarily in unison. Pyrrha yelped but instantly calmed, covering her mouth with her hand. She turns to them with a tiny smile, one so small that they could barely see it.

“Oh…hello…I’m sorry, I didn’t have much for you to borrow today.”

“No silly, we’re here cos we wanna be friends with you!” The blonde exclaimed brightly. Pyrrha thought it odd, their sudden forwardness, especially since it was on the day she was gonna take the initiative. Not that long ago this exact same girl walked up to her when she was on a table on her own, and all she asked for were some crayons.

Then left her alone again.

They practically never spoke. Strange that all of a sudden now they are being really friendly with her. But this is Pyrrha Nikos, and she has never been one to turn down a good opportunity when presented to her. She smiled and offered her small firm hand to them. “That sounds lovely! I’m Pyrrha Nikos.”

“We know! The Invinci-Ow!” A lime green haired girl massaged the back of her head after the obvious ringleader of the group smiled while retracting her hand after the smack.

“Don’t mind her. Nice to meet you, Pyrrha.” She beamed. “I’m Cinder, this is Chartreuse, that’s Dandelion and finally there’s Lapis.”

“Hey Pyrrha!” They exclaimed. Orange, green, yellow and blue all smiling in order. Pyrrha nervously blushed and grinned to herself. She was going to have to tell her parents later, tell them she finally made a group of friends!

After School came to a close for the day…

She let them come round her home for some fun. “Wowzers! You weren’t kidding when you said you lived in a big house!” Chartreuse exclaimed as Pyrrha let her new-found friends into her house with a giddy bounce in her step.

“Yes, well…our family’s done quite well in recent years.”

“No kidding! So have you! We saw your match the other day! You’re fourteen and earning some serious lien!” Chartreuse chuckled as she walks past Pyrrha, looking around. Pyrrha bashfully rubbed the back of her neck, weakly giggling.

“Yes well…it’s not about the money to me. I just wanna help people in the future when I am old enough to go to Beacon.” She explains, getting a surprised look from her friends.

“Beacon? Why not Haven? It’s closer.” Lapis states with the shrug of her shoulders as she gestures in the roundabout direction of which the school is at.

“I got an invitation to join by Professor Ozpin, he saw my scores and wanted to offer me a place in the Academy.” She explains with the shrug of her shoulders.

“Wow.” Cider gasps with awe at the Invincible Girl, however all she wants them to see her as is Pyrrha Nikos, not the title her Father has been fusing to her personality. The humble girl smiles as
she walks ahead, noticing how most of them are touching the antiques around the entryway. From the old Nikos Bronze Shields and Swords to the suits of armour stood in the corner of each room.

“Come on, I’ll introduce you to my mother.” Pyrrha walked deeper into the extravagant Nikos residence, over glossy marble floors that made no more than a pitter patter to their tiny feet. “Mom?” She calls out softly, knocking on the door.

“Yes? I’m in the study.” Juno calls.

“Yeah, I’m outside, can we come in?” She asks her mother, then the door opens up with a click. Revealing the older, yet beautiful mother named Juno Nikos standing in the doorway.

“Well, who are these fine young ladies?” She asks as she bends down with her hands pressing against her knees.

“My frie-”

“Friends of Pyrrha Nikos!” Lapis bounced, grinning away as she shoves Pyrrha aside to get the mother to like them. Pyrrha shrugged bashfully as she lowers her head, feeling the same way she always had for some reason.

Juno is not as gullible though and knows a liar when she sees one. “I see.” Juno raised a sceptical brow at the girls. “I was just finishing up some paperwork, your father is out but he’ll be home soon.” She assures with a polite a beautiful smile, putting on the fake smile in the hopes that her suspicions are wrong.

For her daughter’s sake.

“Oh okay, I’ll show my friends around and…go in the garden.” Pyrrha smiles, Juno nodding as they walked away. Her smiled dropped as she watched the teens following her daughter, at how they marvelled to the extravagances…and not her beautiful daughter. She shook her head of such thoughts and slammed the door shut once more, just wanting to shove the little brats out before they hurt her.

But she doesn’t…

Hanging onto the idea that she just being paranoid.

The girls go outside, and Cider paced up to Pyrrha’s shoulder. “Your mom seems nice; this home is huge though! What does your family do for a living?”

“Oh well…Mother works as a secretary at Haven Academy, and Father is a renowned Gladiator and Huntsman.” She smiled proudly, not as proudly about her father though…because the only relationship she has ever had with her father has surrounded combat training and nothing more.

“And you’re the Invincible Girl!” Lapis exclaimed, until Dandelion slaps her head with the palm of her hand. “Ow!”

“I…Yes…I suppose I am. B-But just call me Pyrrha. We are friends after all, right?” Pyrrha asked with a nervous gulp as she sinks into her shoulders.

“Oh of course, Pyrrha! We’re just interested in your family.” Cider smiled, Pyrrha nodded to herself.

“Oh. Natural, I guess. Come, I’ll show you the gardens.” Pyrrha walked ahead, Cider dropping
back to frown at Lapis.

“You almost blew it! C’mon, think of the big picture! We get to be the friends of Pyrrha Nikos! She’s gonna get more famous as she gets older, and we’ll be the friends that were with her through all of it!” Dandelion whispers, revealing their conniving deceitful plan, aiming to use Pyrrha just like everyone else.

_How could someone treat such a kind soul so cruelly?_

“Yeah…okay…” Lapis nods, the four “friends” followed Pyrrha out into the afternoon heat under the Mistralian Sun. Each breath of air, hot and almost suffocating during the summer…strange since usually Mistral is known for being quite cold most of the time, yet in the Summer it can be quite brutal sometimes. Their eyes bulged as Pyrrha gestured lazily to the swing set, currently covered up Jacuzzi tub and other assortments of toys.

“Whoa! I call the swings!” Lapis ran straight past Pyrrha, followed by the others.

“W-Well I-” C’mon Dandelion, don’t hog it.”

“Hey there’s plenty to go around! Grab your own swing!”

“What about the slide over there?!”

Pyrrha was left silent and frozen, stammered to speak but decided to sigh and tried to engage in some fun. Instead she sat on the edge of the play area and watched the all swing and giggle.

Just like every day at school.

She was alone.

An hour past of playing before Pyrrha got up. And walked over, clearing her throat. Cider looked over at her, feet digging into the wooden chips to stop her swinging movement.

“May I have a swing?”

“Oh. Yeah. Sure.” Cider reluctantly got up. “I’ll go over there, hey wait up Dandelion!” Cider ran off in a laugh, leaving Pyrrha alone again on the swing, turning to face Lapis who too was gone. Just the empty swinging seating swaying in the wind. Pyrrha sighed and looked over her shoulder at them all playing together, and a horrible thought hit her.

What if they are all using me?

She shook her head and let go of the chains, hopping off the seat and padding over to them as they frolicked near the slide, the metal baking hot in the Summer Time Heat. She could not even speak before Dandelion decided to interrupt her. “Hey Pyrrha, got a pool?”

“No…we don’t.” She bit.

“Oh, that’s odd, usually these mansions have that kind of stuff.”
“What about a tennis court?”
“A Maid?”
“An Atlesian House Robot!”

“NO! No, we don’t!” Pyrrha snapped with fury in her voice. The girls recoil back, like they are staring at a freak of nature but it just a girl who was sick of people treating her like a thing that can be used. A host for their parasitic lives.

“Whoa, chill out Pyrrha. We were just asking what you had.” Dandelion lied, making it even worse by how badly she is at it.

“Yeah, you make a lot of money, we figured you'd have lots of cool stuff.” Lapis blurted, and gasps audited from everyone, all her friends staring at her…then the tears welled up from the heartbroken eyes of Pyrrha Nikos. She quivered her lip upon realising the sad truth about her “friends”. It did not last merely twenty-four hours, until her assumption was proven to be true. They were just using her for the spoils and wealth of her family…wealth she never wanted or asked for.

It cut deeper than any knife.

Any arrow.

Because all she ever wanted was a friend.

Sadness shifted into rage as she clenched her fists so tight that the blood ceased to flow and turned her skin yellow from the pressure. “Get. Out.” She snarled at them, glaring into their eyes with teary yet intense eyes. None of them even noticing the metal on the slide, the metal chains on the swings…even Cider’s Scroll…began to bend.

None of them paid attention.

“Huh? But Pyrrha, we’re friends!” Dandelion was the last straw until she yells.

“GET OUT!” She screamed, and suddenly all the metal collapsed, the entire metal slide crushed inwards like somebody scrunching up a piece of paper, in a deafeningly loud metallic screech. The chains blew apart, hundreds of pieces thrown across the emerald green grass, and Cider’s scroll broke into a hundred pieces in her hand. She gasped in pain, seeing the shards hitting the floor and some pieces of metal cut her palm, blood dripping from the hot wound. “You’re not my friends! You’re just…Opportunists! F-Freeloaders! PARASITES!” She yelled, diamonds of salty water wobbling under her emerald eyes.

“Hey, that’s uncalled for-”

“You’re using me, because I make winnings from the fights, and buy all this…useless void of having no one! You just use me, just like everyone! Just like my father who just uses me as a prodigy of his own successes!” She screamed at them with heartbreak in her voice, collapsing to her knees with distress, sobbing. Through her broken voice, she sniffled one last demand. “Now get out…”

Anyone else would show some sympathy for the girl after hearing that…but all of these girls? They practically spat at her as they left. “Suit yourself, be lonely.” Cider snapped, grabbing her hand to hold the bleeding back from the wound. “C’mon guys, Invincible Girl’s had enough of us.” She snarled as she walked away, hearing the others all giggling at her misery.
“What a pathetic freak.” Lapis giggled.

Then…

They turn to see a furious Juno Nikos glaring into her eyes with tear rage in them, slowly walking towards her with clenched fists. The four girls back up from Juno as she walks towards them. She crouches down and grabs Dandelion by her collar, pulling her close with her emerald irises practically burning into the girl’s. “If you ever…ever…make my baby cry again…I will make it my mission to ruin your lives forever.” She snarls with anger.

“You…you can’t do that.” Dandelion challenges.

“You think? You like to take pride on our wealth, huh? Take a wild guess of what I could do to your families just because you upset my baby girl? Go ahead.” Juno snarls, and they whimper fearfully. “I know people out there, people I could pay a lot of money and not lose a night’s sleep over what I have them do. I could put your families in debt for the rest of their lives, debt that you will have to pay as well. And then your children, and your children’s children…all because you upset my little girl. So, I’m giving you once chance. Stay. Away. From. Her.” She whispers with a snarl.

The saying is true.

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned…or a mother furious.

“Now get out of my house.” She hisses through gritted teeth, releasing the little brats and letting them flee as she rises up, looking back at them. She wished…wished so hard…that she was wrong. But apparently, she was not, her intuition has become so strong that she has become sick of it.

Sick of being right.

Juno approached her child and walked over to her as she sobbed on the floor. “Amica Mea…it’s okay…I’ll always be here for you.”

Ruby

Left stunned from this revelation of her childhood…and heartbroken at the same time, Ruby looks at Pyrrha with awe. But that awe shifts into anger at how someone could possibly treat such a kind and gentle person that way. “How could they do that to you?” Ruby questions with rage in her voice, and Pyrrha wipes a tear from her eye, feeling extremely emotional over the whole situation.

“Kids are cruel, Ruby…even to girls who are born into wealth and fame. Especially people like me, because it gets hard to know who to trust.” She states as she looks down at the floor. Ruby smiles, then immediately wraps her arms around her friend, making Pyrrha gasp when feeling the kind embrace of her…friend.

And this time…it is not fake.

It’s real.

“You’ll always be my friend Pyrrha…one of my best friends…to me, you’re like family.” She promises with a tender voice, and Pyrrha squeezes her teary eyes shut. She hugs her back, burying
her head into the inspiring yet so much younger girl’s shoulder. She has never known friendship until meeting Jaune and Ruby, Nora and Ren, Yang and Blake, Weiss and Sun and Neptune.

Ruby is right.

They are a family.

“And for the record…I know what it’s like…to feel alone. Maybe not in the same way…but I do.” She assures Pyrrha, and the Nikos girl looks at her as she hugs her.

“What do you mean?” She asks her.

“I had a few friends before Beacon…but…every time I saw their moms come to pick them up…I couldn’t…I just couldn’t ever be near them.” She sniffs, feeling such jealousy over how her friends had a mom to laugh with. To hug and hear them say how much they love them.

But Summer was gone.

“I’m so sorry, Ruby.” Pyrrha sniffles for her, but Ruby assures her with her tender voice.

“It’s fine…I got better…I found you guys. And I would never trade it for anything.” She promises with a smile as she looks at her friend.

“Thank you Ruby…c’mon, let’s catch up to them before Nora thinks we got kidnapped or something.” Pyrrha giggles, since they actually experienced that once.

Until one more question hits Ruby.

“Wait…Pyrrha?” She asks her.

“Yeah?” Pyrrha replies as she turns.

“Your mom…what did she do? Did they upset you again?” Ruby inquires curiously and Pyrrha sighs as she turns to Ruby.

“They attacked me. Dandelion and her friends jumped me after school one day and…they beat me up. I was…I was so scared, everything my father taught me…everything I learned went out the window. I curled up into a ball in fear and let them hurt me, and when they were done they ran, demanding I never tell my mom otherwise they will hurt me worse.” Pyrrha explains, grabbing her arm…because that was the one that was broken in the attack.

Ruby stares at Pyrrha with worried eyes. “What did she do?”

“I don’t know…all I know is that they never passed to the Academies, not even Vacuo. And their families’ all lost their jobs and their other companies went into liquidation. Houses were sold…and they were left with nearly nothing. I don’t know what they do now…but my mom made it clear…that she can be just as bad as my father.” She states, showing that after that, she is now afraid of her mother as well as her father.

Her father for his desire to control her.

And the mysteries of her mother.

Pyrrha sighs as she looks at Ruby, and now the young woman also understands what she meant by – she never wanted to be a Nikos. “You don’t get rich in Mistral without playing dirty.” She states, turning and walking away from Ruby with saddened…
No…

Disappointed eyes.

Ruby waits a second, comprehending this.

Before following her.

**Raven**

Three days ago…

With the window open and Yang finally managed to fall asleep, sat by her bed is the Raven Mother that gave birth to her. She is sat down on the seat of her wooden chair with her Odachi on her lap, staring at her daughter with tears in her eyes. She is rolled over and can see her face, and the stump that has replaced where her arm used to be. Her tear red eyes gaze to her…she is so beautiful…but looks so broken at the same time. She sits there so silently, unable to think of anything to say.

She sighs…finding something. “I see you made a team…your sister with them…she looks so much like her mother.” She chuckles with a smile as she sits there, trying to think of something. She shakes her head as she keeps looking at her arm, for all she wants is for her to be happy.

Her voice softens. “I wish you never followed in our footsteps Yang…Ozpin…the Huntsmen…all it brings people is pain. It has never brought anything else…you could have been better than what we were. Could have been a nurse…could’ve been so many things…but you followed our path.” She sighs, pressing her hand to her head, until a smile forms. “I guess you’re just as stubborn as I am.”

As she would know, Yang does not wake to respond to her, she has finally found a deep sleep. Good too, the last thing Raven would want is to accidentally wake up Yang after how long it took her to actually get to sleep. “You can get through this Yang…you have Branwen and Xiao Long Blood in you…you can do this.” She promises.

She stands up and walks over to her daughter and caresses her cheek with a soft smile. “I love you, little dragon.” She whispers to her…unable to find anything else to tell her, before walking away from her.

She must have been sat there for nearly half an hour, thinking of things to say but unable to think of anything.

Before she leaves, she looks back through the crack in the door. “Good night.” She whispers, closing it behind her, standing right against it with a sigh, holding her Odachi and Scabbard in her hand before she walks down the stairs and to where Taiyang is sat on the sofa, waiting for her. She walks down and looks at him.

“She finally asleep?” He asks her.

“Yeah…I remember the early days when she was just a baby…before…well you know.” She says with a sigh and he nods his head as she sits down on the sofa by him, looking down at the ground. “How did it happen?”
“The reports have tagged him as Adam Taurus.” Taiyang answers and she snarls, tensing her grip on the scabbard of many dust shaded blades.

“Taurus…I know that name.” She snarls.

“He’s a Commander of the White Fang, apparently Blake told Yang about him and he went mad with power. Now he has hurt our little girl.” He explains to her with a saddened voice, Raven sighs as she hangs her head low.

“I’m sorry…Tai…I wanted to stay, I really did…but…” She stammers, but he shakes his head.

“I know…and it’s happening again, isn’t it?” Taiyang asks her.

“Yeah…and I don’t know what to do.” She stammers, the two of them sit there in an awkward silence, then Taiyang chuckles.

“They were good times…before…he came back.” He sighs, remembering when they built the house together, Summer and Qrow both helped them with the help of Port and Oobleck. Even Ozpin and Glynda came by to help build their home one time, friendship amongst tutors and headmasters.

And now…

Taiyang is the only one left inside. “They were…” Raven agrees, she looks around then stands up. “I miss it…I miss her.” She says with a sigh, and Taiyang nods his head sadly.

“Me too…” He sadly says, she looks at him and she closes her teary eyes as she walks away from him and draws her sword to open the portal.

Until he asks one more question.

“If things were different…if he never came back…would you have never gone back to the Tribe?” He asks her.

She looks at him with tears in her eyes and she drops the sword and walks up to him, and he walks to her. The tension between them is so strong that they cannot hold it back…but when they lean in to kiss.

She freezes.

Like a deer in headlights, lip quivering with worry as she stands there, feeling his breath.

But then she steps away…

“I’m sorry…I…I can’t stay. If he knows I’m here…” She stammers, and he sighs with disappointment…just wanting her back.

Having someone.

“I know…” He sadly says as he looks away, then there is a red flash behind him with a metallic thrum. When he turns.

She is gone.

Leaving only a feather behind.
Family

Ruby

The gentle hooting voice of an owl echoes from outside the cranked window, the Fractured Moon watching silently in the dark starry night sky. Inside of Team S.S.S.N’s dormitory are the three members of Team R.W.B, asleep in the beds loaned to them by the gentlemen who admittedly sleep quite happily on the floor. Scarlet’s hand close to the palm of Sage’s where they lay. Sun laid in the corner right by Blake’s bed and Neptune close to Weiss’, her hand actually near his blue hair, she must have been caressing it ever so gently when he fell asleep.

Ruby however is the one alone, yet she is happy with that – has never really felt she needed to have a boyfriend of girlfriend in her life. All she ever wanted was to help people, to bring happiness everywhere she would go and stop the Creatures of Grimm from taking anymore lives. She wears her black pyjama top and white and red striped bottoms as she sleeps there, her scroll on the bedside table.

The scroll starts beeping and vibrating on the desk, with a piece of music playing that she recognises – called “All Our Days”. She moans as she lays in her bed, groaning as she mutters through her dreams. “Mom…where are you?” She whispers softly, until she gasps, waking up from her dream, looking around to see everyone still asleep in their positions. Her eyes pan round to see the scroll that hails her ear, so she sits up and rubs her silver eyes with her fists closed.

Reaching over to it, she grasps the closed scroll, flicking it open and revealing the glass screen inside, and the face on it. She raises a brow when she sees that it is her kind and loving father – Taiyang Xiao Long. She immediately answers it, since he has always been the overprotective one in the family, if someone had not picked up the scroll immediately then may the gods have mercy. Because he would be going mad, calling repeatedly and even calling the cops to make sure that she is okay.

Wouldn’t be the first time.

She opens the scroll and with a softly spoken hushed voice she answers, both because she is bleary eyes and does not want to risk waking them up. Weiss especially, she does not like getting woken up when she is asleep, she can still feel the bruise on the back of her head when she pranked her once when she was asleep. They never did it again, that was for certain.

“Hey dad…what’s up?” She whispers groggily, rubbing her eye again as she yawns, totally cool with being woken up like that. Well…clearly it was not just the scroll that woke her up, it was whatever that dream was that she was having.

Something about Summer.

“Sorry honey, I didn’t mean to wake you up…but I couldn’t wait any longer.” He explains with a sigh, and Ruby sits forward, trying to keep as quiet as she possibly can to not wake everybody up right now.

“It’s okay…what do you mean?” She asks her father curiously, he falls silent for a moment, knowing that her reaction will either be that of great concern or ecstasy…or both at different points since her sister’s situation is not perfect right now. “Dad?”
“Yang…she’s woken up.” Taiyang informs her, Ruby’s silver eyes bulge from their sockets and a high-pitched squeal builds and builds. She cannot contain it for any longer, squeaking with happiness to know her sister is alive.

“She’s okay?” She cheers, accidentally waking everyone up, and Weiss tenses, eyes bursting open as she slowly sits up with messy white hair, glaring at her teammate with annoyance. “Sorry…” She softly whimpers, shrinking into her shoulders. Blake and Sun both groan as they rub their faces, knackered from being woken up so early in the night.

“Ruby…what’s going on?” Blake groans as she sits up, Neptune does the same, looking around as he scratches the back of his head. Scarlet and Sage both sit up as they look at Ruby whom awkwardly sits there on her scroll, squeezing her eyes shut with embarrassment and guilt for waking them all up.

“You’re not alone are you?” Taiyang asks her from the other end, a slight chuckle in his voice…despite everything his little girl can still make him smile.

“Nope…” Ruby sighs, now speaking in a normal tone of voice now that everyone is up.

“Sorry.” He apologises.

“No, no…it’s fine. They’ll wanna know anyway.” Ruby assures, Blake raises her eyebrow curiously at the youngest member of their team.

“Know what?” Blake inquires, her ears perking up slightly.

“Well, my dad’s on the scroll right now…he just told me that Yang woke up.” Ruby states and they gasp, Weiss and Blake smile with happiness.

“That’s fantastic!” Neptune supportively cheers, patting Weiss’ knee, in which she responds with a shy blush on her cheeks. As Ruby sits there, happy as well, she hears the soft sigh on the other end of the call, a sigh that instantly triggers worry.

“Dad? You don’t…sound happy about that.” She says, they all look at her and they wait to hear what comes back.

“I am happy, Ruby…but…she isn’t the same. She lost her arm…it’s taken its toll on her. She has been jumping at the smallest things, hiding in her room and not eating properly. I think she is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress.” Taiyang explains, leaving out Raven’s visit since the little one would most likely not truly understand who she is or why she even showed up to the house. And he made her a promise, to keep quiet about her visits. Ruby closes her eyes sadly when hearing him say that, unable to imagine Yang upset since she has always been the bright one in the family.

Even after Summer died she was always there for Ruby. “She’s…suffering?” Ruby whimpers, and they all fall silent in the room, concern filling their minds.

“She needs help…she’s been awake for around three days now. I have been unable to contact you because of the glitches in the C.C.T around here, not everything is completely repaired yet.” Taiyang explains, giving a good reason behind why he has not informed her of this news earlier.

Because he couldn’t. “Not only this, but I received a package today…from General Ironwood. I looked inside, and it is a cybernetic replacement for her arm, free of charge. I think he made it for her, as a thank you for her dedication during the Battle.” Taiyang explains to Ruby and she rubs her knees with her hands.
“Has she…used it?” Ruby inquires.

“No, she’s been avoiding it.” Taiyang answers, Ruby looks to the others and they all look increasingly worried for Yang’s mental health.

“What is it?” Weiss asks her desperately…but as she looks at them…

She gets an idea.

Ruby looks at them and she smiles sweetly. “I think I have an idea.”

“You do?” Taiyang asks her, and they all look worried.

“You might wanna do some shopping, Dad. ‘Cus you’ve got a bunch of Huntsmen and Huntresses on their way for a sleepover.” She smiles, and she hears a fearful stammer from Taiyang.

He has not forgotten the last sleepover Ruby ever had before she arrived at Beacon and met her new friends. “Please don’t break the new T.V…” Taiyang sighs as he scratches his head, and Ruby giggles.

“Don’t worry, we’ll keep Nora under control.” She assures with a smile. “Love you, Dad.” She says to him and she can feel the warmth of his smile on the other end of the line.

“Love you too, sweet pea.” He replies.

The call ends, and she closes up her scroll, gently setting it down on the table, looking at them all and Weiss grows a big smile. “I’ve never been able to have a Slumber Party before!” Weiss cheers, the happiest she has actually seen Weiss since she first ever met Zwei. She gasps suddenly, eyes building. “Will Zwei be there?” She gasps.

“Mhm.” Ruby nods her head with a smile, Weiss squeals with joy whereas Blake hisses with anger. Sun chuckles at Blake’s reaction, watching her feline ears sharpen and her eyes narrow with gritted teeth. Truly channelling her cat nature right then in that moment.

“A sleepover…I wish I could join you.” Sun sadly says, his demeanour changing after chuckling at Blake’s reaction. The girls look at him with concerned eyes, and Blake affectionately holds his hand.

“Huh?” She coos, but he looks at her with a sigh.

“The Black Gallows won’t let me leave Beacon like this, they might let you go…but me? After my fight with Ickford? They’ll never let me go.” Sun says with a saddened pair of eyes.

“Damn the Black Gallows, just come with us.” Weiss suggests but he shakes his head.

“Then you guys will be targets too. I don’t want to make the situation worse…I will stay here. The rest of you guys go with them.” Sun says selflessly with a smile, but Neptune shakes his head.

“Hell no, pal. We’re a team, and we stick together.” Neptune states.

“Yeah, can’t get rid of us that easily.” Sage chuckles as he crosses his muscular arms. Scarlet nods as he sits against the wall, Sun sighs, shaking his head.

“You don’t have to worry.” Sun assures.

“I know, but either all four of us go to the sleepover or not at all.” Scarlet tells him, he looks at
Blake and he closes his eyes with a sigh…he knows that he cannot leave this place. Neither can Jaymes, at least not until the situation recovers and the Grimm leave the outskirts of Vale. Even then…it is still suspicious of why the Black Gallows don’t just send them away already…if they consider them a ticking time bomb.

“It’s okay, Sun…” Ruby assures with a smile. “We can tell her you send your kind words.”

Sun smiles. “Thanks, Ruby.” He says to her.

Ruby hops up from her bed and looks at the door. “C’mon, gang…let’s tell the others.” She tells them excitedly, her team and S.S.S.N get up and walk away from the window.

Where the mysterious silhouette was watching them the whole time from the rooftops, before walking back into the shadows.

**Winter**

Hours later…

Marching down her path like a hurricane tearing through a village, Winter storms past multiple students leaving their dorm rooms to the one she has been forced to share with someone. She enters the Visitor’s Wing, since she has been housed for the time being in one of the suites saved for visiting family members or live-in teachers…like Port. She stands before the dorm to her room, pulling her scroll out of her back pocket and swiping it across the device that scans her signature. The light shines from red to green with an upbeat beep, unlatching the lock.

She presses her palm against the door and steps in, throwing her scroll onto her adjacent bed. Scrubbing her face up and down, she pads over to the large rectangular mirror on the wall and observes her own reflection, eyes snapping to the other bed in her shared suite.

To see her…dreaded…roommate.

“Eryka! It’s almost midday, why are you still in bed?” Winter frowns with disgust at her.

“Err…cos I’m tired? Duh?” Arose the muffled reply from beneath the sheets as just a lump with messy blue hair spread over one side of her pillow. She has never been a graceful sleeper…in fact she has never been graceful before in her entire life. And she is proud of that achievement because it is quite funny. Winter huffs, clenching her fists before blowing out a calmed breath, something a Yoga and Martial Arts Specialist taught her in Atlas to combat her rising blood pressure.

Winter knows exactly what her problem is, it is her obsession with everything being done right. Her life in the military has taken her Schnee Family overbearing nature and supercharged it like Nora being thrown into an exploding electrical plant.

Almost to nuclear proportions.

For example, everyone has to be up and dressed by six thirty on the dot, beds made to crisp perfection as well. It was not a nuisance for her to wake up that earlier, it was just her way of life back in the military and in training. Add the Atlesian Military and expectations to that cake mix, and you end up with the ice-cold volcano of O.C.D known as…Winter Schnee.
Who was desperately fighting the urge to rip her white hair strands from her scalp over the animal that is Eryka Vasillias who has not even gotten up yet. Her shoes thrown across the room and her clothes just dumped and scrunched up in the hamper, purposefully to overhang and pool on the floor…she has not even had a shower…and from the smell she reeks, it is doubtful she has had one in years.

Winter’s eye twitches as if the pencils on her desk are out of alignment. To be forced to share a room with the most laid back, relaxed, messy woman she has ever met almost gives her an aneurysm there and then. Winter takes two, long and deep, breaths before forcing a very plastic smile across her face.

“Eryka…” She says in a very insincere high-pitched tone. “…-It’s almost noon…maybe you should get it now, hmm?” Winter’s voice squeaks desperately. The response she received from the lump is merely ruffling of sheets, following with a hand poking from the white bedding, middle finger waving to the Schnee.

“Bite me, Ice Queen.” Groggy Eryka grumbles, causing the Specialist’s eye to twitch once more…

THAT’S IT!

Winter marches over to the bed and grabs onto it, Eryka’s neck twists round and her eyes bulge open as Winter flips the bed over and throws her onto the floor, Eryka yelping as gravity unexpectedly had its way with her. “You’ve got a Hunting Lecture in an hour! Take a shower, look somewhat decent and get up!” Winter bellows, turning and storming out of the room with shaking fists.

“Okay…maybe breakfast does sound good.” Eryka moans with a yawn, Winter stops and swings round, slapping her in the face.

The students nearby freeze and look in the direction of the commotion, only hearing their echoes.

“Ow! Hey!” Eryka exclaims.

“IT’S NOON, YOU BOOB!” Winter yells, echoing down the halls. The fearful students just slowly turn and walk away from that direction.

“We didn’t see anything…” A student whispers to her friend.

Ruby

R.W.B and J.N.P.R sit at their usual table, smiles on their faces as idle chit-chat rebounds off each other as they all discuss the coming sleepover. Since Sun cannot risk leaving the school with the Black Gallows watching his every move along with Jaymes, Team S.S.S.N are currently out helping C.F.V.Y and C.R.D.L clean up the city of Vale after the attack. Ruby has laid her plan out though, a smile so wide that it nearly comes off her face entirely.

“Okay! So, we’re all sleeping over tonight, yeah?” She asks them with pure excitement in her voice, for she has never spent time with her friends in this way before. Outside of Beacon Academy and being just friends…as they should be.

“Seems like it, no objections?” Jaune looks around, meeting with multiple smiling heads shaking
“Yeah, we’re all in Rubes.”

“Shame Sun and the others can’t come.” Ruby sighs.

“I know, but he knows what he’s doing at least.” Blake admirably says to them with a smile and Nora leans over to her ear.

“Oh, Belladonna’s got herself a lover!” She squeaks connivingly and grinning, Blake blushes shyly as she looks away from the mad orange haired Valkyrie.

“Shut up.” She shyly says as she buries her head in her shoulders, her ears folding down, trying to hide from the embarrassment of having a crush.

“Maybe he is too shy to go to a sleepover with you, Blake?” Jaune suggests playfully, only making her cringe even more at her shyness.

“Please stop…” She coos softly as she sinks lower and lower in her own skin, ears hiding her eyes adorably.

“And they enjoy poetry and long walks on the beach…” Ren chuckles with a grin.

“Ren…” Blake groans.

“And two weeks later the two of you were married!” Nora theatrically gasps, pressing the back of her hand to her forehead, playfully falling onto Ren’s lap like a distressed princess. She winks at him with a smile and Ren just rolls his eyes, letting her sit back up. Blake sighs, nearly curled up into a ball from bashfulness of her crush.

“You are all terrible.” Blake sighs, making them all chuckle.

“Yay! Sweet, oh this is gonna rock! We’re gonna cheer Yang up so much, I know it!” Ruby’s smile wilts away slightly when hit with that realisation…what if it doesn’t work? “…At least I hope so.”

“Don’t worry, Ruby. We’ll drop as many pun set ups as possible, she won’t be able to resist the opportunity.” Jaune smiles, Nora bouncing in her seat, still buzzing.

“Oooh! I can’t wait, Renny! A sleepover! A real sleepover with friends, and candy, and stories, and-oop!” Ren places his finger upon her lips, creating a cute squeaking sound which she smiles adoringly at him. He quirks his lips into a bemused smile, taking his finger away to speak himself.

“I’m excited too, Nora.” He says in his usual, calm and stoic voice, devoid of enthusiasm but filled with knowledge. Nora beams a bright smile towards him before turning to wolf down her lunch like a vicious animal that has not fed in days. Jaune however huff, looking at his bowl of soup, flitting with jealousy at Blake’s Tuna Steak. Pyrrha’s ham sandwich, even Weiss’ salad looked more appetising than usual.

“What err, what time are we leaving?” Blake rises back up, still nervously asking as she swallows a fresh bit of her flaky tuna whole wringing her fingers. Her heart hammers like war drums at the idea of seeing Yang, scared of what she might be thinking of her after what Adam had done to her. She knows that she told them about Adam back at Mountain Glenn, meaning she could have figured it out on her lonesome…and if not…she will have to tell her that her Ex-Boyfriend almost killed her.

The last time she saw Yang was in a puddle of her own blood, and with a hot pain in her side where
he stabbed her with Wilt and Blush. Nobody saw where the Faunus Commander escaped to, he just disappeared with the White Fang that night, meaning his current whereabouts are unknown.

The twirling display of reds and yellows as she span from the impact...the shockwave from Moonslice...she will never forget it. She and Sun bandaged Yang’s wound, after Sun had to bandage her waist after she was stabbed...Blake was insistent to help him help her...even with all the sticky hot claret on her fingers. The taste of blood in her mouth, it was getting hard to tell at one point if it was her own or Yang’s from her bleeding arm.

Blake whimpers under her breath at the terrible memory of cradling Yang’s head in her lap as they waited for the Airship, as the C.C.T Tower erupted into a display of white light.

And the Dragon fell to the ground.

Causing an Earthquake.

Then she passed out.

She reaches under the table to touch her fingers to the bandage still wrapped around her waist to cover the wound that still heals even now. The pains have faded away now after the week that has passed...but the memories...they shall never fade.

She jolts when she pushes the memories away, hearing Ruby’s kind voice again. “After dinner.” Ruby shrugs, answering her question that feels so long ago. Ruby’s bright silver eyes study the pained expression on Blake’s face, but decided it better to ignore it for now. “’Bout half six?”

“Sweet.” Jaune gives a firm nod, before picking up his spoon. “Why did I get soup again?” He huffs, looking up at the front of the cafeteria. “They had ham sandwiches.”

“Soup is good for you.” Weiss says with a smile.

“That’s a lie.” Blake immediately replies.

“Not a total lie.” Weiss defends.

“Mmm!” Pyrrha swallows a mouthful of her sandwich and she offers it to him. “Here, you can have my other half. I don’t mind.”

“Oh...well...th-thanks Pyrrha.” Jaune smiles, reaching over and accepting it. Pyrrha smiles at him and he beams right back, before they once again blushed and looked elsewhere. Weiss twitches her eye, just like her sister does...maybe it is a Schnee thing.

“Ugh...these two.” Weiss grumbles into her palm, and the two of them jolt as they stare at her.

“Huh?” They defend in unison.

“When will you just accept you have feelings for each other?” Weiss questions.

“We...don’t...it’s complicated.” They both struggle in unison and Weiss sighs.

“You just shared the same sandwich.” She reminds them.

Both of them look at the sandwich.

At each other.
Then Weiss.

“That doesn’t mean anything.” Jaune states as he bats it aside and Weiss literally slams her head against the table and Ruby bites her knuckle with frustration whereas Blake rolls her eyes so hard they nearly looked into the back of her own head.

Jaune looks at Pyrrha.

“Does it?”

“Hopeless lovers…” Ren sighs as he facepalms and shakes his head.

**Velvet**

Her long bunny ears listen the slightest movements in the city of rubble, the ruffling of fur from a raccoon or a badger scavenging off the remains, or the caws of a crow or raven. She looks across the destruction…she fought with the Academy of Beacon, however she never ever saw the extent of the damage done to the city itself. The Goliaths never reached the school because they knew it would be foolish to do so. So instead the lesser Grimm attacked the school as a horde to damage it, and the Goliaths attacked the city, crushing Valerians in their own homes and businesses.

Today they have uncovered six new bodies, more decayed than a couple weeks ago, with chunks missing out of their bodies and maggots already settling in on their corpses. Coco throws a rock off the sixth body that they have just uncovered, a middle-aged man buried alive by the rubble from the Goliaths that marched through and decimated the streets. Team C.F.V.Y are forced to wear masks to prevent getting infected, the bodies have been out here for too long.

So much destruction in a such a vast area, an epidemic is getting more likely as every day passes by.

Velvet shuts her eyes tearfully as she stands there, looking away from the destruction for a moment, as Fox gently pats her shoulder with a smile. “It’s okay, Velvet…” Fox assures, with his soft spoken and rarely heard voice, an accent very similar to Velvet’s in fact. Velvet shakes her head as she paces back and forth, fighting the urge to burst into tears, no matter how much she knows it will not help the situation. No matter how much she knows it will not bring the lives that were lost back…it hurts so much.

“No Fox! It’s not okay! All these people were dying when we could have done something! If I did something!” She cries out with heartbreak, Coco and Yatsuhashi turn when they hear her distress, she falls to her knees and she scrapes her palm through the dust on the ground. Across the wasteland that was once a bumbling city are Team C.R.D.L, hearing her cries and Cardin sighs, walking to the body that Coco found, looking at her.

“Go, we’ll take him.” Cardin assures, and she stares at him, at first to protect Velvet after everything…but she looks into his eyes and can see that something has indeed changed in him. He has always seemed a bit different since Forever Fall, but after this? He is damn near a completely different person.

Coco puffs a sigh, nodding and walking away from the body with Yatsuhashi to help their friend. The tired Winchester sighs, exhausted from all the death he has come across, but continues to do
his duty no matter what. He crouches down, and he picks the body up, legs and arms mangled from the rebar and sharp chunks of concrete that lacerated through muscle and skin like a thousand knives. His blood however has dried into a hard-crispy layer on his body, skin pale and stanching of rot.

He turns and carries the body towards the cart that was brought with them to put the bodies on. Whilst C.F.V.Y have uncovered six...they have uncovered eighteen...most of them were families...of four and six, parents and children. All killed...they wanted to become Huntsmen and Huntresses to protect people.

But to think that the Grimm were truly this monstrous?

It’s only made their mission to kill them all that much more motivating.

Velvet sniffs as she remains kneeling on the ground, covering her eyes, unable to look at all the destruction that surrounds her right now. Coco crouches down beside her teammate and rests her hand on her shoulder. “There was nothing we could have done, Velv…” Coco softly says to her, but Velvet seems insistent on claiming that they could have done things different.

“Of course, we could have! Beacon had so many Huntsmen in there, but there were only three of them in the city. Cardin, Qrow and Glynda! How could have they saved everyone in here? Why didn’t we help them?” She whispers with a saddened and guilty voice.

“If you weren’t there, Weiss, Nora and Ren could have been killed in the battle against those Paladins. And what different could we have made?” Yatsuhashi asks her, and she raises a brow as she looks up at him.

“We could have saved some more people.” She says. “I failed before this...my hometown...I could have saved them, but I didn’t. And my parents where killed by the Grimm because I failed.” She states, sniffling, a story she has already told her team and they nod their heads.

“You couldn’t have saved them either, Velvet.” Fox says to her.

“Then what is the point in being Huntsmen if we cannot save people?” She questions.

“Huntsmen and Huntresses try and save everyone, but we can’t do it all the time. Sometimes things go wrong, or we simply can’t get there in time. We’re not gods, we only do what we can always do...our best.” Fox explains to her, and Velvet looks at him with a soft smile yet still with pain clear in it. Seeing her world constantly reminding her of when she lost her family.

She was only twelve when it happened, she lived in Vale but not in the city, in a small defenceless town in the outskirts. They had a few Huntsmen protecting it, but she was training to be just like them, hand to hand combat, how to hold a sword. But she never got far for a very long time simply because she was too young...or that is what those Huntsmen felt. Pyrrha Nikos is the living embodiment that the idea of being too young for combat is a lie.

But none of them, not even Velvet could have stopped that attack.

How intriguing that memories can be some confused over time, because the reports described the attack as a regular one, twenty to forty Grimm at once, but her young mind paints a different picture. The sun blocked out by swarms of Nevermores and Griffins, devouring everything that moved, burning houses to cinders and leaving nothing behind. To a child, one Grimm would feel like twenty...but even then, these Huntsman could not take on a Grimm attack like that.

They were not Team R.W.B.Y, they were kicked out for not learning well enough to be Huntsmen.
And clearly, they were right because they were torn apart, then the Grimm attacked the civilians once by one. Velvet hid with terror when they killed everyone, because her parents told her to, demanded her to because she was only small.

She heard them being killed, eaten…by the Grimm that broke into her house. Their screams will haunt her forever…but that day…when the Grimm fled because they could not find her…it motivated her to become a Huntress.

To ensure that it will never happen again.

But here she stands, around the rubble and blood of so many civilians who died for nothing, just a message from a woman who failed. That is why it hurts so much, she feels as if her family, her parents and the people in her village…all of them…feels like they also died for nothing. “We can’t save them all.” Cardin tells her, and she gasps, her eyes widening, and she turns to see the tall and muscular man standing there, finishing what Fox was going to say. The team all stare at him, again as if they need to protect her, but he has changed.

“B-But…” She stammers.

“We save as many as we can, but tell me, Velvet. If we did not fight in the school, or if we ran, or if we did try and help the city…would Ruby have survived and done what she did? Would anyone be left?” He asks her, and Velvet stammers, because Ruby never left the school, she stayed there and went to save Pyrrha and she did it because she got up there with seconds to spare.

“I…I…” She stammers.

“We did the right thing. Because there are still people around to tell the tale.” Cardin states, Coco stares up at him and she sighs, nearly gagging at the words that come out of her mouth.

“Can’t believe I’m saying it…but…Cardin’s right.” Coco sighs with defeat in her voice, and Cardin just smiles softly, glad that he could help her…atone for his many sins against her. He turns, and he walks away, but Yatsuhashi grabs onto his shoulder to stop him. Cardin turns and looks at the huge student.

“Thanks.” He says to him, yet still looking suspicious of Cardin and his interests, however even they can tell that he is trying to turn over a new leaf.

All people need to do is give him that chance.

But as he walks he stops and swiftly draws his mace his eyes narrowing and teeth gritting together. Velvet gasps, springing up to her feet with Coco and the rest of her team also drawing their weapons, aiming down the gunsight of her Chaingun. Standing amongst the rubble is a lone Beowulf, softly growling as it glares into their eyes, standing as still as a statue, it’s motives unclear.

It sends chills down their spines.

Especially when it just calmly turns and walks away…because that means that if one Grimm is getting closer to the school and the populated areas of the city that were left untouched…then that means others could as well.

They observe the Grimm as it walks away from them and back towards the smog where it came from. “What the hell was that thing doing?” Fox questions with a snarl and Cardin lowers his mace, exhaling through his nostrils.
“They’re getting braver. Soon we’re gonna have an attack if we aren’t careful.” Cardin says with a heavy sigh, walking towards his team. Velvet watches as the guy who once bullied her walks away, then her eyes gaze towards The Smog.

They can only pray that positivity can drive those monsters away soon.

**Jaune**

Eventually the day comes to a close, unaware of the Beowulf that got curious enough to return to the location of battle…

The two teams have finished their dinners and returned to their respected Dormitories to gather a few supplies for the weekend, even though Taiyang is assembling the food and things. However, they still need extra clothes, toothpaste, sleeping bags and so forth.

Their goal?

To cheer the wonderful Yang Xiao Long up from her depression, the poor girl suffered a horrific injury and in such is trapped alone in her home. She needs her friends, whether she admits it or not, she needs them now more than ever before. So that is what they’ll do, go home with Ruby and be there, even if it takes the whole weekend.

Ren tucks a sleeping bag into his rucksack. Followed by a handful of sundries. Nora did the same, reaching for her plushie sloth on her bed, causing Ren to huff. “Nora…can’t Captain Snuggle Bubble stay here?” Ren asks, knowing it is such a risk to ask her to leave her favourite plushie behind. The look she shoots at him says otherwise and exactly what he predicted, eyes watering and hugging her sloth tightly. “Never mind.”

“Damn right never mind.” Nora mumbles, tucking the sloth into her backpack. The orange haired girl looks up at Jaune, as he pushes his own sleeping back into his duffle bag. “Hey Jaunathon?” She asks, combing names there. Jaune raises a brow and spins round with confusion.

“That’s not my name.” He reminds, but Nora doesn’t even seem to notice his reply.

“I’m a bit…nervous about this. Seeing Yang again is…well…I dunno…just…”

“We feel the same way, Nora. She lost her arm, and that’s gonna be a hard thing to get used to. But, what’s hard for us is a thousand times harder for her. We just gotta be there for her.” Jaune squeezes her shoulder with a smile. “Whether the hard head wants us there or not.”

“She’ll cheer up when she sees us all, I’m sure of it.” Pyrrha adds as she throws Jaune his toothbrush from the bathroom doorway. He catches it with ease, murmuring thanks before tucking it into his bag. “Jaune, I wanted to take my pillow, but I don’t have any room left in my bag, can I please put it in yours? I-If there’s room of course!” Pyrrha stammers both awkwardly and nervously.

“Yeah sure, got plenty of room. Probably too much actually, pass it here.” He holds out his hand and she smiles, grabbing the soft pillow. She walks over and gives it to him, instead bending down to place it in his bag, their faces very close together. They both gaze up into one another’s eyes, noses almost touching. Jaune exhales, hot on her lips, and Pyrrha swallows. She closes her eyes, as did he and closed the distance without thinking, until he grits his teeth and tears himself away.
Pyrrha sighs, nodding to herself, standing up straight to flatten her skirt.

“I’m umm…just going to get changed.” Pyrrha exhaled loudly, grabbing a handful of clothes and disappearing into the bathroom. Ren and Nora huff as soon as the door locks, magenta and cyan eyes staring at Jaune.

“What’re you two doing?” Nora raises her brow.

“Not talking about it.” Jaune shakes his head. “Tired of talking about it.”

“Okay.” Ren nods, Nora biting her lip with a sigh. “So…it will be good to see Yang again. Gods know it’s been different without her.”

“I miss her puns, and I never thought I’d say that!” Nora exclaims in her usual loud and exaggerated voice. Ren nods sombrely, looking up at Jaune as he worries his lip with his teeth, flexing his fingers in thought, eyes darting to the bathroom door then back to his lap.

“Jaune…”

“Mmm?”

“You and Pyrrha. You need some time to yourselves. To just…talk. We’ll be at Taiyang’s all weekend, no Black Gallows, no Grimm…just us. I think you and Pyrrha should take an evening to go into Patch’s town square. Just the two of you…and. Talk.”

“Ren, I appreciate the thought, but-”

Ren stands up and paces up to him, eyes flaming with magenta anger. He shoves a handful of Jaune’s sundries into his chest, Jaune dropping his bag to catch them all.

“Talk.” He snaps, sick of seeing the pain they both give each other by avoiding the Goliath in the room. He paces his way back over to Nora, Jaune sighs and goes to stick the items in his bag. As soon as he unzips the bag and bends down to place everything in there around Pyrrha’s pillow, her scent wafted up off of the plushie fabric. His heart aches at the smell and he quickly shuts the bag, groaning into his hand.

Ren is right.

They need to talk.

Find out where they stand, and more importantly what they definitely both desire.

The bathroom door opens and Pyrrha emerges, wearing figure hugging black jeans, knee high lace up boots, and a baby blue off the shoulder top, that clings to her buxom chest and then hangs loosely around the rest of her athletic frame. She pulls on a warm, beige suede jacket, and ties the belt around the middle, sighing contently.

“Are we all ready to go?” She asks, picking up her bag.

“I think so, right guys?” Jaune smiles as Ren and Nora get up. Everyone happily in their casual clothes, they grab their coats and make their way out into the hall. Ruby is already out there with her arms crossed and a frown on her little face.

“Ruby? What’s wrong?” Pyrrha asks as Jaune closes the door behind them until it clicks shut. Ruby shrugs her shoulders and thumbs over her shoulder at the door.
“Weiss.” She grumbles, they peer inside and see the bossy Schnee carrying several bags.


“Yes, but three nights.” Weiss holds up her finger, which is true but still insane to carry three bags like she is going on holiday to Mistral for two weeks. They are indeed staying from Friday until Monday morning. Oobleck’s class does not properly resume until Tuesday and since none of them have any lessons with Winter or Eryka this week and have already had one with Port, they are free to go on leave for “study”. “And you can never be over prepared.”

“You can! You can you can you can you can!” Ruby yells, Weiss wincing. She goes to retort but Ruby yells once more. “Can!”

Blake steps out into the hall, panting, clutching her bag to her chest with fear. “I don’t know if I can do this.” Everyone looks to the incredibly nervous Faunus Huntress and Friend. “Y-You’re gonna have to go without me, I’m sorry!” Blake goes to close the door with a slam but Ruby and Jaune stop it with their hands.

“Hey, hey…whoa hold on Blake.” Jaune comforts as Ruby pushes the door open as Blake staggers back, hyperventilating and tugging at her cat ears and hair. “What’s going on?” Jaune softly asks her, Blake pants and licks her lips.

“I’m scared, okay?” Blake whispers. “I haven’t seen her since she lost her arm, and I’m scared because it’s my fault!”

“No, it’s not, it was that…Adam dude.” Jaune huffs.

“Believe me Jaune, that’s why it’s my fault.”

“Oh, it’s your fault, it’s my fault, it’s everyone’s fault, who cares?” Weiss snaps, everyone spins round in shock at Weiss…but then they calm down since Weiss is giving a bit of tough love again. Somehow it works ninety percent of the time…they can only hope that the ten percent different won’t come into play here. “It doesn’t matter, and Yang isn’t going to care because right now she is dealing with her injury, not who to blame. So…be there, like we’re all being there for each other, right?” Weiss looks around at the group and they all smile and nod.

“Right.” Ren beams, Blake bites her lip and looks at her hands as Ruby takes them gently.

“Please, Blake. I’m her sister, but…you’re her partner…her best friend.” Ruby pleads, Blake eyes widen and a new fire burns in her heart. She firms the worried lip and gives a strong nod.

“O-Okay…okay…” Blake blows out a steely breath and nods to herself, more than anyone else.

“Let’s go before I change my mind.” She scoffs at herself, it wasn’t a threat but more like an attack at herself and her struggle to deal with emotional stress. Ruby smiles and hugs the Faunus Girl.

“Thanks Blake.” Ruby whispers.

“Blake, taken back by the affection, wraps her arms around the Rose, sighing contently at being cared for, at being home.

Ruby
The stars twinkle in the black abyss above, like glitter thrown over black silk. The Fractured Moon casts a bright white glow across the land of Patch, like a broken panel of ice, floating on a sea of oil, the cracked segments of the moon all bobbing around the crescent of white.

Ruby smiles with relief as their walk down the long winding dirt path after a long trip on a Ferry over the sea between Vale and Patch concluded…finding the small warming house sat in the clearing by its lonesome.

Completely unaware that Raven Branwen was here merely a few days ago…

…and so was that Jackdaw.

The windows are lit up warm amber, and a rising column of grey smoke leaves the tall chimney stack. “Why couldn’t your dad have built the house a bit closer to the docks? Gods it’s such a long journey!” Nora whines as she shuffles tiredly behind Ren, eyes perking up at the sight. “Yay! We made it!”

“Okay, so, like a surprise party, right?” Ruby whispers to them all. “I’ll go in, make sure she’s in her room, then you guys come in. Then…we surprise her!”

“Good plan.” Jaune thumbs up her, grinning. Pyrrha smiles as the rose shoots off in a spray of red petals before letting her gaze fall onto Jaune, and her smile falter into a longing frown.

Ruby knocks on the door, and not long after does the door open to her father, Taiyang Xiao Long himself, standing there, hands drying into a tea-towel. He smiles brightly and wraps his damp hands around her back, hugging her tight. “Ruby! Hey sweetheart, oh I missed you!” He coos as he hugs her lovingly.

“It’s only been a couple of weeks, dad.” She laughs, and he chuckles, pulling back from his daughter and looked at her with knowing eyes. Ruby shrinks under his gaze. “O-Oh yeah…you don’t have to worry though! Everything’s fine at school.” Ruby looks around her dad, then pulls back to look at him. “Is Yang in her room?”

“Hasn’t left it.” Tai sighs, rubbing his face tiredly. “She…she’s not as sunny as she used to be.”

“Well…I might be able to change that.” She says, snapping her fingers.

Nothing happens.

She groans and rolls her silver eyes before she turns and blows a whistle their way. “Oh, that’s us.” Jaune quietly says, then they all rise up out of the bushes and they emerge to appear behind Ruby, beaming at him.

“Hello sir.” Ren smiles. “We’ve come to cheer up our friend.”

Taiyang grins and his eyes fall to Ruby, smirking. “I was wondering where they were after our call. Good to see you two made some great friends.”

“Yeah, the best. A few of our friends couldn’t make it, with the situation at the school Sun couldn’t risk leaving. Didn’t want the Black Gallows coming here.” Ruby explains with a saddened sigh, since he did want to come…but couldn’t.

“Understandable, I guess fine is just a perspective isn’t it?” Taiyang chuckles.

“Eh, couldn’t worse.” Nora shrugs with a smile.
“Well, come on in.” Taiyang welcomes, stepping aside and letting them all walk into the warmth of the cabin. They all kick off their dirty shoes at the door and shucked their warm coats off, protecting them from the cold of Autumn around them. It is October now; the month of which Ruby was born...on the thirty first of all days. They all hang their coats on the coat hangers with a thank you to Taiyang as he smiles at them.

Taiyang could not be more pleased with the friends Ruby and Yang have made.

He runs his hands through his blonde locks and nodded up the stairs for Ruby. “You know where her room is.” Ruby beams at her Dad, and shoots up the stairs like lightning. Taiyang smiles to the new roommates for the weekend, slapping and rubbing his hands together. “So! Who wants a drink?” Tai smiles.

“I’ll help sir.” Ren says politely, stepping forward and clearing his throat. “Nora will have tea with six sugars – make it three, she won’t tell the difference.” Ren whispers, not informing him on the fact she sometimes has sixteen in her drink, nearly thick with sugar. Taiyang nods with wide eyes.

“So, this is what Dad’s been dealing with?” Taiyang chuckles as Ren carries on.

Meanwhile upstairs, Ruby creeps up to the door marked “Yang’s Room.” She blows out a breath and knocks.

“Go away.” Was the immediate response.

So, this is what Dad’s been dealing with?

She knocks again, and the same response greeted her, albeit angrier, Ruby groans and opens the door, peering in as Yang stares out the window, her reflection a sombre one. The bandage around her stump is lighter coloured, having recently been changed and redressed. Clearly Yang has not even touched the Cybernetic Arm that Ironwood had made for her. Yang turns her head slight, seeing Ruby and her eyes widen minutely. “Ruby?”

“Hey sis!” Ruby beams, stepping in to shuffle her feet bashfully, arms behind her back. “Thought I’d come home this weekend and say hi. Sick of all the Black Gallows soldiers killing the mood everywhere we go.” She groans, and Yang looks back out the window.

“Oh...well...hi, I guess.” Yang despondently mumbles, Ruby clears her throat.

“So, err...whatcha been doing?” Ruby playfully asks her, as Yang scoffs.

“Well I haven’t been playing guitar if that’s what you’re wondering.” Yang snaps, Ruby frowns.

“Don’t be so hostile, Yang. I-”

“Ruby I appreciate you being here, but...just...please leave me alone.” Yang sighs, practically begging with her wavering voice. Ruby steps back and looks into the hall, at the six other friends all standing holding hot mugs of cocoa and tea. Ruby grins and plays the part.

“Come see, I made it myself.” She says, and Yang rolls her eyes with a teenage sigh, throwing the
bed sheets off her smaller looking body. She grabs her cream coloured dressing gown, soft and warm and shuffles to follow her sister.

“C’mon sis…” Yang grumbles.

“Oh, you know, I made some Juniper flavoured cakes.” Ruby speaks, winking to them as they get ready, Taiyang leant against the wall at the bottom of the stairs with his arms crossed. Yang raises her brow over her rested eyes.

“You know I don’t like juniper berries.” Yang huffs as she starts to leave the room.

“Oh, and I also brought…” Yang turns the corner and her eyes widen more than ever before when she sees the two teams standing before her. “R.W.B.Y too!”

“HEY YANG!” Everyone cheers with joy and Yang gasps with shock, immediately covering herself up, since she is only wearing her pyjama shirt and shorts. Covering her body with her dressing gown shyly and lowering her head since she has no makeup on.

“Ah! Wh-What, what’re you all doing here! I-I’m not fit to be seen, err, hang on-” Yang runs back into her room and reaches across her bed, tugging a box of tissues under her blanket and TV remote, trying to hide her struggles. The team turn, and they walk over to the doorway with a chuckle. Blake steps forward, moving past Ruby who stands there, kneeling beside her bed. Yang snaps her eyes onto Blake’s stunning amber feline eyes, and the lilac infused with hers. Blake smiles and hands Yang the handle of a cup of cocoa, just as Yang liked it. Yang takes it in her only hand and stammers.

“Hey partner.” Blake breathes tearfully, Yang sets the cup down and wraps her arm round her partner, Blake wraps her around Yang, tightly holding the blonde as she gives in, sobbing and Blake tears up as well. “I’m so sorry.” Blake breathes, as Yang’s hand went up the back of Blake’s head to stroke down over her cat ears.

“D-Don’t be.” Yang sniffles, eyes watering down her cheeks. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Blake smiles into Yang’s fluffy blonde hair as she hugged her friend, to hear the subject of her woes say it was not her fault helps relieve her guilt in magnitudes. The nerves she felt hammering her heart for the last day leading up to this moment have finally stopped, as two best friends reunite. The others all smile and huddled around, as Yang looks up and wipes her tears from her eyes, beaming for the first time in days.

“Y-You guys, you didn’t have to.”

“We know, but we love you, buddy.” Jaune smiles, wrapping his arms affectionately around Yang, hugging her tightly. “Besides, us blondes gotta stick together right?”

“R-Right…” Yang chuckles, but then concern forms over her as she looks around and searches for Sun. “Wait, where is Sun?” She asks.

“Don’t worry he’s fine…but the he needs to stay at Beacon. He got into a fight, drew in some Grimm but not a full attack. Now the Black Gallows are watching him…I take it you’ve heard?” Ruby assumes as she looks at Yang, and she nods.

“That’s why?” She asks them.

“Yep, got in a fight with a student who was bullying Pyrrha for accidentally killing Penny.” Nora sadly says as she lowers her head, whilst Pyrrha stands beside her with her own concerns…because
she knows about the fact he has a condition. And that he did not mean for any of this to happen.

“Who the hell is it?” Yang snarls.

“Don’t worry about it.” Pyrrha assures with a smile.

“No…I may be messed up…but nobody hurts my friends.” Yang states with a snarl.

“Yang…the situation…it’s complicated.” Pyrrha says, and even Jaune nods. “Besides, another fight is the last thing we need with the Black Gallows watching our every move. Was a pain trying to convince them we can go?” Pyrrha explains, and Yang raises her brow.

“If they are worried about panic then why are they keeping people there?” She questions, they all shrug.

“I don’t know…the bastards haven’t really been talkative about their methods unfortunately.” Jaune chuckles as he scratches the back of his neck.

“But the rest of his team are okay, same with C.F.V.Y and C.R.D.L…hell Cardin and his team are trying to turn over new leaves.” Blake chuckles and Yang chuckles.

“Okay…now you’re messing with me.” Yang scoffs.

“No, I swear it.” Blake assures as she shows her pinkie finger.

One at a time everyone shares a warm and affectionate hug with Yang, letting her know she is surrounded by love and affection no matter where she looks. Each hug warms her heart in different ways, all in which are gentle waves of tingling sensitivity she has not felt since she lost her arm and was taken home by her father.

Her friends already have helped her feel real again.

So here they all sit, J.N.P.R and the finally complete R.W.B.U on the floor of Yang’s room, in a circle, cups in hand with half drank lukewarm cocoa sat by their hips. As Yang pulls on some grey sweatpants over her sleep pants, she sits next to Ruby and kisses her sister’s hair quickly.

“Thanks sis.” Yang murmurs with a smile, rubbing the stump on her arm. Jaune hugs his knees and rests his chin on his wrists, working up the courage to ask her.

“Hey Yang?”

“Mmm?” Yang looks up at him, smiling slightly.

“Are…” He swallows. “Gonna sound stupid, but…does it hurt?” Jaune subs his cheek nervously. Yang shrugs her shoulders and looks at her stump.

“A bit…worse at times. The Phantom Limb pains suck though.” Yang huffs, Jaune smiles softly across to her.

“Totally badass though.”

“How?” She asks him.

“Cos if someone is trying to get attention for being hurt you can pull one hell of a trump card on them.” He chuckles, making her laugh.
“Heh, guess you’re right. Thanks, Jaune, I’ll remember that.” She smiles, and he chuckles, her eyes turn to her black-haired feline friend. “So, err, Blakey?”

“Yeah?” Blake looks up at the brawler.

“How’s things with Sun?” Yang grins, and everyone smiles brightly again, and Blake groans, only been a few hours from last time. “You tied tails yet?”

“W-What does that even mean?” Blake nervously chuckles, smiling at the blonde. Yang shrugs and laughs lightly as she drops her hand into her lip, riffling with the drawstrings. “Being with friends…this is perfect.” Blake sighs with an uncharacteristically large smile on her face as she leans back against the wall, purring.

“By the gods…did you just purr?” Yang squealed excitedly, lilac eyes widening and Nora gasps and squeals into her hands, eyes wide with glee. Blake however gasps and covers her lips, blushing blood red again.

“That. Is. So. CUTE!” Ruby and Nora both explode with glee, Blake small smile grows as she groans, unable to be humiliated by them since there is no malice. So, she just hides behind her mug.

“Guys…stop.” Blake whines.

“That was adorable though.” Pyrrha smiles, a hand on her chest. Jaune smiles at the friends conversing, repairing their wounds piece by piece. Blake fidgets and looks at Yang.

“Hey, umm…Yang?”

“Uh-Huh?” Yang looks up at her with a smile.

“H-Have you thought about going back to school?” Blake hesitantly asks her, Yang sighs heavily and shakes her head.

“I…I can’t…I mean, how can I? Look at me Blake? I’m missing one of my weapons, pretty much.” Yang huffs. “And I know I have that metal arm and everything…but…well it’s not that simple.” She sighs.

“Why not?” Weiss asks her, and Yang looks at the Schnee Heiress, closing her eyes when she looks at Blake.

“I failed you…” She sniffs, and Blake gasps as he eyes widen.

“I failed you…” She sniffs, and Blake gasps as he eyes widen.

“You…you didn’t fail me though, Yang. I’m here…and he ran.” She states, and Yang looks at him with confusion. “When Ruby…did what she did…he retreated, with the rest of the White Fang as well. So did the Grimm. You didn’t fail, because despite everything…he got distracted. And I managed to save you…I just wish everything didn’t go down the way it did.” Blake explains, and Yang looks down at the floor and she sniffs.
“But…what if I fail again…and we aren’t lucky? That’s why I’m scared of touching that arm…it isn’t me.” She states as she stares at the stump where she actually felt like she could lift up her hand…only the stump rises up.

“But we miss you, Yang.” Nora says softly with a smile. “We were literally talking about it at lunch. How we miss hearing your puns.” Nora explains with a smile, making Yang chuckle.

“Please, they annoy you.” Yang says, and Jaune chuckles.

“Yang…if we laughed at a pun…it wouldn’t have been good.” Jaune states, and Yang cannot help but argue with that logic. Puns are groan humour after all.

“Fair enough…look…I’ll…I’ll think about it, okay?” Yang asks them all.

“That is all we ask.” Ren assures with a smile.

“So, what have I missed so far then? Y’know, apart from the Black Gallows and this bully?” She asks them.

“Well we did get to meet Neptune’s big sister.” Weiss beams, everyone else mirror her expression and Yang raises a brow.

“He’s got a sister? Is she…you know…” Yang swirls a hand “…is she hot?”

“Another example of the Vasillias Family being able to make ridiculously cool, good looking people? Yeah.” Jaune shrugs, voice tinged with jealousy. Pyrrha snorts into her palm, much to his glee as he smiles at her.

“She is kinda like the female version of him from what I have heard.” Ruby says, since only a few have met her. Weiss met her with Winter one time when they were talking, Pyrrha met her with Jaymes and Jaune saw her one time with her Eagle and Neptune.

“She’s staying at Beacon for the next week or two. She’s sharing rooms with my sister.” Weiss smiles, and Yang’s eyes widen.

“No way…your sis is there?”

“Yeah, Goodwitch has been struggling lately so she decided to help teach some lessons. So, did Eryka – Nep’s sister.” Weiss explains, and Yang smirks, noticing the nickname.

“Nep?” She asks her. “Is that a pet name?”

“Quiet you.” Weiss squeaks, blushing nervously and defensively. “Though I’ve heard that Eryka is…and I quote…the messiest creature she has ever seen.” Making them all laugh at her comment.

“I take it your sister is you but magnified, right?” Yang asks.

“Pretty much.” Weiss admits, not even arguing with that point either.

A pregnant pause of silence filled Yang’s bedroom as they all sat in the circle, one broken by the enigmatic Ruby Rose. “Sooooooo…let’s play a game!” She squeaks when her large silver eyes focus onto a deck of cards in the corner.

“Ruby!” Weiss whines, but the Rose gets up and grabs the deck, stopping to glance at the silver rectangular box on the desk.
That has to be it…

The Cybernetic Arm…

She must have been thinking about attaching it for it to be right here. However, she does not ask, for her sister’s sake…it is obviously why she has been so hesitant to even speak of it. As Ruby begins to slide cards to each player, Jaune saddles up to Pyrrha, the redhead hugs her knees to her chest. He nudge her softly and she snaps her eyes to his.

“Jaune?” She softly asks him, he worries his lip and leans to his ear.

“We need to talk…about some stuff.”

“What stuff?” She asks him innocently, Jaune gives her a knowing look with a frown and she sighs. “Right…of course.”

“I want us to have a bit of privacy for this, and…well…Ren had the idea that we walk into the small village by the docks. We’ll get a coffee and have a talk, okay?” He asks softly, and she cannot help but smile at his idea and soft tones.

“O-Okay.” She reluctantly nods, scared since this would be it. The inevitable conversation of either how he no longer feels the same way about her anymore…or maybe that he does feel that way about her. Jaune gives her shoulder a gentle squeeze and stands up, flattening out the creases in his jeans. All eyes of the card game are on him now.

“So umm, Pyrrha and I are just gonna take a walk into that small village down the road. We won’t be long.” Jaune swallows a thick breath.

“We’ll come with you, right Yang-”

Ren stops her with his hand on her knee, she looks at him and all he does is glance and Jaune and Pyrrha, then raises his brow. “Oh…” She figures out, nodding her head. “Don’t worry.” She assures with a firm nod.

“Don’t be too long.” Weiss advises, since all of them know what is going on. Yang looks at Pyrrha and gives her a small smile, along with her characteristic wink. Basically, her soft side and saying…Don’t worry, it’ll be okay.

Pyrrha smiles to her and grabs her coat, pulling it on and tying the belt around the middle as Jaune tugs his black coat on too.

“We won’t be long. Want anything?” Jaune asks.

“Err…Gummy Worms!” Nora squeaks brightly and Yang nods her head in agreement.

“Cookies!” Ruby cries out.

“Gummies and Cookies. Got it.” Jaune opens the door and lets Pyrrha walk out first. Jaune looks over his shoulder at Ren, who gives a small smile to him and a gentle nod. Jaune meekly smiles back and shuts the door behind him.

Weiss looks at Ruby on how she has such an addiction to cookies. “How have your teeth not rotted away yet?”

Jaune closes the door and he exhales nervously…
They need this conversation.

Now?

There is no turning back.
Gravel crunches under heel as the two teens pace side by side under the crumbled lunar glow. Red and yellow, side by side for so long, through thick and thin, both gulp and avoid eye contact. The wedge of emotions between them has widened into a gaping chasm of solicitous hearts. Both want the same thing, both wanted the other, both wanted languid kisses, warm skin on skin, souls unbound to tie together. But the constant overhang of that fateful night, that almost last kiss that now left sour tastes and memories, has poisoned what they had, and made it so very hard to even mention where they stood.

So being their usual unsure and nervous selves, they elect to ignore their hearts.

To be friends.

But feelings only hurt and ache to near physical levels of pain when they're ignored. Now Pyrrha hurts. Now she aches, with the need to have him be hers. Her thoughts are only mirrored tenfold by the blonde boy.

"So..." Pyrrha clears her throat, ducking her chin down to hide her chapped lips behind her scarf. "What did you want to talk about?"

Jaune fixes her with a knowing look, Pyrrha frowning beneath the fabric of her scarf. "About us. Where we're at after a week or two of..." Jaune trails off, unsure of the words.

"Fixing ourselves." Pyrrha nods, letting out a shaky breath. "I'm umm...nervous of what's on your mind."

"Ditto." Jaune scoffs, rubbing a numb hand over his face as they finally went from moonlight to streetlights, entering the small village square. It is mostly abandoned this late, but a few shops are still open, luckily the coffee shop being one of them. Pyrrha stops by the fountain in the centre of the square, looking down at the water as she places a hand on her buxom chest, trying to quell her drumming heart.

She quivers a gulp at her red-haired reflection, tenderness in her skin prickling at even the ruffling of her coat against her arms. Her reflection wobbles as the ghostly carp in the cool waters slurped at the air, begging to be fed the usual crumbles of bread from the now shut bakery.

She smiles lightly, shakily even, at the giant golden scaled fish. "Hey...you okay?" Jaune asks tentatively, causing her heart to flutter at the mere sound of his voice. Pyrrha huffs, looking up at him with sparkly green eyes.

"Yes. Just needed a moment, I guess." She blows out an obviously shaky breath. Jaune smiles and nods over his shoulder to the shop. "Okay." She smiles weakly. The two walk over and he pushes the wooden door open, a bell dings above their heads to alert the owner, letting Pyrrha step in first and into the warm shop.

Porcelain clinks in the back of the shop, low murmurs of customers adding an atmospheric hum to the chorus of clinks, melding wonderfully with the sweet and sharp smell of freshly ground coffee and warm soft doughy pastry.
"I'll get us our drinks." Jaune says, Pyrrha frowning, fumbling in her pocket for her wallet. Jaune smirks, always admiring her for how selfless she always is, always happy to pay for everything just like Weiss is. Just makes it fun to do the same for her when she never lets anybody else do that.

"S'okay, I got this one. What d'ya want, Pyr?" He asks, with her nickname, which makes her smile. He obviously still cares, she is just scared that it will always be as a friend.

"Umm...A latte would be lovely, thank you." She smiles that brilliant beam that he loves so much. Gods, she wanted to just lean up and kiss him, to let him know how much she means to him, and how she would die for him...but then again...she nearly did. That might not be the best thing to tell him. He smiles back warmly and steps up to the counter as Pyrrha walks over to a secluded and warm booth in the corner, looking out through a large window at the night time Town square.

She sits down and exhales with anxiety flowing through her and out her firm lips, fingers fiddling nervously atop the brushed steel table top. She bites her lip and her heart drums in her chest. She is scared, that much is dead certain. Scared it will end before it even began, scared he couldn't see her romantically anymore for how that night panned out. Thing is, she'd had a taste of his heart, and she wanted it forever more.

She knows the taste of his lips, soft and tantalizingly warm. Now that she knows of this, she craves it, she didn't want to go without ever feeling or tasting it again, having it light her nerve endings on fire with pure joy and ecstasy. She was addicted to him, frightened that it could be like any other addiction, a hunger that is never satisfied...a hunger that will kill you.

She snaps from her thoughts as Jaune sits opposite her in the quiet booth, sliding her cardboard sleeved cup over to her, a hot cloud of steam warming her cheeks and tempting her nasals with sweet coffee. She cups the drink and hums, smiling at him.

"Thank you, Jaune."

"You're welcome." He rubs his slightly stubbly chin, blonde facial hair so faint they are nearly invisible, blowing out a loud sigh. She drums her fingers into her cup, before lifting it to take a sip of the scolding drink. The warm liquid runs down her throat into her belly, letting a calming heat pool in her stomach, trying to battle the icy cold gooey dread that sat there before. "Oh...I-I dunno how to talk about any of this." Jaune scoffs at himself.

"Mmm, me neither." Pyrrha unwraps her scarf from around her neck, tucking it into a coat pocket. "But...you must have some idea, right? F-For wanting to have this talk I mean." Pyrrha mumbles, bashfully eyeing the swirling froth in her drink.

"I guess...It was more Ren being overly worried about us." Jaune grumbles, sipping his coffee, eyes trying to look through the glass at the night time world, but instead watching Pyrrha's gorgeous reflection instead.

"Well can you blame him? We've been trying to steer clear of obvious feelings, and it's..." Pyrrha hugs her stomach with a weak almost ironic smile. "...it's hurting more than it's helping."

"Mmm." Jaune mumbles, stirring a wooden stick around his cup, unsettling the caramel sludge at the bottom. "How err...How are you doing? I'm sick of talking about me." Jaune scoffs, taking a swig. Pyrrha smiles lightly, looping a fallen lock of vermilion behind her ear, her porcelain skin practically glowing with the lunar light pouring in through the pane.

"I'm...I'm better, thank you." Pyrrha shrugs, chewing her lip thoughtfully. "All thanks to you, well and talking to Jaymes helped me...at least I know he doesn't mean it." Pyrrha sighs as she scratches the back of her head, something her crush does not seem to share the same thoughts over.
“I still think he should have been kicked out for what he did to you.” Jaune snarls as he pictures Ickford's face.

“He’s…unwell, Jaune. What he told me, he was certain of it…and I know when someone feels remorse. He never touched that petition.” Pyrrha explains to Jaune, but Jaune shake shis head, realising that they are back to talking about the problems that surround the Academy right now, problems they wanted to escape.

“Damn, we’re talking about Beacon and the problems again.” He sighs, and Pyrrha giggles nervously.

“Oh yeah…seems like it’s all we talk about now.” Pyrrha states.

“That and…what comes next.” Jaune agrees with the nod of his head.

“Grimm or the Gallows…the double Gs.” Pyrrha jokes, making Jaune chuckle as well.

“Let’s find something else to talk about…surely we have something, right?” Jaune asks her, so Pyrrha ponders through her memories to think of anything interesting that has happened recently.

Finally, something comes to her head. "I...I spoke to my Mother and Father the other day. Professor Goodwitch let me use her satellite scroll." Pyrrha softly beamed, Jaune mirroring her expression. However, it is clear that she does not have lighter thoughts for her parents, as she told Ruby…her father’s parenting surrounded combat training, whereas her mother is ruthless and would do anything for her child.

To the point of which it made Pyrrha scared of her. "How are they? Okay?"

"Mmm..." Pyrrha gulps her hot latte, licking her lips inadvertently slowly to Jaune's pleasure. "Yes, all is good at home. My Mother is well...Father is well...everyone is well." Pyrrha begins to mumble towards the end, stirring her wooden stick, eyeing the swirling froth. Jaune huffs. "...All is well."


"I had to...I had to tell them...about that night." Pyrrha winces, closing her eyes tight.

"Oh." Jaune freezes, skin paling.

"They asked. How could I lie? I... I almost died, Jaune. I was...milliseconds from dying, when Ruby saved me. I told them about the whole night. They threatened to pull me out of Beacon and bring me home. I... I told them I couldn't. I had too much here, too much I cared about to leave." She looks up through her lashes at him, knowingly, poignantly. Jaune bites his lip, closing his eyes, skin crinkling atop his scrunched brow.

“They don’t sound happy…” Jaune comments, making her softly laugh.

“That’s putting it mildly…my mother is over-protective as hell and my father wants me to be a lethal warrior to keep me safe.” Pyrrha explains, looking up at Jaune and she sighs. “If he finds out...about you...about any of you...I’m worried about what he will do.”

“What do you mean?” Jaune inquires.

“He believed friendships…relationships…they hold people back when it comes to becoming a warrior. He only believes that marriage and love comes when you are older.” Pyrrha explains, her
hands shaking as she holds her cup there. “I’m scared of what he will do if he comes to Beacon… Glynda sent that message out to all our parents. They could come…either pull me away from all of you…or maybe hurt you.”

“It’s your life Pyrrha, not theirs.” Jaune reminds, but she shakes her head with tears in her eyes.

“I…tried to give my life…for you…if my father, Anaximander…if he knows of this it will make him believe his point to be true. And I do not want that to happen…otherwise…well like I said. Either I get taken away or…he will hurt you.” Pyrrha explains, her voice breaking when she mentions the horrific thought of the man she loves being hurt by Anaximander.

"Why, Pyrrha?" Jaune asks, opening his glossy eyes. Pyrrha's eyes widen at him, cradling the cardboard sleeve around her cup. "Why'd you push me in that locker?"

"Jaune..."

"It's been eating away at me, for...gods since the minute it happened! I know, I know, b-but...gods, why?" Jaune grits his dentures, hands paling on the table, a single tear hanging on a lash, glass buds on a branch. Pyrrha sniffs and looks over at the shop, zigzagging her teeth up and down the length of her bottom lip, almost slicing the chapped skin.

"Because...I...I..."

"Partners support each other, Pyrrha. I was your partner, and I could have helped you. Why? Why'd you push me away, I am your partner-"

"That's why." She snaps, Jaune freezing in place. "Because Partners protect one another. But we were closer than just partners. I... I’ve cared about you in a different and confusing light since initiation. I’ve never had feelings like these, and I’m sorry if I'm not sure how to show or utilize them. While other children were taught to walk, I was taught to run. While other children learnt to ride bikes, I learnt to wield swords and spears. I've always been sure of myself as a warrior. Then you come along. You and your...quirky adorableness...and your beautiful smile and kindred heart to everyone you meet!" She pants, eyes glossy too.

"...You shattered everything I knew. You saw right through my...stupid title and... damned ugly fame, and you saw...me!" She presses her hands to her chest, the heavy emotion in her voice cracking. "I was taught not to care. I was taught to lock away my heart and replace any feelings with a spear and shield. I had no desire for relationships when I was younger, because I was taught not to. It bled into friendships and made me seem...cold to everyone else. So, when I craved attention, not the press, real friendship attention, they were scared of me, of my strength, of my title. Nobody got close, and anyone who did, did so for money or to play with the useless plastic toys I'd accumulated in a desire to fill that empty void." She looks down at her cup, sniffing as a salty tear dropped to mingle in her sweet latte. Remembering what Dandelion and the other girls did, how they used her like a toy so they could have fun whilst poor little Pyrrha was left alone.

"Pyrrha-"

"You know, I used to have a rocking Horse that was my one and only friend. He wouldn't run when my emotions boiled over. He wouldn't ask me for money, he wouldn't pretend to be a friend, so he could claim to be friends with the Invincible girl!" She growls, teeth gritted, eyes streaming by now as Dandelion’s face flashes in her mind. Jaune blinks and wipes his eyes, fighting the urge to just lean over the table and wipe hers. "...He listened to me."

"...Then I met you." She whimpers tearfully. Jaune looks up at her as she sniffles. "You. You and
your...fake bravado and... womanizing attitude when in reality you were the exact opposite. You saw right through the Invincible girl. You saw...me."

The way Pyrrha spoke about her title strikes a deep chord in Jaune.

Like it was Jekyll and Hyde.

A monster that latched to her, a parasite that weighed her down, almost a totally separate entity. He slides his hand over the table and cups her shaking digits, squeezing and moulding the rigid flesh into warm dough.

"...You. You are...everything to me, Jaune. You gave me so many friends when before, I sought friendship in a wooden toy, because nobody else could see the real me!" She sniffs, eyes brimming and dripping long rivulets of salty sadness down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, I am... b-but I had to protect you..."

"Pyrrha." Jaune sighs, massaging her knuckles with his thumb. "You don't think it works both ways?" He blinks. Like emeralds catching the light at the bottom of a lake, her wobbly green eyes lift to study him. "I care about you a lot...like, a lot. I didn't realize how much until that night." He swallows thickly. Pyrrha lets a weak smile curve her lips, thumb swiping her tears away.

"I care about you too." Pyrrha smiles lightly. Desperate to change the focus from her, wiping her eyes, she chews her tongue before parting her lips. "H-How have you been?"

Jaune gives a lopsided smile and lets go of her hand, much to her chagrin. She paws at the air for his retreating hand and catches it, her face blotchy red as she seeks to feel weak and in need of help, of the smallest of things, even as simple as holding his hand. He smiles and gave a gentle squeeze, his own face blushing red.

"I've been...ahh, you know." He shrugs, eyes studying the incredibly soft and smooth hand in his. "Okay? I guess? I dunno, it's been really rough. Black Gallows running the school, Glynda struggling, Ickford, the Grimm...I'm starting to think we didn’t win...rather we survived." Jaune explains as he looks into her eyes, something she nods her head to, because he is right.

If they had won?

The Smog would not be watching them. "Mmm. How are you now though? Is being with friends helping?" She asks softly, the tables turn as now she sooths his hand with massaging digits. Jaune closes his eyes, smiling, intent to enjoy the feel of her smooth fingers sliding over his.

"Yeah. Yeah, being back at Beacon's been hard, but...at the same time, it's great! Having my team back...my family." Jaune smiles, Pyrrha beaming at him, tears left behind, albeit leaving drying streaks on her cheeks. "Being with you has helped." He mumbles, blushing as she smiles even wider. He sits back into the plushie leather padding of the booth, fingers absentmindedly drumming into his cup. "It's...It's been nice getting back to being friends with you. I mean, before the Vytal Tournament we were easily best buds!"

"We were." Pyrrha grins brightly to him, with love and adoration in her gaze. "And yes, it's been lovely getting my wonderful bestest friend in the world back."

Jaune grins sheepishly, scratching behind his ear. An awkward silence befalls over them as they sip their drinks, clearing clogged throats and avoid locking eyes. Until Pyrrha huffs and snaps her fingers together, Jaune blinking back into the room.

"I have something I want to ask you." Pyrrha bites her lip. Jaune leans forward on his elbows, a
perplexed look on his face.

"Shoot." He shrugs, anticipating what is on her mind. Pyrrha smiles and nods to herself.

"Before...th-that night..." She swirls her hand and shuts her eyes, before opening them again on his soft sapphire gaze. "."Did you see me...did...wh-what I'm trying to ask is..." She huffs loudly and thumps her fists softly to her forehead with a groan. "I'm sorry, I'm not very good at thi-"

"Yes." Jaune smiled lopsidedly, Pyrrha's eyes widening on him, lowering her hand. "Yeah, I did. A lot changed for me, during the dance. I learned that I'd wasted a lot of time chasing the wrong girl." He scratches at the wealth of stubble under his chin, Pyrrha placing a hand over her heart at his words. "It was at the dance, when I saw you on your own, you in that beautiful dress..." He blushes bright red, clearing his throat as his face grows hotter and hotter. "."b-b-but it was when I spoke to you on the roof...and you said that I was the kinda guy you wanted to go to the dance with."

"I remember..." She blushes. "It... I often wish that had played out differently."

"Hey, you me both. You dropped that bombshell then walked away, leaving me talking with Neptune! I mean sure I helped him with his girl problems, but funnily..." He sighed, sobering. "."I'm still struggling with mine."

"Mmm...Sorry about that." Pyrrha chuckles weakly under her breath. "Buuuut, at the same time...I'm glad it panned out how it did too. Because you made my night when you wore that dress for me." She smiles, finger tracing the rim of her cup.

"Oh yeah." He blushes bright scarlet, sheepishly chuckling. "Well, I mean, an Arc never goes back on his word."

"Mmm...Thank you, all the same." She smiles lovingly. Jaune smiles back.

"Course." He clears his throat, pointing to his empty cup. "Also...got a question for you...since you’re a girl." He begins, Pyrrha in which raises a curious eyebrow.

“Ask away.” She replies with a bright smile.

“How can you wear those things? They’re so tight...thought I was gonna pass out at one point.” Jaune nervously asks her, causing Pyrrha to laugh aloud, and it warms his heart so much to hear that laugh again, he has not heard it like that since the dance. Her laugh even has a few snorts in it as she bounces in her seat.

“I remember hearing you say that...what did you say…it’s squishing me like play-doh?” She giggles.

“I did say that...I thought it was gonna give me an hourglass figure.” Jaune chuckles, making her laugh again at his hilarious descriptions.

“Well...I think it would look good on you.” She flirts, making him chuckle.

“Well maybe I’ll ask Yang if she has another for me.” Jaune says.

“Yang gave it to you?” She asks him.

“Yeah, I asked her after I stupidly left you on that balcony. Guess it worked out in the end, huh?” Jaune asks her, she smiles at him.
“Yeah…it did.” She agrees with the firm nod of her head. Jaune looks at his empty cup in his hand and sets it down.

"I-I'm done, err...you?"

"Mmm..." She pouts adorably, showing him her empty cup. "All gone."

"Come on...Wrap up again and we'll do the ol' Walk n' Talk." He grins as Pyrrha snorted.

"Is that an actual branded thing?" She shuffles out of the booth, tugging her coat on.

"Oh yeah, course! Copyrighted and everything!" Jaune grins, his red-haired companion giggling.

"Oh, come on, silly." Pyrrha rolls her eyes with mirth, wrapping her checkered blue scarf around her neck.

Winter

As the moon looms over the quiet campus of Beacon, a lone woman shivers at a gust of chilly wind, like icy tendrils plucking every ridge of her spine. Winter loops a lock of frost behind her ear, blowing out a cloud of fog, eyes searching for nothing. She huffs and hugs her upper arms, stroking some warmth into her cardigan wrapped upper body.

"Sup, buddy?" Eryka yawns, stretching her arms above her head. Winter's smile is almost non-existent, but it is there all the same. "Just giving Dulcis his last flight before bed...tucker him out a bit. What about you? What you doing up?"

"Hmm?"

"C'mon Wints. I know you're no party animal, so it's not a night on the town keeping you up, it's something in here." She taps a finger to the Schnee's head. "C'mon hon, speak your mind." Eryka perches her generous rear on the stone banister, tilting her head to let her blue tresses pour like a river down her equally generous chest. Winter bites her lip but eventually huffs.

"It's Weiss. It...well it's a lot of things, I guess." The older Schnee shrugs, pressing clammy hands into cooling concrete. Eryka nods to herself, sapphire blue eyes peering at Winter as she studies the moon.

"Okay...what's bothering you the most?" Eryka bobs her shoulders, Winter staring at her. "Narrow it down a bit."

"Well...in all seriousness...It's Goodwitch." Winter says, Eryka's brows knitting in confusion. "You were right, Eryka. Something's not right. She knows we have a traitor in our midst, you saw the body. They knew he had those meds for Jaymes and killed him for it. But Glynda...she hasn't done anything about it. She has fled back into the office with Ozpin." Winter explains.

"Mhm? And your point is?" Eryka asks her.

“I don’t know…and that’s what worries me. The Black Gallows are stopping my men from getting anywhere in this investigation, saying that they have everything under control. You don’t need to be a detective to see the connections, first with Jaymes being let in and then kept in the school,
then the courier is killed…and now, our investigation is turning up squat thanks to them.” Winter explains, burying her head in her hands. Eryka ponders on these thoughts as she looks around, seeing some of the soldiers standing guard.

"Mmm. Tis a weird one." Eryka chews her lip. "Killian’s walking around like he owns the damn place, and Goodwitch is pussyfooting around him. Doesn't add up." Eryka agrees.

"Exactly. I don't like it. Glynda is as tough as they come, it isn’t like her to mess up like this.” Winter swipes her thumb along her bottom lip thoughtfully. Eryka kicks her legs back and forth a bit, before grinning at the tiles below. Winter noticed, and her stomach dropped into a cold pit.

"What?" Winter winces, as Eryka's smile grows. "No..."

"I say we do a little digging, huh? Find out what Killian and the Gallows are hiding. Cos something does not add up!"

"Soooo...what are you saying, Eryka?"

"I'm saying, we become..." She leaps off her perch on the banister, on tip toes to hold her arms up over her head. "Detectives!"

"Hey! That's our thing!" Sun yells from the doorway of the balcony, Neptune crossing his arms beside him. Luckily Team S.S.S.N do not need to do body clean up tonight, the Gallows at least are not running them until they collapse.

"Yeah! Come on Eryka, don't steal our thunder!"

"What are you dummies whining about?" Eryka deadpans, slumped forward, arms dangling heavily. Neptune scoffs, Sun mirroring the action as they dig around in their pockets.

"What are we on about, I'll show you, where is it-AHA!" Neptune holds up his golden badge, Sun finding his too. "We're Junior Detectives!"

"Yeah! So back off!" Sun adds with a grin. Eryka looks at Winter and they both snort.

"That's dumb." Eryka adds, crossing her arms under her buxom chest.

"Pfft, no way! You're dumb!" Neptune points at his sister.

"No, you are."

"No, you."

“You.”

“You.”

“You.”

Neptune snaps his fingers and points at her with a smirk. “You infinity.” Eryka clenches her hands into fists and bites her lip with a growl of anger.

"Got em." Sun adds, backing up his partner, high-fiving him.

"It does sound rather childish." Winter adds, Eryka smirking. "That goes for you too."
"Aww, hey! You're supposed to have my back!" Eryka pouts.

"We don't need this, do we Sun? Come on dude, we got lots of stuff to do. Detective stuff!"
Neptune sticks out his tongue, before walking away in a stomp. Sun shrugs and follows, his grin
never leaving his face. Eryka runs a hand down her face.

"My brother...is a doof sometimes." She rolls her eyes. "Anyway! C'mon Wints, we gotta find out
what's going on, or you'll never sleep again!"

“Wait, Eryka! What is your plan? Just waltz into Killian’s office and read his files? He’ll have
armed guards nearby, or security systems in place.” Winter states, but Eryka smirks.

“We’ll make it up as we go along.” Eryka says with the shrug of her shoulders.

"Eryka, if we get caught we could get in trouble."

"Now who sounds childish?" Eryka places her hands on her wide hips, just as Dulcis drops from
the night sky to perch on her shoulder, nuzzling his beak into her nest of blue hair. Winter huffs.

"I'm serious! If we get caught we’ll never see the light of day again, be imprisoned in the Gallows
facility. Or worse, we will be killed. I have a reputation to uphold!"

"Chickensayswhat?" Eryka cups her ear.

"What?" Winter growls.

"Cluck-cluck-cluck!" Eryka flaps her arms like wings, Winter's eye twitching. "Chic-chic-chicken!"

"Urhg! Fine! Fine, fine, fine! We'll do the stupid detective thing, we'll get stupidly caught, we'll get
stupidly in trouble, all because you were-"

"Stupid?" Eryka grins like a Cheshire cat. Winter sucks in a deep breath, blowing it out Shakily.

"J-Just remember your calming techniques...blood pressure...in...and out..." Winter walks away,
Eryka giggling to herself. "She must be trying to kill me..."

"C'mon Dulcis! Off to bed with you!" Eryka sings, skipping after Winter. "Messin’ with you is
soooo fun!"

Pyrrha

The two Arkos teens pace around the rapidly emptying town square, talking about their friends,
their friends love interests and lives, basically being their usual selves and avoiding their own
issues. Until Pyrrha befalls wisely to the situation, sighing as she shrunk her head down at a gust of
harsh wind. Jaune stops rambling and looks at her downward gaze.

"We're doing it again."

"Doing what again?" Jaune asks, to which Pyrrha scoffs to the shattered moon above.

"Avoiding talking about us! Talking about everyone else, bar ourselves, Jaune!" She spits with
glimmering diamonds clinging to her long lashes. Jaune sucks his lip, eyeing his boots.
"Cos I dunno what to say, okay?" Jaune mumbles.

"Okay, Umm, I'll start. Jaune, do you like me?" Pyrrha crosses her arms.

"Yeah, course-"

"No, do you...like-like me, to quote a certain Valkyrie." Pyrrha asks as they settle to a spot around a row of thin and pruned spruce trees, tucked into sculpted plant pots. Jaune sucks his lip and steps around the nearest tree, pressing his cheek into the bark as he nods, eyes flitting down to his shoes. Pyrrha sighs softly and steps closer with a clack of heels.

"So why do this to ourselves?"

"Because I'm scared." Jaune mumbles. Pyrrha tilts her head, flicking her fringe out of her eyes.

"Of what?" She asks softly.

"Pyrrha-"

"No Jaune, of what?" She asks with a mirthless chuckle. Jaune drums his fingers into the tree, before locking his alluring blues onto her beautiful greens. He steps around the tree and closes his eyes, softly leaning his forehead against hers, the Nikos girl closing her own to bump her brow against his. He sighs heavily, enjoying the feeling of her forehead pressed to his, both humming gently.

"...of losing you." He breathes at last. Pyrrha's eyes open as she wraps her arms around his neck and gave him a warm hug. "I-I'm just not...I dunno if I can..."

"Shhh...it's okay, Jaune. Deep wounds always hold the biggest scars." She sighs softly, her warm breath a brand of fire to his icy neck.

"I'm just...I know it's stupid, but...I-I can't get that kiss outta my head!" He reels back out of her hug, but she keeps her arms locked around his neck, her eyes and nose scant millimetres from his own. "How...soft you felt...how warm you are...how..." He blinks and stares deeply into her emerald gaze, so tantalizingly close. He huffs shakily and takes her arms in his hands to slowly ease them out of their coil around his nape. Reluctantly Pyrrha nods to her shoes, lowering her arms to her chest, blowing hot air onto the numb digits. Turning on his heels, he eyes the shattered moon above, sniffing.

"W-We should get back, huh?" Jaune scoffs dryly to the sky, swiping his cheeks. Pyrrha steps over to him and wraps her arms around his wide frame, hugging herself tightly into his back. He feels her arms thread through the gaps between his arms and sides, her fingers lacing together over his heart. Nuzzling her cheek between his shoulder blades, the Invincible Girl speaks.

"I adore you." Pyrrha says above a whisper. Jaune looks down and deflates his bravado, his puffed-out chest shrinking. His bigger hands envelope hers, his thumbs working circles into the back of her hands.

"You're the best thing that ever happened to me..." Jaune croaks, gulping with a loud click. "A-And I'm so, so scared of losing that..."

"How will us being apart change how long we have in this world?" Pyrrha asks, hugging him a little tighter.

"It's hard to pretend to love someone when you don't..." Jaune says, and Pyrrha's breath hitches.
"...but by the gods, is it harder to pretend…not…to love someone when you do."

Pyrrha squeezes him and smiles softly, nuzzling her cheek into his back.

"We're an odd pair, aren't we?" Pyrrha speaks and Jaune scoffs in agreement. "Both in the same boat...too afraid to take that dive into the deep." She turns him around gently, swiping her fringe out of her eyes as she looks up into his adoringly. "Thing is, Jaune...it's not as scary to dive in, once you know how deep it is."

He sighs heavily, closing his eyes and resting his forehead against hers, the two being the only thing that exists in that moment. "How deep is it?"

"Deep enough I can't see the bottom." She smiles, sliding her forehead up along his until her lips press into his nose. "But I'll still jump in...as long as I'm with you." He smiles lightly at her words and opens his eyes as he lifts his own head, eyes locking in alignment with hers, their lips touching in the briefest, ghosting of kisses.

Pyrrha closes her eyes and leans forward, firmly pushing and moulding her pillowy lips over his. They both hum, enjoying their mingling tastes, before the languid kiss ends, Pyrrha stepping back and looking into his sparkling blue eyes. He stares at her radiating beauty, the glimmer of her gorgeous big eyes, her red hair fluttering in the breeze, her incredible smile speaking volumes of her affection.

It all became so apparent...how close he came to losing it all. It all became too apparent how he'd never be able to protect her, be able to fight to keep her safe. It all became so apparent how dangerously fragile their lives were. How fragile hers was. His gaze sours, watering suddenly as he chokes into his hand.

"I-I gotta go, I can't do this..." Jaune quivers, quickly trying to leave the village square.

"Jaune!" Pyrrha calls, thumping her fists into her brow, growling in frustration into her hands, raking them down her face. She spins quickly and heavily to face the fountain, angry and upset, eyeing the carp swimming in the lunar lit waters. With a determination in her heart, she turned and briskly walked, almost runs after him.

"Jaune, wait, please!"

"Pyrrrha, please stop." He begs, sniffling, wiping profusely at his eyes. She frowns and grabs his hand, tugging him around to face her, almost throwing him over. He spins on his heels, panting and covering his eyes with his sleeved arm, while the other stay firmly grasped by the girl of his dreams. She reaches up and grips his arm, pulling it away from his face, revealing watering bloodshot eyes, full of hurt emotion, practically bleeding down his cheeks in salty rivulets. "I c-c-can't do this."

"Shhh...Shhh..." Pyrrha hushes softly, stroking his hands, trying to quell his hiccupping gasps. "Don't cry, Jaune."

"I-I-I can't-help it." He closes his eyes, dropping his head down, chin atop collarbones. "That night ruined everything!"

Pyrrha sighs heavily and leans forward, pressing her forehead against his, a branding heat erupting at the very instant their skin met. Jaune visibly softens, still gasping and sniffling.

"I adore you too." Jaune cries. "...And it's killing me."
"Oh Jaune..." Pyrrha whispers, hands lifting to cradle his face, thumbs swiping tears away. "We really weren't ready for this conversation, were we?" She scoffs. Jaune shakes his head against her forehead, sniffing as her thumbs wiped away another bout of tears.

"N-No... I'm sorry." Jaune whimpers. "You don't deserve this stress on top of everything else."

"Hey, hush...Don't think that anything involving you is stressful to me. I enjoy spending time with you, training you...even this, despite the emotions." She quirks a dry smile.

"I'm sorry I ruined...y-you know, what happened back there." He licks his lips, Pyrrha smiling lightly as she enjoyed the soft press of his brow into hers. "Gods, you deserve so much more!"

"I've got more than enough, Jaune. And you didn't ruin anything. I'm sorry for rushing you. It's obvious you're really struggling with what happened." Pyrrha murmurs softly, stroking his cheek.

"But it's so stupid! I mean, you were the one in peril, you were the one who got injured, nearly killed! I should be helping you, not the other way around." Jaune snarls at himself. Pyrrha sighs, brushing the straw out of his eyes, back into his messy thatch atop his head.

"You can't help how you feel, Jaune. You can't help how your wounds show themselves." Pyrrha speaks gently. Jaune looks up into her eyes, so close to him they blurred into a mass of evergreen. "I can't help how I feel...a-about you." Pyrrha admits. Jaune worries his lip, a silence dangerously close to awkward settling in the very small space between them. Until Jaune sucks up his nerves.

He gingerly leans over and plants a gentle, nervous kiss onto her cheek. Pyrrha hums at the gesture, sliding her hands down his face to cup his cheeks. Her thumbs smooth over his face, before she leans in and softly brushes her lips over his. Jaune whimpers shakily, hands trembling at his sides, until Pyrrha pulls away, sighing hot puffs of air against his face.

"A step in the right direction, no matter how small, it's still a first step." Pyrrha smiles, Jaune nods weakly and turns to look at the Town Square. He shakily breathes out, before professionally changing the subject, much to Pyrrha's chagrin.

"Gummy worms and cookies, remember?" Jaune gulps. Pyrrha huffs and looks at her shoes, slapping her hands against her legs lightly.

"Yes." She swallows thickly. "We mustn't forget that."

Jaune

Jaune opens the front door with a gentle click, seeing the clock on the wall ticking away methodically past the midnight mark. Pyrrha steps in behind him, shutting the door softly as Jaune's cerulean eyes adjust to the darkness, and the figure slumped on the couch.

Taiyang is asleep, snoring softly with his head thrown back over the crown of the couch, Zwei curled up asleep in his lap. The little dog breathes steadily in the comfy position on Tai's lap, unaware of the two teens gently padding into the kitchen to set the bag down. The plastic rustled and Jaune winced as Zwei's head shoots up, ears darting in all directions.

Pyrrha gingerly pats the dog's head, calming him as he recognizes the lack of threat, though Zwei is hardly a guard dog. Pyrrha smiles as Zwei shakes his head, collar jingling, before hopping off of
Tai to stretch and walk over to his food bowl, in his usual bold and brash prance. Pyrrha looks at Tai as the single Father groggily groans and rubs his eyes, blinking at the dark room, gasping at the silhouette beside him, until he notices the red hair and green eyes.

"Oh...hey Pyrrha." The adult grumbles, sitting up to rub his stubbly face. Pyrrha loops some hair behind her ear and bends down before him.

"It's okay Mr Xiao Long. Go on up to bed, better than than sleeping on a couch."

"Nah, I'll sleep too deeply. Gotta be able to hear if Yang needs me." Tai grumbles with lament. "Thank you for caring though. It's good having you all here. I haven't heard my sunny little dragon laugh in so long."

"Mmm, Yang does seem to be much more chipper with her team here."

"Yeah. Just glad everyone stayed. I know a'lotta kids called it quits. Well, fair play to you kids for staying together and strong." Tai groans as he stands up, rolling his shoulders back to crack the tension in his back. "I'm gonna make a cuppa coffee. You kids want anything?"

"No thank you, we're just going off to bed." Pyrrha kneels as Zwei pads over in seek of affection, the Nikos girl all too happy to oblige. "Aww, he's affectionate."

"Ah! Tss! Zwei, come here!" Tai snaps his fingers. "Leave her alone."

"Oh no, it's okay! I love dogs. My parents used to have a Mistraalian Retriever."

"Oh wow. Big dog." Tai chuckles as he flicks the kettle on, yawning into his palm.

"Mmm, he was all bark and no bite though." Pyrrha giggles as a memory fills her mind. "He used to get scared of hot air balloons, if I recall."

"Yeah, Zwei's not fond of em either, are ya pal?" Tai bends down as the little dog rubbed against his leg. "What was he called?" Tai asks Pyrrha, still high on the afterglow of her memories.

"Hmm? Oh! Yes, his name was..." She snorted as Tai scoffs.

"W-What?"

"Well, don't judge but Mother and Father let me name him...and I hasten to add, I was five at the time."

"C'mon!" Tai chuckles, stroking Zwei as Jaune finishes unpacking the grocery bag in the kitchen, grinning over Tai. Pyrrha bites her lip and shrugged.

"Polkey."

"P-Polkey?" Tai snorts.

"He had dark spots of fur, like polka-dots!" Pyrrha shrugs, blushing. Jaune smiles adoringly at her, setting the bag of gummy worms and cookies on the counter, scrunching up the plastic bag to throw in the recycling.

"Well, I can't talk. My first dog, when I was a kid, I called grapes." Tai shrugs, scratching under Zwei's chin to get his back-leg thumping.

"Grapes?"
"Well yeah, my Dad used to say that "People like grapes." I wanted people to like my dog. Sound logic, really." Tai chuckles as Pyrrha smiles at the warm moment.

"Grapes is a lovely name."

"Kettle's boiled, Mister Xiao Long." Jaune says as he puts a spoonful of coffee into his mug and a splash of milk. "Sugar?"

"Oh, one please. Thanks...Jaune, right?"

"Yeah. Jaune Arc."

"Ah, sorry. I'm awful at names." Taiyang stands, rubbing the back of his blonde head.

"It's okay. So am I at times." Jaune shrugs, pouring the boiled water into the cup, hot steam rising to almost scold his nostrils on the inhale. With a stir and tap of the spoon, he hands the mug to the older man.

"Thanks, Jaune. Oh! While you're both here, there's something I wanted to ask...while you're here over the weekend that is."

"What is it?" Pyrrha crossed her arms, leaning against the wall. Tai bit his lip.

"Well, I've been trying to get Yang outta the house a bit. She's cheered up immensely tonight, I mean...listen." He nods to the ceiling, as murmurs chatter and laughter fills the house. "She needs her friends, but the stubborn goof won't listen. What I'm asking is..." He sighs and pulls up a stool at the breakfast island in the kitchen, nodding to the other two. Pyrrha and Jaune sat down.

"Pyrrha, you're a world-renowned fighter. Jaune, you're an Arc. You grew up in the Arcadian mountains, right?"

Jaune nods. "Yeah."

"Well...Yang's lost a'lotta strength being cooped up here."

"Yes, she did look...thinner." Pyrrha shrugs, itching her cheek. Tai nods.

"Ironwood dropped off a gift for her earlier this week. She refuses to touch it. That box on her desk upstairs? It's a new arm. State of the art. It'll give her a chance, to keep her dream alive!" Tai begs as only a Father could.

"Yeah Ruby said you told her about the arm." Jaune nods his head.

"She doesn't want to have to wear it, but sad part is...she has to. I was wondering if...while you're here, you wouldn't mind helping me train her." He asks Pyrrha, her eyes widening.

"Me?"

"Yeah, you. And Jaune, you've got a good noggin on your shoulders." He taps his head for further incentive. "Help me convince her that wearing it will get her back out there. With all her friends here, she'll listen, I know it!"

"I..." Pyrrha looks at Jaune and he shrugged. "We...would be honoured to help our friend."

Tai breathes out heavily and smiles softly to them.
"Thanks. I... I owe you kids." He drums his fingers into the porcelain of his mug. "I want her to be able to move on from all...this."

"Yeah. Don't we all." Pyrrha smiles sadly.

A few moments later…

Jaune opens the door to Yang's room, peering in as the group are all sat in a circle, blankets over their legs, swapping stories. Yang wears a beaming smile as her lilac eyes flit from friend to friend, as Nora takes to a dramatic and exaggerated retelling of how she took down a Nevermore during the Battle of Beacon.

"There were twelve of them!" Nora exclaims.

"It was one." Ren corrects, sipping his cocoa.

"And then one of them looked dead at me...it recognized me!" Nora grins.

"I'm...fairly certain you don't know a Nevermore." Ren smirks.

"So, it lunged for me, and I beat it to the punch!" She smacks her fist into her palm with a loud thump. "Bang! I hit its head so hard it cracked like an egg! Then the body fell and killed fourteen Ursae!"

"I don't think I even need to correct that, it's so far-fetched-"

"It happened Ren! Then, I just stared at the other eleven and they burst into flames." Nora cackles. Ren chuckles into his cup.

"Didn't feel like keeping up the facade?" Ren grins as she sticks her tongue out at him. Jaune shuts the door as Pyrrha files in, throwing the bag of Gummy worms at Nora, and the cookies at Ruby.

"Special delivery." He grins. The sugary duo cackled at their new desserts, until Ren takes Nora's from her hands, and Weiss takes the cookies from Ruby.

"Aww!" They both pout. "No fair!"

"You hush. You, Jaune Arc, should know better!" Weiss scolds. "Giving them sugar at this hour is not a good idea." The Heiress crosses her arms. "I need my beauty sleep, you know."

"Yeah ya do." Yang smirks as Weiss frowns at her. Jaune sits on his sleeping bag by Yang's desk, looking up at the box on it. He sighs and looks at Pyrrha, who gives him a warm smile of encouragement, her mind however swimming with how their talk practically changed nothing. Frustration was not the word...

"Hey, Yang?" Jaune asks.

"What's up, Vomit boy?" Yang grins, and Jaune has never been so glad to hear that name.

"That box. It's a gift from Ironwood, right?"

"Uh huh." Yang's smile drops.

"What is it?" He asks.
Yang narrows her eyes as she stares at her friend, she is not a fool...she stares straight at him and sighs. “You know.” Yang states as she glares at him.

“I do.” He admits, unable to lie to save his life.

“Dad told you, didn’t he?” Yang asks him.

“Yang he’s afraid for you...worried about you not getting back to normal.” Jaune says and Weiss nods her head with a gentle smile on her face.

“We all are.” Weiss assures as she presses her hand on Yang’s knee.

“I know...but...I’m...scared...” Yang admits with a soft-spoken voice.

Blake looks at Yang and she speaks with such a sweet yet supportive voice. “You once told me we cannot do things on our own...that’s why we’re here. Try it on...we’ll be here for you.” Blake assures, and Ruby holds her sister’s hand.

“Whether you like it or not...you’re stuck with us, blondie.” Jaune chuckles, getting a smile in return from Yang.

“Okay...” Yang sighs, nodding her head to them.
Facing Our Fears

Killian

His arms rest upon the table in his office down on the ground, cold eyes staring at the holographic men sat in their seats, all speaking at once, with none of it entering his mind. A face can carry so many stories in a single glance, the slight cut on his bottom lip shows that someone had gotten into a fight with him a few weeks ago. Most likely from an inmate trying to fight back before being thrown into the shadows to be forgotten forever. The scars on his knuckles also show that he once was a boxer, and most likely can still fight like one…and has been beaten for most of his life.

The scar across the left side of his jawline, given to him from the stinger of a Deathstalker that lunged its pincer straight at his face. Slicing right across the skin and bone, leaving the scar behind.

Yet here he is, still fighting hard to accomplish what it is that he came here for. As a forty-six-year-old man, it is a very long time for a man to see some things, something very clear in his almost emotionless eyes. Not even a tear forming inside as they talk of the casualties recorded from the Battle of Beacon.

The Councillors across the kingdom turn their heads to the leader of the Black Gallows and the Mistralian Councillor raises his brow in curiosity. “Commander Killian? Are you even listening?” The Mistralian Councillor questions with an annoyed voice, scratching his grey beard. Killian stares at him, and stuns them all with his answer.

“I will listen when your points actually matter.” Killian replies, his voice well spoken and certain, never mumbling and every word carefully chosen for his statement. The Councillors from the four Kingdoms gasp, eyes widening, and the Atlesian Councillor rises from his chair suddenly with clenched fists, not threatening the Commander at all. The posh elderly man sounds extremely disgusted by the voice of Killian.

“You dare speak against us in such a way? We are discussing the future of our society!” The Atlesian Councillor argues, but Killian rolls his eyes, rising up with his hands pressed against the surface of the table, glaring right into their eyes with anger.

“By talking of how much you should charge the families for the funerals of their children? For their husbands and wives? For father and mothers?” Killian questions as he tenses his muscles, and the Atlesian Councillor shakes his head.

“Disgraceful, we are thinking logically here! About the economy! An attack like this is bound to have affects!” The Atlesian Councillor argues, pointing at Killian, again he does not flinch, if anything his eye twitches with hatred towards the four Councillors all arguing over who should get the highest split of the profits.

“No…you’re filling your pockets and shovelling all that delicious food into your mouths.” Killian corrects, glancing at the fruit stand in shot of the hologram, one that the Atlesian Councillor pushes aside. “Don’t try and convince me that you give a damn about our Kingdoms, Councillors…you all only care about your own wealth.” Killian coldly reminds, pushing his palms against the table as he rises back up. The Valerian Councilwoman looks down at her table and she exhales, rubbing her bulging belly where she is pregnant. The youngest of the councillors, around thirty-four years
old, the Mistraalian fifty, the Atlesian sixty-six and the Vacuo forty-five.

The Valerian Councilwoman looks at Killian and she sighs, shaking her head. “Look, Commander…we need to talk about this…your presence in Beacon Academy is making the situation more concerning. The Grimm…appropriately named as the Black Smog by the media…have been seen inside of the city, some venturing closer to the populated regions. And it is frightening people, just look at the footage that has been collected.” She explains, tapping a button on her screen, and it brings up a collection of holographic screens in front of his face.

One of them shows someone filming a couple of Beowulves walking through a small residential area, right across their lawn. Snarling softly as they stare straight through the window at their faces, licking their lips with their glowing red tongues. The footage can even pick up the terrified stammering of the people inside their homes, and the scared screams of their children hiding from the window. But the Grimm never attack, as if they do not think it is worth it yet. They just keep walking around.

Next to that recording is someone gasping as they record a few titanic Goliaths marching across highway that connects to one of the mountains, huge bone armour and tusks curving out. The beasts break some of the concrete barriers with their tusks as they march off towards the trees again, disappearing as quickly as they appeared. “By the gods, did you see that?” One of the kids recording it screamed in fear, unaware that the monsters at their door are waiting for the perfect opportunity.

Another piece of footage shows a lone Griffin landing on top of a restaurant, roaring monstrosely as it claws away at the roof, snarling as it walks across the tiles. The civilians inside scream with terror as they hear the beast walking around, trying to get inside. Until a cacophony of gunfire erupts from outside, getting the recorder’s attention as he turns the scroll to see Coco Adel outside. She aims her Chaingun at the creature, pulling the trigger down as she shreds away some black feathers and muscle. The Griffin roars as it jumps towards her, only for Yatsuhashi to leap up and swing his sword across ways, carving the creature clean in half.

Its cadaver burning and fading away into thick black smoke, to leave the world of the living. The recordings swipe away, and his eyes return back to the councillors. “This is only a few pieces of media, all across the Extranet however, we have seen lots of people talking about the Grimm getting closer to the city again. And the school itself, and all of this has started ever since you and your men arrived here.” She explains, before the Vacuo Councillor and shrugs his shoulders.

“To what end does this even matter? Just evacuate your people out of there and find somewhere else to go.” He explains.

“Oh, are you volunteering to harbour our refugees then?” She asks him, the infighting between the councillors as clear as ever.

“Of course not, but there are plenty of settlements across Vale that your people could go to. We have done it before, we can do it again.” He states, and the Valerian councillor bites her lip to not say something that she shouldn’t. She exhales calmly before glaring right at him.

“We will not abandon our home.” She reminds, and the foolish and selfish Vacuo Councillor just rolls his eyes as he also yawns afterwards. He clearly does not seem to give a damn about the situation.

“We have problems of our own right now! That footage from the Vytal Tournament has sparked Grimm attacks across Anima, sparked a full-scale attack on our city’s walls. Many people were killed where our Huntsmen could not get to in time…or died trying to save them.” The Mistraalian
Councillor explains, for the after-effects of the Vytal Festival are still healing even now. The Grimm would have sensed every single negative emotion across the world at once, and like sharks to blood they came running.

“We understand that, and I am truly sorry, but we need supplies to repair the damage, better defences against the Grimm.” The Valerian Councilwoman explains with a nervous voice, rubbing her stomach softly.

“Oh enough, woman! I can see through the crap that spews from your mouth!” The Atlesian Councillor yells with furor. “You Valerians have been a thorn in our side for years, so arrogant to think you could get by without our defences. And now that you have had a taste of what real chaos is like, you come running back to us, after you gave nothing in return.” The Atlesian Councillor barks.

“I…” The Valerian Councilwoman stammers.

“And don’t think you can play the sweet Councilwoman, honey. I know that you don’t give a damn about your people, just you and your baby.” The Atlesian Councillor states, whereas Killian sits down again and sighs, hearing all the Councillors arguing again.

This is how most “conversations” with the Council go really.

“As you can see, Commander…we all have problems. So, tell me, how does your plan possibly help prevent more attacks like the situation at Vale right now?” The Mistralian Councillor states as he massages his brow with his thumb and finger. Killian looks at them all as silence finally befalls the group of people deciding the fate of the world, he clasps his hands together and rests his elbows against the table as he leans forward, staring into the lens sending the holographic feed to them.

“The Huntsmen must be controlled…it is our imperative place to do so.” Killian states, and the Atlesian Councillor rolls his eyes with a heavy sigh.

“You have been gunning for this idea for years! What help will controlling them bring?” He questions, and Killian scoffs.

“Let me tell you a story, Councillors…”

Thirty-Four Years Ago…

He opened his onyx eyes to the sound of his alarm clock blaring in his ear, practically yelling at him to wake up. He sat up, looking around as he wore his grey and black pyjamas, his style has never really been overly colourful. He rubbed his eyes and yawned, throwing his sheets off his small body as he gets off, pushing his little feet into his fluffy bear slippers. He waddled along towards his door and went to use the bathroom.

Even as a child he seemed to act a bit like a machine, getting up and doing what he has always done without being lethargic at all. He brushed his teeth, had a shower and got dressed into his school uniform, running down the stairs. Whilst he remembers his past his voice can be heard, practically narrating his story.

“I was twelve when the imperative choice came to my mind…just going to school like any other kid.”
His school uniform comprised of a black blazer and a red shirt with a golden tie, black trousers and black shoes, slip-on ones, not with laces. The same sort of shoes he actually wears today, his parents never taught him how to tie his shoe laces. So ever since he was a child he has never worn laced shoes, always slip-ons. He walked down the stairs of his house towards the dining room where his breakfast waits for him, fresh cereal with milk poured over them and a small glass of orange juice. No pulp, could never stand pulp.

As he sat down, his mother approached, a beautiful woman with shoulder length black hair and onyx eyes, just like his own. With a heart shaped jaw and an hourglass shape, it would be difficult to presume that this boy and his loving family were the same person.

“Good morning, Nathan!” His mother beamed with a happy smile, carrying a tray of her breakfast, containing a slice of toast and some eggs with a few slices of bacon.

And revealing his forename…

Nathaniel Killian…

“Morning, mom.” Nathaniel replied with a happy smile as she sat down in front of the television.

“We were not a rich family, but we could get by. Had a happy life, I went to school and worked hard every single day to make them proud…that was all I ever wanted.”

Walking down the stairs is also his father, a man whom has brown hair and brown eyes, unlike his wife…meaning that Killian takes after his mother rather than his father. Has her hair and her eyes, however he has the same build as his father used to have. Compact but able to put on muscle very easily. His father smiled to his son as he walked over to his wife. “Ready for school?” He asked him, before kissing his wife lovingly as he walked to the coffee machine.

With some cereal in his mouth he answered. “Mhm.” Cheeks full of milk and cereal, a smile on his face.

“Want some coffee, Hun?” Killian’s father asked her as he picked up his mug and reached to her pink one with hearts on it.

“Oh, yes please, darling.” She replied with a smile, and he smiled back.

As Killian finished his breakfast he heard the sound of the yellow school bus pulling up outside their house since they lived quite close to the Bus Stop. He looked up to see the name of the Bus and the location it is based at.

*Patch Bus Service.*

He was born and lived at Patch, just like Ruby and Yang. A smile spread across his young face, for he even enjoyed school because he had friends there to hang out with. He got up after finishing his cereal and drink, taking it to the sink before picking up his bag to go to school. “Uh-Uh, what’re you missing?” His mother asked her, and it came to him immediately.

“Oh, sorry, mom!” He squeaked, running back to her and kissing her cheek, hugging her, then his dad walked over to him. He shows him his fist and the young boy jumped up to fist-pump him.

“Go on then, have fun at school.” She asks him with a smile.

“I will, love you! See you later!” He called as he ran to the door, opening it and going to the bus.
“School was never that far away, about fifteen minutes – tops – to get there, better than most kids that lived on patch. It’s such an awkwardly shaped island with only two schools. One for students and the other for Training Hunters at the Combat School…Signal.”

“You never went to Signal?”

“No…my parents never wanted that life for me…they just wanted me safe.”

A few hours had passed when he was at school,

Studying away with his friends in his class, the television was on in the corner, playing the news that would come up. Nothing overly intriguing would come up, the odd missing kid case would come up, or a Grimm attacked someone in the woods, or maybe an accident. But most of the time it was stupid celebrity news or other things.

As Nathan studied away, though…that changed.

He turned his head when he heard the voice of the reporter speaking away. “Breaking News, it appears a student from Beacon Academy has gone rogue and started attacking anyone in his path. He left them cut to bits, murdered anything in his path. We believe he has made it to the Island of Patch by stealing a small Airship to get there. Authorities are pursuing the student as we speak, if you see the man then please call your nearest police station or huntsman to handle it. Thank you.” The reporter spoke.

Killian looked at the student next to him scribbling away who looked terrified of that news, many kids who went to this school never went to Signal because they were scared of going there. But nobody would ever expect a Huntsman to go rogue like that and start killing everything in his path. “That’s…are we safe here?” The student whimpered fearfully as he stared at the screen.

“Don’t worry about it, man. The police will catch him before long.” Killian assured as he shrugged the news off.

“It was the first time I ever saw it, a Huntsman…someone supposed to protect us from monsters…turning against us and killing people…slaughtering them like animals.”

“Who was it?”

“…we never caught him…he disappeared off the face of Remnant.”

“From the Black Gallows?”

“Even from us.”

Hours later, when school came to a close, the bus slowed at the bus stop and Killian left the vehicle to approach the house.

Only to find the door broken down…

And police cars everywhere and an officer blocking the door.

His eyes widened, and tears filled them as his heart broke, the weight of emotion becoming so heavy upon his shoulders he fell to his knees. He did not even need to see the bodies, or even blood…it was just seeing the police officers and remembering the news. The Huntsman killed them in his home.
In the present day…

The boy born into happiness died that day and became the cold and cynical man that everyone knows as Commander Killian. With emotionless eyes and what seems to be a constant scowl on his face, he stares at the Councillors with his fists on the table. “So yeah…the Huntsmen and Huntresses of the Academies must be controlled for no further loss of innocent life. That much power should never be bestowed upon children, especially when it’s headmaster refuses to check their history…for madness.” He explains with anger in his eyes.

The Councillors have finally fallen silent, then Killian turns to the Valerian Councilwoman. “If controlling the Huntsmen would keep your daughter safe, Councilwoman…would you do it?” He asks her, knowing what her answer will be.

She blows out a breath with sadness. “Yes.” She guiltily answers, knowing that it sounds selfish…but she is a mother.

“We never did find out what happened to him…but the people of patch gave him a name.” Killian states, and the Mistraalian Councillor raises a brow out of curiosity.

“What was it?” He asks him.

He stares at them all.

“Jack the Ripper.”

Killian stands up and stares to the Councillors. “Then I believe this meeting is adjourned, good day, Councillors.” He tells them, pressing the red button that hangs the call up. He turns and walks away from the screen to sit down behind his desk, exhaling as he presses his hands against his head.

Unaware of the fact that he is being watched by Eryka and Winter from a distance…Eryka aiming down a scope that Winter gave her.

“Damn…guess you were right Wints…we’re gonna need to think about this. He has a lot of security.” Eryka admits.

“Finally…” Winter huffs.

Pyrrha

Pyrrha wakes up first as always, blinking as the world blearily comes into focus. Or…the world being Yang’s room, and a face full of golden hair. She smiles and hums, shuffling closer, burying her face in the soft golden tresses as sunlight illuminates them like a heap of treasure.

"Mmm, morning Jaune." She beams, taking a deep inhale of the messy locks.

"Morning, P-money.” Yang mumbles, lifting her head, Pyrrha feeling the trove of woven hair lift away from her face. Lilac and emerald eyes meet, though those green eyes suddenly begin to shrink with shock. "Sorry to disappoint ‘cha!”
"Ah!" Pyrrha reels away, tumbling out of her sleeping bag. Yang snorts and laughs, waking Blake and Jaune.

"Mmm...so soft." The Arc boy blinks and blearily opens his eyes, humming as he strokes the cat ears, enjoying the purring...wait, cat ears?

Blake's golden eyes snap wide as did Jaune's, both having curled up together in the night. "AH!" They both shout, rolling away from each other.

"Oh for...Excuse me, but I am trying to sleep!" Weiss sits up, pulling her sleep mask off her eyes, looking down at the mass of black and red currently coiled around her stomach. "Wah? Ruby!"

"Weiss!" Ruby exclaims, sitting up sharply, silver eyes wide. Weiss frowns, deepening the expression when Ruby grabs her elasticated mask off her brow and snaps it over her cyan blue eyes. "You didn't see anything!" Ruby waves her fingers in front of the now fuming - and blind - Schnee.

Yang yawns and sits up, stretching her arm over her head, blinking away the sleep. Her mass of blonde hair is messier than normal, fresh with severe bed-head. She looks down at the undisturbed Valkyrie, sucking her thumb and still coiled up in her sleeping bag.

"Anyone gonna wake the Nora Burrito over here?" Yang smirks, thumbing to the girl. Ren sits upright, eyes wide, rigid as a board.

"Don't." is all he says, deathly still. "Hell hath no fury like a Nora woken."

"I want breakfast! Which meeeeeeannns..." Ruby saddles up to Ren, begging him with a grin.

"Pancakes." He whispers, admixed with a sigh.

"Pancakes?!" Nora sits bolt upright, wide awake. "Well why didn't ya say so!"

"Aaaand she's awake." Jaune chuckles, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He settles his back against Yang's bed, looking over as Pyrrha stretches her arms over her head, pushing her chest out and yawning till her eyes shut. He gulps. How? How could she look so beautiful literally just stretching?!

Her emerald eyes open with a few slow blinks, and her gaze soon finds Jaune's. Their cheeks aflame, they look down at their laps, Pyrrha busying herself with rolling up her sleeping bag.

"Breakfast sounds great actually." Yang stands up. "I've got a whole new appetite all of a sudden!" The blonde picks up the box containing her arm and puts it away on her desk, much to Jaune's chagrin. Blake stands and yawns, blinking, her ears flicking about a few times. Her usually well controlled black mane is all over the place, in gravity defying positions.

"I'm hungry." is all the Faunus says. She was never a great morning person. Jaune rises to his feet and offers a hand to Pyrrha, to which she accepts with a grateful smile.

"Ren! Pancakes, pleeeeeeaaaase!" Nora bounces eagerly. Ren huffs and nods, rolling up his sleeping bag before being literally shoved out of the room by a torrent of hungry Valkyrie and Rose. Weiss yawns adorably, a little squeak, as she takes off her sleep mask. Stretching her arms out either side of her, she stands up out of her sleeping bag, popping her back as she cricks left and right.

"So, what's the plan for us today?" Weiss asks as Jaune rummages around in his duffel bag, pulling out a pair of toothbrushes. He hands Pyrrha hers, turning to face Weiss.
"Dunno yet. Any ideas?" Jaune shrugs. The heiress taps her chin, before having the large fist of Yang Xiao Long punch into her pale skinned shoulder. Weiss hisses and rubs the affected spot.

"I say we chill, play some games, order pizza. Y'know, teen stuff!" Yang beams.

"Oh, not for you, Yang. We've got plans for you." Jaune says, turning to leave for the bathroom, Pyrrha stands staring at the head of her toothbrush.

"Well that was ominous." Weiss raises an eyebrow, Yang frowning at Pyrrha. That frown quickly shifts to a grin as the one-armed brawler steps up to her Invincible friend.

"Soooo, P-money, how'd last night go?"

"Huh?" Pyrrha snaps up from her daze. "I'm sorry, I wasn't listening."

"I asked how last night went. I wanna say well, but you and Jaune haven't even said a word to each other yet. Not even a good morning kiss. I mean, I would've thought you'd have your mouths glued together by now."

"Oh no." Weiss face palms. Pyrrha quirks a sad smile, looking at the toothbrush.

"Not as much as you'd think." She sighs. Yang furrows her brow.

"But last night...didn't you and lord denseness figure out...whatever the issue is?" Yang shrugs.

"It's not as easy as that, Yang..." Pyrrha smiles lightly. "...but, we did kiss..." biting her lip to hide the grin, her bright green eyes flit up to Yang's. "Aaaaand, we've both made it perfectly clear how we feel."

"Well there ya go!" Yang grins. "That's awesome! So, are you two like, official or what?"

"Oh no, we're not together." Pyrrha shakes her head. Yang frowns.

"You literally just said you kissed."

"Yes, but we're still figuring ourselves out and moving on from that night." Pyrrha shrugs, pinching the bristles of her brush. Yang huffs, squeezing the bridge of her nose with finger and thumb.

"Just...do it soon, yeah? The sexual tension between you two is killin’ me." Yang walks over to her chest of drawers, fishing out her orange vest and charcoal grey cargo trousers.

**Blake**

Ren - still clad in pyjamas, much like the rest of the group - stands in the kitchen, over the stove as he flips the fourteenth pancake, letting the dough brown either side. Nora is literally salivating, staring at the humongous stack on the plate. Zwei mirrors her expression, two ears poking up at the lip of the table.

"Wow, gotta say Ren, you go all out." Taiyang tilts his mug of coffee in appreciation. Ren gives a curt nod. "Doesn't talk much, does he?"

"Ah Ren's a man of few words, but he speaks volumes in Pancakes!" Nora drools like an animal.
Soon the others come hopping merrily down the staircase.

"Good morning Dad!" Ruby pecks Tai's cheek, sitting down next to salivating Nora. "Eww, why's the table wet?"

"Good morning mister Xiao Long. I thank you for your hospitality." Weiss smiles and curtsies. Tai raises an eyebrow, leaning back in his chair to cross both boots on the table, one arm propped behind his head.

"Polite or what?" Tai thumbs to the Heiress.

"Weiss, my Dad's the last person to appreciate that sorta talk." Ruby deadpans. Weiss huffs, pinching her brow. The Schnee took a deep inhale.

"Mornin', Tai!" She tried again.

"Mornin, Weiss!" He tilts his mug to her. The Heiress sits down beside Ruby, pulling her stool in at the breakfast island. Blake combs her mane back into a slightly more respectable mess.

"Morning everyone." Blake murmurs, sitting opposite Ruby and opening her book. As she looks down at her legs, the head of Zwei pops up between her and the table. "Ah!"

"C'mere Zwei!" Ruby snaps her fingers under the table, quickly picking up the little dog. "Aww, who's a little cutie?! Mwah!"

"Ruby, don't kiss the dog, we are about to eat!" Weiss sighs. Ruby sticks her tongue out at the Schnee, Zwei mirroring her. The table sat in comfortable silence for a moment, Weiss taking out her scroll to look through her emails, Ruby playing with Zwei and Blake happily reading. Blake looks up over her book at the tattoo on Tai's arm. She clears her throat.

"Umm...what inspired your tattoo, Mister Xiao Long?" Blake asks curiously. Tai looks at his arm and shrugs, giving her a smile.

"Call me Tai, kiddo; Aaaand, that's my emblem." He bobs his shoulders, taking his feet off the table and leaning his chair back forward. "Any of you kids got tattoos?"

"No." Weiss looks shocked at the accusation.

"Nope." Blake shrugs.

"Uh, uh." Nora shakes her head.

"Good. Should hope not at your age." Tai smirks into his cup. The stairs creak as Pyrrha and Jaune descend, murmuring between one another, before the Nikos hushes him, smiling brightly to the table.

"Gooooood morning, all!" Pyrrha beams. She sits down beside Weiss, arms crossing on the table, quick to retract them. "Eww. Why is the table wet?"

Jaune stands over by Ren, pouring two cups of orange juice. Ren smiles and turns back to the pancakes he was cooking, as Jaune takes both glasses over to the table, setting one down before Pyrrha.

"Here ya go."

"Oh, thank you!" She beams brightly.
"What gives, Jaune?" Ruby frowns. "We not good enough for juice, that it?"

"I uhh..." He huffs and walked back over to the fridge. Ruby grins and Weiss smirks, both fist bumping each other. Pyrrha takes a swig of juice, the cool and tangy liquid hitting the back of her throat.

"So... the plan today everyone..." Pyrrha starts, looking at Tai.

His eyes widen, and he nods.

"Yeah, I uhh, I asked Pyrrha to help me beat Yang into shape." He shrugs.

"Oh. B-But, she won't wear her arm, Dad." Ruby mumbles. "Where is she, anyway?"

"Probably staying in her room." Tai mumbles, sighing heavily as he eyes Pyrrha. "I'm sorry Pyrrha, it was a waste of time asking for your help."

"No, actually. She's having a shower." Weiss smiles proudly. Tai's eyes widened.

"Y-You guys...got through to her?"

"Sometimes, Tai..." Blake lowers her book and smiles softly to him. "Us teens don't listen to our parents. Sometimes we need someone our own age to tell us how it is."

"Makes sense." Tai smiles. "I owe all of you so much."

"We're just helping our friend. You owe us nothing." Pyrrha smiles over her glass.

"Yeah! Zilch!" Nora exclaims. Weiss sighs, dropping her cheek into her propped palm.

"I just hope she gets to grips with her arm. She's got the best replacement available, and I know, it's not the real thing, but...it's an arm, isn't it?" Weiss shrugs. "I don't know. Our team's incomplete without her...and, more importantly, we miss her."

"Mmm. It's not the same without her." Blake sighs heavily, a downtrodden look in her eyes. Jaune sets a glass of juice in front of her, follows by Nora, Ruby and Weiss.

"Thanks, Jaune!" Nora exclaims. Weiss sighs, dropping her cheek into her propped palm.

"I just hope she gets to grips with her arm. She's got the best replacement available, and I know, it's not the real thing, but...it's an arm, isn't it?" Weiss shrugs. "I don't know. Our team's incomplete without her...and, more importantly, we miss her."

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"Thanks, Jaune!" Ruby beams, head thrown all the way back to see him. Jaune grins and grabs her in a gentle headlock, playfully knuckling her head. "Ah! Dad, make him stop!"

Jaune lets go, chuckling at her stuck-out tongue as he sits beside Pyrrha. Tai thoughtfully looks at the table of friends gather to help their comrade, and he beams at them.

Then the stairs creak…

Humming a happy tune, Hair tied back into a bushy ponytail of gold, Yang happily trots down the stairs, all of their eyes widening with glee at the cybernetic arm firmly in place at her right elbow.

"Morning guys!" She cheerily smiles. They all gape at the new Yang, or...the old Yang. Happy, lilac eyes filled with that constant mirth and cheeriness.

"Yang! Y-You're...I..." Tai stands in front of his daughter, stammering. Yang shrugs, looking at her robotic appendage with a frown.

"I still hate it, but..." She smiles at her dad. "I can make it mine."
Tai hugs her, kissing her hair as he joyfully grins into his Daughter's crown.

"I love you, Sunny dragon."

"Love you too, Dad." She hugs him back. "But uhh...my friends are all here."

"Right!" Tai quickly releases his beautiful daughter, clearing his throat. Ren sets the final stack of pancakes down and sits next to Nora, huffing.

"Dig in guys." Ren says, as Nora quickly grabs a handful of pancakes, slapping them on her plate. "Quickly too." He frowns at his best friend. Pyrrha takes a pancake onto her plate and pours a dollop of syrup onto it. In her own little world, she doesn't notice Jaune's apologetic smile, as he gives her knee a gentle squeeze of thanks for last night and her understanding.

Instead she gasps, and her leg shoots up into the underside of the table with a loud bang, the plates jumping with a clatter.

"Jeez! You alright?" Yang asks as she looks down at the table, reaching across the table with her cybernetic hand. She frowns as she tries to move the fingers, finding them very much unresponsive. "W-Wait, is it...do I... huh?"

"Ah, yes...I-I'm fine." Pyrrha laughs meekly, rubbing her knee under the table. Jaune winces as she frowns at him.

"Sorry, I didn't expect you to jump like that!" He whispers, taking his own pancake onto his plate. Pyrrha grumbles and rubs the affected area, thanking the gods for Aura. Yang continues to get angrier with her lack of control over her metal fingers, shaking the arm like a plaything.

"So, I was thinking Weiss, we could...take Zwei for a walk later. Sound fun?!" Ruby asks brightly, eyes flitting to Yang occasionally and her worrying erratic movements.

"It does actually. Yes. We'll do that." Weiss smiles, tucking her scroll into her pyjama pocket. A loud clatter alerts the table to Yang banging her arm on the counter.

"C-Come on!" Yang yells as her hand stays in a fist. "Work, dammit!"

"Yang, you-"

BANG!

CRASH!

"Grr! This thing sucks! This is pointless and stupid! I should never have taken it out that box, I hate it!" She fumbles with the connector at her elbow, trying to rapidly take it off. Tears well in her eyes as she struggles to undo it. "It's not my arm, and I want my arm back!"

The group all pause their chewing to look at her with soft empathy. Her frantic attempts to get it off grows even more needy, tears streaming down her cheeks. But they cannot see or feel what she does, for every single bang made sends images of Adam's cruel face and smirk flashing into her mind. The agony she felt in those few seconds before she passed out repeating in phantom pains, making her cry out with desperation.

Frustration turns to terror and anguish.

Ruby winces and gingerly reaches for her sister over the table, jerking her arm back at Yang's
desperate thrashing and hyperventilating. "W-Why won't it work? Why me?! I-It's not me, and I hate it, I hate it! I... I don't want it!" Yang sniffs, still panicking as she tries to take the stubborn limb off to no avail. "Dad, I-I can't get it off! I want it off!" She grips the arm out to him, sobbing. "I-I don't want it!"

"Hey, hey, Yang, calm down, honey." He gently cradles her cheeks. "Take a deep breath."

Yang tries to quell her sniffling and hyperventilating, but his face keeps flashing in her mind, that smirk will forever haunt her. “Get out of my head! Go away!” She screams in agony. As she stares at her loving father, his face transforms before her very eyes. His eyes fading away as the White Fang mask forms over it, and his blonde hair spiking with blood red pigment...black horns protruding from his head.

Adam smirks sinisterly as he stares right into her eyes. “She will bring death to all who care for her…” Adam’s snarling voice whispers in her head, sounding as demonic as ever.

Lilac eyes fill with watery upset look at her also upset Dad, begging him to save her from Adam Taurus and what he did to her. She shakes her metal arm, rattling it at him with a begging in her eyes that just kills him. He sighs heavily and eventually undoes the clasp on her arm, slipping the appendage off. Yang immediately gets up and runs upstairs, heavy footfalls rapidly climbing the house.

Silence.

The room is eerily quiet as the teens all sit in reticence. Tai stares at the metal limb in his hand, before his hand pales with tightness, his teeth gritted together, and he launches the arm at the trashcan. He too storms off, shoving the front door open and walking outside, running his fingers through his hair. He wants Adam to die in the most agonizing way possible for what he did to his baby girl, he could see her fear in her eyes.

They watch him pace back and forth through the glass pane, until he drops to his knees, hands held over his eyes.

"Well..." Jaune coughs into his fist. "That sucked." He drops his fork onto his plate heavily, running his hands over his face with a loud groan. Ruby gets up, pushing her chair out and making for the staircase.

"Indeed." Pyrrha murmurs, dropping her cheek to squish into her propped palm. Even Nora pokes her fork at her pancake, sighing heavily. Weiss gets up, padding over to the trashcan, reaching in with a grimace and pulling out the silver arm, gagging as she swiped a banana skin off of it.

"Unbelievable." Weiss scoffs. The collective group gasp at her.

"Weiss!" Pyrrha holds a hand over her heart. Ruby growls at the Heiress, who shrugs.

"There are injured people in Vale who would kill for this! No. No. I'm going to talk to her." "If you dare!" Ruby steps in front of the Schnee, growling, silver eyes flaring. "...if you dare upset her...s-say anything to make her cry...I... I-I'll..."

"Ruby..." Weiss sighs softly, placing a hand on the Rose's shoulder. "Come with me." She nods to the staircase. Ruby blinks, but soon follows the Schnee as she climbs the staircase. Ren sighs heavily, standing up and taking the uneaten pancakes onto a single plate.

"We can eat the rest later, I suppose." He huffs, placing them on the kitchen counter. Blake bites
her lip and closes her eyes tight, before opening them with newfound determination. The brave Belladonna rises to her feet, pacing around the door frame, grasping the banister on her way up the stairs. JNPR sits on their own, listening to the murmurs upstairs.

"So! H-How are you two?" Nora gulps, the wincing smile on her face portraying she already knows the answer. "T-Together-togeth-"

"I'm going to go get changed." Pyrrha sighs, getting up out of her seat. Jaune's eyes widen.

"Huh?"

"Well, I brought my training gear with me, so I'm going to train. Go for a run. Clear my head a little bit." She huffs, gripping the architrave lightly. Nora stands up, beaming.

"Sweet! Oooh! We can make a day out of it! I-"

"Alone...would be preferable." Pyrrha grumbles, before solemnly leaving the kitchen. Nora, downtrodden at the response, sniffs and storms out of the kitchen into the living room.

"Well, this has been one great big disaster, huh?" Jaune scoffs, shaking his head to the ceiling. Ren nods, looking at the doorway to the living room. He looks back at Jaune, mouth opening to ask-

"Go after her." Jaune deadpans, Ren nodding curtly and disappearing into the living room, leaving Jaune on his own in the kitchen. He looks down at Zwei, the dog panting and wagging his tail. "Ah, at least you'll stay with me bud-"

The dog instantly turns and trots out of the kitchen.

"-dy... Nope. Sweet. Okay. I'll err...I'll just be here if anyone needs me." Jaune sarcastically spits at himself, sitting there awkwardly on his own. "Now I'm talking to myself...that's the first sign of crazy."

Ruby

Weiss wraps her knuckles on the door, the response coming in the form of the lock twisting with a mechanical click. Ruby sighs and rakes her fingers through her red tipped locks. Weiss, firming her upper lip, knocks on the door again. "Leave me alone!" Yang shouts, the rejected Schnee huffing and pinching the bridge of her nose. Blake steps closer to the door, lightly knocking her knuckles against the wood.

"Didn't you want pizza aaaaaand...to hang out today?" The Faunus' soft tones try to be chipper, a plastic smile on her face, quick to melt into a frown. "Yang...please let us in."

"Guys...please." Yang sniffs. "I'm all broken...a-and useless...you need...you need to get a new team mate. It's over for me."

RWB gasp among themselves. Weiss softens, welkin blue eyes fill with hurt. Ruby however, leaps at the door, hammering away without rhythm with her knuckles in quick fire bursts.

"Yaaaaaang! Yang let us in!" Ruby yells as she assaults the door, Blake lowering her chin to her collarbones, hugging her upper arms. "Please..." Ruby begs, the pounding on the door melting into
weakening pats. "Pleeeaaase." Ruby slides down till her knees knock against the floorboards, forehead pressed into the door.

Silence reigns for what feels like forever. In reality, only a brief few seconds have passed, before the lock on the door unlocks. The collective eyes of RWB glance to one another, before Ruby wastes no time in clambering to her feet and pushing the door open. Yang was still walking back to her bed when her fractured team stumbles in.

"We're not giving up on you. Never in a million years!" Ruby whispers, afraid if her voice were any higher it would crack and tumble, a torrent of tears following. Blake nods, stepping around Ruby gently, a hand smoothing along her shoulder on the pass.

"The only way to truly heal our wounds, isn't time. It's surrounding yourself with people who love you. People who would..." Blake bites her lip, shutting her eyes tight. "D-Die for you." She hoarsely whispers with a crackling to her tones. "You all taught me that. Otherwise I wouldn't be here. I'd have...run off somewhere, on my own."

Yang looks up at her partner and sighs, sitting heavily on her bed, pinching the bridge of her nose. Weiss however, frowns and set the cybernetic limb down on Yang's legs. Yang growls and flicks it off onto the floor with a clatter, much to the Schnee's chagrin. "Yang!"

"Stop it, Weiss!" Yang shouts, instinctively going to cross her arms, the limb tumbling and falling into her lap. She frowns harder and her lilac eyes water slightly. "Like I said, it's over for me. You guys need...you need to look after yourselves. You need a new teammate." Ruby shakes her head, her silver eyes brimming. Blake too sniffs, cat ears flicking. "Who knows...maybe Goodwatch'll find you someone whose name begins with a Y. Saves changing the team name, I guess." The broken brawler mumbles.

"That's not going to happen, Yang!" Ruby throws her fists down by her hips. "We're a team!" She sniffs and whimpers, eyes streaming admix hiccupping gasps. "No... w-we're a family! Y-You're my sister, Yang! Weiss, y-you're my sister, Blake, you're my sister too! I love you guys, and I don't want it to end because of this!" She cries, sobbing openly into her hands. Blake comforts her the best she can, patting the young leader's shoulder.

Weiss simply stares at Yang.

"What, ice Queen?" Yang frowns at her. Weiss scowls back, equally. She bends down and picks up the arm.

"Let's try this again. You're going to put it on-"

"Like hell-

"YES. YOU. ARE! Not for you, not for me, not for Blake, but for your sister!" Weiss snaps, eyes scarly seething. "We care about you, Yang, don't you get it?! I don't..." Weiss huffs, looking back at Yang with a different gleam in her eyes, calming herself down. "This really isn't easy for me...speaking from the..." Weiss swallows thickly, gesturing to her heart.

Yang stares solemnly at her knees, an icy, gooey guilt settling in her gut as Ruby sniffed, wiping her eyes, beginning to calm from her bout of tears. She looks back at Weiss as the Schnee sits beside her on the bed, the feather light girl barely indenting the mattress. Weiss sits her hands atop her thighs, biting her lip. 

"I have two siblings. Winter and Whitley. I adore Winter, but I never see her. And Whitley? He
hates me. And I can say I'm not overly fond of him. My family is wealthy, but it seems to think money can fill the holes in relationships. My mother...she drinks. A lot. She thinks I don't see it, but I'm not a fool. And my Father? Well. Let's just say he doesn't like to lose..."

The team all look at Weiss as she finally opens up in a way they have never seen before. Swiping a fallen lock of snow behind her ear, Weiss sucks her lip and carries on.

"...growing up in an environment like that, where the only time I felt cared for was when Winter would visit, was hell. I know...I can be a hard person to deal with. For that, I'm...s-sorry." She forces the word out, like saying it was poison to her lips. "I don't mean to be, but it's a part of me that I'm trying so hard to beat out. It's thanks to you, my team that I've gotten better in that respect."

Yang looks at Weiss, a lop-sided smile gently creasing her features.

"Guess you can't judge a book by its cover, huh?" Yang shrugs, voice low. Weiss smiles at her lightly, pinching the fabric of her baggy pyjama pants. "I'm...missing a part of me, Weiss. A part of me is gone, and it's never coming back."

"I know." Weiss says softly, sitting cross legged on the bed to face Yang, looping messy hair behind her ear. "What happened to you won't heal like our injuries will, and it's...it's not fair." Weiss frowns. Yang nods, looking at her legs, and the arm on the edge of the bed. "I have a scar."

"Huh?" Yang raises a brow. Weiss shrugs.

"I know it's nowhere near the same. But, I do." Weiss bobs her shoulders once more, running her index finger down the length of her facial scar. "I hated it. I thought it was ugly, and it made me very self-conscious for a long time. I still hate it...but then somebody told me I looked beautiful for it...unique even. Hearing that, changed the way I felt about it, truly!" Weiss smiles to herself, Yang raising her brow, startling slightly as Blake sits beside her, Ruby beside Weiss.

"So... what are you saying, Weiss?" Yang shrugs, licking her lips. Weiss blows out a breath, velvety eyes meeting lilac.

"You can embrace your...cuts, your scars, your marks, your missing limbs. You have so much to give still, so much to live..." Weiss picks up the arm, licking her lips. "...please, just...try again. Because I don't want my friend to give up their dreams over this." Weiss says, her voice so strained, so kind.

"I got stabbed." Blake shrugs, itching her cheek, Yang looking at her with watery eyes, Blake taking her hand and giving it a squeeze amidx a small smile. "I'm okay. But, I did. See?" Blake lifts her baggy white top, showing tone pale flesh, and a paler spot of hardened weaved tissue. She lets the top drop back down to the hem of her black pyjama pants. "It's ugly...and a reminder of what happened. For that, I hate it too. But it's...it's there. It's a part of me now."

Blake picks up the silver arm from Weiss' palms, looking it over, golden eyes flicking to Yang's. "Out of all of us, you've suffered the most, Yang."

"Blake." Yang breathes, leaning her head into the warm Faunus' shoulder. Blake rests her head atop Yang's, sighing contently. "I'm sorry. I should've...I could've...I should've done something differently!" Yang growls at herself. Blake hushes her.

"I look back at that night and see a thousand different outcomes, different paths..." Blake tilts her head back up, cradling Yang's face in her palms. "But when you're in that moment, all of those paths aren't there. You just...do what you feel is right, whether it is, or it isn't. I got run through
“I just...I saw red, Blake. I was scared...and angry...I was afraid. Afraid I was going to lose my partner...my best friend." Yang sniffs, her eyes swimming with emotion. Blake smiles and hugged the blonde tightly.

"I thought the same."

Yang huffs heavily, deflating her bravado. “We’ll get out of your hair?” Blake assures with a smile as she gets up with Weiss and Ruby. They make their way towards the door so then Yang can make her choice, but as Blake is about to leave...she stops and looks back at Yang.

“Yang…” She softly says, getting her blonde friend’s attention. “I have spent my whole life...scared.” Blake tells her. “Frightened of things that could happen...might happen or might not happen. Ever since I was born I have lived like that, terrified that a human would hurt me for what I am. Stab me for being different...or what Adam could do if he kept going.” Blake explains to Yang, and she looks right at her as she speaks, listening to every word that the black-haired young woman says.

“But...wanna know something strange? Ever since I met all of you? I sleep just fine.” She tells her with a smile. Yang stammers, confused of what to say. “O-Okay...” She softly says, then Blake continues with her point, with Weiss and Ruby looking and listening to her.

“What I found out...is that I was constantly afraid of what Humans would think of me...wearing that bow was only making it worse for me. Fear...is the real enemy, Yang.” Blake tells her, then she inhales, knowing how to get to Yang.

She looks into her lilac eyes. “So...get up.” Blake tells her. “Get up, and show Fear...what happens when you mess, with Yang Xiao Long.” She says with a smile, gently closing the door.

Yang sits there alone...astounded by Blake’s words. She sucks her lip, before taking the prosthetic into her hands. Lilac irises flit back and forth over the alien arm, before setting it down on the bed and standing from the mattress...

Half an hour later...

When they are all together with a tearful Taiyang, they all hear her walking down the stairs, with her hair still in its ponytail, and with the cybernetic arm reattached to her stump. Smiles form on their faces and Taiyang stands tall.

She exhales a shaky breath.

“Okay...let’s try this again.” Yang states with an eager smile.

Adam

As the shadows consume his body, with just his knee bent from the darkness, and with the iron bars keeping him from leaving...a woman approaches the cell. With a White Fang Mask resting by his shoe and the sensation of pure fatigue filling the air, she crouches down.
The Bengal Faunus crouches down and taps the iron bars to create a metallic clanging sound, getting his attention as he turns, face concealed in the darkness. He looks at her orange eyes, dark complexion and wild black, chin-length hair with an asymmetrical bob style. Her Faunus trait manifests as an extra pair of ears, and her body is adorned with numerous tattoos resembling tiger stripes. She wears four golden earrings on three of her ears, one each on her human ears, and two on her left Faunus ear, as well as a small jewel on her forehead.

She is dressed in a form fitting black dress with light green accents on the rims of the outfit; the dress left most of her back open, has two long splits on the side which reveal a pair of black shorts, a shorter split in the front and a small squared keyhole. Over the dress, she wears a back-revealing red cape with gold accents, as well as a green waist cincher with red rims that has a black belt over it, which fastens a green pouch on her right hip. Aside from that, she wears black stockings in conjunction with green sandals that has red laces which are tied to her calves, as well as a black elbow length fingerless glove on her right hand.

The prisoner glares at her, his fist tightening. “Adam…it’s time we spoke.” Sienna tells him with judgemental eyes for the crimes he has committed.

His hand emerges from the shadows and he picks up the mask, pressing it over his eyes as he reveals his face, a shadowy red beard formed around his face and he grits his teeth.

“About time…”
“Adam…”

The red banners with the White Fang Beowulf insignia hang above her head inside of the huge building hidden somewhere in Mistral. The Headquarters of the Mistral Branch of the Fang, a long seemingly unending hallway with a red carpet stretched out across the wooden floor where the torches crackle away as they light up the place. White Fang Honour Guards stand beside her, wearing more impressive armour than the normal soldiers with full face masks that have jagged teeth that match that of a Beowulf. The eyes hidden behind the slits, gauntlets grasping onto long staves with red dust flowing through the spearheads.

On his knees before her with two Honour Guards at his shoulders, aiming their Staves at his neck is Adam Taurus. Tired and defeated, with bags under his eyes and his hair hanging over his mask that shrouds his mysterious eyes. Parts of his long trench coat torn with thread dangling out in places. “I am disappointed that things have been forced to this point, but you leave me no other choice.” Sienna states with her cold voice, eyes glaring right at him. He looks up at her slowly and exhales through his nose.

“I did what was necessary, High Leader.” He states bravely, making her clench her fists and sharply rise from her throne.

“Necessary? You attacked a school where both Humans and Faunus train to become Huntsmen! Faunus died in your little attack, Adam…just as many as the humans. And you demand that we must attack the Academy again?” Sienna questions with pure rage in her voice, rage combined with confusion. Adam stares through the mask at her as the Guards keep him on his knees, then he speaks yet again.

“I was approached by three people…humans…who said they were working for someone who could give us what we desired. All I had to do was bring an army to attack Beacon Academy.” Adam explains to her, and she glares at him and nods to her Guards, they both hook their staves to his chin and lift his head so then he is staring up at her, and she stands with her fists clenched.

“You…did what? You conspired behind my back…with humans?” She questions with disbelief and disgust in her voice.

“Their leader can bring us the peace we deserve.” He assures, and Sienna shakes her head, unable to comprehend this from this man…who has always been the savage dog they have unleashed to kill the humans. “But we can only gain that peace is if we destroy Beacon Academy, it’s headmaster is a threat to everyone we care about.” He states, then she glares into his eyes.

“Or is it because Blake is there?” She questions, and Adam falls silent, actually tensing at the sound of her name being spoken in the room. Sienna is no fool, she knows a man obsessed with payback when she sees one, and he is giving off all the signals. If it were not for the guards and lacking Wilt and Blush…he would most likely be trying to kill Sienna right now for ever saying her name. He grits his teeth as he stares at her, but then stifles his rage, answering as calmly as he can.
“No…because as long as the Huntsmen remain we will never be able to achieve the peace we have been fighting for. That is what we tried to do, but we can still finish it. They are crippled, all it would take is a single attack to finish them off to lure the Black Smog into the school.” He explains, Sienna stares at him with even seems to be fear in her amber eyes, then she speaks softly. “Our attack is already a minor victory, for the Humans fear us…the second will make them submit themselves to us.”

He is becoming more and more…monstrous…with every day that passes by.

“Adam…I am not going to repeat myself. So, I want you to listen when I say that we will not attack Beacon Academy.” Sienna states, her voice travelling through the halls that they all stand in. The many White Fang soldiers inside all watch Adam’s every move, for even weak he still poses a threat to their safety. He stammers after hearing her answer, leaning forward.

“High Leader Khan, I am begging you.” Adam states, until she snaps back. “You should beg for forgiveness, and nothing else!” Sienna snarls, clenching her hands back into her fists, claws extending as she stands before him. He lowers his head and sighs, listening to what it is that she has to say to him. “The assault you lead on Beacon is not the great victory you clearly think it will give us. And you should be grateful your punishment wasn’t more severe. Many of my advisers said that I should kill you right here and now, but I am not merciless. And I do not want Humanity to cower beneath us, I want humanity to treat us like equals.” Sienna explains as she slams her fist against the arm of her chair.

Adam listens to her words as he hangs his head low. “You have become a symbol for many in our organisation, but it does not make you infallible.” She explains as she sits back down in her throne, crossing one leg over the other as she awaits his reply.

“I…I was merely trying to follow your example, High Leader.” Adam states, almost defensively and trying to preserve his rank…and his skin.

“And what example might that be, Commander?” She questions with the lift of her right eyebrow. He coughs as he looks up at her, still being held down by the Faunus Honour Guards standing at his shoulders with their dust charged staves at his throat.

“Strength…strength and unwavering conviction. And with our attack, Humanity understands we have that strength now.” He states, and Sienna sighs with more disappointment leaving her mouth.

“I was one of the first to suggest violence where violence had to be necessary. Ghira does not understand the world like I do…he is too idealistic…but I have never disagreed with his end goal. My methods have been extreme, and I cannot promise they will change, because I won’t let humanity push us down without pushing back. Because Peace brought Complacency with it, acceptance of our place in the world.” Sienna explains as she reminisces the old times in her head. Then she stares at him and narrows her eyes once more, her feline cat ears crease with animosity towards the Bull Faunus. “But destroying the Huntsmen Academies crosses a line.”

Adam listens to her words but Sienna looks down at him, wondering if her words are even getting through to him. “The C.C.T may be back up, but trade and commerce has fallen apart ever since your attack and Grimm attacks have spread like wild fire to every corner of the globe. And all of that thanks to you, making the White Fang more of a target now than ever before!” Sienna shouts with anger at Adam. “You have justified Humanity’s campaigns against us, and for what? Empty promises from a group of humans? Humans you don’t have the faintest clue about, humans who most likely aim to use you like a pawn. I truly expected better of you Adam, for you have let your short sightedness corrupt your mind…because of your own self-interests.” She explains, stabbing
him with the reference to Blake Belladonna once more.

“She…has nothing to do with this.” He lies weakly, and she scoffs, picking up her scroll and clicking a button which shows a recording from inside of the Food Hall during the Battle of Beacon.

“I will destroy everything you love…”

“Blake! Where are you?”

“…starting with her.” The recording of Adam says, and he sighs, lowering his head with defeat for she has just proven her own point with the click of a button. He watches the recording, seeing Sienna flinch at Blake’s cry of agony when he stabbed her to get Yang’s attention.

“Get away from her!”

“Go…please…”

Adam turned and sheathed his blood covered blade as he stared straight at Yang, waiting for her to attack. She screams with fury, leaping at him with her teary eyes glowing red and hair glowing like the sun. Sienna cuts the recording off as soon as he swung the sword, not wanting to see that footage. “What you did…was callous…and would never bring peace for the Faunus. Only war…a war we cannot win.” She states, and Adam clenches his hands into fists as he stares at her.

She exhales, standing up from her throne and turning to walk away from Adam. “Guards take him away…I must see to the repairs of what he has done. Starting with the aid of helping Beacon Academy and any victims recover from the attack.” Sienna explains, and Adam snarls with fury.

“You cannot hide from the truth, Sienna! You know that there is a change in the wind! You can either embrace it or be blown away with the rest of them!” He bellows, until the doors cut him off and she exhales, her eyes shutting.

“Damn it…Adam…I just hope we can repair what you have broken.” She states, walking away from where he was knelt.

Yang

"Oof! Hey!" Yang grumbles, frowning up at the red-haired warrior responsible for her current seat in the dust. Pyrrha quirks a plucked brow, placing both hands atop her hips.

"I'm sorry, but your stance is all wrong.” Pyrrha challenges, offering a hand out to the blonde. Yang rolls her big pretty lilac eyes, before accepting the hand. "Your feet need to be at least shoulders width apart, and one foot needs to be further back than the other. You won't fall over if-

"Yeah, yeah, let's go again." Yang scoffs, spreading her feet, drawing swirls in the dirt with her boots. She raises her fists, both mechanical and flesh. Pyrrha bites her lip and nods, raising her own. Red and Yellow pace in a circle around one another, both waiting for the other to make the first move. Yang swings first, her impatience getting the better of her.

Pyrrha blocks with her wrists, staggering back at the sheer harsh weight of the metal limb. Her bones flex, before swinging around to the side and sweeping her leg across the dirt, knocking
Yang's legs out from under her. The blonde falls on her back with a thud, panting and staring up at the blue sky.

The arcing cloud of dust settles at the heel of Pyrrha's shoe, before she stands up straight, patting the wisps of sand out of her vest. Yang thumps her fist into the earth and growls, rolling over and getting up.

"This is pointless!" Yang throws her fists down by her sides, stamping off towards the house. Pyrrha sighs and pinches the bridge of her nose, when a voice speaks out.

"Man, that thing packs a punch!" Tai smiles hopefully, standing from his seat besides Zwei in the baking afternoon sun. Yang stops in her tracks, sighing heavily and straightening the warp in her downtrodden spine. Her lilac eyes flit back over her shoulder to her rising Dad and her red-haired sparring partner.

"We've been at this for hours! I get it, you wanna know I can still fight. Obviously, I can't." Yang murmured, grasping the door handle.

"Giving up already, huh?" Tai huffs, Yang letting go of the knob to face him. "That's not like you."

"Dad..." Yang huffs, studying her cybernetic arm with a grimace. "I've tried."

"You're still strong, Yang. Almost broke my wrists." Pyrrha smirks as she rolls her wrists round, feeling a click in them, Yang scoffing. "Yes, you're still slightly sluggish, but you haven't fought in... just over two months."

"I guess..." Yang looks at her arms, the thin biceps not as thick as the brawler was used to.

"You can't give up, hon." Tai loops an arm over her shoulder. "Tell you what, how 'bout you and I go a few rounds, huh? I'm old and slow, so we should be evenly matched."

"Ha-Ha, very funny." Yang blows out a calming breath, rolling her shoulders. "Okay, you're on, old man."

"Hey!" Tai chuckles, raising his fists. Yang paces back into the circle of disturbed dirt and boot prints. Pyrrha smiles as the pair begin to lightly spar, her Father going slow enough for Yang to get a slight upper hand, helping her self-esteem greatly. With a grin, her fighting becomes more aggressive, as she pushes through the lactic acid and fatigue.

Pyrrha looks over her shoulder to the porch of the house. Sitting in the shade, Jaune smiles brightly at her, trading a toothy grin with the red head.

Both of them feel as if they are watching Yang go through the same training they both would go through on the rooftop. Watching it brings back a touching memory she has of being with Jaune before the Vytal Festival...

**Pyrrha**

Kicking her legs to and fro, hands wringing subconsciously in her lap, the teen worried her lip with her teeth. She looped a vermilion lock behind her ear, blinking her bright green eyes to the blinding
mid-day sun's rays. The day's heat was suffocating, having to breathe in barely satisfactory breaths of hot air, like huffing carbon dioxide. As customary to a hot summer’s day in Vale, the Cicadas were out in droves, deafening and constant chirps echoing through the meadow.

With leather heeled boots firmly hooked over one of the lower runs of the fence, Pyrrha played with her digits some more, closing her eyes and listening to the beautiful chorus sung by the Cicadas. Perched on the fence, she had a wonderful view of Vale's wide-open farmland, stretching for miles, before disappearing into the hazy blue mountains.

"Hey, I wondered where you got to." Jaune softly said, Pyrrha startling and snapping her head to the sound of his tones. Resting his crossed arms over the fence post, he sat his chin atop his wrists, looking out over the fields.

"Oh. I just wanted a moment, that's all." Pyrrha shrugged, fidgeting on the slightly uncomfortable wooden beam. "It's a beautiful view."

"Yeah it is." Jaune smiled, relaxing his muscles to the calming warmth of the sun, and the chirping Cicadas. Pyrrha smiled lightly, pinching the fleshy tip of her index finger through her glove, bending it back and forth lightly.

"See a lot of farmland back home?" Jaune broke the quiet. Pyrrha smiled lightly and bobbed her shoulders once more.

"Not really. Mistral is quite... Mountainous, I suppose you could say. Not really a lot of flat land to grow crops." Pyrrha explained in her soothing regal tones that Jaune honestly could fall asleep listening to. They were that calming to him. "I... might have to admit - and it's slightly embarrassing - that I've never seen sugar cane before. Or wheat crops." She blushed. Jaune's eyes widened, lifting his head and climbing up the slightly rickety fence to perch beside her. He too kicked his legs gingerly.

"Really? W-Well what does Mistral do for food?" Jaune asked. Pyrrha smiled to herself. She enjoyed Jaune's company so much, that even little conversations about their cultural differences pleased her.

"We grow a few crops on plateaus outside of the main city, but... other than that, we have good trade in fish, and buy in foods from other kingdoms." Her eyes widened. "Oh! I almost forgot, Mistral is known for its rice paddies. They farm near the lakes at the foot of Mount Krondokinni. Mistral is known for its delicious rice dishes and sushi... Jaune?"

"Sorry, just trying to understand that gibberish you said back then." he shook his head. "Mount... w-what?"

Pyrrha giggled lightly and shoved his shoulder gently. "Mount Krondokinni."

"Yeah, Pyr, just saying it again doesn't help me out." Jaune scoffed. Pyrrha smirked at him with a roll of her eyes.

"Krondo... " Pyrrha said slowly.

"Krondo... " Jaune copied just as slowly.

"Kinni... " Pyrrha smiled.

"Kinni?" Jaune raised a brow.
"Kronokinni!" She exclaimed brightly, wide eyed.

"Gazuntite."

"Jaune!" She giggled into her palm, shoving him playfully, her leader yelping and falling off the fence with a thud. "I can't help it if your balance is all wrong." She smirked as he sat up in a groaning chuckle. Her smile sobered though, looking down at her hands. "I've just been thinking."

"About?" Jaune asked as he got up, dusting off his jeans. Pyrrha smiled lightly.

"My parents. Things back home, I guess. Things to come here." She huffed.

"Ah. The Vytal Tournament?" Jaune hopped back onto the fence, raising a brow. Pyrrha scoffed, looking up at the cloud of glistening insects swirling over the crops, reflecting the light on their wings like a hurricane of crystals. "Ah, we'll be fine, we've got you. You're the glue that holds us together." He elbowed her lightly, Pyrrha chuckling.

"Oh. well, thank you, Jaune." she beamed. He never once referred to her combat abilities being the only aspect she could bring to the table. Instead - in true Jaune fashion - he called her the important being who helps hold their team together. Even if she didn't fully believe the praise. "Thank you."

"What for?"

"For being you. Being my rock in a sea of... issues. I can always talk to you." She smirked and blushed. "You're my guilty pleasure."

"That, and chocolate." He grinned, Pyrrha's emerald eyes widening. "Don't deny it, I saw the wrapper under your bed."

"I-It was a treat, I had earned it." She blushed, flipping her long wolf tail of vermilion locks over her shoulder.

"Mmm... Ah, in all seriousness though... you're welcome, Pyrrha."

"Thank you. All the same." She smiled, shuffling over to him along the fence, before resting her head on his shoulder with a content sigh. Jaune visibly stiffened, before calming and eventually resting his head atop hers.

"Anytime, Pyrrha. You're my best friend after all." Jaune hummed. Pyrrha beamed and closed her eyes. "What flowers did you have back home?"

"Huh?" Pyrrha furrowed her brow, opening one eye to look up at him. He caught sight of the bright green eye and grinned.

"You were teaching me about Mistral. Soooo... what flowers? Back home."

"Oh. Well... in my Mother's garden, she had petunias, Lilacs, tulips. The Roses were pretty in the summer especially." Pyrrha chuckled lightly, Jaune smiling at her mirth.

"W-What?"

"Well, I once brought a Caterpillar into the house. When I was a little girl. Six, I believe. Mother told me to take it back outside... " She looked up at Jaune fully, biting her grinning lip. "I let it go into the bushes. Well, that Caterpillar went on to devour almost all of her lilacs." She winced. Jaune snorted and shook his head.
"Bad girl, Pyrrha. Bad girl."

"I didn't know it was *that* hungry of a beast! Bigger appetite than Nora." She shrugged, happily resting her head on his shoulder again. "Don't laugh! I got in big trouble." She sighed contently to the warmth of Jaune around her. "What about you?"

"Letting Caterpillars go?" Jaune asked, wincing as the closed eyes, content Nikos thumped his leg. "Ow okay, okay! I once tried to prank my sisters by propping a bucket of ice water over the door."

"Uh oh." Pyrrha smiled brightly as she snuggled deeper into his side.

"Yep. Didn't count on Mom coming home first and walking in. Splash! Biiiiig trouble for that one." He grinned weakly, rubbing the back of his head with his free hand. "Ah stupid things we do as kids."

"Mmm." Pyrrha's brow scrunched and her eyes opened. "Jaune?"

"Yeah?" He asked softly, content in feeling her vermilion locks ruffling against his cheek.

"I'm... thankful for you. You... you mean a lot to me." She hugged his arm tightly, closing her eyes and snuggling into his neck. Jaune smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, blushing at their closeness. He gulped and rested his head on hers.

"You mean a lot to me too."

**Jaune**

Pyrrha looks back to the fight as Yang and Tai lock fists, sweat dripping off their straining faces. Content to take a moment of leave, she paces over to the front of the house, to take some solace in the shade... and Jaune.

Her once pale porcelain skinned shoulders are now dusted red with a tinge of sunburn. She steps up the steps and sits on the cool wood beside Jaune, hands wringing atop her knees.

"You're great with her, y'know." Jaune comments, biting a tag of hard skin from his calloused hand. Pyrrha smiles to him, looking back to the sparring as Tai swings a boot around to drive down onto Yang, the blonde Brawler quick to block with her wrists. "He's pretty spry, for an older fellow."

"He's not that old, Jaune." Pyrrha chuckles. "But yes, he is a terrific fighter."

"And look at Yang. Really didn't think we'd get her to this point. There's almost a... sense of normality again." Jaune chuckles. He looks at Pyrrha and smiles brightly, gingerly reaching into her lap and gently gripping her hand, moulding the rigid flesh into soft and warm digits. Pyrrha smiles back to him and lightly squeezes his hand. "I hope you're starting to feel a sense of normality again, I mean... i-if not, is there anything I can do to help it along?"

Pyrrha squeezes his hand and shuffles over, her hip nudging his, holding his hand in her lap, resting her head on his shoulder.

"You're already doing it." She smiles contently, stroking her thumb over his knuckles.
"Mmm. Good." Jaune rests his head on hers. Both of them revelling in the warmth of the other, in their scent, in their heartbeat, in their very aura. The front door to the house opens sharply and both Pyrrha and Jaune jump, quickly letting go of the other, clearing their throats and blushing feverishly. Nora babbles in Ren's ear as they both step out of the house, before silence quickly replaces her rapid words.

"Err...what's up with you two?" Nora raises a brow, bouncing on her toes. Ren's usually unreadable expressions are null, replaced with a warm smile.

"Nora and I are going into town. Do you two need anything?"

"Yeah! Whatcha need?!" Nora grins, hands on her hips. Pyrrha shrugs, kneading her thighs, Jaune bobbing his shoulders too.

"We're fine thank you." Pyrrha smiles to them, Jaune nodding rapidly. Nora was sceptical, but decides to simply plead innocence, and skip down the steps of the porch. Ren smiles supportively at the pair.

"I see you're figuring things out."

"Guys. Stop. It's... It's great. I'm happy for you. Don't worry, I won't breath a word to Nora." Ren smiles to them, giving a brief nod and stepping down the porch. Pyrrha and Jaune smile at each other and shuffles closer again, hands held in Pyrrha's lap.

"We are, aren't we?" Jaune speaks, Pyrrha lifting her head from his shoulder to meet his eyes. "Figuring things out I mean."

"I believe so. There was a time not even a week ago we were too afraid to be this... close." Pyrrha gestures to their current arrangement. Jaune nods and sighs contently, the tension in his frame melting away like butter. "This is nice. Perfect even. Little steps."

"Yeah...little steps." Jaune hums, resting his head on top of hers. The front door blows open again, startling the soothed pair once again.

"ZWEI! ZWEI?!" Ruby yells as she paces out onto the porch, Pyrrha's eye twitching and her teeth audibly grating. "Oh! Hey guys! How's my sister doing?"

"She's doing great! Just look at her." Jaune chuckles, gesturing to Tai receiving a hard punch from Yang, both of them laughing joyfully. Ruby beams brightly and looks at the leash in her hand.

"Have you guys seen Zwei?" Ruby asks. Pyrrha blows out a breath and her emerald eyes flit up to the young leader.

"Yes, I have. He's just over there, by Tai." Pyrrha points ahead to the folded-out deck chair, the two white towels atop it, and the happily panting dog beside it.

"Zwei! C'mere boy! Walkies!"

Weiss steps out next, tapping away intently on her scroll. Jaune looks up over Pyrrha's head to the Schnee.
"Hey Weiss!"

"Hello Jaunie." She beams back. "How are you two?"

"Good thank you. How about you? Have you been speaking to Team S.S.S.N at all?" Pyrrha asks. Weiss nods and bends over to show Pyrrha her scroll. The Invincible Girl snorts into her palm as she reads the string of messages.

"What's that?" Jaune asks. Weiss shrugs and stands up.

"We've started a group chat between our three teams. In fact, I was just about to invite JNPR riight now." She clicks a button and both Jaune and Pyrrha's scrolls buzz. They both take out said devices and instantly accept the invite, the conversation now visible to them.

Jaune chuckles as he reads them, looking up at Weiss. "Well...at least they can stay optimistic considering everything." Jaune chuckles.

“I admire them.” Weiss giggles softly, Jaune raises a brow as he looks at Weiss.

"So, how're you and Neptune doing? You talked at all? You know, one on one?"

Weiss huffs and puts her scroll in her pocket, shrugging her shoulders. “Kinda? Oooh, I don't know. I don't know what goes on in his head!"

"Tell me about it." Pyrrha smirks at Jaune, the blonde boy scratching the back of his head bashfully. Ruby soon re-joins the conversation as she clips the leash to Zwei's collar, standing up and facing the three teens.

"C'mon Weiss, If Zwei doesn't get his walk soon, we'll have a tantrum on our hands."

"Okay, okay, Ruby, I'm coming." Weiss smiles to the Arkos pair, before turning and trotting down the steps. "We won't be long."

"See ya later!" Jaune calls, mirth leaving his lips in light chuckles. He sobers and faces Pyrrha, their faces inching closer as Pyrrha happily closes that distance between themselves again. "Hey."

"Hello." She smiles, resting her head on his shoulder contently. Jaune finds her hand and the two stay in comfortable silence as they watch Yang and Tai.

Yang

The Xiao Long's continue to spar, trading hits back and forth, until Yang ends the round with a firm punch of her metal fist to his arm, knocking her Father back a few staggered steps.

The two breathe out breathlessly, Tai managing to chuckle between gasps. "Yeah...that really does pack a punch!" He winces, rolling his arm experimentally. Yang stands up tall, smirking smugly.

"Yeah... okay, okay you were right." Yang rolls her eyes and chuckles. "I'm glad I didn't give up earlier." Her expression turns to a smirk. "Y'know, for someone who's been out of it for a while, I think I'm doing fine." She punches her fists together, metal meeting skin with a thump.

"Yeah..." Tai stands up straight, his panting now quelled. "You're close."
"Oh really? I just wiped the floor with you!" Yang grins, Tai circling her with his own smirk plastered across his face, enjoying every second of their playful banter returning between them.

"You're still off balance." Tai off hands the comment, Yang's eyes boltering wide.

"What?! No, I'm not! Pyrrha, you saw, right?!" Yang calls out to the porch. Pyrrha lifts her head from Jaune's shoulder, nervously prodding the tips of her index fingers together.

"Uuuum..."

"Urgh, okay... so maybe I'm still a bit outta shape. But, honestly..." She looks down at her robotic appendage. "I'm kinda surprised. I thought it'd just be this huge weight, but it feels... natural." Yang smiles brightly as she flexes her cybernetic digits back and forth. "They did a great job with this thing."

She doesn’t even hear the quick dusty shuffle of impeding boots, as Tai jabs across her jaw, Yang startling from her daze to quickly throw herself back into the fray, blocking his swings. She jabs back, lifting her leg to offer a few swift kicks to his shoulder and stomach. He blocks them all, and eventually the pair become locked in the other's grip, her cybernetic arm in his grasp and her flesh hand stopping his elbow from meeting her neck.

"I wasn't talking about your actual balance." Tai sighs. With that, he kicks her leg out from under her, once again letting Yang fall flat on her back. Pyrrha notices and gives Jaune's hand a squeeze, before standing and trotting down the steps.

Yang sits up on her elbows, frowning at her Dad.

"Um, her actual balance could use some work too." Pyrrha adds, Yang rolling her eyes and sitting up with a groan. "Perhaps I should work on that now, Tai."

"Jeez, what is this, 'kick a Yang while she's down' day?" Yang huffs, swiping the grime from her pale shoulder. Tai holds a hand out towards Pyrrha, instantly stilling her.

"I saw your tournament fights, during the Vytal festival?" Tai shrugs, offering a hand to Yang. She frowns and looks at her knees.

"Let me guess... I was sloppy?" Yang mimics his voice, rolling her lilac eyes. Tai chuckles and hoists her up to her feet.

"No. You were predictable."

"And stubborn!" Jaune adds from the porch. Yang growls in his direction.

"And bone headed."

"Perhaps a little on the-"

"Urgh I get it!" Yang crosses her arms, acting like the angsty teen she is. "Can we be done for today?"

"No. Not yet." Tai huffs, gently gripping her shoulder to turn the teen to face him. He soberes and hollers over his shoulder. "Hey! Pyrrha! C'mere a sec!"

"Okay." Pyrrha paces over. "What is it, Taiyang?"

"Yang, do you realize you used your semblance to win every match after the qualifiers?" Tai says
to his daughter. Yang turns away and paces over to the deckchair, picking up a towel to swipe the
dirt and sweat from her brow. The once white towel is now very much brown with grime.

"So, what? How's me using my semblance any different from someone else using theirs?" Yang
grumbles, unscrewing her cybernetic arm with a hiss and setting it on the chair to clean the
collected grit and dust out from where her stump met metal. Tai looks at Pyrrha and smiles.

"Yang. I want you to look at Pyrrha."

"Why?" Yang asks, staring at the green-eyed warrior. "What am I looking for?"

"I saw her rounds in the Tournament too." He turns to Pyrrha with a sombre sigh. "I'm... sorry.
About what happened in the end."

"It's... It's okay." Pyrrha smiles meekly.

"Pyrrha only ever used her semblance if the chips were down. If she had no other choice. She very
rarely relied on it at all."

"So? Everyone's semblances are different." Yang shrugs, picking up the prosthetic and blowing a
plume of dust out from the pistons. Tai huffs and places a hand on Pyrrha's shoulder.

"Yeah, they are different. But not everyone else's is basically a temper tantrum." Tai steps over to
his daughter as she locks the arm back into place and rolls the limb back and forth experimentally.

"I didn't choose my semblance, Dad." Yang's eyes water ever so slightly. "Besides. It can't be that
great... " She looks at her arm. "Didn't help me when it came to saving Blake, did it?"

"No, that's true. In fact, that's my point. You can take damage and dish it back twice as hard, but
that doesn't make you invincible." Tai places both hands on Yang's shoulders, her eyes meeting his
sombrely. "It's great if you're in a bind, but what if you miss?"

"This." Yang holds up her whirring arm, titanium skin gleaming in the light. "This is what happens
when I miss."

"Yang... " Tai whimpers almost. "... You have always been one to burn brighter than everyone
else." He lifts her chin with his thumb. "Whether it was with your smile, or..." He grins and
touches her hair. "Well, I remember your first haircut." He chuckles, Yang shoving his hand away
with a light smile. Pyrrha lightly steps into the conversation.

"Yang... I say this as your friend... I know what your Father is saying. You need to keep your
emotions in check. Keep a level head. That's the key to any fight." Pyrrha adds. "I was an infant
when I first held a spear. I wasn't much older when I had my first fight. As you can imagine I
messed up. Made mistakes. Got hurt. Because I was young. I was naive. And I wore my heart on
my sleeve. Emotions in a fight can be our undoing." Pyrrha looks down at the dirt with a sombre
sigh. "Look at what happened with Penny. My emotions were toyed with. My mind was... warped
too. I lost. In a different way than I'm most certainly used to."

Tai squeezes Pyrrha's shoulder affectionately and fatherly...something she never experienced with
her real father, turning to face Yang. "Your semblance is a great fall back, but..." Tai sighs heavily.
"What we are trying to say is that it won't always save you... Obviously." He closes his eyes with a
tired and weighted sigh. He lets a dry chuckle leave his throat though. "You definitely have your
Mom's stubbornness."

Yang looks up at him with a raised brow. "Oh? So now we can talk about her?"
"Well, as you're always reminding me, you're an adult now, remember?" Tai shrugs and smiles. "...I see so much of Raven in you."

"Well, I'm sorry I remind you of her so much." Yang deflects, crossing her arms.

"Don't be." Tai softly speaks, pulling Yang into a hug. "Raven was great in so many ways! Her strength, her ambition. Her dedication to whatever cause she thought was worth fighting for." He reels out of the embrace to look deep into her lilac eyes. "I'm proud of how much of her I see in you."

Pyrrha smiles from the side-lines, looking at Jaune over her shoulder. "I'll leave you two to talk."

"Oh! Sorry, Pyrrha." Tai chuckles, Pyrrha shaking her head with a beaming smile.

"Don't be. Family is the most important thing in the world." And with that the emerald eyed warrior turns away.

"Hey, Pyrrha?" Yang calls, Pyrrha looking back over her shoulder. "Thanks. For... helping and... you know, not giving up on me when I gave up on you."

"You never gave up on us Yang. Whatever feelings you had were definitely warranted. It's nice to see you up and about." Pyrrha gleams, pacing back to the porch. Tai smiles at the red head.

"You have a great band of friends supporting you." He comments affectionately, both the Xiao Long's watching Pyrrha sit beside Jaune and rest her head on his shoulder, both content. "You're lucky..."

"Yeah. I do." Yang has a biting thought niggling at the back of her mind, and her lips move with the words pouring forth. "If you saw so much of Mom in me, if it made you proud... then why wouldn't you tell me more about her?" Yang asks with a pained inflection to her voice. Tai's smile falls, and he exhales heavily.

"Because while I'm proud to see so much of her in you, I'm glad I don't see all of her in you."

"Why?" Yang asks softly. Tai sits on the floor, cross legged, gesturing to the spot before him. Yang sits opposite, hugging her knees with both flesh and robotic arms.

"Your mother was a... complicated woman...hell the Branwens are a complicated family. " Tai shrugs. "Like everybody, they have their faults, but those faults are what tore out team apart. And it did a real number on our family..."

“What about Qrow?” She asks him with concern, worried of how he feels about her loved uncle. Taiyang chuckles with a smile.

“Qrow’s fine...it’s just...his family have a lot of issues.” He states with a nervous chuckle as he scratches the back of his head. “And his sister...well...she’s no different.”

"Did she..." Yang closes her eyes. "H-Hate me?"

"No. No, no hon." Tai leans over, gripping her knee and kneading it affectionately. "No, she didn't. But, like I said... she was complicated. Your Uncle's the same." Tai chuckles dryly. Yang raises a brow.

"Uncle Qrow?"
“Yep.” Taiyang states.

“Where is he? Ruby said he isn't at Beacon.” Yang shrugs, itching her shoulder.

"He's... got some personal errands he's running, if you could call it that." Tai huffs. "Whatever it is he's looking for, I hope he finds it soon. Gods know the school could use him right now."

"If I... had some more questions about Mom..." Yang gulps, Tai furrowing his brow as he listens to her plea. "Would you... answer them?"

Tai sighs heavily, but lets a lop-sided smile grace his face. "If you promise to work on your fighting style, to realize that - like your Mother - strength isn't all that matters in a fight. That if you look at a situation a little bit harder, you can see that there's often another way around as well." He walks his fingers through the dirt to pace the digits around a stone, as opposed to through it. "You promise to work on that?" Yang bites her lip and nods.

"Yeah. I promise."

Tai smiles and nods. "Okay. Well, what do you wanna know?"

Nora

Nora paces beside Ren, the pair content in one another's space, gravel crunching under boot. The usually chipper Valkyrie wrings her fingers and flits her eyes along the path.

"Are you okay?" Ren asks, placing a hand on her shoulder. Bright orange bangs lift up to face him, cyan eyes meeting his warm magenta concern. She quirks her lips into a wry smile.

"Not really. You?"

"I'm better. Being around our friends has certainly helped. And you." Ren smiles warmly. Nora beams back, skipping forward a few steps before returning to a walk. "So, what did you want to do in town?"

"Hmm? Oh nothing, silly! I just needed to get out for a bit." Nora huffs, waving off his comment. The two walk in a silence tinged with slight awkwardness, a weight hanging in the air between them, like something was going unsaid, something needed to be said. "Pinkie promise me."

"Huh?" Ren startles at her, eyes focusing on the little finger holds up before him. "Promise you what?"

"Keep a secret, Renny. Pleeaase?" Nora pouts. Ren smiles softly and wraps his smallest finger around hers.

"Of course. Now what's bothering you?" Ren lets go of her hand, Nora clapping her hands together as she bounces with her steps. She pops her lips and looked at him.

"A lotta things. How all our friends are feeling. Their injuries. I guess...I feel lucky? That I'm not in as bad of a place, but I always feel all yucky."

"Yucky?" Ren raises a brow. "What do you mean?"
"Well... not physically yucky, but like..." She huffs and shakes her head. "I just feel sad all the time, okay? I smile, and it hurts my cheeks and jaw. Like I'm forcing it."

"Oh. Yes, well that's natural. The pain we all endured will linger over us for some time."

"Yeah, but I don't want it to! I wanna do something nice! It’s like when we were kids, Ren! After...After the Nuckelavee..." Nora throws her fist into her palm with a clap, determination in her eyes...before her anger dies down into fear and reminiscence. Ren smiles fondly to his best friend, feeling that constant covet for something more out of their relationship.

Hiding his fears...the past slowly eating away at them both.

Maybe the feelings started the night he could have lost her. Maybe they started when he first ever met her. He didn't like to think he was that oblivious to his own heart. He prides himself on being more in tune with himself than Jaune was, the boy who failed to see Pyrrha Nikos practically drooling over him.

He sighs as he looks down at the floor, unable to beat around the bush that she mentioned. “You still think about it too?” Ren asks her softly, and she exhales sadly.

“Never stopped...” She replies.

The two of them fall into a saddened silence as they think of the Nuckelavee...a monster that haunts their minds. “Do you think it’s...still out there?” Nora asks him fearfully and Ren taps his Stormflower Pistols hidden under his coat.

“I don’t know...part of me hopes so...for revenge...but another part...hopes I don’t have to.” He explains, shuddering as he hears the screeching howl of the Horsemen in his mind.

“Alright, let’s stop thinking about it.” Nora requests, shoving the past away.

"Okay, Nora. Soooo, what did you have in mind?"

"Well, I just had an idea!" She holds her hand over her head, gesticulating like the flickering light of a bulb. "Ding! And I think while we're in town, we should get them all something."

"Oh? What did you have in mind?" Ren beams fondly. Nora grins and rubs her hands together.

"Well, I thought we could do a little shopping, find something cool for each one of em!" Nora bounces. "Oooh it's the best idea ever! Of all time!"

"It is a good idea, actually." Ren chuckles lightly, the woodland path giving way to the wide-open expanse of the town square. "So, what sort of gifts did you think of?"

"Well..." Nora takes a deep inhale. "Ruby likes cookies so I think we should get her some of those, Weiss likes jewellery - though between you and me that stuff is suuuuper expensive - so maybe a little necklace or something, Blake likes books so how about the new copy of Ninjas of love? Yang loves - and I mean looooves - games, so let's grab a copy of that new racing game! Pyrrha and Jaune? Hmm, well Pyrrha likes chocolate - though she'll deny it to the death - so we'll get her some of dat, Jaune likes sentimental stuff, so I'm gonna get him an engraved statue made from the finest Boarbatusk ivory!" Nora pants from her quickly spoken eruption.

That’s the world they live in, lying about materials to claim they come from the Grimm...despite the fact that they disintegrate away after they are killed. It is just normal ivory from Boars.
"And you? Well... I've got something special in mind for you... it's secret though."

"Nora... " Ren sighs. "That all sounds very expensive."

"But they're worth it." Nora says softly, with the most determined yet pleading look in her big round eyes. Ren smiles at her.

"You're amazing, Nora." He pulls her into a one-armed hug, Nora humming and wrapping her arm around his back as they walk together. "So... which shop first?"

"Weeeeeeell..." Nora scans the array of shops in the high street, eyes snapping to the Jewellers, then the bakery, then the video store, then the book store, her lip being worried by her teeth harder and harder. "Oooh! I dunno, Ren!"

"Maybe the sculptors should be our first inquiry. See if they actually have Boarbatusk ivory in stock." Ren chuckles with a roll of his eyes.

"Well they should have! How hard is it to get a hold of?!"

"Not everyone can one hit kill a Boarbatusk, Nora." He smirks at her, the pair enjoying some alone time... just the two of them.

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Ruby

"Zwei, okay, okay, I'll let you off your leash now." Ruby giggles at the whiny dog pawing at his collar uncomfortably. "Just... don't go running off anywhere, okay?"

The little dog whines and whimpers at her, the silver eyed girl huffing and clicking the leash off of his collar. Instantly the Corgi perks up, bounding and frolicking in the long grass around Ruby's feet, panting eagerly. Weiss smiles and fans her face with her hand, looking up at the almost rainforest-like canopy overhead.

"Ruby, can we please get out of this humid... jungle!" Weiss whines, swiping her glossy brow with the back of her hand, gagging at the accumulated sweat on her knuckles. "Eww."

"Oh. Sure Weiss. C'mon Zwei!" Ruby calls as the perky dog's ears flit up from behind a moss smothered log. Ruby steps back onto the crumbled and cracked tarmac path, Weiss following suit, as Zwei quickly catches up to them with a few echoing barks. Weiss exhales heavily.

"Oh. Much better." She hums as a whipping of refreshingly cool air pours down the path. She flicks her slightly matted white fringe aside and swats at a few buzzing flies, welkin eyes falling on Ruby. They soften at her searching gaze, watching the path disappearing under the front of her shoes. "Ruby? Are you okay?"

"Hmm?" Ruby looks up with a start. "Oh. Yeah, I guess."

"You wouldn't be lying to your partner now, would you?" Weiss stops walking with a final clack of her heels, crossing her arms with a smirk. Ruby too pauses her walk and smiles weakly, shrugging.

"Eh. I've just got some things on my mind."

"Well... " Weiss blows out a breath, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I'm trying to be better at
"listening to people and-"

"Being an overall nicer person?" Ruby tilts her head. Weiss grates her teeth.

"Yes. That."

"It's okay, Weiss."

"Ruby!" Weiss grabs her shoulders firmly, eyes wide and lips snarling. "Share with me!"

"Wah?"

"I mean..." Weiss shakes her head, calming down. "I'm here to help and listen. So... what's bothering you?" Weiss sighs softly. Ruby bites her lip and sags her shoulders with a huff.

"I just... haven't been sleeping well. Nightmares and stuff." Ruby blushes, fist rubbing her eye. "It's embarrassing."

"No, it isn't, Ruby." Weiss shakes her head. "I have them too. Blake does. Yang certainly does. We're all struggling. This is the first time I've heard you voice your own, though."

"Yeah. I figured keep it to myself." Ruby shrugs, going to walk on when Weiss grabs her forearm, stopping her. Their eyes meet, Weiss' swimming with concern.

"What do you mean, keep it to yourself? Why would you do that to yourself, Ruby?"

"I just... people are struggling enough. They don't need my problems on top of theirs. Besides... I have to be strong... I-I'm a leader, and my team needs me."

"While that's admirable... it's stupid too." Weiss snaps. "We help each other, Ruby! Leader and all. Like you said, we're a team."

Ruby sniffs and her eyes water, an icy guilt pooling in her gut, mixing with the crushing weight of all that transpired. She hiccups and kicks a pebble.

"I killed..."

"Huh?" Weiss tilts her head. Ruby shrugs, sniffing.

"Torchwick. Neo. Just two of the lives I took. Not to mention White Fang soldiers..." Her bottom lip wobbles, teeth digging into the flesh to stabilize it. "I know they were bad, but... a life's a life! I wanted to be a Huntress, to fight Grimm, kill Grimm, stop bad guys. I just never knew how I'd feel when I took a life."

"Ruby..." Weiss breathes, hand held atop her heart.

"It hurts, Weiss." Ruby wells up, her throat clogged and thick. Her watery silver eyes meet soft icy blues. "I know they were bad, but it hurts."

"That's what makes you a good person, Ruby." Weiss gently grips her shoulder. "You feel. They don't. Do you think they'd think twice about killing you?"

"No." Ruby sniffs. "But isn't that your point? That we're different? Are we?" Ruby sobs into her hand, closing her eyes and bouncing on the spot as she fights to get the strangled words out. "... or am I just a monster too?"
"Come here." Weiss sighs, pulling Ruby into a hug as the young leader with such weight on her shoulders breaks, sobbing her heart out into Weiss' shoulder. The two of them share the quiet moment between partners, letting a wounded leader finally release the emotion she fought to hide from her heavily wounded team.

A single Jackdaw watches from a high branch, fiery red eyes flitting over the scene, before flapping its jet-black wings into the woodland canopy.

"Better?" Weiss murmurs as Ruby nods, wiping her eyes. "Good." The Schnee smiles and looks up at the dusty gold columns of light pouring through the cracks in the woodland canopy above. "We should probably get back, hmm?"

"Wait! N-Not yet." Ruby shakes her head. "I... I wanna see my Mom... j-just quickly!" Ruby whimpers. Weiss sighs and smiles softly.

"Of course, Ruby."

**Jaune**

The midday sun beating overhead has a way of draining the strength out of you, leaving your mouth dusty dry. Jaune claps his lips as he sets an array of glasses down on the kitchen counter, humming to himself as he goes about making some drinks. He walks over to the fridge and pulls out two bottles of orange juice.

"Ah, orange juice. Perfect choice. Vitamins and the sugar content are a much-needed boost after a workout." Pyrrha smiles, shutting the door with a click. Jaune nods with a hum and pours the bright liquid into each glass. Pyrrha watches him fondly, bouncing on her toes with her hands wrung behind her back. She tilts her head and steps closer to him.

He pours the last glass and screws the cap back onto the freshly squeezed juice. He pauses his motions and looks at Pyrrha as she smiles softly to him. "You okay?"

"Mmm... just thinking." She bobs her shoulders. Jaune raises a yellow brow.

"About?"

"Our date. That even though I'm slightly nervous to be in a romantic environment with you... I'm excited." Pyrrha blushes. Jaune smiles sheepishly and nods, scratching the back of his head.

"Yeah... so am I."

"Nervous or excited?" Pyrrha quirks a brow, tugging the corner of her lips up into a lopsided smile. Jaune snorts.

"Both, definitely both."

"Well... what's making you nervous?" Pyrrha leans against the counter, crossing her arms. Jaune raises a brow at her as she shrugs nonchalantly. "Humour me."

"Okay... " Jaune nods to himself. He opens the fridge and sets the bottle back into its frosty shelf. Shutting the fridge, he turns to face her and huffs, leaning against the breakfast island. "Well, I
guess I'm just nervous I'll say something wrong, or we'll find it weird and any feelings between us will just ruin our friendship."

"Oh Jaune, my silly partner." Pyrrha steps closer, cupping his cheeks softly, thumbs smoothing over the bags under his eyes. "Do you really believe it could end that way?"

"I dunno, I have my ways. It's a fear, I suppose." Jaune shrugs.

"Last night... when I kissed you. Did anything feel weird between us?" She asks gently.

"Besides me running away?" Jaune rolls his eyes. Pyrrha's hands firm on his face and his eyes snap to hers again. "No. It felt... it felt right. Like coming home, you know?"

"Mmm. I felt the same way. You don't have to worry about anything feeling weird on my part, Jaune. I care about you, very deeply."

"I care about you too, Pyrrha. To me, you went from being my cool partner - and super badass fighting champion and Pumpkin Pete's mascot - to the girl I want to be with more than anything in the world." Jaune whines, pressing his forehead to hers. "I want this to work, so badly. And even if we couldn't make a relationship work, I don't wanna lose you as my best friend. I just... I need you to be a part of my life."

"Jaune. I'll always be here for you." She strokes his face, eyes darting as she ponders if she should. "I want to do something for you."

"What?" Jaune asks softly in the gap between them. Pyrrha shrugs.

"I want to show you that you have nothing to worry about."

"Huh?" Jaune looks up into her warm green eyes. Pyrrha leans forward and softly pecked his lips, peeling back and reopening her eyes on his slightly pursed lips. With a soft giggle, she steps back from him and blushes, scratching the back of her head.

"So... tell me. Would I do that if I didn't think we could work? If I wasn't sure I wanted to be a part of your life in that way?"

"I guess not." Jaune chuckles with a grin. "Okay... so... We'll have dinner. Next weekend, yeah?"

"Sounds perfect. You still haven't told me where though." She snickers. Jaune nodded.

"Surprise." He winks. Pyrrha goes to retort, just as the door opens sharply, Yang panting and glistening with sweat. Her towel draped over her shoulders, orange vest soaked a darker shade, she swallowed to catch her breath.

"Whew! Kicked his butt on that last round!" She chuckles, pacing over to the fridge and opening the door, bending over to examine the shelves. Jaune smiles knowingly to Pyrrha and takes one of the glasses of orange juice off the counter.

"Hey Yang?" Jaune says, not breaking eye contact with Pyrrha. Yang shuts the fridge and turns, seeing the held-out glass of marigold liquid.

"Thanks, Jaune." She lightly punches his arm after accepting the glass into her cybernetic hand.

SMASH!

Shards of glass explode across the tiling admix splashes of orange juice. Yang's closes cybernetic
fist slowly opens, dripping with juice. Jaune and Pyrrha are wide eyed, Yang blushing and shrinking her head down, ears touching her shoulders.

"Oops. Heh. Still gotta work on applying pressure." Yang scratches the base of her neck. "Can I err... maybe get another?"

Jaune nods and hands her another glass, into her other hand this time. Pyrrha loops a vermilion lock behind her ear and grabs the dustpan and brush from the closet, bending over to sweep up the reflective glitter of broken glass. Yang finishes a swig.

"Mmm, thanks Pyrrha. It's okay, I can do it."

"I don't mind."

"But... You've already done so much for me. All of you have." Yang sighs, hopping up to perch her rear on the kitchen counter. Cradling her glass in her lap, her metal fingertips drummed a gentle rhythm into the cup. "I don't how to thank you."

"Come back to Beacon." Jaune says with finality, hands pressing into the counter either side of her legs, looking into her lilac eyes with a plea. Yang looks down at her glass and sighed.

"I don't think I can, Jaune."

"Why not? It's not like you left on bad terms with the staff or anything, you left for an inj-"

"I don't think I'm cut out to be a Huntress." Yang sombrelly shrugs. Pyrrha dumps the glass remnants into the bin and sets the dustpan back in the closet, looking back to their wounded friend. "You heard my Dad. I rely too much on my semblance. Every fight I've ever had, it's been used in some way or another."

Jaune steps back as Yang hops off the counter onto her feet. She gulps back the last of the juice and sets the cup on the drainer. "I never really thought about what would happen if I missed... until I did." She lifts her cybernetic hand up to the light, watching the kaleidoscope of colour as it seeps through the gaps between plates and pistons. "This thing is amazing, but... it's not me. And I've only got one of my gauntlets! The other is gods only know where. To return to Beacon like this would be... I don't think I could handle it."

Jaune nods and looks at Pyrrha, flitting his eyes back to Yang and searching her features. "Are you... worried about what people might say? Gossip and stuff?"

"Heh. Nah, people have always spoken about me behind my back..." Yang shrugs the comment off, sobering as she looks at her arm. "This is different though. I guess I'm kinda nervous to go back, cos of this and what people'll think or say. I just don't want pity!" Yang throws her arms down and straight back up to run down her face. "Urgh, you know? I don't want my grades perked up cos 'Ah, she's missing an arm, we've got to allow for that' or 'poor thing, here's some extra credit cos we feel sorry for you!"

Jaune nods and leans back against the counter, Pyrrha perching her butt on the worktop beside him. "I can understand that." Jaune nods. Yang tilts her head.

"You can?"

"We both can." He gestures to Pyrrha as well as she nods. "I'm always getting pity, whether it's about bullies or my fighting ability. Constant pity sucks. I've been pitied all my life for being the weakest of a family of great huntsmen. It sucks, I get it."
"And while I am grateful for all the care and support I've received from people at school, the pity does start to wear you down. That's why this has been so lovely, being with friends who don't show pity, but compassion." Pyrrha smiles. Yang looks down at her feet.

"We're not trying to take anything away from what happened to you, sis." Jaune says, gently squeezing Yang's shoulder. She smiles at his soft gesture, and the family orientation to his words. "We just want you to know we understand. I still think you should come back to Beacon."

"Jaune, I... I've only got one weapon."

"So have I. Other's a shield. I use that arm to protect myself, and the other to attack."

"The whole point of today hasn't been to only get you back into fighting shape, but to adapt your fighting style to your current predicament." Pyrrha shrugs, tilting her head. "Adapting is how we survive."

"Your team needs you, Yang." Jaune says, Yang scoffing. "Low blow, Jaune."

"I'm serious. They're a team of three when they need four. They need you, Yang." Jaune sighs. "We all do."

"I... I'm... " Yang turns away to face the table, pressing both hands into the wooden surface. "Can we just drop it?"

"No, Yan-"

"Yes, of course." Pyrrha adds, looking at Jaune's frowning face knowingly. "That's enough for today." She says slowly, her eyes bleeding what she meant into him. He nods and huffs.

"Yeah. No rush." He rubs his eyes tiredly. With the desire to clear the dark cloud over the trio, Pyrrha stands and claps her hands together.

"You did incredibly well today, Yang. Lovely footwork. You've grown accustom to the new appendage very quickly. I'm impressed." Hands on her hips, the red-haired tutor grins. Yang smiles over her shoulder.

"Thanks, Pyrrha. I know I've got a-ways to go, but... " She looks at her arm with a huff. "It's like learning to walk again. Or forgetting how to ride a bike. Something so ingrained in you vanishes, and you struggle to relearn it when the opportunity comes around." She smiles and closes her metal fist. "I'm trying though."

"Hey, you tried it on for the first time this morning, Yang! Don't sell yourself short. What you've achieved today is incredible!" Jaune beams. Yang's eyes widen.

"Oh yeah! I forgot! Dad and I were talking, and he said we should have a barbecue tonight! It'll be sweet, the setting sun, group of friends just relaxing and unwinding and eating grilled... everything!"

"Sounds good to me." Pyrrha smiles warmly. Jaune nods and gives Yang a quick hug, startling the brawler. She softens and smiles, wrapping her arms around his back and burying her face into his neck with a hum.

"Thanks, bro."
"You're welcome, sis." Jaune breathes. Yang opens her eyes and looks over Jaune's shoulder at Pyrrha.

"You two are perfect together. Please... figure it out." Yang mumbles into his neck.

Jaune smiled and nodded.

"Yeah... we have."

**Later that night…**

"With a quivering hand, she picked up the torch! Her legs trembled with fear, to the knocking within the closet door! Then - don't laugh, it's supposed to be scary - ahem - THEN! Then. Then she opened the door, and inside the closet was..."

"What?! What was it?!" Nora cries out, hugging Ren's arm tightly. Jaune grins devilishly, taking a deep breath.

"It was... A HAND!" Jaune exclaims, Nora and Ruby screaming and cowering into their partner's sides. Ren smirks and hugs the trembling Valkyrie, while Weiss frowns and tries to free herself from Ruby's incredibly strong grip.

"A hand? No way, was it Yang's?" Tai says, all of the kids gasping. Yang looks scandalized and hurt, everyone watching her intently for her reaction. It comes as quite the surprise when Yang snorts and giggles, punching her Dad's arm.

"You jerk!" She laughs, Tai laughing too. Slowly JNPR and RWB shift their nervous laughs and share glances to genuine chuckles. "I gotta **hand** it to ya, good story Jaune, if it was a little cheesy." Yang sobers, hugging her knees and staring into the camp fire they are sat around. A warm orange glow flickers over their features, shadows dancing over their bodies like the reflective coils of light beneath the surface of the ocean.

"Thanks. Ah, thought of it on the fly." Jaune chuckles, rubbing the back of his head. "So! Anybody else got any **scary** campfire stories?"

"I do! I do!" Ruby bounces, hand held in the air. Weiss scoffed.

"Oh please. I can already guess how your story will go." She crosses her arms. Ruby frowns.

"Nuh-Uh."

"Yes, I believe I do. A girl or a boy will be in bed when they'll hear a noise from downstairs. They'll get up to investigate and it'll be the cookie monster." Weiss explains, Ruby frowning harder and crossing her arms. "See? Told you I knew you too well."

"Well I don't know whether to be flattered or angry!" Ruby yells. "I'm... FLATTERED!" She yells, before knitting her brows and angrily pouting to the flames of the campfire.

"No. What **you** need is a truly well-structured scary story with a beginning, middle and end, with a very sagacious plot. Allow me. Ahem." Weiss clears her throat into her fist. Jaune smiles at the group, before sobering and looking to the house's front door. Blake nudges his arm, startling him.
"You okay?" She asks. Jaune nods.

"Just... Pyrrha's been gone a while, don't ya think?" He shrugs. Blake raises a brow.

"Jaune, she went to use the bathroom. She'll be fine."

"Yeah, I know." He sighs. "Guess I'm just... a little overprotective of her still."

"I get that." Blake whispers over Weiss's story. "After what happened, I can see how her being out of sight for a while can... bring up old memories. Not savoury ones either." She hugs her knees, cat ears flicking every now and then.

"Are... do you... " Jaune huffs. "Have you felt like that at Beacon? With Yang being here?"

"A bit, yeah. I worry she's in pain. But being here this weekend has helped massively. I mean, look at her smile." Blake beams fondly over the lapping flames of the fire. "Doesn't she look happy to you?"

"Happiest I've ever seen her." Jaune grinned.

"... Then the girl took a deep inhale, before picking up the 'Schnee dust company' dust capsule-"

"No self-promoting." Yang holds a finger up. Weiss frowned.

"It's my story! Besides, who else makes Dust?"

"I dunno but I'm covered in dust, waiting for you to get to the scary part!" Yang grins as she challenges.

"I'm setting the scene!" Weiss yells back. "Now where was I... Ah yes. She took it upon herself to pick up the dust capsule and load it into the pistol. Then the sound came from the wall again. She was afraid, nervous-"

"But on the surface was she calm and ready?" Yang asks.

"Yeah, to drop bombs, but did she keep on forgetting what she wrote down?" Blake adds.

"Mmm, did the whole crowd go so loud?" Jaune quips.

"Yeah, did she open her mouth, but the words won't come out-" Yang grins.

"STOP QUOTING LYRICS OVER MY STORY!" Weiss yells, bouncing on the log she perches on. "Now. Where was I? Oh. And then she-"

"Boo!"

"AHHHHH!" Weiss screams, hugging Ruby with wide welkin eyes. The collective around the fire burst into laughter as a giggling Pyrrha stepped back from behind Weiss. "P-Pyrrha!"

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't resist." The red head blushed. "I'm really sorry!"

"P-money that was gold!" Yang laughs, falling backwards off of her log with a giggly thump. Even Ren has to get a grip over his chuckling. Pyrrha wraps her arms around the frowning Schnee, hugging her and apologizing over and over. She lets go and pads back to her spot beside chortling Jaune, swiping a tear away from his eye.
"Pyrrha, that was so good!"

"Yeah!" Ruby laughs breathlessly. Weiss quirks a small smile.

"I-It wasn't funny!" Weiss tries to argue, but her own light giggling and twitching smile betrays her. Pyrrha smiles and hugs her crimson cardigan around her waist, Jaune shuffling closer to her.

“That was really funny." He smiles fondly to her.

"Yeah, good one Pyrrha." Blake giggling in little hiccupping fits.

"Weiss' face!" Yang laughs breathlessly, legs kicking to the sky over the back of the log. "I can't breathe!"

Pyrrha smiles till her cheeks hurt, looking around at all of her friends, true friends who love and cherish her. Not like Dandelion and her many liar friends…these guys really love and care for her. Her blush spreads across her cheeks even redder, as Jaune finds her hand in her lap and gives it a gentle squeeze. She looks up at him, two pairs of eyes filled with mirth and warm emotion. Before she rests her head on his shoulder, feeling his lips press into her red locks and his thumb smoothing over her knuckles.

She once tried to make friends with the wrong people.

People who used her for her name, her title, her belongings.

Turns out, that several years later, she'd be sat around a campfire, not just with her friends, with her teams, but with her family. With the people who cherished Pyrrha, not Pyrrha Nikos the Invincible Girl. She never felt more at peace than she did in this very moment, cuddling with Jaune by a campfire, swapping stories, laughing till their jaws ached at the antics of her greatest investment ever.

Her investment in them.

Her investment she paid for not with Lien, but with her heart.

She looks up at the sky and smiles up at the Shattered Moon…

Sometime later…

The Shattered Moon watches over the many trees beneath it, thousands of stars dotting the dark night sky. Beneath the moon at the campfire she remains, looking ahead. Long raven black hair and red eyes, grasping her Multi-Coloured Bladed Odachi on her lap with two other individuals sat at the fire with her. One is a young woman with short hair and a pair of bladed pistols and another is a sleeping young boy with hazel coloured eyes.

She narrows her red eyes as she speaks. “I hope I don’t regret saving you…”

She stares across the fire, and as the smoke parts it reveals the bandage that covers her eye, dried up blood covering her face and a stare right back with an amber eye. Also wearing bandit clothing. She pants, looking into Raven’s eyes.
“You won’t…” Cinder promises.
The Glass Slipper

Cinder

The red portal splits open in the air as she falls from the tower, accepting the end and the cold hands of death to grapple round her. But instead she keeps falling, and falling and falling until she came out the other side, crashing into the ground and tumbling across, dust covering the sticky hot blood on her burned body. She groans in pain, some trailing across her body as she looks around, looking in the direction of the tower to see her standing there.

Raven Branwen.

Her mane of black hair blows softly in the wind with her hand resting on the pommel of her Odachi, staring at the Grimm that flee from the Academy and the city, retreating into the safety of the forests that surround them. She looks over her shoulder slowly at Cinder with narrowed red eyes, then walks towards her calmly. “Cinder Fall…” She softly greets as she approaches, and Cinder snarls as she activates the dust in her dress to form a sword, only for Raven to kick it from her palm, then stamping onto her scorched arm. Cinder screeches in complete agony as she grabs onto the heeled boot of the mother of Yang Xiao Long.

Raven leans down and stares into her eyes…or her eye from how much blood has left the scarring. “Let’s chat, back at my place, shall we?” Raven asks her curiously, until she winds her leg back and kicks Cinder in the side of her head with full force. The impact knocks the young woman out in one swift motion. Raven exhales, sheathing her side and turning to a bandit from her tribe who approaches her.

She is a young woman with tan-coloured skin, short brown hair and icy blue eyes. She has a tattoo of a bird rising from flowers on her left arm. She wears a brown vest over a torn white shirt, with a collar that appears to spike up behind her neck. She also wears maroon-coloured pants with the right side rolled up to her thigh. At the same time, she wears dark brown knee guards that go down to her brown boots.

Clearly one of her closest friends, looking at Raven. “Shouldn’t we kill her, Raven? She is…dangerous…she caused all this. She works for Salem.” The woman asks her with concern in her voice, and Raven looks down at her, scooping her unconscious body up and slinging her over her shoulder, the blood from her eye and arm staining the back of her red clothes.

“I know who she is, Vernal. We could get a lot of money for turning her in…but at the same time she is powerful, like you said. If she does work for Salem, and I think she is…then she can never return. Salem is going to kill her for failure, she doesn’t broker it.” Raven explains as she walks towards Vernal with Cinder over her shoulder.

“And if she tries to kill us? She is a Fall Maiden.” Vernal reminds, and Raven scoffs with a grin on her face.

“Please, for her it is nothing more than a title. I can handle her.” She assures as she takes her sword and opens up another portal, but before she leaves, she looks back in the direction of the Academy.

“Your daughter is in there, Raven…don’t you want to check on her?” Vernal asks, and Raven sighs, shutting her eyes.
“She’s a strong girl…she will be fine.” Raven states, walking through the portal with Cinder in her custody. Vernal looks back at the destruction the Academy and parts of Vale suffered that night. She sighs, then follows Raven, the portal closing behind her.

Years Ago…

Snowflakes danced in the breeze that eve. The moon was hidden behind thick heavy clouds, the occasional seep of liquid light bleeding through. White coated the land, and the clocks hands twitched ever closer to midnight.

The village was silent, flurries of snow speckling the cobbles, bathed in dim street lamp light. Then the clacking of hooves broke the nightly hush, trotting through the inch-deep snow. A pair of chestnut brown horses merrily trotted down the street, pumpkin shaped carriage trundling behind, wheels carving swaths in the snow.

At the end of the small quiet village - just outside of Mistral's borders - sat a grand house, and within its walls, a lonesome girl scrubbed tirelessly at the tiles beneath her worn hands and knees. She scrubbed and scrubbed, teeth clenched at the harsh solid flooring against her bare knees.

Dressed in sacks and rags, raven black hair hanging over one eye, she groaned and scrubbed with all she had.

The sponge ran dry, the suds faded away, and she panted as her eyes danced over her handy work. A sigh of relief and she rose to her tired feet. Her thin legs buckled and wobbled under her weight, albeit not a lot. Holes in her rags revealed skin tight against ribs, her stomach groaning louder and louder.

Sponge dropped into the murky bucket, her hand finding the rough broom. Sores speckled her pale skin, callouses and blisters screaming against the grain of the handle.

Then the trundling carriage and trotting horses found her ears. Her eyes blew wide, her heart dropped to the pit of her stomach. Her fingers began to tremble, and the bruises alighted with pain all over again.

Tirelessly she swept and swept, flitting her eyes up to snow buried glass. A man in a suave suit stepped from the carriage with a chuckle, hand outstretched to the brown-haired beauty within. Her pale blue dress cradling her curves, the diamonds across her skin dazzling in the light.

Jealously tightened the hand on the broom and the fist at her hip. Bare feet padded across the tiling to get a better look, nose almost against the cold glass.

The lady took the gentlemen's hand as she carefully stepped out, her glass heel clacking softly onto the snowy stone.

Through the fogging of the glass, the hot breath from her lips, the young girl looked down at her starved body, at her lack of beauty and trinkets and worship. She wanted to cry at her life.

The door unlocked with a loud click, startling the servant. She dropped the broom with a yelp, knocking the bucket of murky water over, spilling grimy fluid over the expensive flooring. Hands found her hair as she cried in horror
Her skin paled further, her pupils shrunk and it all crescendo to a tearful yelp as the door slammed shut.

“What is going on here?!” The Gentlemen yelled. “I expected this floor spotless or did the nineteen lashings from yesterday teach you NOTHING!” he bellowed, the tendons in his neck tightening like violin strings under skin.

“I-I'm sorry.” She sniffled, panting to the fast rhythm of her heart.

“Sorry?! Sorry doesn't pay for all this, sweetheart! You think “Sorry's” bought this suit, this house, my horses, her slippers?! No!” He stepped through the murky water, stalking towards her as the dress wearing princess behind watched with a frown.

“You should get better servants, Charming.” She said to him with a huff. He gripped the servant girls thin and brittle wrist, making her cry out as he lifted her to her tiptoes.

“I think you're right.” Charming growled, reeling his hand back and sending it colliding across the small girl's face. She fell to her knees on the watery tiling. “Lashings teach you nothing, none of my punishments change you. You think Lady Tremaine and her daughters were harsh on you?” He gripped her elbow and pulled her up, so he could lowly whisper in her ear. “I can be so much worse. Crueller than Tremaine, more sadistic than Drizella, nastier than Anastasia.”

She cried, tears dripping from her cheeks into the watery mess below. He dropped her into the muck, turning to his Princess with a gleeful smile.

“Now. Why don't you head up to the bedroom? Put your shoes over there, away from this filth. I'll join you in a moment, my dear.” He grinned. She smiled and gave a clap, taking off both carefully crafted glass slippers. Each one gently set down on the table top. She quickly padded her bare feet to the staircase, vanishing up them with a light giggle.

“And you. I should be up there with her, but instead... I'm dealing with you.” He growled, turning and kicking the weaker teen across the jaw. She splashed down in the mop water. “Ah, what she doesn't know won't hurt her. Not like anyone's gonna miss you, right?” He grabbed her elbow as she reeled from the kick, lolling her tongue as blood dripped from the tip.

He turned and threw her across the ruined tiling, her spine hitting the metal bucket, her head bouncing off of the table leg. A smash sounded next to her seconds later.

She lifted her head, blearily looking at the shards of glass on the wet tiles. His boot pressed down on her windpipe, pinning her neck between his foot and the table leg.

“Those... weren't cheap!” He snapped. As the light began to fade from her eyes, her hands clutching at thin air, uselessly pushing at his boot, a revelation hit her. In the last seconds of her pitiful life, she decided enough was enough.

Her hand swatted at shards of glass, cutting her pale skin like butter. In the last seconds of life, her bloodied palm found the smooth glass heel of the slipper. Without hesitation she brought it forward and jammed the shattered glass into his thigh. Blood spewed down his leg, darkening his black suit further.

He cried out and keeled over to his knees, clutching his leg as his screams echoed across the house. The servant girl gasped for air, colour returning to her cheeks. And with two gasping breaths, she fell forward and buried the broken slipper into his neck, slicing the flesh and tearing the arteries.

He gurgled, the murky bucket water across the tiles running dark ruby red. He wheezed and
choked, before he fell to his side with a light splash, pupils widening as life left his sorry hide.

The servant girl stood over him, panting with bloodied glass slipper in hand.

“Oh Charming? Charming what’s going on? A-re you coming to... bed.” The woman's pupils shrunk as she took in the carnage. The floor ran dark around his body, white shirt stained red. Her panicked eyes lifted to the panting servant girl.

“P-Please!”

With a scream of rage, she’d never been able to unleash – years of repressed hatred exploded forth, burying the slipper in the woman’s chest, dropping her to the staircase. Again, and again she stabbed her, over and over the slipper hit its mark.

Tears ran unrivalled down her cheeks as she painted the woman's body red with that slipper.

**Present Day…**

Weeks have passed since she fell unconscious after the Battle of Beacon…

She groans in agony, her eye throbbing from the burning sensation, feeling the sticky hot blood that has hardened on her cheek and the tight pressure over her arm and her eye. Along with a second bandage wrapped over her right breast and diagonally over her torso, since she has suffered burns in many areas from Ruby unleashing the full power of Silver Eyed Energy into her to protect Pyrrha Nikos.

Cinder presses her hand to her head, gasping as she feels her eye bursting in pain, biting her lip to fight it. Only to find her arms have been bound by the wrists by rope, and she looks ahead to see her sat on one of the crates on the other side of the bars. Raven Branwen sits there with a chicken leg in her hand, biting some off and looking right at the new Fall Maiden. She swallows the food down and throws the dry bone picked clean into one of the trash bins in the corner. “So...Cinder Fall...at least that is the name you have chosen, right? I know a lot about where you come from though.” Raven explains as she crosses one leg over the other.

Cinder snarls, sitting up and pressing her back against the cold metallic bars. “Oh yeah? Enlighten me.” She replies, crossing one of her legs over the other as she sits there, looking down at her fingers, her amber eye faintly glimmering as she heats up her Fall Maiden gifts in an attempt to break out. Raven chuckles at her attempt, and Cinder looks at her with a raised black eyebrow.

“I know you are from a Rich Family that lived nearby to our current location…as you can see, we tend to break down camp and move around a lot. Anima is a large continent.” Raven explains with a smirk. “Lots of places to hide…I guess you would know that.”

“You could say that.” She grunts, trying to burn the rope around her wrists, slowly working but quickly she catches onto the fact that Raven totally knows what she is up to.

“I wouldn’t bother trying sweetie, because you won’t leave this place…not until you give me a reason to.” Raven explains, leaning forward. “And trust me, don’t think that just because you have the Fall Maiden’s gift means you can take me down. You are not skilled in its power, and that means I could take you out with ease.” She assures with a small smirk on her face, then Cinder gasps softly when she realises.
“You know? How do you know?” Cinder questions with confusion and disbelief, cooling her hands down and Raven leans back as she reaches over to the barrel’s lid next to her, picking up the bottle of beer resting there. She pulls off the cork with ease and she drinks it before answering her question, ungracefully wiping the residue from her lips.

“That mark on your back is a pretty good guess…and I watched you fight from the treeline before the Grimm infested them. You were lucky I didn’t just let the Grimm eat you up for what you did.” Raven explains, and Cinder narrows her amber eye at the red eyed Bandit Leader sat before her, and she scoffs.

“Why would you care? You clearly don’t care about Ozpin or your daughter.” Cinder snarls, however Raven does not even flinch from her jab, she just stares right into that untouched amber eye of hers, raising a brow, then smiling with a soft intake of breath.

“So…you know who I am.” Raven deduces perceptively.

“Yeah, you’re Raven Branwen…Salem has been keeping her eye on you for a very long time, y’know.” Cinder explains and Raven chuckles as she leans back.

“Well, since you are quite the fool then I guess you know that Salem never opened a portal to save you. Either you knew that from the get-go or you are stupid as well.” Raven explains as she shrugs her shoulders, picking up a whetstone and scraping it across the blade of her Odachi, the many other multicoloured Dust Forged Blades loaded inside of her scabbard next to her. Cinder exhales deeply as she sits back.

“I failed…Salem does not broker failure…I have seen it myself.” Cinder explains with a fearful voice as she hears the screams of all those that have failed her in the past. The agonising screams of them being either devoured by creatures of Grimm extremely slowly…or by other means unknown to every single one of them.

“I know, that’s why I ditched my brother and Ozpin when I did…I’m smart, I know that you need to be ready to survive when the time comes…and I know it is coming. So, do you, I can see that desperation to survive in your eyes. I have seen it before, I see it every day…it is who we are…the Branwens. We are survivors.” Raven explains with her hands held out and Cinder raises her brow.

“Even your brother? Who is indoctrinated by Oz?” Cinder questions with disbelief.

“My brother’s choices are his own, I won’t stand against him as long as he stays out of my way. His methods are different to mine, but I know him, he knows how the world works. One of the few things we ever shared in common…our beliefs of Ozpin on the other hand…not so much.” Raven explains with the sucking of her teeth in between the sentences surrounding Ozpin. Cinder scoffs, because that is something that they both seem to agree on right now. Raven glares at Cinder and something seems to change in her mannerisms. “But there is one thing I will always share with my brother…I will always care for family…even if I cannot be around them. My daughter lost her arm thanks to you and your attack…you are lucky I haven’t killed you already, but at the end of the day you are more useful to me alive than dead.” She explains and Cinder scoffs.

“I am already dead.” Cinder states as she hangs her head down, no longer trying to escape from her cell when she realises that as a stone-cold fact.

“Indeed.” Raven agrees. “So…there is a hefty sum of Lien currently on your head for multiple reasons. At the end of the day the family you killed that night when you were a kid have still not had rightful justice and I know for certain that the Mistraalian Police Department would pay a hefty sum to us if we turned you in. Salem could show up with her other Disciples and offer me a
reasonable exchange for you, which I could agree to.” She explains, and Cinder’s eyes burst open with terrified fear.

Raven stares at her, half-tempted to actually do that since she wants her daughter’s suffering to be avenged in some form. However, there is always a third way, a way that Cinder could possibly agree with. “Or…you come with me tonight, with a few of my Bandits and we investigate that home of yours. Has not been touched since the Mistraalian Police investigated it. Could still be some really valuable shit in there we could auction off.” Raven explains as she crosses her arms. “Play it cool and I could consider having you join us, you would be a lethal weapon against our many enemies, like the Vasillias Cartel.” She mentions, the same Cartel family that Eryka and – unknowingly – Neptune are descendants from.

Cinder raises her burned eyebrow at the Bandit Leader. “Why?” She questions.

“You’re the Fall Maiden, that would stack our odds in our favour significantly.” Raven explains, until Cinder shakes her head as she lifts her hand up to rub the hot pain in her head around where her eye has been burned.

“No…I mean…why save me…after everything I have done? And not kill me and take the power for yourself?” She questions, and Raven narrows her red eyes as she crouches down outside her cage, staring right at her, drawing her sword and suddenly holding the red blade up against her throat. The unexpected thrust knocks Cinder back, and her eye widens, but then she calms as she stares Raven Branwen down.

“Oh, honey…believe me…it is taking every single fibre of my being not to cut you down right now at this second. I once gave a monster a second chance and I have regretted it every day since…but at the end of the day it is in my nature. I give people second chances, so I hope that you will make this right.” Raven snarls with narrowed eyes, making Cinder scoff.

“Looting, killing and stealing is better than what I have done?” She questions.

“We do what we have to, so then we can survive. But attacking a school, a city with thousands, no, millions inside of it? With nothing to gain? That is where we draw the line, we attack weak populaces, ones that are dying out already or we loot already fallen villages from the Grimm. You mercilessly murdered thousands in your campaign in tow with Salem, I may not fight for Ozpin anymore…but I know the difference between right and wrong.” Raven explains with a snarl as she stands outside her cell with that long Red Odachi Blade pressed against Cinder’s jugular.

All she would need to do is slash, and she would die, her aura is not up right now…she is not even activating it.

“So…I could end it here, give you over to Salem, turn you in to the authorities for your many crimes…or…I give you the chance to join me. What’ll it be, Cinder Fall?” She questions with judgemental eyes, pulling the red blade from Cinder’s throat ever so slowly. Cinder exhales through her small nostrils and looks up at Yang Xiao Long’s intimidating mother.

“Deal.” She agrees.

“Good.” Raven replies, cutting the rope bound round her wrists and turning away from her, revealing the door was open the whole time and her amber eyes widen with disbelief. “You could have escaped at any time and killed my people…I expect that you will maintain that behaviour. But trust me, if you even dare try and betray my trust – I will kill you without a second thought, you hear me?” Raven questions, and Cinder nods her head.
“Say it.” Raven snarls furiously, aiming the sword to her neck again.

Cinder looks up at her. “You will kill me…if I betray you.” She repeats, and Raven analyses her expression…normally it is easy for her to tell when someone is trying to play her for a fool…but Cinder seems genuine. She knows the price of failure with Salem, and it is clear that now the Grimm will no longer serve Cinder and most likely be against Mercury and Emerald…wherever they are in the world.

Maybe she wants a second chance…

Raven sheaths her Odachi and turns to walk away from Cinder, speaking once more. “We have a horse ready for you. Put on these clothes in that tent, that dress is worthless to you now.” Raven orders, picking up a folded set of Bandit clothing and throwing it through the now open cage door to Cinder’s lap. “It has Dust Markings lined in them, so if we encounter Grimm along the way you can make your weapons.” She explains, and Cinder stands up weakly, her aura starting to heal her lesser wounds.

“You’ve done your research.” Cinder huffs with an impressed tone in her voice.

“My perception has kept me alive so far, you should try being more perceptive. Maybe you would have won that battle.” She states as she walks towards the Horses that wait for her. Vernal stands by one of the Horses with her Wind and Fire Bladed Guns, crescent shaped blades curving over the two barrels with dust shells loaded inside of them. Cinder examines the clothes and exhales, walking over to the tent to get changed.

Shedding her damaged dress, she can see the extent of the damage done by Ruby Rose and her Silver Eyes. Burns have covered her once gorgeous frame, across her chest and round her back, ironically forming wings of scarring on her spine. She winces as she touches her bandage, still feeling that beating pain in her head where the concussion still throbs away. She reaches down to the wraps of bandage around her arm and she looks at the fresh burns slowly being healed by her aura. The pain is starting to subside thanks to the aura cooling the burns and making the red flushes fade away back into their Caucasian colour.

She opens up the folded clothes and starts to put them on, first of all is a pretty worn red vest she puts on over her black bra, sewing up the lower portions of her V-Neck, showing her cleavage a bit but not too much. Then she picks up the trousers, pretty tight, must have once belonged to a woman a bit younger than her. But they still fit, dark brown with a few holes in them and some pouches for ammunition or spare space for looting. They also have one built in metal kneepad on her right leg. Now she picks up the black leather cut jacket, with the sleeves ripped off with slight markings in the clothes where the dust has been woven into it like thread.

She takes her bandage and wraps up her arm again, able to move it better now than she did earlier on, however it would be best to keep it on for now. She looks up and catches herself in the mirror, she pauses, and she shudders when she sees the state of her once beautiful long black hair. Now scorched from Ruby’s silver fire, she touches it and it barely moves…like it has been frozen. The same feeling, she had when she tried to move her arm, like it froze her…like the Dragon. She turns her attention to a pair of scissors and she picks them up slowly, exhaling.

If she is in hiding…

She cannot be so familiar.

With the scissors she begins to cut her hair piece by piece, cutting the long hair away every singe snip. Locks of black hair float from her head and onto the dirt beneath her. Piling up as she
viciously cuts it, leaving it all messy but short, making it harder for her enemies to grab onto her. She sorts the hair out with her hands, straightening the strands as she looks at herself…she may not be as gorgeous as she once was anymore…but…she is alive. Her eyes finally turn to the pair of boots in the corner, knee height leather with lots of buckles that she tightens around her slender legs.

They also have small knives hidden inside of the caps, ones that can extend whenever she wants them to with the flick of her leg.

She is ready.

Cinder emerges from the tent, still in pain but recovering on the go…what worries her most of all is having to return to where her suffering all began.

Half an Hour Later…

While on Horseback the Fall Maiden looks around at the woods, feeling the cold air of Fall brushing across her cheek like the stroke of Death itself. Desperately trying to pull her back to the crushing jaws of the afterlife, but she shall not let it take her, not today, and not ever. She will not fall this day, and not the next…it is not in her nature to give up. But to run and hide so then she can fight another day? Then she will if she must, but even now she finds herself looking over her shoulder, waiting to see her teacher staring at her, ready to put her through immense agony for her failure.

She rides behind Raven and Vernal, the leader watches the trees for any mysterious threats, from Creatures of Grimm or even to rival Gangs in Anima. There are more Bandit Tribes here than one can possibly even count, but the major players are the Branwens and the Vasillias Cartel, and even then, the Cartel are far beyond anything that the Bandits are used to. Conducting Business and bribing politicians across the world, with Atlesian M.E.C.Hs at their disposal and many ships, vehicles and weapons – with practically an army of men and women to use them, they are undoubtedly a force to be reckoned with.

One that hides in the shadows though, using their name to sell thousands of products everywhere. It is likely that Neptune believes that his parents work for one of the companies that have their name and that he never gets to see the rest of his family. Little does he know that he is the child of the leaders of a massive Drug and Weapons Trading Cartel. Cinder has not said a word since they set off, Vernal looks back at the Fall Maiden and she slows her horse down just enough to ride alongside her.

Cinder glances at her with her one good eye. “ Noticed you cut your hair, there a reason for that or are you just copying me for my good looks, babe?” She asks her playfully, caressing her cheek with her index finger. Cinder snarls, batting her hand away and igniting her eye threateningly, Vernal grins as a response. “Ooh, cool it fire eyes, just teasing you. But why? Sick of it getting in your eyes?” She asks her curiously, Cinder rolls her amber coloured eye.

“It was damaged from the girl on the tower. Rather cut the trapped leg so I could be free, if you catch my drift.” Cinder explains as she holds the reigns of her horse, riding alongside the Bandit with her pistols resting on the saddle of her brown horse. Ahead of them is Raven on her black horse, and Cinder has a White Horse, very pretty one too. Quite nice of them to actually lend such a pretty horse.
And of course, Raven has a black horse, she seems to like that colour a lot.

“So, why’d you do it?” Vernal inquires.

“Do what?” Cinder replies almost venomously.

“Kill your family? You get bored of their company or what?” She asks her, and Cinder just stares ahead, trying her best to stifle that anger, luckily Raven helps in that regard.

“She was enslaved by them.” Raven answers and Vernal pauses, looking back at the saddened Cinder Fall who just keeps riding, staring at the white mane of her Horse, caressing its neck ever so gently.

“Oh…sorry.” Vernal apologises with a sigh, and Raven sighs back, then the trees seem to part ways before them. Revealing the overgrown estate where Cinder was kept, not sure if she was born here or not…but this is the only place she has ever known. Old police tape left to be covered in moss and over flora over the years. Vernal raises a brow with confusion as she stares at the abandoned vehicles out front. “Why…did the Police close this investigation?” Vernal inquires.

“Officially? No evidence was found. Most likely? Someone paid ‘em off, most likely someone working for Salem to get them off Cinder’s back when she trained her. Right?” Raven presumes and Cinder chuckles.

“Spot on.” She answers, and Raven smiles as she keeps riding, full of herself and her ability to deduce fact from lie, like a needle in a haystack and Raven always brings a magnet with her. Resting on the saddle of her horse is her mask, looking like a Grimm with every second she wears it. Almost like the soldiers of the White Fang, except she knows she is not a monster, she just gets the job done. They leave their horses outside the front of the estate, some of the other Bandits follow them whilst the others search the perimeter for signs of Grimm.

“Any Grimm Activity, sound off.” Raven orders as she puts on her mask, looking at the abandoned building, the door broken in after the Police breached to get in. She holds her Scabbard and clips it back onto her belt as she walks inside with her allies, pushing the slightly broken door open as they walk in. Vernal steps in first, aiming her pistol up to keep the area secured.

“Clear.” Vernal sounds off.

Cinder however stares at the door, how overgrown and ruined it has become. She stammers as a memory flashes into her eyes of the door once being pristine and the wishing she would make to leave that place. Or that the Grimm would attack and eat her family…little did she know that she would be the one to kill them. She closes her eye and exhales a shaky breath, following Raven and Vernal into the building with her fist clenched as she enters. Raven looks around at the place, tall spiralling staircases and three…no…four levels of at least six rooms on each. And the ground floor is gigantic, with marble floor everywhere and stunning furniture.

However, it looks like some looters have been here before them, taken the obvious things. But Raven’s clan are used to situations such as these, where lucky looters have taken the opportunity when they could and gotten there first. “Search the area, find whatever we can. Either of value or of use for our people.” Raven orders, but Cinder walks right past her through the lower level.

As she walks, her memory forms again…as she as a child leapt at her father and slammed him to the ground. Taking the glass slipper, smashed and stabbing it into his throat over and over again. With a crunch, the memory fades, as she steps onto his skeletal hand, breaking one of the fingers. Her father’s bones still lay where she killed him, all organic matter stripped bare by scavengers,
and the glass shoe caked in old blood resting next to him where she fled.

It is all...perfectly preserved.

The rest of her family still lay where they fell after Cinder snapped, killing every single one of them...she prayed her Prince Charming would come and rescue her...but he never came. So, she rescued herself, and met the Dark Queen herself. Cinder closes her eyes with guilt as she stares at their corpses, as Raven walks over and looks down at them. “They hurt you...didn’t they?” Raven presumes, and Cinder says and does nothing...apart from walk over the corpse of her father to search the area. Raven sighs, looking back at the bones...knowing that this should have been cleaned up a long time ago.

*Salem works fast to make sure that this would never be investigated...but why? Why would they not collect the bodies? Did Salem demand this place stay this way?*

*Sometimes I wonder if I should have abandoned then...but it is things like this...that make me glad I did. I could never bring myself to see Tai and Summer...or Qrow like this. Or Yang...or even Ruby.*

*I don’t know what to do...* 

Raven walks ahead as she starts to search through the place. Cinder looks around and catches a glimpse of Vernal searching through the Wine Cellars, and all the Whiskey Bottles, only for Raven to hit her on the back of the head with her palm. She cannot hear what Raven said to her, but she is not an idiot, after just seeing the way Vernal was searching...she was looking for a drink.

The sign of someone addicted to alcohol.

All of them seem to have a problem, one of the Bandits has multiple scars on his arms where he has shot himself up with needles. Another with self-harm, and another with cocaine addictions. All things that must attract them to turning to crime, where they have nothing else.

But their own anger.

Just like her.

She walks up the marble steps as flashes appear in her mind, of when she was on her hands and knees trying to keep it all clean for her family...desperately trying to make them proud of her. But it never worked, her eyes look down the flight as she sees the chip in the step where she fell and hit her head. She nearly died that day, where she clattered her head against the edge and nearly got a severe concussion.

Her parents never cared, her siblings never cared...only the Doctor who came to visit her. He treated her wound...but the scar is still there...one she can feel right now with her hand, hidden in her thick black hair. She sighs, walking up to the next floor and looking at some of the tables that have been pulled open to find valuables. Cinder picks up something...a golden goblet, one that is actually made from real gold. Just bought it because they could, they never used it, it just sat there. She shoves that into the bag she has with her, and some other random things.

Pens.

Documents left behind, they tend to sell for quite a good price.

She continues to walk and opens a very familiar door...the one to her bedroom. Unlike her sisters and her parents – who all had beautiful large bedrooms...hers was tiny. Basically, just a couch that
she has to sleep on, one that had bed bugs and a grimy mirror. She looks in there and has no idea
that Raven is behind her, looking at how she looks at the place. She turns to see the leader of the
Branwen Tribe standing in the doorway. “This…this is me.” She sighs as she twirls round with
her arms out, the fingers touching the walls it is that wide.

“I’m…sorry. My brother and I…we never really knew what this life was like until Beacon. We
were both born in a tent in the Tribe…I was always more devoted than he was…but I have to admit
part of me liked being a mom…a wife.” She explains with a smile, and Cinder keeps her miserable
straight face as she looks around, touching the bed she slept in.

“This was my bed…covered in bugs…blood stains from when I got low, or when I vomited from
the leftovers…usually out of date. I don’t wanna go back to this.” She states, walking away from it
as she runs her delicate fingers across the surface of a table with the grimy mirror. “This table
however? It was like my best friend, I drew on it with the paper my sisters never used…the
crayons they broke. Always wanted to be free from this prison I was born in…that’s the difference
between me and you. You were born outside…got to see the stars…me? The closest I got before I
did what I did…was that window.” She explains as she points to the glass.

Cinder looks right at her. “You were born free, but I was born a prisoner…I still am.” Cinder
states, clearly referencing Salem as she walks out of her room and past Raven. She stands in her
room alone, staring to feel for the Fall Maiden.

Because it all starts to make sense now.

All of this…the power and what she did…it is all because she finally feels free.

They spend hours searching this huge place, every single floor to find what they can, leading to
around a few bags worth of items collected, some gold and silver which can be sold for Lien and
some scrap metal that can be used for forging or repairs. Cinder goes to leave but she stops,
looking back at the bodies inside and she sighs, storming over and grabbing one of the shovels on
the carriage that was with them, and she returns back to the soil. “Hey!” One of the Bandits yells,
until Raven stops him with her hand.

“Let her…she killed her parents…her whole family. But they left her no choice.” She orders her
soldier. The Bandit looks back at her as she picks up the bones of her father and carries him
outside. The Bandit sighs, and he follows her, helping her pick up their bones and taking them
outside. Each of them…help her…and it freaks her out.

“W-What are you doing?” Cinder questions with confusion.

“Well if you’re part of the Tribe now…you’re one of us. You might as well be family now.” He
states as he gently sets the bones of his sister down on the dirt.

“I killed them…It is my burden to bare.” She says as she picks up the shovel after they managed to
carry all their bones outside so then she can dig their graves. Something a bunch of undertakers
should have done but they never did. She digs up the soil, and the Bandits help her despite her
wishes. And they bury the bones of her dead wardens into the soil, and they stand above them.

Cinder has no words, she never did when she was their prisoner…so she just leaves them be where
the crosses stand, and she approaches the Horse of hers. One of the Bandits hands her the reigns
with a smile.

“Here you, g-AAARGGH!” The Bandit suddenly gets tackled by a massive Ursa, the huge monster
bites down onto his arm and rips the reigns from his grasp, sending the horse into a braying frenzy,
along with all the others. Cinder’s eye widens with horror as the huge Creature of Grimm rips the wailing bandit to shreds in front of her, gore all over the floor and blood pouring from its flopping lips as it bites down into his head and rips his head from his shoulders, throwing it across the forest. The Ursa rises up and roars at them savagely.

The Ursa…is so different what they have ever known. Instead of having a round a rather bulbous shape, the skull is more snouted with more bone armour across its huge furry and muscular body. With long razor-sharp spines protruding from its back extend and it growls deeply, watching their every move. It is an Ursa, but unlike any they have ever seen before. Cinder growls with anger as she forms a Glass Axe in her hand and she sprints towards the Ursa Major. She slams the axe-head into the Bear’s abdomen, making it roar in anger. She cartwheels out of the way of its next slash.

Cinder jumps up and she slams the axe into its roaring mouth, almost silencing it until she slams the huge mass down into the ground with all her might. It groans and roars in pain, until with all her might she screams, smashing its head with the axe so hard the glass shatters away.

Swiftly she took down the beast, but not fast enough to save that Bandit. But they have all been left utterly shocked, that thing literally came out of nowhere. Raven growls and she grabs one of her men by the neck and punches him in the face, breaking his nose. “You said the perimeter was cleared!” Raven yells with furor.

“I-I did! I swear it!” The Bandit strains.

“Your pleads mean as much to me as it did to him!” Raven yells, pointing at the dead Bandit who was gored by the Ursa that came out of nowhere. A good thing Cinder was here to quickly take it down.

“We checked the area and there was nothing! Even yelled! Nothing responded!” The Bandit strains, but as Cinder looks at the direction that Ursa came from…he is telling the truth, because the tracks lead off into the bushes.

And from here…

She can see a house, with a light on.

“He’s not lying, Raven…look…it came from over there.” Cinder states as she points to the house with her finger. Raven stammers as she looks at the house then at the Bandit, releasing him with a sigh.

“All of you, stay here. Cinder, Vernal – with me. We need to check that place out, make sure there are survivors.” Raven explains, but Vernal still looks shocked from the Ursa.

“Was…that an Ursa?” She questions with horror and Raven stops. “I’ve never seen an Ursa like that…it was huge…the armour was different.”

“It was an Ursa…created by Salem. She has been upgrading the Grimm to be more formidable against Huntsmen. Luckily…I know how to take them down…you aim for the belly…or the mouth for a fast kill.” Cinder explains to them, since she must have had to test them before the Battle of Beacon. She probably had to test a lot of things for her master.

“How many of these…new Grimm have you tested?” Raven inquires.

“I lost count past twenty…she is making some scary stuff…I don’t even want to know what she has made since I’ve been gone from the Sanctum.” Cinder states and Raven nods.
“Well…c’mon. Let’s check if that Ursa killed anybody in there.” Raven states, walking away from the dead Ursa’s ashes and towards the house which looks so warm and comfy ahead. Raven keeps her hand close to the hilt of her Odachi and Vernal has her pistols at the ready. Whereas Cinder has her hands ready to form any weapon she deems necessary, most likely another Obsidian Axe like last time.

They approach the front door and they can smell a terrible stench…the stench of a rotten carcass. And the buzzing of carrion flies, and the ripping of flesh from some kind of Scavenger. Raven busts the door open and Vernal aims her pistols at the small Scavenger Grimm inside. Like rats but bigger, she fires her pistols and the fire burns them away instantly. Fire rounds burning through like bullets. They all fade away into smoke and Cinder walks in…wide eyed.

“That Ursa…did not do this…”

Blood everywhere…

A body hanging from the ceiling from some kind of metal feather by the looks of it, and another corpse on the ground that has been savagely cut to pieces. From what seems to be blades, but…no human could possibly accomplish this, nor a Faunus. This was aggression on an animalistic scale. This was a Grimm…it must have been…the question is what kind. Raven slowly takes off her helmet with…an almost unsurprised look on her face as she stares at the carnage…the horror.

Vernal gags as she covers her nose with her wrist, walking in. “Gods…what the hell did this?” Vernal questions.

“Maybe another new Grimm…Salem’s getting creative…never seen her use metal before.” She explains as she walks around the area, looking around at the place. There are still plates of food on the table, smelling fresh…this must have happened mere hours ago. The Grimm must have been drawn by the terror, and the carrion flies were very fast. Cinder feels the meat and looks at Raven. “Still warm. This was recent…could have happened on the way to the mansion.”

Raven still has not said a word, staring at all of this with familiarity in her eyes. She slowly walks and exhales through her nose as she follows the carnage.

Then…

Raven hears a whimper from upstairs.

A voice…

A child’s…

Cinder, Vernal and Raven go upstairs to find a bedroom with the door open, and red footprints in the floor…boot prints actually. And in the corner of the bedroom is a small bed, with the bedsheets covering over. Vernal reaches out and Cinder cautiously forms her axe in her hand to be ready, just in case if something happens. “Hello?” Vernal softly whispers as she takes off the covers to see the fourteen-year-old boy scream with terror of her.

“Go away!” He wails.

“Shh! It’s okay.” Vernal assures with a calm and gentle voice.

“It’s back! The monster!” He screams as he points right at Raven, not Cinder, not Vernal…Raven. She looks at the boy and then slowly takes her white and red mask off, to reveal her face and her red eyes look at him with a motherly concern.
“It’s okay…no monster here.” She assures as she sets the helmet down on the table. “No trouble.” She assures, and the boy whimpers.

“The monster…it had red eyes…like you…it was a Grimm…I know it was. No person has red eyes like that…it had feathers like a Nevermore but was shaped like man!” The boy screams with terror, but Raven gently strokes his hair to calm him, and it works. She looks into his hazel eyes.

“Why don’t you tell us what happened back at our camp? It’s not far from here, we’ll cook up some food for you help you get some sleep, huh?” Raven coos gently to calm the terrified child, but he whimpers.

“It will come for me…it left me for last…” He whimpers.

“I’ll sit outside at watch, promise.” Raven assures with a smile, and the boy nods his head with a whimper. Vernal holds his hand and she covers his eyes as they walk down the stairs, away from the body pinned to the wall by the metal feathers. Blood staining everything inside of the wooden house, the fire still burning in the fireplace it was that recent.

“What’s…what’s going on? Where’s my Aunt and Uncle?” He asks, and Vernal squeezes her eyes shut to fight the tears she feels for the boy.

“Don’t worry, just keep walking.” She tells him, walking him away from the butchered family he has got to leave behind. Cinder walks behind Vernal but stops, looking back at Raven…seeing her staring at the metal feathers and she runs her finger across one of them. It wobbles in the corpse of the uncle.

“Raven? You come?” Cinder asks her and Raven exhales, nodding her head.

“Yeah…right behind you.” Raven assures as she walks away from the metal feathers impaled into the father.

As they catch up to Vernal, they hear her ask the boy a question.

“What’s your name?” She asks him.

He sniffs.

“Oscar Pine.”

Oscar

Hours prior…

“Oscar! Supper’s almost ready!” His aunt called.

“What’re we having?” Oscar replied as he flicked through his book in his hand, the *Man with Two Souls*. Just like Blake he is quite into reading books, he always has been.

“Doesn’t matter! You’re eating it!” His mother called up to his bedroom.

“I never agreed to these terms!” Oscar called back jokingly.
“It’s called the *Living Under My Roof* contract, read the fine print and come wash up.” The Aunt called, and Oscar chuckles, closing his book and walking to the door, hearing the doorbell ring.

“I’ve got it honey.” The Uncle assures as he walks to the door and opens it, and as soon as Oscar goes to open his door, a scream was heard. Blood curdling, as a loud bang erupted from inside and right next to his wall. Then the Aunt screeched in terror, so loud Oscar entered a primitive state of terror, one he only found solitude in underneath his bed. But he could hear her...her agonised wails as the blades slashed through her body, slowly butchering her, flesh cutting and bones snapping from downstairs.

Eventually...her wails ended...and silence was heard.

Until heavy boot steps started to move up the wooden stairs towards his bedroom, whimpering with fear he peered over the sheets to see his door handle begin to move. It slowly creaked down, and he saw the entity.

A dark shadowy mass with glowing red eyes and sharp metallic feathers extending out from its hideous humanoid arms. He whimpers in terror, cowering underneath the bed. But then...the entity turned...

And walked away...

Leaving only Oscar behind.

**Cinder**

Now...

“It left...only me...” Oscar whimpers, remembering every horrific detail of what he heard, the death of his Uncle and Aunt was no lie to him. He knows that they are both dead, but he does not know how they died and what their corpses look like. But if that was really a Creature of Grimm then that is unlike anything they have ever encountered before. It was humanoid...and had metal feathers.

Oscar sits at the burning fire with Vernal, Raven and Cinder, the Fall Maiden laid down slightly as she lets her burns relax. She looks at Raven with her helmet sat down on the ground by her lap. Whereas Vernal is sat there with a poncho wrapped around her body as she looks at Oscar, feeling so bad for the poor boy. “I’m so sorry, kiddo...you should go get some rest...you need it.” She says, and he nods his head.

“I’d...like to stay by the fire...I don’t like the quiet.” He says as he takes his sleeping bag and fits himself in it, closing his eyes as he tries to go to sleep. Raven sighs, looking across the fire with her Odachi resting on her lap.

“I hope I don’t regret saving you.” Raven says to her with narrowed red eyes, and Cinder pants, nodding her head.

“You won’t.” She assures, for she has made her choice now...she wants to be part of Raven’s Tribe.

“That better be true, because I know what thing was...or...who...” Raven explains as she exhales
through her nose.

“Who?” Vernal questions.

Raven exhales, looking at the two of them.

“Have you heard of a man…named Jack the Ripper?”
His blue eyes gaze up at the black ship that hovers in the sky, just like that of the Atlesian ones that once protected Vale and Beacon from the Grimm that fateful day. Yet it is so different and not from the colour of the paint put across it, the weapons on it look extremely advanced and the thrusters used to keep it moving seem to be using some form of Gravity Dust.

Neptune sighs, lowering his head as he walks with his team down the pathway of the city that is still recovering from the attack of the Black Smog. Sun looks around as he hears and sees so many different after affects, some people are having to wear masks over their noses and mouths due to a plague beginning to spread due to secondary disaster. So many dead bodies undiscovered from the rubble of destroyed buildings, diseases are beginning to spread…and fast. Their aura has kept them safe so far, but soon they could have something else that could draw the Grimm in…so much death from sickness could be enough.

All that heartbreak and grief.

It is chilling to realise that the Black Smog are simply waiting to be triggered by one small moment of panic. Some children are left alone, crying for their families to come back from where they last saw them…despite that their parents are most likely dead. Killed by the Grimm or by the destroyed buildings that collapsed over them. Sage passes by a man sat in the corner as he whoops a heavy cough, most likely due to the diseases spreading across Vale from the corpses inhabiting the ocean of rubble.

Photographs of beloved family members stapled to Notice Boards with desperate pleas to find them, some families offering to pay everything they have to make sure they get home safe. Some are adults and…many…are children. There was a school in that district of Vale that was demolished by the Goliath Herd…only twelve children were found in the remnants of it…everyone else died…

Families having to sit out in alleyways for their homes have been completely demolished from the Grimm that buried them from their powerful bodies. Many of them with wounds that Field Nurses are going around the city to cure and help as many people as they possibly can. Binding their wounds up and giving them antibiotics, even the ones granted to them by the Atlesians.

But with so many people injured, or sick or in need of help across the city right now, those supplies are going fast. Soon they won’t have enough resources to keep people alive…but as they walk through, seeing so many Atlesians and Valerians helping the civilians, Huntsmen and Huntresses helping people.

But not one Black Gallows soldier has even lifted a finger. “It’s not right…it’s not fair. These people never deserved what happened here.” Scarlet says with a voice that is both angry and upset as he sees the children, hearing their cries echoing through the city. The coughs and vomiting, the one clean air of Vale has been replaced with that of thick diseased air.

“No…they didn’t…what happened at Beacon should have stayed in there.” Sun states with his eyes narrowed with anger, just wanting the people responsible for this attack to be punished for what they have wrought, the amount of death during and even after the attack. So many people
have been found dead from many causes, either from disease or from suicide, there have even been violent fights that have sparked between civilians that fight for scraps just to survive.

They are acting like society has collapsed and it is every man for themselves...when they should be fighting together now more than ever.

Before their anger, terror and sadness draws the Black Smog in...and this time they will have no chance.

And it seems unlikely that the Black Gallows will help, from the little attention they have given the people, focusing on the school and the Huntsmen.

Keeping them in check.

Sage turns to his boyfriend and gently holds his hand, the two share a look as they walk, feeling for all the poor people that are suffering from the attack on that Academy. “It’s going to be okay, we’ve survived worse.” Sage assures with a smile, and Scarlet sighs, looking down at the ground with closed eyes as his red hair hangs over one of them. He scratches his head as he walks along, thinking about all these people.

“How are we meant to save these people from an attack like this? Sure, the Grimm retreated but it feels more like they ran so then they could fight another day.” Scarlet explains, and Sun looks over his friend.

“Then we’ll fight back – together.” Sun states with his fist clenched as he pumps it up like one of Yang’s shotguns. Sage smiles, then looks over at Neptune who has not said a word as he walks with his arm in the grip of his other hand, looking at his feet as he walks with something on his mind.

“Neptune?” Sage softly says to him, Neptune turns and looks at Sage as he hears his voice.

“Huh?” He replies, so much clogging his head.

“You alright? Haven’t said much recently.” Sage asks him, as a supportive friend would always have his team’s concerns in mind, and not just his boyfriend’s. Sun and Neptune are the same, as is Scarlet...he has always been the first though to ask. Neptune stammers, for the topic of his silence is something he has very rarely ever spoken about.

“I...” He sighs, massaging his brow. “Seeing all these people...and seeing my sister again...it’s made me think a lot about family. My family...I’ve never met my mom and dad, Eryka always tells me that they are living in Mistral...but I have never met them in person. But they have never seen me, they haven’t even come here to check on me. Eryka has always been there for me...but...if they love me like she claims they do...why have I never met them?” Neptune inquires with heartbreak in his voice, one that Sun looks down at the floor about.

“I’m sorry, Neptune...I’m sure Eryka has her reasons.” Scarlet states with the shrug of his shoulders, then Sun asks the question that has been on his mind since his sister first ever arrived here.

“Neptune...I gotta ask...what’s the deal with you and your sister? You seem close with her, but you act all defensive and weird around her.” Sun asks him curiously, in which Neptune scoffs.

“Have you seen her? I know you, and you’ve already teased me for her looks.” Neptune dismisses, but Sun doesn’t fall for it. Neptune has always had a very clear sign of lying, where his cheeks will softly flush red and he will tap his pinkie finger against a part of his body. Something that his team
has learned to pick up on…and Sun has also informed Weiss on this little tick he has.

And he knows that they have spotted it…

He sighs, shaking his head. “Look…I love my big sis, I really do…she raised me and always looked after me. And I have always wanted to be like her, to make her proud and to feel she never wasted her time with me. But I never feel like I’m ever good enough.” He explains, sitting down on a bench, resting his arms on his knees as he stares down at the floor with saddened eyes…almost looking disappointed in himself.

“Wait…is that why you always try and be cool all the time?” Scarlet asks him, for they are finding this out together.

“Yeah…I try really, really hard…to be like her. But I never can be…she never even graduated to be a Huntress and yet she is so much cooler than me. She has Dulcis, a Bow and lives in the Mountains. Hell, I even dyed my hair blue like she did, y’know…it looks cool.” Neptune explains to them all with his eyes closed as he buries his head in his hands. “If she were here when the Battle happened…I bet she could have done more than I ever could.”

Scarlet sits down next to him and smacks his shoulder, making him jolt. “Ow! What was that for, dude?” Neptune squeals as he rubs the spot of which that Scarlet slapped.

“Suck it up, you’re not a failure. You’re our friend, and you are surrounded by friends. And as you said – you are already cooler than her because you are a Huntsmen. No offense to Eryka, but she never graduated, she doesn’t have a semblance, you do. You can focus your senses down into a slowed down moment which makes you a crack shot.” Scarlet describes to him, naming his semblance.

Known as – Dead Eye.

He uses his golden goggles to help focus his enhanced senses to a point where time seems to slow down, giving him the opportunity to attack his enemies extremely quickly. Where his sister has the ability to see through the eyes of Dulcis, not her semblance but she bonded her aura with his. “I guess…but…”

“But nothing, look around you, you have made so many friends and the Heiress of the Schnee Dust Company has a massive crush on you.” Sun states with his arms crossed, making him blush nervously.

“Hey man…c’mon.” He shyly says as he hides his face from his supportive friends.

“No, really. You have nothing to be insecure about, you might look at everything she has…but have you taken a second to think about what you have that she hasn’t?” Sage asks Neptune with his arms crossed, standing beside Sun, who looks tiny in comparison to him with his huge muscular frame.

Neptune pauses, thinking of everything he can about his sister, and what she has that he does not. Yeah, she is beautiful, yes she is skilled and has a badass Eagle – but there is something very powerful that she has lacked for many years.

Friendship.

Winter might be her first friend she has made in many years.

“Well…I have you guys, like you said. Everything you’ve said…I never thought of it that way. I
just hope we can give her that, she is lonely.” Neptune explains, and Sun chuckles as he looks at him.

“Don’t worry bro, we’ve got your back.” Sun assures, and Scarlet looks at him with a smirk.

“Besides, you look good blue.” Scarlet comments as he pats his back, standing up and walking over to Sage and turning to face him.

“C’mon, Neptune. Let’s go.” Sun says with an encouraging voice, and Neptune nods his head, pushing his hands against his knees as he gets up, exhaling as he pushes his own self pity from his mind.

“Yeah…let’s go.” Neptune agrees as he follows them down the path.

“Don’t worry Neptune, I wouldn’t say Eryka is less crazy than you either.” Sun assures as he pats the back of his shoulder.

Then they hear the crying of a wild animal.

“OH, COME ON, WINTER! I’VE BEEN WAITING FOR HOURS!” Eryka cries out, and as they turn the corner, they see Eryka Vasillias, ironically the same person their conversation has surrounded. She is wearing some different clothes, ones that she clearly must have chosen because it is not something the graceful Winter Schnee would have chosen. She wears a red T-Shirt which is a little short since it shows her belly button and has a brown sleeveless jacket on over it with around four pockets. She has the golden zip undone as she stands there, also wearing a pair of shorts and some trainers.

She leans all the way back as she cries out for Winter.

They all chuckle, since that is something Neptune does all the time. “My point exactly.” Sun states with a laugh.

Eryka

As Team S.S.S.N turn to a different direction, Eryka paces back and forth with a proper sense of attitude in her step, flicking her blue hair over her head so then it is out of her sapphire blue eyes. She finally stops when Winter emerges from the clothes shop, choosing her new outfit that she wanted to wear, keeping her uniform neatly folded away in her satchel.

She wears a white tucked in shirt with the buttons almost done up to the top, unlike what Eryka would have worn which would have been pretty open, since she has always worn very light clothing unless she is in the mountains. The climate here in Vale is so much warmer to what she is used to back in the Mistraalian Mountain Range.

Winter’s handbag is white, just like most things she wears, hanging down by her dark blue trousers and heeled boots. She flicks her hair which covers her eye with the movement of her head, looking at the much less prim and proper Eryka Vasillias with her hair still in the same style as always. At least now she actually looks decent though, with her hair washed and looking fluffy and all the grime washed from her body. She is like a completely different person somehow.

“By the gods, about time. What were you doing? Buying the store?” Eryka questions with her hand
planted on her hip.

“Could you have at least worn something a little less…revealing?” She asks her curiously and Eryka raises a brow with a smile on her face, walking towards Winter as she stands right up to her face…almost seductively.

“Why? Getting uncomfortable?” She asks her softly as she runs her finger across Winter’s cheek. Winter yanks her head away from her finger and she walks away from Eryka, blushing slightly but steels herself once more.

“I’m more uncomfortable about what we are doing, Eryka. It’s betraying my orders, the oath I made as a Specialist.” Winter explains, glancing over her shoulder at the Falconess walking behind her with the Eagle gliding overhead, examining the landscape. From Dulcis’ stunning eyes he can see everything, the beautiful rolling hills of emerald green grass…and the destruction wrought upon the city from the Grimm attack.

Eryka walks behind Winter then catches up with ease, looking at her friend she has made. “Yeah, but ain’t that the greatest part of this? Breaking the rules, exploring a new road of life, stepping out of your comfort zone?” Eryka lists as she holds out her hands, walking backwards as she looks at Winter curiously. Winter narrows her eyes then rolls them with an audible groan.

“You wouldn’t understand, the General saved me from a life my father would have forced upon me. As he did to my brother, he never had a choice. I owe everything I have to Ironwood.” Winter explains, and Eryka lowers her hands and then starts to get a bit sympathetic and serious with her, truly understanding her situation.

“I do understand actually.” She states, walking with her head focused forward, and Winter raises a brow with confusion.

“You do?” Winter questions with disbelief as they walk across the path, she turns and sees a family begging for some money. She smiles, and she reaches into her purse and gives her a few hundred lien each, since she can spare it. The joy and appreciation on their faces warms her heart, despite how cold she claims it to be.

“Yeah…my family…well I guess our family, Nep and I…is not the greatest.” She states as she walks beside her friend. “Ever heard of the Vasiliyas Cartel?”

Winter looks at Eryka, yet she does not seem shocked since both Eryka and Neptune have the same surname. It is true that when she first met Neptune, she was concerned for Weiss’ safety from how dangerous the family really is…and how powerful they have become. “I’ve crossed paths with them on occasion.” She states.

“You don’t sound very surprised.” Eryka replies with curiosity in her voice.

“Well your surname gives it away a bit, but I also know not to judge a book by its cover.” Winter states, making Eryka think on that, since she admittedly did judge Winter and Weiss on being Schnees alone. But clearly, she is starting to like the woman, despite where she comes from and the family, the same with her younger sister.

“Nice of you.” Eryka says with a smile, yet she does not seem to be very proud of her bloodline. “I never wanted to follow my parents’ footsteps, or the footsteps of my foremothers and forefathers. I witnessed my family butcher people who failed to pay in time or would try and hustle their way through the deals. And gods forbid you killed one of their men.” Eryka explains, truly showing how dangerous her people really are, or at least her family is, they are not her people anymore.
“I have heard, they own the entire Crime Ring in Mistral, and they are stretching out into other Kingdoms too. Quite worried about them, actually.” Winter explains and Eryka nods her head.

“I want to tear them down, but I don’t stand a chance, Winter. Too many of them, and they outgun me.” She explains, and Winter lowers her head, knowing what they feels like with Jacques Schnee and the things he has done to get to power. “When I escaped from my family and got Neptune out when he was born, I looked after him…but I needed money…so I turned to crime…or illegal boxing.”

She looks at her knuckles, showing the scars formed around each of them from the people she has punched in the face with them. She flexes her fingers which look long and delicate, until you look at the knuckles themselves. “I started to get used to having blood covering my hands from all that fighting…I lost some, but won most. When he got older, I sent him to an orphanage for a while, so then he would be safe while I still made some money. I went dark for a few years…and I ended up in the mountains…where I found…him.”

Winter raises her brow as she looks at Eryka. “Him?”

“The man who trained me, helped me to go straight. He taught me how to find peace in myself, because I could never control my anger, I’d get carried away in boxing, killed someone once because of it. After a few years with him, visiting Neppy whenever I had the chance. Then…he taught me how to be a Falconess, and a few years later I got an egg delivered to my home in the mountains.” Eryka explains, gazing up at the sky to see the stunning Altum Eagle following them from above.

“Dulcis.” Winter softly says as she watches the beautiful animal gliding over their heads.

“I raised him, was able to see Neptune more often, managed to raise him more again, got a job as a Hunter. Not a Huntress, since I have a shitty strength of aura and no semblance…but I could still hunt animals and take down Grimm with the skills I learned. Took bounty missions and have been making a living ever since. He…made me right.” Eryka explains, concluding her short tale, clearly glossing over some details here and there, summing her story up fast for Winter to fully understand why she is the way she is.

“I…I’m sorry for not thinking you would know what I have been through.” She states, and Eryka smiles as she looks at her friend.

She pauses then sighs, looking at Winter. “Winter? Please don’t tell Neptune…or Weiss…or anyone. He doesn’t know about his parents.”

“He doesn’t?” Winter asks.

“No…I told him the Vasillias Cartel just happens to have the same name as ours…but he doesn’t know the truth. If he finds out…it could destroy him…he could hate me for lying.” Eryka stammers, and Winter nods her head as she pats her shoulder.

“You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” Winter assures. “We’re the both the same, you and I.”

“What kind of a pair are we?” She asks her with a smile, making Winter actually smile and chuckle, something that truly surprises Eryka. But as they walk, they both slow down when they spot their targets as Dulcis calls out from above.

Walking on patrol are a pair of Black Gallows soldiers, conversing in their voice disguised tones,
but they can still hear them. “Okay…let’s be quiet and find out how to get a pass into his office.”

Winter whispers, and they both switch to their professional modes, listening carefully to the things
the soldiers are saying. As Eryka watches them, her eyes shimmer and her hearing increases to
almost supersonic levels to hear every word.

“What’s the next step?”

“The Commander wants us to keep the city and the Academy on Lockdown.”

“For how long?”

“As long as it takes until the Black Smog retreat.”

“Do you think it will?”

“Unlikely, these people are scared, and with disease starting to spread and so many missing, it’s
really surprising that the Smog hasn’t attacked already.”

“What do you think they’re waiting for?”

“Panic, from what I’ve seen the Grimm only attack in full force when they sense panic, they just
get closer from the other energy in the air.”

As Eryka and Winter follow the soldiers they both look at each other, truly surprised by the
knowledge the soldiers actually have, since normally the grunts don’t get that much info. But
clearly these soldiers are informed on everything, perhaps it is for the best since they are the
Shadow Division and operate in situations nobody else could handle.

They both softly chuckle, mimicking their chatting with their hands.

But they keep speaking.

“Well, as long as these Huntsmen don’t start something again then things may get better.”

“We might have to replace some of the staff with our own, because they do not seem to know what
they’re doing.”

Winter clenches her fist at the snide comments they make at her friends.

“I know, Dutch is already stepping in to take the place of military training for the students.”

Winter and Eryka look at each other and both whisper the same name that they heard.

Dutch?

“Speak of the devil.” One of the soldiers stops in his tracks and they both stand to attention as the
man wearing a black suit and cap on his head approaches them, with his baton holstered on his belt
beside his gun. He has a shaven head and a thick black moustache on his face as he approaches
them.

“At ease, men. Is the situation in the city acceptable?” Dutch inquires, Winter and Eryka both
watch him, and Eryka nods to Winter as she walks up to her.

“We need to grab him, get some information out of him. He could have a pass on him to get into
his office.” Eryka whispers as she stands beside Winter, whispering in her ear.
“Good idea, I’ll distract him. I’m an Atlesian Specialist and they wouldn’t suspect me, I’ll get him to follow me into that alleyway, then you grab him and knock him out.” Winter whispers, and Eryka nods, for it is a good plan.

Eryka calmly walks through the crowd and into the alleys of the Valerian Buildings as Winter walks with the soldiers from behind, listening carefully.

“The city is…vulnerable. With disease spreading throughout the civilians and still hundreds missing, most likely dead, people are not happy in the slightest. The Black Smog will not take much panic to trigger an attack.” The soldier states.

“Oh? Dutch, isn’t it?” Winter asks as she gets the Black Gallows Captain’s attention, he turns and looks at her.

“Specialist Schnee, we have already told you that your soldiers cannot investigate the scene of the Courier’s Death. Our men are already examining it.” Dutch states, but Winter shakes her head, despite how much she wants to break this man’s nose for what he has done to their operation, for clearly, he has had a hand in it like Killian.

But, she has a trick up her sleeve. “Actually sir, when off duty I came across something, something I believe is related to Emerald Sustrai. She is a thief and I noticed some possible clues that could explain where she went.” Winter lies, extremely well too, since Ironwood has told her that the Gallows are searching for Cinder, Mercury and Emerald as well.

Dutch’s eyes widen, for he has an opportunity to impress Killian. “Really? Where? What is it?”

“Follow me, sir, I can show you. You see my men have deduced that she was here before Cinder Fall acquired her services, as a thief that used her semblance to steal from jewellery shops without trouble.” Winter describes as she walks towards the alleyway, the foolish Captain following her towards it, since her lie has been so well crafted that he cannot disprove her.

“We’ll hopefully this clue could be enough to –”

Eryka suddenly grapples onto him round his neck and squeezes, holding him tight as she starves him of oxygen so then he collapses to the ground, knocked out pretty fast. She drags him out of the way and Winter stands beside her, looking at her with a nervous laugh. Then they both chuckle at what they are doing.

“I didn’t expect breaking the rules to be so…thrilling.” Winter softly giggles.

“There you go, girl…told you breaking out of your shell is great fun.” Eryka giggles as they look into each other’s eyes. They both look back to Dutch and then they both sigh at the same time.

“There’s a storage room over there, if we are quick, we can get information out of him. Hopefully he has a pass on him.” Eryka says as she crouches down and searches through his clothes, patting him down as she finds nothing more than some lien cards and his pistol and baton.

She takes the weapons and holds onto them, so he does not try anything when he wakes up. “No pass on him…but…” She whispers as she pulls out his scroll and opens it, flicking through the files but nearly all of them are encrypted.
“Wait…there is a pass…damn it, it needs a password to unlock.” She snarls.

Winter stares at Dutch on the ground.

“Then we know what we need to get out of him.”

Jaune

"You sure you won't come back with us?" Jaune asks as he gives Yang a warm squeeze, separating the hug to lock his cerulean gaze onto her lilac eyes. Behind him, with rucksacks slung over their shoulders, the others all smile warmly to the exchange of blondes. A light chuckle vents past Yang's lips, stroking her hand down her opposite upper arm bashfully.

"I... I can't right now. I just don't feel ready yet, that's all. I've got a lot of... stuff to figure out, I've gotta fix my bike for starters!" Yang gestures to the shed by the woodland's edge. Jaune nods with a smile and lifts his head to meet her gaze. "... and, okay maybe I'm... a bit nervous about seeing everyone again like... well, this." She holds up her cybernetic limb in front of Jaune's face.

"Okay. Well, take care Yang." Jaune beams, hugging her once more, much to Yang's mirth. "We'll visit again real soon, I promise."

"Mmm, make sure you do." Yang smiles as the hug ends, smoothing her thumbs down Jaune's arms before he steps down the porch to the dirt. Blake steps up the wooden steps and embraces her partner, sighing contently as her open palm presses a brand of heat to Yang's vested back.

"Are you gonna go to the dance? I'll text you the details when we get back to Beacon?" Blake murmurs into Yang's messy tresses. Yang sighs and the hug rears apart.

"I... I dunno, Blake."

"It's not for a few more weeks. A-And we could really use your expertise on how to decorate. Otherwise it's Weiss' doilies everywhere." Blake rolls her amber eyes. Yang bites her lip to hide that famous Cheshire cat grin.

"Hey!" Weiss frowns from behind Ruby and Nora. Blake smiles lightly, but it fades as soon as Yang's did.

"I... I wouldn't get my hopes up." Yang hugs herself, eyes looking down guiltily. "I'm sorry Blake, but... I'm not ready for that yet... that sort of environment. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I'm sorry for asking." Blake sighs, hugging her one last time. "It was selfish."

"Don't be silly, Blakey." Yang smiles as she gives the hug one last squeeze, gyros in her arm whirring. "I'll see you soon."

"Definitely." Blake smiles, before stepping down the steps. Yang rubs the back of her head, gasping as her sister tightly hugs her.

"You already said goodbye, Rubes!" Yang manages to gasp out, face comically going blue. Ruby eventually lets go and Yang gasps for air, hunching over, hands steadying atop her knees.

"Oops. Sorry Yang!" Ruby winces. "I'm just gonna miss you!"
"S'okay... " Yang chuckles breathlessly, standing up straight, popping the tension in her back. At that moment, the front door creaks further open and Taiyang fills the void, leaning against the architrave with a smile on his tanned face. He watches the exchange with a fond heart, both in his chest and evident on his face.

"W-We'll come visit as soon as we can! Two weeks! Two weeks at most, we promise!" Ruby yells to the others with a small hint of desperation in her eyes.

"Yeah. Of course." Jaune smiles.

"I'm sure Professor Goodwitch will have no issue with us visiting Yang, Ruby." Pyrrha offers, hefting the strap of her bag over her shoulder.

"Goodwitch might, but Killian? Let's just hope the situation at Beacon is dealt with and they're gone by then." Weiss states with a heavy sigh.

"We should get going if we're going to make our flight back." Ren offers sadly. Yang nods and drums a rhythm into the pale flesh of her upper arm.

"Yeah! Yeah, don't miss your flight guys!"

"Take care of yourself Yang. We'll see you soon, we promise." Weiss smiles, holding the strap of her bag and hefting it onto her shoulder. Yang smiles back with a warm wave. "Thank you for the hospitality, Taiyang." The Schnee beams over the blonde brawler's head. Ruby hesitates on the steps, before whining and hugging Yang once more.

"I love you." Ruby breathes with misty eyes, balling up the orange vest. Yang blinks hard and hugs her tightly.

"I love you too, Ruby. Stay safe sis."

"You too. Look after her and Dad, Zwei!" Ruby yells to the little Corgi sitting by the front door. Ruby sniffs and separates, running into her Dad's arms to hug him tightly. "I love you Dad."

"Yeah, I love you too Ruby. Take care, okay? Promise me you'll be safe." Tai gives her a warm squeeze. Ruby nods against the soft fabric of his shirt. She sniffs and pulls back out of the hug with wobbly silver eyes. Tai sighs softly and thumbs a tear off her ashen skin.

"Hey, none of that now. We'll see you real soon, okay?" Tai whispers fondly. Ruby smiles and wipes her eyes. He looks up over Ruby to the patiently waiting others, his hands-on Ruby's shoulders. "You guys take care too, okay? I don't want any more bad news, ever."

"We will, sir." Ren smiles.

"Yeah, we got each other!" Nora beams to him, stood close beside Ren. Tai smiles with a nod and his eyes befall on Pyrrha. She smiles, but sheepishly under his fatherly gaze.

"You got a second chance." He says to everyone, but his eyes on hers definitely tell her the double meaning to his words. Pyrrha blushes lightly and her head shrinks down into her shoulders. "Don't waste it. Life's too short to think of the what ifs."

"We won't, we promise." Weiss offers, Pyrrha looking to her, but catching Jaune's warm blue eyes instead. He smiles lopsidedly to her and she quirks a smile back, before looking down at her shoes.

"Well, you've gotta flight to catch." Tai claps before his chest, Ruby nodding and giving him a
leaping hug and kiss on the cheek, before turning and briskly walking down the steps, because she knows if she stands there any longer, it’d be immeasurably harder to leave her family otherwise. She joins her extended family on the gravel and Weiss hands her pack over to the Rose, slinging it over her red cloak.

"We'll see you soon, Yang. Thank you, Tai, for offering your home to us." Ren gives a curt nod, Jaune nodding.


"Don't worry about that, Vomit boy. Got a lot of stuff I gotta do before I come back. Busy bee!" Yang chuckles, rubbing the back of her head. Jaune smiles affectionately, before turning and following the others down the path.

**Blake**

Seven pairs of feet shuffle along the gravel on the long walk to the airship port, their expressions slightly sombre.

"I liked it here. It was... peaceful." Blake shrugs with a sigh. Ren nods to her.

"Yes, it was incredibly relaxing." He huffs, swiping a black lock out of his eyes. "However, I'm looking forward to the idea of my own bed again."

"Urgh, yeah, you and me both!" Nora whines, slouching forward with exhaustion as she walks beside him. "My neck is soooooo sore!"

Jaune chuckles at Nora's comical whinging, before he looks at Pyrrha as they walk, her sparkly emerald eyes darting across the dirt in deep thought. He nudges her softly with his elbow, startling her back into reality.

"I'm sorry, did you say something, Jaune?" She asks. Jaune shakes his head and his brows curl with worry, eyes studying her deeply.

"Are you okay, Pyrrha? You seem... I dunno, head in the clouds. Something on your mind?" He asks, slowing his walk with her to create a small distance of privacy from the talking others. She quirks her lips into a wry smile.

"You can read me like a book." She rolls her eyes, stroking her upper arm bashfully. Jaune chuckles and rakes his fingers through his thatch of blonde.

"Well, vice versa. You're a bit more observant than me most of the time," Jaune offers. Pyrrha gives him a look, an incredulous look. Jaune pauses and huffs. "Okay, so more than a bit, more than a bit." He chuckles, Pyrrha humming alongside him.

"I'm joking Jaune. You're very observant to me, to my feelings. You've been an amazing support to me for so long now." She smiles bashfully. Though she gasps silently, and her eyes shoot wide open when she looks down at her hand, his firmly clutches around it, thumb smoothing over her tendons. "Jaune?"

"Second chances, right?" He smiles softly to her, eyes fill with what she could only describe - and
hope - as loving adoration. She smiles softly and walks a tiny path closer, closing the gap and nudge

In front of them, the others stop at the fork in the road, turning their heads to the lagging two behind them. All of their eyes warmed and their smiles widen at the close pair pacing hand in hand. "Hey you two." Blake smiles fondly. Weiss hefts her bag over her shoulder into a more comfortable position, smiling almost smugly to them.

"W-What?" Jaune chuckles at her, never once releasing Pyrrha's hand, contently supporting her head on his shoulder. Their faces flushes, yet they care not what the others think. Besides, they know they are happy for them, of course they are.

All those smiles aren’t plastic.

"Nothing. Just always thought you two would be cute together. I guess I was right, as always." Weiss smirks. Jaune smiles to Weiss and bashfully looks down at the pale hand in his, giving it a fond squeeze.

"We're umm... We're getting there." Jaune offers, Pyrrha nodding and reluctantly parting from him, standing bashfully beside him. "W-Well, whatever 'there' is, heh."

"Y-Yes, umm... it's a case of taking careful, small steps." Pyrrha flushes, fidgeting with her fingers.

"Guys, you don't need to defend yourselves. We love you guys. Just... do what makes you happy." Ruby smiles brightly. Jaune smiles at Ruby's warm blessing, then to Pyrrha, her eyes locking with his. Timidly she slips her hand into his and he instantly squeezes it.

"Well... Pyrrha and I... we're trying... we're trying to make things work, and... " He chuckles weakly, cheeks bright red. "We've got a date planned for when we get back to Beacon." His voice cracks.

The others all beamed brightly.

"Yay!" Nora bounces giddily. "I knew it Ren, I knew it!"

"That's wonderful guys." Weiss smiles fondly, Ren nodding beside her with a gleaming simper.

"About time." Blake smirks, Pyrrha blushing and smiling bashfully.

"Thanks guys." Jaune chuckles meekly, looking adoringly to Pyrrha as she smiles right back. They always knew they would have the blessing of their loving friends, and yet to hear it plain and simple, in warm words and smiles of flesh, calms the rough tides of their fluttering stomachs.

Pyrrha

It is hardly bustling, but the 'Patch Airship Port' is still busy enough, considering the small population that inhabited the land of Patch. It isn’t a massive terminal like Atlas', or Mistral's, but it has enough there to entertain those awaited their flights. Built upon a grass plateau overlooking the ocean via a sheer cliff, the late afternoon view is more than captivating enough to keep most busy in their wait. Alleys of food stalls litter the open Port, the wind wafting scents of savoury and sweet dishes from various cultures.
"Well, I've got good news and bad news." Jaune huffs as he returns to the bench the friends are all sat upon, just at the edge of the Airship Port. Weiss look up over her scroll at him, as the dwarfining shadow of a banking Bullhead eclipse them all.

"That doesn't fill me with confidence." Weiss whines.

"What d'ya wanna hear first?" Jaune shrugs.

"Bad news I guess." Ruby bobs her shoulders, nibbling on a cookie the size of a dinner plate.

"Bad news is our flight's been delayed for another hour." Jaune sighs. Pyrrha nods beside him.

"Sorry." She huffs, playing her fingers over her wolf's tail of vermilion hair.

"Well, what's the good news?" Nora asks, slurping a mouthful of noodles out of her steaming cup, slapping the wheat strands against her forehead. "Ow."

Ren dabs the sauce from her forehead with a napkin along with a sigh. Magenta eyes flit up to Jaune.

"Oh, I don't have any good news." Jaune announces nonchalantly.

"Well then why did you say there was?" Weiss sits forward, scroll in her lap to let her incredulous gaze sink in. Pyrrha turns to him with a raised brow.

"Yes, Jaune, w-why did you say there was?"

"I didn't want there to just be bad news." Jaune shrugs. Pyrrha snorts at him, hiding her mirth behind her palm, shaking her head with complete adoration.

"You dunce." Weiss huffs, slouching back with a whine. "Urgh! This is why I never fly economy."

"But... If the ship's late, does it matter what seat you sit in?" Nora asks, tongue sticking out as she fumbles with her chopsticks. "Grrr Ren! Who thought it'd be a good idea to use sticks to pick up noodles?!"

The way people act here…if it were not for the number of soldiers armed to the teeth here in the Port you would never suspect there was a massive Grimm Attack on Beacon, causing attacks across the world at once.

Everyone acts so calm.

So normal.

Like there is absolutely nothing wrong.

Ren scoffs and tries not to smile at her struggle, handing her a fork from his bag instead.

"Thank you!" Nora discards the sticks and uses the metal utensil instead. Weiss frowns and crosses her arms, slumps in the seat as she looks up at the flight arrival board.

"So anyway. Flight's late. Get something to eat, I guess." Jaune huffs. "Nora, where'd you get those noodles from?"

Nora quickly hides her pot from him, eyes narrowing. "Nowhere."
"Nora, I'm not gonna steal your food." Jaune chuckles.

"Oh. The stall over there. Blake's getting fish I think." Nora shrugs, going back to eating. Jaune nods and turns to Pyrrha.

"Hungry?"

"Starving." She huffs, stretching her arms up over her head with a yawn. Her back pops a few times as she stretches. Weiss stands up and struts over with a clacking of heels.

"I could eat too."

"C'mon. My treat." Jaune waves them over.

"O-oh no. You bought the coffees the other night, this is my treat." Pyrrha takes her wallet out. Weiss simply walks behind, hugging her arms at a gust of harsh wind, cool to her skin, yet her smile is the warmest she'd worn in a while. Watching Pyrrha and Jaune playfully bickering over who was going to buy their snacks. Stroking her lopsided ponytail over her shoulder, raking her fingers through the frost white locks, she smiles brightly at the pair.

Though Weiss did roll her eyes after a while and watches them walk up to the counter, ordering three bowls of steaming noodles. As Pyrrha goes to take out her Lien card, Jaune fumbling with his, the Schnee simply opens her scroll and scans it over the Lien reader with a beep. They turn to her with wide eyes, both blushing at her raised brow.

"Thank you, Weiss." They both mumble bashfully. Weiss nods firmly and takes a seat at the counter, flicking her hair with an elegant swish. Pyrrha and Jaune both take seats as their bowls of steaming stir fried noodles slides to them.

Ruby looks at Weiss with a playful grin. “Couldn’t resist, could you?”

"I'm just glad it didn't get declined this time." Weiss admits with a wry smirk. Pyrrha chuckles and places a hand on the Schnee's shoulder.

"Thank you, Weiss."

"Yeah, thanksh, Weissh!" Jaune's head leans back from behind Pyrrha, cheeks filled with noodles. Weiss snorts and rolls her eyes.

"Jaune, Eww!"

Pyrrha turns to see his hamster-like cheeks.

"Wha-?" He muffles.

She scoffs and smiles, shaking her head all the while. Jaune gulps and twirls some more around his utensil, as Pyrrha sobers with a warm sigh. "Back to Beacon soon."

"Looking forward to my own bed, I must admit." Weiss exclaims, leaning back to arch her spine and crack the tension out. "Tired of sleeping on the floor."

"Here's to that." Pyrrha squeezes the muscles in her back together. "Miss mine too."

"Same." Jaune yawns into the back of his hand. "Urgh, could do with a real good night's sleep."

"I think we all could." Weiss looks over her shoulder, over at the bench where Ruby sits alongside
Nora and Ren, just as Blake returns to sit beside their leader. Her eyes linger on Ruby with a sombre sigh. Pyrrha watches her intently though.

"What's wrong, Weiss?"

"Hmm? Oh... well." Weiss huffs. "Keep a secret?"

"What is it? What's wrong?" Jaune asks with worry in his tone. Pyrrha mirrors his face exactly. Weiss exhales a heavy breath.

"Ruby hasn't exactly been sleeping well. I know none of us have, but... she's taken quite the weight onto her shoulders. She's struggling with what she had to do at Beacon... during the attack. It wasn't just Grimm she had to kill, it was... people. That's what she's dwelling on... constantly it seems." Weiss toys with her food.

"Oh... Rubes." Jaune sighs, pinching his brow. "Why didn't she tell anyone?"

"She told me, only after I pretty much interrogated her." Weiss drops her face into her hands. "When I came to Beacon, I didn't like Ruby, I was cold, I was a brat and I didn't like that lovable goofball I proudly call my team leader... and friend. Now? I couldn't imagine life without her. To know she's been suffering this long, with that weight on her shoulders, hiding it because she thinks we have enough problems to deal with, without hers added to it as well? It kills me."

"That's why she hasn't told anyone she's not been sleeping? Cos, she thinks we have enough on our plates?" Jaune sags his shoulders, shaking his head. "Oh, Ruby."

"Indeed. That poor girl." Pyrrha sighs, trying not to dwell on the people that died around her that night... due to her...

"We should... we should eat up. Get back to the others." Weiss clears her throat into her fist. Pyrrha and Jaune shares a look, before nodding.

**Winter**

Dutch groans as his eyes begin to open up, surrounded by nothing but darkness, until suddenly a bright light shines into his eyes, so suddenly it is like a flashbang grenade going off. Winter and Eryka were lucky that this storage unity happened to have a small floodlight available for usage, so they are using it on him for their interrogation. “What the hell? What is this? Where the hell am I?” Dutch snarls with anger, yanking at the rope tied around his wrists in the chair they found in this abandoned storage unit.

“The owner of this storage unit died in the attack, Dutch...he stored some random stuff...stuff we found that could really hurt if you don’t tell us what we wanna know.” Winter warns as she emerges from behind him, her hands held behind her back, staring right at Dutch captured at her mercy.

Dutch stops, realising that she is actually against him turning his head as she walks into the light and she looks down at him with her stern blue eyes, still wearing her casual clothing. In the shadows is Eryka with a screwdriver in her hand, most likely one of the tools she intends to use to get information out of him. “Wow...never expected you to betray your oath. Kinda disappointed.” Dutch scoffs.
Winter just stares at him, clearly, she is the good cop in this scenario, and Eryka is bad cop. She might be a specialist, but she would not torture a man for it could affect her reputation as the leader of the Specialists – but Eryka? Well, she actually volunteered for this position, because as she said, she is not afraid to get her hands dirty.

“Look, Dutch…this does not need to get painful for you. The Black Gallows are causing more trouble than help, scaring people and none of you have lifted a finger to help the people getting sick from disease. And we know that you have the tech to cure them in seconds.” Winter explains as she walks around him, and Dutch listens to her words.

“Yeah, your point is, Schnee?” Dutch questions, as he looks over his shoulder at her.

“We need to know why you are really here, I’m not stupid, I have worked in this kind of business for a while now. And I know when a division is using a catastrophe as a cover story for your real reasons. So, what are they? What is Killian hiding?” Winter questions, and Dutch chuckles as he stares at her, then gathering a shell of saliva in his mouth and spitting in Winter’s face. She shuts her eyes and sighs, standing tall as she picks up a cloth, wiping it from her face with disgust.

“Okay…” She says, nodding to Eryka.

The Vasillias Boxer walks out from the shadows and punches her bare-knuckled fist into the side of Dutch’s face, so hard it nearly knocks his chair over on its side. Dutch grunts, a dark bruise formed with blood leaking form the split skin. She does not even flinch from the pain of her knuckles colliding into Dutch’s skull. Dutch sits up and stares up at Eryka, scoffing when he sees her attractive face with a scowl staring down at him. “Ah…the Falconess…somehow I had a feeling you were the one that grabbed me.” Dutch scoffs.

“Answer her question.” Eryka demands.

“What’s it to you? You’re not even a Huntress.” He keeps avoiding the question, so Eryka grits her teeth and with her other fist she swings against the other side of his face, and he grunts in pain from the sudden impact. Blood leaking from his face where the skin has been split.

“Avoiding the questions, a stupid idea, pal.” She states, walking round his shoulder again as she holds that screwdriver in her hand. Winter comes back round with her hands behind her back, looking at him.

“Why are the Gallows here?” She questions.

“You know why…you Huntsmen and Huntresses? Need to be put in check, the Vytal is the most recent example, but there have been plenty more over the years. And you know it.” Dutch growls.

“That does not allow you to just march in here and torment these students, they want to make the world a better place.” Winter states, and Dutch scoffs sinisterly.

“A better place? Look at the trees, Schnee! The only thing this world brings is death and destruction…the only way we can prevent that is through control.” Dutch states, but Winter shakes her head with angered blue eyes.

“To a degree…” Winter states.

“No…you’re wrong…you need to be put in check.” Dutch growls, and Eryka groans as she rolls her blue eyes.

“Y’know what needs to be put in check? Your goddamn attitude!” Eryka retorts, punching him extremely hard in the side of the head and he grunts, spitting blood onto the floor.
“Keep hitting me, bitch…see what happens.” Dutch snarls, but Winter gently raises her finger from her lowered hand, calming the fury in Eryka. The Falconess lowers her fist but tightens her grip on the screwdriver in her hand. “Yeah…that’s what I thought.”

“What is Killian hiding?” Winter repeats.

“What? You think he tells me?” He questions.

“Well he clearly trusts you if you have a pass into his office.” Winter states as she reveals his scroll and opens it to show the pass that needs a password to activate it. “Mind giving us a hand with the password?”

“You must be crazy if you wanna steal from Killian, you’ll never see the light of day ever again.” He snarls with a threatening voice.

“That is if catches us.” Eryka states.

“I know your faces.” Dutch warns.

“Yeah…and I have a screwdriver that I am not afraid to use on you. So, don’t bother threatening us, it won’t work.” She assures, and he eyes up the silver screwdriver that glimmers in the light of the fog lamp.

“What won’t work…is trying to steal from Killian…he will know…and he will catch you.” Dutch snarls.

“Then we will be the first.” Eryka states.

“Funny…that’s what so many others claimed.” Dutch chuckles menacingly, but then Winter crouches down and stares into his eyes.

“What is the password?” Winter repeats, and he smirks as he stares at her, spitting again.

Eryka snarls with anger, walking round and then suddenly slamming that screwdriver right into his kneecap, wedging it right underneath it. He bellows in agony as he feels the cap shifting and squelching as she digs that tool deeper into his leg, blood pouring down the limb and to the floor. “Squeal as loud as you want, nobody will hear you.” Eryka warns as Winter wipes the spit and blood from her face with the cloth.

“You…argh…won’t win…” Dutch snarls.

“Do you really want me to pop your goddamn kneecap off?” She snarls, as she twists and slowly pushes it downwards, pushing the kneecap higher and higher. He screams in agony, tapping his foot.

Then in all that pain he gives them an answer.

“Broken Dawn!” He cries out in pain, and Winter looks at the pass and she types that password into the keypad.

BROKEN DAWN

It opens…and they can use it.

“See? Didn’t have to get messy.” Eryka states as she rips out the screwdriver, before she swings round and punches him in the side of the head, so hard this time that it knocks Dutch out.
“We have what we need. We should wait until the others are back, during school hours would be best, Killian would be watching the classes.” Winter explains, Eryka looks at Dutch and sighs.

“He’ll tell her.” She warns, and Winter smirks.

“I don’t think so…I’ll have my men wipe his memory a few hours. We have some tech for it.” Winter assures, and Eryka nods her head.

“Sounds good…let’s hope this works.” Eryka states.
Parents' Arrival

Glynda

She stares out from Ozpin's office with her arms resting on the surface of his wooden table, rebuilt after it was blown apart by Cinder in her battle against Pyrrha Nikos. The Shadow of Broken Promises orbiting the skies Vale and Beacon Academy, like some sort of dark shadow of a monster watching over them with every second that passes every day. And from up here, she can see where the Black Smog are, it looks like they are starting to spread like a plague.

A thick black smoke flowing the trees.

They are gaining more numbers every single day, every now and then they can hear the roars of countless monsters that lurk within those trees. Many of them are so alien that they cannot even recognise them, for the monsters are all changing with every day. Glynda sighs, her desperation for all of this to be over beginning to show on her exhausted soul, taking her glasses off and setting them upon her table, groaning as she buries her head in her hands.

Just as she did Forty Years ago today…

Back then she was only a child, around eight years old, with short blonde hair and tears in her large green eyes, shaking on the floor with blood staining her hands, frail as a twig. She had not eaten in weeks by the looks of things, or been able to take a bath or simply get a good nights' sleep from the bags which hang underneath her large eyes. She sniffles softly, reaching her hand out for people to give her money, but not one of them ever gave her a glance.

One of them though does, stopping and looking down at her, only to reach down to her bowl of coins and liens given to her and stealing them. But she is far too young and weak to even possibly fight the bigger man, who grins as he takes the child's money, she has collected from kind Samaritans. It is hardly anything, barely even adds up to twenty-five Lien. Glynda whimpers softly, reaching up to the man who takes her money from her. "P-Please…" She whimpers, only for the man to kick her in the chest with his booted foot, she cracks against the wall with a yelp, landing on her scabby knees in her moth-eaten clothes.

The fat man spits down at her, the saliva drooling down her cheek as she gasps, feeling the hot pain in her chest where the man hit her. "Tough luck, kiddo – I could get a delicious sandwich with this." He chortles disgustedly as he walks away from Glynda. The young girl begins to sob uncontrollably, finding no hope in the world, for everyone just seems to be against her, to be her enemy with every single one that walks past her.

But then…something miraculous happens down the street from her, causing her to stop crying for a few seconds as she sits there, hugging her scabby knees. She lifts her head slowly to see the source of the hard punches that resounded nearby. A man is beating the living hell out of that civilian that just stole her money and flaunted in her face about it, and he swings upwards and breaks his nose.

A spray of red blood flying up into the air with what looks to be glowing red claret falling and sticking to the pavement. The man wipes the blood from his knuckles, turning to Glynda on the ground and he presses his cane to the floor, using it to walk towards her slowly. She rubs her bleary eyes as she looks up at her saviour, to see him holding the coins in his hand, giving them back to her and putting them back in the bowl.
She gazes past his hand as it lowers, seeing his brown hair and the brown eyes looking down to her. She wipes the tears from her chubby cheeks to see him clearly, as he holds his mechanical cane in one hand, and crouches down to be level with her, resting his knee against the pavement. He gently caresses her strand of blonde hair which hangs over her eye as she looks at him. "I'm sorry, honey…you don't have a home?" The man asks her, she hiccups a gasp and nods her head.

The man smiles as he looks at her then pats her head. "Come on, come with me." He says, holding out his hand so then she can go with him. Reluctantly, she reaches up to his much larger hand and he helps her up, she picks up her bowl and walks with him, dwarfed by his much taller and stronger stature. "What's your name?"

"Gl-Glynda…Glynda Goodwitch." She answers timidly, walking with him down the path, past the unconscious man with his face battered and his nose crushed, blood smudging his face as he lays there. The man chuckles as he walks with little Glynda.

"Goodwitch? Well, hello Glynda Goodwitch – my name is Ozpin."

This was how she first met the Professor that she would give her life for without a single question asked. He saved her from a life that would be extremely short lived, dying from starvation or sickness on the streets of Vale. He takes her to Beacon, which was not as large and impressive as it is now. The Cross Continental Transmit Tower still stands above the location but does not pierce the clouds, less buildings but the statue of the Huntsman, Huntress and the Beowulf are all still there.

Still holding her hand, he takes the little girl to his home that is built into the original C.C.T Tower, at its base, he opens the door and lets her in first, closing the door behind them both. He walks in and she looks around, holding her bowl in her hands, shyly looking around with large glistening eyes, seeing all his heroic medals he has earned over the years for his actions as a Huntsman. The many good men and women he has fought alongside, some with smiles, some are men and others are women.

And he is only twenty-five years old.

Glynda looks back at him with concern in her big eyes. "W…Why did you…he-help me?" She stammers softly, twiddling her small fingers as she walks over to him, seeing him preparing a bed for her to sleep on. He has a room for her, and already has the oven cooking some chicken and lots of vegetables.

Enough to keep her belly full for a long time.

Ozpin pauses what he is doing to look at her, and he shows a kind smile to her. "It's what I believe is right, to help people." He states, finishing his preparations for his bed, walking back into the kitchen and dining room, he crouches down and pulls out some plates for the two of them.

"Like Roast Chicken? Got some vegetables, potatoes and gravy. Delicious." Ozpin says with a smile on his face, kissing his finger with a satisfied sigh as if he just tasted the food he is about to serve.

"Umm…yes…but not a lot…my family weren't…rich." Glynda stammers as she describes her family, looking at the dry scabby blood stains that cover her little hands, then looking back to this man who has just happily taken her in, despite not knowing her.

"Rich, poor or in between…doesn't matter to me. I just think the right thing to do is to give people a second chance, to help people no matter what." Ozpin explains, putting on some mittens to take
out the scorching hot metallic tray out from the oven so then he can take the roasted chicken fillets out and place them onto their plates. He takes the hot tray after giving the fillets to her, luckily cooking enough for two people.

"Were you expecting someone?" She inquires.

"No, I just had two left over, so I felt like cooking them both. At least now I won't make myself sick." He chuckles, making the little girl softly smile. She walks over to the table as Ozpin pulls a chair out and helps her up so then she can sit upon the seat, she looks up at him as he walks round, taking a saucepan and scooping some assorted boiled vegetables onto her plate; green beans, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and some Brussel Sprouts. He then uses a ladle to scoop up the chicken stock gravy he has cooked, pouring it onto his and her food to give more flavour.

The steam and delicious taste fills her little nose as she stares at the huge meal, most likely the most she has been able to eat in weeks, or maybe even months. It would be surprising if the little thing could even eat all of this, but she cannot even resist…she picks up her knife and fork and digs in. Ozpin chuckles, impressed by the appetite of the eight-year-old. "And I thought Grimm have terrifying appetites…but a hungry child? That's something else entirely." He chuckles with a smile, taking his knife and stabbing the fork into the chicken, sawing a chunk off, and squishing some bits of potato and veg onto the gravy caked meal.

"Are you…a Huntsman?" She asks him with some broccoli in her mouth, gravy dripping down her chin…completely unlike the very proper woman she has grown into. Ozpin chuckles, taking a napkin, reaching over to her and cleaning it from her chin.

"Yes, I am the Headmaster of this…well…soon to be prestigious school." He states with a smile.

"This is Beacon…isn't it?" She asks him, and he nods his head.

"Yes, one day it will be bigger, I have big plans for these schools, to be something incredible. Where anyone who wished could come and learn to become a warrior to protect the people. No matter where they come from, or their past or conditions…as I said…I believe that everyone deserves a second chance." Ozpin explains, and Glynda raises a brow and she sniffs.

"What if…they don't deserve it? What if they are evil?" Glynda inquires curiously, tilting her head – it always surprised the Professor of how impressive her speech and curiosity was even as a child…even when being raised from the streets.

"Evil? No…I don't like to believe that there is such thing as evil. Evil is something a man or woman chooses to do out of pure malice, with no reason behind what they do…just chaos. I have been fighting for a long time now, my dear…and not once have I met an enemy that I considered to be pure evil. Misguided? Yes. Insane? Yes. Following orders? Yes. Truly believing their cause will help the world? More than I can count…but evil? Not once." Ozpin explains to her as he clasps his hands together on the table, and she looks down at the table, exhaling through her dinky nostrils.

Ozpin looks at the girl as she eats, her cutlery clinking every now and then as she eats her well earned dinner. "Now…may I ask you a question?" He inquires, since he has answered every single one of the questions she has asked him. She knows it is unfair of her to deny him that, so she nods her head. His eyes look to her bloodied hands and he immediately asks the question she feared. "How did you get so much blood on your hands?" He asks her curiously. "And please…answer honestly."

Glynda looks at Ozpin nervously and she looks at the cuts in her hands and the blood that has
hardened on her skin. Her hand shakes as she sees the knife in her grasp again, having to punch him in the face over and over again to stop him. "I…" She sniffs, fighting against the growth of emotion in her mouth, fighting the tears beginning to well up in her large green eyes. Then she finally tells him, despite how much she only wishes to move on from her decisions. "…I killed my father."

Ozpin looks at her and he closes his eyes with grief for the girl, he can tell that the father would have deserved it, and that no child her age should ever have to stab a man to death. He can tell just from the way that her eyes glared at the knife in her grasp that she killed him that way, she is not strong enough to use her body to kill him.

A blade was used.

He nods his head as he responds. "What did he do, to provoke you into committing such actions?"

She stammers as she sits there, quivering her lip before she gently bites it, squeezing her eyes shut. "He…he would hurt my mom…every night…he did it again, so I took a kitchen knife and stabbed him in the neck until he died." She sniffs, still hearing the screeches of her mother when she did it, how much blood left his neck when she did it…the sound of a sharp metal blade puncturing through skin and flesh.

Ozpin nods his head. "And your mother? I didn't see her with you."

"She…I woke up the next morning…she was outside…from the tree…"

"Stop." Ozpin pleads, not wanting her to finish what she was going to say, it is hard enough for him to hear, let alone for a child to recollect. The sight of her mother whom committed suicide, in his years as a Huntsman he has seen many terrible things…but sometimes there are people that have become so used to the abuse that they do not know how to live without anything else. And sometimes when they lose that abuser…they take their own life…as if it is what they deserve.

Men and Women like her father make his blood boil, but even then, he does not believe that they are pure evil. Many of them do what they do because that is what they were raised around, thinking it was the norm. Or they have too much rage in them to control it, or because their marriage is that corrupted.

But sometimes…

There are some men and women in the world that make him question his beliefs.

But the thing that hurts the most in these kinds of situations, is when the poor child is left alone to fend for themselves, because they only thought about themselves. Glynda was lucky, because Ozpin was kind enough to look after her when she needed someone to help her.

But not every child is as fortunate as her.

"I'm so…lonely…now…" Glynda begins to cry again as she tries to picture their faces but every time it just makes the blood on her hands seem to thicken. Ozpin stands up and walks over to her, gently wrapping his arms around her in a warm embrace.

"You're not alone…you'll never be alone. This I promise." Ozpin assures with a soft spoken and reassuring voice.

Back in the present…
Glynda stares out at the beautiful world that is Vale, her green eyes glassy as she turns and looks at the comatose body of the man who saved her from starvation. That little girl who was homeless and an orphan, has grown into a very beautiful woman and powerful Huntress, she acts all tough and stern…but deep down she is a gentle soul, who just wants the best for her students.

Glynda walks over to Ozpin, hearing the steady beep from his life support machine as she sits down, gently caressing his forehead with her thumb, checking if he is okay. His wounds have started to heal more since the destruction of the Vault, which has also been undergoing repairs. "I need you…Ozpin…I don't know what to do…" Glynda softly says, not even noticing the door opening behind her, and Ironwood walking into the office, seeing her with her head resting on his chest.

He softly smiles, walking over to her and gently placing his hand on her shoulder, she gasps when she turns, seeing him standing there. "You know what he would say if he heard you say that, right?" Ironwood asks her, and she softly laughs.

"Probably – go get some popcorn, it will be fine in the morning." She chuckles, shaking her head as she looks at him.

"His condition has improved, he will be fine. The students have been working hard to set up the party as well, even the Black Gallows cannot argue with that." Ironwood states, and she scoffs.

"I dunno, Killian is a confusing bastard." She states.

"Yeah he is…but I think that he does mean to do the right thing…despite how extreme his methods are." Ironwood says, Glynda sighs and she stands back up, looking up at him as he gently rubs her shoulders, then bringing her in for an affectionate hug. He gently kisses the top of her head, and she holds him tight.

Sometimes even the coldest of teachers need to be thawed.

"Thank you, James…" Glynda softly coos.

"Any time, Glynda…now where is that stubborn teacher everyone misses? A bunch of parents have arrived…some important ones too." Ironwood says with a smile.

"Important Parents?"

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**Velvet**

Deft fingers gently tune the glowing strings of the violin, clearing her throat into her fist, before cradling the hollow instrument to her cheek. Then, her soothing voice leaves her lips - albeit with a soft inflection of nervousness...

" **Dream of anything;**

*I'll make it all come true*

*Everything you need*

*Is all I'll have for you forever*

*Always by your side*
Whenever you need a friend
I'm never far behind
If the stars all fall
When there's no more light
And the moon should crumble
It will be alright"

As her fingers ease the translucent blue bow from her violin's strings, the brunette Faunus clears her throat and winces to her small audience. "So... what'd you think?" Velvet asks with a fidget, blushing red as she watches the three faces looking at her. "It's bad, isn't it? Oh, I knew it! Gods, I need to get this done by the dance, but I just can't-"

"You been hiding talent from your team, Velv?" Coco smirks, index finger lightly tugging her sunglasses down her nose, dark brown eyes flowing with pride. Velvet's eyes widen, and she shuffles on the concrete step of the courtyard's statue.

"W-Well, I... I wanted to write something for the dance... maybe do a duet with Weiss if she was interested. You think it's good?" Velvet's bunny ears droop lightly.

"Don't sell yourself short, Velvet. You've got an amazing voice." Yatsuhashi smiles, sat on the grass beside Fox. The red and brown themed boy simply smiles up at Velvet, conveying more than words could.

"Oh... w-well, thanks guys." Velvet chuckles, rubbing the back of her head. The bright blue holographic bow and violin soon dissolves into the air, as Velvet closes her box beside her with a firm click. "I just need to work on the lyr-"

"Hey, you guys seen Blake at all?" Sun interrupts, walking around the base of the statue. Coco sits back in the grass, supported on her elbows as the rising sun lathers warmth over her skin.

"No. Didn't know they were back." The Fashionista shrugs.

"Got back last night apparently." Sun shrugs, hopping up the concrete steps to vault into a back flip, tail hooking over the cast iron Horse's leg of the statue. Contently hanging upside down, he lets out a heavy sigh, swinging to and fro. "Neptune can't find Weiss either, they just got back from Yang's. Guess we're just worried about our friends is all."

"Yeah. I'm sorry Sun. We've not seen any of them to be honest. But we'll be sure to let you know the moment we do." Velvet nods, grabbing her bag and slinging it over her shoulder.

"Thanks guys." Sun huffs, pulling out his scroll. "Good singing Velv. You got a good set of lungs on ya." Sun grins over his scroll.

"Oh! W-Well thank you." Velvet nervously chuckles. "We should get to class. See you later, Sun!"

"Yeah... you too." Sun gives a quick wave, still intently focused on his scroll.

Message to Blakey:

Hey, Blake? Where u at? I haven't seen u. Are u okay?
With a tired sigh he hits send and stuffs the scroll in his pocket, only for gravity to pull it out and drop it on the floor below. "Nuts."

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**Blake**

Blake's scroll thrums in her coat pocket, startling her from her stupor. She pulls it from the cotton pocket, thumping the button to reveal the message. Her eyes scan the scroll left to right, before a heavy sigh leaves her lips. Zigzagging her teeth over her bottom lip, she vaults to her feet, shucking her coat. In the room are the rest of her team, Scarlet and Sage, since Neptune is out right now looking for his sister and the others as Sun said. Blake has already unpacked her things; however, Weiss is still getting the rest of her huge bag unpacked and neatly tidied.

Ruby is sat on her bed, kicking her legs back and forth as she plays her video game on her scroll, grunting in annoyance as she keeps getting beaten by Sage. "Ooh, yeah!" Sage cheers with a laugh, pumping his fist up as Scarlet draws some impressive artwork on the piece of paper sat on the desk.

"Blake? What's got you in a rush?" Weiss asks from the bathroom doorway, hands busy above her head, tying her off centred ponytail up after she finally finished putting makeup in there, until their room is repaired by the Construction Teams have finished their work. Blake huffs, amber eyes settling on Weiss.

"Sun messaged me. I need to talk to him."

"What's he done now?" Scarlet groans.

"Dunno, guess I'm gonna find out…" Blake replies with the shrug of her shoulders.

"See if he's okay?" Weiss offers.

"See if he knows anything about last night." Blake says over the top.

Weiss freezes, eyes wide at her Faunus friend. "Wow. That's... well, cold." She shrugs. Blake sighs and slumps her shoulders, looking at her scroll. "You think more of him than just that. Than some... informant."

"Doesn't stop him from acting like it though." Sage states as he looks at her, and Ruby pauses her game, looking at Blake.

"I don't know what to think right now." Blake snaps, shoving the scroll in her pocket. "I've got a lot on my mind, and I don't need feelings getting added to that!"

"O-Oh no, I am not putting up with this again." Weiss snaps, standing in front of the door, the taller Faunus pausing to growl.

"Move Weiss!"

"Make me!" Weiss frowns, crossing her arms tightly.

But then, Sage suddenly raises his voice as he sits up. "Wait!" He yells, before he seems to magically pull out a bag of popcorn and leans the back of his head against the wall, crossing one leg over the other. "Continue."
The girls and Scarlet all stare at him with confusion, before returning back to the discussion at hand. "I'm worried about you, Blake! Like how you got so obsessed over the White Fang that you just stopped sleeping or eating! I won't have a repeat of that, I won't! You are getting so obsessed over something, that you... stop caring about yourself and the others around you! Was what you told Yang just for her or did you really mean it?" Weiss softens her hard gaze; her firm pose loosening.

"Of course, I meant it, it's just...Adam attacked and hurt Yang and caused so many to die. You and I and everyone else here knows that this is not over. The Black Smog might be near but that woman? They never found a body. Emerald and Mercury have not been found either, or that Neo girl. Only Roman is confirmed to be dead." Blake explains to Weiss, and the Schnee Heiress raises a brow.

"We cannot risk stressing ourselves out, Blake. Not with the Black Smog waiting for the opportunity to attack again." Weiss explains. "Take. A. Break."

"Weiss, I'm not going to... I-It's not like that, okay?" Blake huffs.

"Isn't it? What's stopping it from being like that?" Weiss asks with a gulp. "Our team is hanging on a thread right now." Weiss stops when she sees Ruby sat there on the bed, however she has her earphones on now...she can't hear them. She sighs and nods her head, beginning to continue what she was saying but softer. "Ruby's... Ruby's falling apart, and I..." Weiss sniffs, welkin eyes growing hot and stinging, wobbling like ripples in a lake. "...If you're not there to help me, then I don't know what to do!" Fists fling down by her lithe hips, lip trembling as she spoke.

"Weiss..." Blake bites her lip, breathing out a heaving gust of pent up emotion. "I'm... I'm sorry."

"I just... I can't keep this up, if you're not there to help me." Weiss blinks.

"Then ask us to help – it's what we have been doing from day one." Scarlet suggests.

"C.F.V.Y does it, hell even C.R.D.L have been. Taking most of the clean-up duty so the other teams can recover." Sage adds.

"You've got friends all around you, stop trying to keep it to just a team of four. We need to stand together, now more than ever." Scarlet advises, and Weiss looks at him with a soft smile, both of themrealising that he is right. Blake places a warming hand atop her shoulder, Weiss' eyes lifting to Blake's smile.

"I do this a lot, Weiss. I... I forget that people care about me. I'm not used to it still, but I should be..." Amber eyes sting as her breath grows shakier. "What Yang did for me during the attack proves it. So, I know it's a... bad excuse, I know, but..." Blake huffs and Weiss steps away from the Dorm's door. "...my wonderful little team, and the people around us, are all I've ever had." Blake sighs, opening the door, her eyes exploding wide on the two figures in the doorway.

"BLAKE!"

"My baby girl!"

Blake stares in awe and disbelief at both Mother and Father in the doorway. Her Mother; tanned skin, warm amber eyes, golden accents over black cloth, purple linings to clothing and eyelids. Her Father; massively dwarfing his wife, thick black hair and matching beard, dark purple suede coat and skeletal silver pauldron stretching up over his left shoulder. While imposing, his eyes hold no wrath, only warmth and concern laced together.
Momma Belladonna, and Daddy Belladonna.

In Beacon.

Blake simply pales and slams the door, pressing her back to it and heaving heavy breaths, eyes wide on incredulous Weiss. "Okay... And them." Blake groans, knuckles wrapping on the other side of the door.

"Blake? Oh, come now!"

"Now I know you didn't just slam the door in your Mother's face."

"Uhh... G-Give me one second, please." Blake winces to Weiss, who grows smugger by the second.

"Oh, I can wait." Weiss smirks, sitting back against the bed's edge, waving her off, Ruby not even noticing what is going on. "Take all the time you need."

"I hate you." Blake lulls her head down, the knocking growing even faster. Gingerly she reopens the door, almost toppled by the hug her Mother assaults her with.

"Blake! Oh, my baby girl!" She strokes her daughter's hair, purring into her neck. Blake's hardened outer shell very quickly dissolves at the warmth of her Mother, and her Father's smile above. She takes a deep inhale of her loving parent and wraps her arms around her back.

"Hey Mom."

Ruby pulls an earphone out with curiosity. "Who's that?"

"That...is Blake's Parents."

Ruby gasps with joy, her silver eyes expanding with excitement, nearly going through the ceiling and the roof.

Squealing...

Is about to erupt like Mount Vesuvius from Ruby Rose.

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**Jaune**

"So...Arkos..."

"Oh gods...I was hoping that you forgot about that." He groans, walking with Pyrrha around the courtyard, both of them holding candy floss sticks in their hands, Pyrrha pulling some of the sticky, sugary pink fluff from the sweets. Jaune holds it too, shaking his head at his stupid idea.

"Is that what...we are now?" She curiously inquires with confusion, and Jaune pauses with concern, unable to answer the question due to his awkward nature that eats away at him like moths to a shirt at midnight.

"Uuuum...maybe? I mean it's our names put together." He says back to her and she giggles, both of them tenderly holding hands as they walk around the area, passing by some of the Black Gallows soldiers that patrol around the area. They both look at one of them as they pass, and the armour is so different to anything they have ever seen before. Completely intricate and covering their whole bodies...begging the question if they are even people.
But they don't let the soldier ruin the moment, since he did not even speak to them. "Imagine if that was what marriage was like?" Pyrrha asks him, Jaune raises a brow as he looks at her.

"What, we combine our names?" Jaune asks her.

"Yeah, imagine some of the names." She giggles.

"Let's see…Bella-Kong! Or Wu-Donna?" Jaune chuckles, making Pyrrha laugh as they imagine Blake and Sun having their surnames combined in that kind of way.

"Schneptune!" Pyrrha gleefully cheers as she arcs her arm up, then giggles playfully as she rests her head on Jaune's shoulder, giggling over the idea of Weiss and Neptune's names being combined like that.

"That's a good one." Jaune laughs, nodding his head.

Pyrrha looks ahead…

Then she goes stone cold, staring at someone ahead of them, Jaune looks at her with worried eyes as she freezes on the spot of which that they stand. "Whoa…what's wrong?" He asks her, then he follows the line of her gaze, to see the two people walking away from the landed Airship. Amongst many other parents are Anaximander and Juno Nikos, the large Spartan and his smaller but still deadly Wife at his side, both of them searching for her.

She releases Jaune, hoping to protect him from Anaximander and she throws the Candy Floss in the bin, so then her father does not lecture her on her diet. "We can't…we can't look like we're together, Jaune…go…" Pyrrha begs, but Jaune shakes his head, wanting to support her.

"Nuh-Uh, I'm not leaving you." Jaune states, but she holds his hands and looks into his eyes.

"Please…I don't want you to get hurt." She begs him.

"You've been teaching me, surely your father could respect that." Jaune states as he gently caresses her cheek with his hand, and she squeezes her eyes shut. She knows she would never be able to argue with him, she and him are as stubborn as each other sometimes.

"O-Okay…"

They both stand there, and pretty fast the parents locate their daughter, green eyes fixing onto hers, walking towards her with what appears to be concern for her. But she knows her father, her mother does love her but a little too much, since she is not afraid to ruin someone else's future for one small mistake, "Pyrha! My daughter…" Anaximander sighs with relief, hugging her gently, caressing her red hair as she stands there. Juno also hugs her, then after a few moments of embracing with her, Juno sees Jaune…but does not comment yet.

She looks happy but Jaune knows that Anaximander might not share those emotions of his daughter having a friend…let alone a boyfriend. "Are you okay? I heard you were hurt, what happened?" He asks her nervously, patting her down for any injuries.

"I'm fine…" Pyrrha shakily answers with fearful eyes directed to her own mother and father.

"We were so scared, we…we thought…we thought we lost you, honey." Juno softly says as she holds her daughter's hand. But then, Anaximander swiftly catches onto Jaune standing near to her, holding a candy floss stick in his hand.
"Who's this?" Anaximander inquires as he looks at Jaune, and her eyes widen, looking back at the man she loves. Jaune stands there, feeling so small in comparison to the towering Spartan Father of the girl he adores. He musters his courage as he stands tall, looking right at him.

"Jaune Arc." He greets.

"Is he a friend, sweetie?" Juno asks her, sounding happy for her daughter, for she always wanted Pyrrha to be happy and get what she always wanted…but the look on her father's face is that of suspicion.

"Yes…my team leader." She states, then Anaximander raises his brow with confusion.

"Leader? I thought you would have been team leader." He presumes.

"Well…" Pyrrha stammers.

"With your training, all your skill and everything you have accomplished…why wouldn't Ozpin have made you the leader?" He questions with confusion, and Pyrrha squeezes her eyes shut, so Jaune takes it all in force.

"I'm not sure, I think Ozpin appreciated my strategies I showed in the Emerald Forest during initiation." Jaune shrugs his shoulders, and he narrows his eyes. Juno holds her daughter's hand as Anaximander stares at the young blonde knight.

"Come on, honey…" Juno softly says to her, taking her off to talk to her alone. Anaximander looks back at the two red haired women as they walk away, and he sighs, looking at him with angered eyes.

"Strange…how she was so…worried for you." He states, clearly noticing her concern for him.

"Pyrrha cares for her friends, that so surprising?" Jaune inquires.

"How curious, that she is not in your place and then we receive a call of how she nearly died. I wonder…were you a reason for it? You do not strike me for a warrior, boy." Anaximander snarls as he slowly walks towards him, staring down at him with narrowed eyes. But Jaune does not falter, he stands tall with his fists clenched, something that Anaximander respects.

But that does not change his view of the boy.

"What are you getting at, Anaximander…and yeah…I know who you are, pretty hard to forget." He scoffs.

"She told you?" He inquires, but just so then he can protect Pyrrha he lies.

"Oh no, but I'm not an idiot. I knew you were her father from all the damn commercials…and that she hated them." Jaune explains as he glares at the father, who narrows his eyes.

"You dare act like you know my own daughter better than me?" Anaximander snarls, but Jaune just scoffs and shakes his head with a smirk.

"I know she wears socks when she goes to bed at night because she complains about her feet getting cold. I know she takes two sugars in her tea despite saying she takes none. I know that she has a sweet tooth despite knowing she shouldn't have them. And I know…that she just wants to be loved." He states with narrowed blue eyes, and completely shatters Anaximander as he stands there.
Anaximander grits his teeth with anger, staring down at the young man. "You…I bet you are the reason she was hurt, she has always wanted to be the hero in the books. Always wanted to save the man she wished to love…and you know a lot about her, that is clear." Anaximander snarls, and Jaune steps forward, challenging him in return.

"What exactly are you getting at?" Jaune replies.

"That you will get my daughter killed! She would be stronger without the strings of friends." He states, and Jaune shakes his head.

"Sounds more like you are a man that is jealous of what she has and what you never did get." He states.

"If it saves her life and helps her get what she wants in life, then yes!" Anaximander bellows.

Jaune glares at him.

Delivering a cold blow.

"Get what she wants?"

"Pyrrha? Or you?"

Jaune walks past Anaximander and in the direction that Pyrrha went with Juno, leaving Anaximander speechless…and admittedly impressed…but his words bring a memory back into his mind.

Anaximander

When Pyrrha was only a child…

Lunch time was no different. Sat alone, Pyrrha opened her Pumpkin Pete's lunchbox and fished out her wrapped sandwich. She sighed and undid the plastic wrapping, lifting the sandwich to her lips and taking a bite. Emerald eyes scanned the playground, watching the other kids playing with a ball, kicking it to and fro, laughter echoing all around.

Pyrrha sighed and looked down at her lunchbox's contents. She was a star combatant for her age, down to her Father's training since she was an infant, and in such had to eat like one. A sandwich was as far as calories went, the rest of her meal containing an apple and a bottle of water.

She finished her sandwich in silence, until a ball skipped along the floor to her, the spongy ball rolling to a stop by her shoes.

"Can you kick it back?!" One of the children called.

Pyrrha smiled and put her lunchbox aside, picking up the ball and doing just that, kicking it across the playground towards them.

"Thanks!" They called, returning to playing. No invitation for her to join them. Nothing. She put it down to the fact they obviously saw her eating her lunch and didn't want to be rude. Yeah... that.

She perched back on the stone wall and silently ate her lunch, watching the other kids play, watching them form bonds, make friendships that'll no doubt last a lifetime. She looped some red hair out of her eyes and nibbled at her lunch, unawares of Mrs Lavender watching with a deep wash.
of concern in her lilac eyes.

So, it came as no surprise that afternoon that she sat at her desk opposite Mr and Mrs Nikos. Lavender huffed and laced her fingers together, chin resting atop her twined digits. Hazel and green eyes watched Lavender, until she shrugged and looked at the window.

"I'm worried about Pyrrha."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm sorry?" Both parents leaned forward, a rather perturbed look in her Father's eyes, and a concern laced plea in her Mother's. Lavender huffed and set her hands on the desk, sliding them idly back into her lap.

"Juno. Anaximander. Your daughter is a wonderful student. She's so warm and polite, does exactly as I ask-"

"So, she's a model student. Perfect grades? Excelling in combat?" Her Father, Anaximander, leaned forward with intrigue in his gaze.

"She's an A grader for sure. But that's not what I'm worried about. I'm worried about her... forgive me, but her lack of friends." Lavender sighed, looking out the window to the playground.

"Pfft, my daughter? No, she's top of her class, they should be flocking to be her friend!"

Anaximander laughed, Juno gulping and wringing her hands as she too stared out the window.

"You have a funny perception of friends, Mister Nikos." Lavender sighed heavily. "She's the best fighter in my class, she can speak fluent Mistraalian, bar a few words - though that's to be expected of an eight-year-old - and can do math in her head even I can't. But her social skills? Zilch. Nada."

Lavender huffed. Juno and Anaximander looked stunned at the statement.

"I don't think-"

"Look outside. Look at her." Lavender said with raw emotion. All eyes in the class fell to the tiny red haired eight-year-old as she stood alone in a sea of students readying to go home. Children laughed and ran around, while right in the middle with a wide berth, Pyrrha shuffled her feet and kicked a ball haphazardly, barely moving it a foot as the incline in the tarmac let it roll back down to her shoe.

"She's in serious danger of not being able to form any sort of meaningful bonds in the future. At this age, the most important thing is that she makes friends, not be able to throw a spear into a damned bullseye!" Lavender snapped, pinching her brow.

"Oh, my baby." Juno whimpered, desperately fighting that motherly ache in her belly to run outside and wrap her in a hug.

"But... she's top of her class, right?" Anaximander asked. Lavender froze.

"Yeah." She scoffed. "Yeah, she's doing great. Guess there aren't that many distractions when you can't make friends." she snarled. Quickly she calmed, sobering a sigh into her hand. "Mr and Mrs Nikos. Right now, I think it is imperative that you focus on Pyrrha making friends, or she will struggle with making bonds in the future."

"She will continue to train as we have done since day one, Mrs Lavender." Anaximander snapped. "I won't say this to my daughter's face, but friendships are not as important as developing the skills..."
"You surely don't believe that?" Lavender looked to Juno as she sighed and looked to her husband as he bares his teeth.

"I love my daughter very much, do not misread that. She's the best thing I have ever had a part in. Best thing I've ever made. But her social skills will pick up later on in life. I didn't have friends growing up, just my Father and his tutelage, and I turned out just fine."

"Of course." Lavender huffed. "I can't force you to change anything. But... I am deeply concerned for how this will affect Pyrrha in years to come."

"She will be fine. She'll do great things, I know it. She will be the very best, friends be damned. People who'll just drag her down. You'll see."

"See what, Anaximander? Because right now, I see someone who in the years to come won't be proud of the 'Great Pyrrha Nikos', but proud of being the man who trained the 'Great Pyrrha Nikos'... and oh, how there is such a difference between the two."

Back in the present...

He stands there, feeling such Deja Vu...

Jaune is right, and it hurts...

All he wants is Pyrrha to be happy...and safe.

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Blake

"Oh, this school is wonderful, isn't it wonderful Ghira?" Kali asks excitedly, looking around the campus with wide amber eyes.

"Yes. Wonderful." Ghira's eyes firmly set on his leading daughter. "So... is it hot here, in Vale...in the Summer?"

"Huh?" Blake raises an eyebrow. Ghira shrugs his huge shoulders.

"It's just... your outfit... it doesn't cover much."

Blake, mortified, tugs at her clothing, a red band blossoming over her cheeks. "It covers plenty!"

"Oh, so where is that team of yours you spoke of so fondly?" Kali steps forward a hair quicker, hooking her arm around her daughter's, giving the limb a soft squeeze.

"Yes. In the one and only letter you sent home." Ghira raises a brow. Blake swallows. She looks up and her cat ears spike at the incoming yells. "Who is that?" Ghira scoffs.


"Mom!" She whines, tugging her arm free. Running over, Sun pants, hands atop his knees with laboured breaths, standing beside an equally panting Velvet Scarlatina.

"B-Blake! What gives, you've been ignoring my texts all day?!" Sun wheezes, before seeing her parents and curiously raising his brow, suddenly no longer out of breath apparently. "Who's this?"
"Oh, your concern for my daughter is so sweet!" Kali beams, hugging Blake's arm a little tighter, before stepping over to Sun, hand outstretched. "Kali. Kali Belladonna. And this is-"


"H-Hello sir! I'm Velvet." The Bunny Faunus chuckles weakly.

"Blake's parents?" Sun scratches the back of his head, before his pupils shrink to tiny dots. "Blake's parents."

"Oh, aren't you sweet!" Kali greets Velvet with a warm hug. "I want to thank you for being there for Blake during... well, all that nasty business." She waves her hand dismissively. Velvet smiles.

"Oh, my pleasur-URE!" Her voice rasps, eye twitching at the huge hand crunching hers.

"Ghira, be gentle!" Kali scolds her husband.

"OH! I'm, sorry my dear. I do thank you for your support of my daughter. It's nice to see so many Faunus students at Beacon." He smiles to her.

"Uhh, yep! There's a bunch of us! Aaaand, we're treated really well!" Velvet laughs weakly, throwing a fist across her torso animatedly. Even though CRDL have stopped bullying and grown on everyone massively, those memories linger. Sun walks up to Blake, hands pushing at the air.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa... whoa... whoa." He stops, arms dropping heavily to his sides, sunlight painting a stripe of gold down his tanned cheek. "Parents?!"

"My name's Kali. That's Ghira." Kali adds from behind Blake, peering around her shoulder. "Hello!" She sings, wiggling her fingers with her wave. Sun gives an incredulous wave back.

"Eh-heh. Can I talk to you for a sec?" He grabs Blake's hand, leading her out of earshot. Velvet watches them go, looking back up to dwarfing Ghira and beaming Kali.

"I'm... I'm just gonna go. Nice to meet you both!" Velvet smiles brightly, before quickly scurrying away. Meanwhile, Sun pushes Blake against the concrete statue out of her parents' eyes.

"PARENTS?!" Sun yells, eye twitching.

"Relax, Sun. I didn't know they were coming either. Why're you so worked up anyway?" Blake crosses her arms.

Sun shrugs.

"M'not. Not at all." He laughs weakly. "I just don't want them to get the wrong idea about us."

"Us?" Blake raises a brow, almost hopefully.

"What do you think they're talking about?" Kali asks on her tippy toes, bobbing eagerly as she stares at the statue, Ghira having to stare at their shadows for any movement he declares to be... indecent.

"Hopefully about how my daughter is off limits." He snaps, Kali huffing and slapping his arm.

"You said you were going to try."
"I am. I'm trying. Really hard." He mumbles in retaliation as Kali rolls her eyes.

"You said you weren't going to embarrass her, you did, yes you did, on the flight over, I remember, you said 'Kali, I won't embarrass her', yet you're getting ready to - yes you are, I know you, you are."

"I'm not gonna embarrass her."

"Promise?"

"I don't make promises I can't keep."

"Pussy."

"Kitty."

"What do you mean, Blake? I mean have I not made it clear how I feel about you?" Sun raises a brow, swallowing thickly. Blake strokes her arm, looking downward.

"I... I'm not ready for that right now, Sun. I can't think about that sort of stuff right now." Blake firmly lifts her chin, though her amber eyes betray her. Sun gulps, nodding as he eyes his feet.

"So... Tell me - just tell me Blake. Am I wasting my time?" Sun pleads, a look in his eyes that she's never truly seen before.

Vulnerability.

She sighs and bites her lip, Sun huffing and slapping a hand to his thigh, for her silence was her answer. "Your err... your parents are waiting." Sun smiles weakly, before turning and walking away, hands shoved in his pockets.

"Sun." Blake closes her outstretched hand into a fist, dropping it to her side. "Wait... I'm... I'm sorry."

"Knock, knock." Kali taps on the bronze plaque of the statue, wincing as Blake yelps. "Sorry, but... well, we wanted to make sure you're okay."

"I-I'm fine. Come on, I'll introduce you to my friends." Blake sighs, leading the way with an eye closure that swallows back her welling emotions.

Pyrrha

Back when she was a child...

After Dandelion and her accomplices broke her heart...and before Juno ruined their futures forever...

Pyrrha ran into the house, unable to see through the blurry vision of salty tears. Juno immediately stood from her desk at the muffled sounds she knew all too well as crying. Opening the door, she watched Pyrrha run down the hall into her bedroom, slamming the door.

"Pyrrha?!" She stepped out and padded over to the door, marked 'Pyrrha's room. Stay out please.' "Amica Mea, what's wrong?"
"I hate everyone! I hate everything!" She cried through the door. "They u-used me, Mom! For m-my name... my... useless toys! I feel so stupid!"

Juno sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, sighing heavily. "Oh honey. I'm so sorry. Open the door... let mommy in."

"Go away!" Pyrrha cried. "Please!"

Juno bit her lip to not cry herself, shaking her head to the ceiling.

"Why? Why couldn't she just meet some nice, genuine people?" Juno breathed. "I'm coming in, Pyrrha."

She turned the door knob to resistance, seeing the blackened cloud around the metal. "Pyrrha... please, let me in."

"No! Go away, please! Leave me alone like everybody else does!" Juno sighed, and her motherly bond overcame Pyrrha's semblance, her hand dropping a gentle ribbon of golden light over the door knob, freeing it from Pyrrha's hold. She opened the door and stepped in, Pyrrha's bloodshot and watery eyes lifting in shock.

"Oh please, every Mother has the ability to overcome their child's semblance. It's a mystery of our evolution, a beautiful flaw, exploited by Mother's to help their stubborn, hurting children. But that's not important." Juno sat on the edge of Pyrrha's bed as her daughter buried her face in the pillow to sob.

"I really-gasp-thought I'd made some friends, Mom." Pyrrha sobbed, muffled into the cotton. Juno smoothed her hand down her daughter's back, hushing her gently.

"I know honey, but people can be cruel. They can forget that we all stem from the same earth... and treat everyone differently due to colour, race, and wealth."

"I'd rather be poor... and have friends." Pyrrha sniffled. Juno smiled sadly.

"Mmm. Yes, well... Someday, you'll meet someone, I know it. Someone who won't see you for all of this..." She huffed, looking at the documents on Pyrrha's desk, a sponsorship deal with her signature at the bottom, 'Pumpkin Pete's' printed on the title. "Another Sponsorship?"

"Mmm... it expires when I'm eighteen. Seemed reasonable." Pyrrha sniffed and sobbed into her pillow, hugging it around her face.

"Four years. Very nice. I'm so proud of you, Pyrrha. Fourteen pushing fifteen and taking on all this. But it also concerns me. That you're losing out on a childhood."

"It doesn't matter, Mom." Pyrrha sniffed, sitting up with a broken gaze hidden behind the wobble of her tears. "Like Father said... I'll just focus on all this... my career. Friends will just use me." she looked down, her gaze lifted by the motherly grip on her chin.

"Not real friends, Pyrrha. They'll look after you, cherish you... I know it. Don't give up on people yet, Pyrrha. Don't give up on friendship or... even love. Don't give up on any of it."

Pyrrha sniffled, wiping her eye. "I'll try, Mom." She whispered hoarsely, looking at the wooden rocking horse in the corner. "I'll try."

How she has changed over the years, matured into a beautiful young woman sat beside her mother
whom has not changed a bit in looks or in personality. If there is any change it is just in what she is wearing, despite it still being a pretty bronze colour, a dress with lighter gold accents across it. Juno walks over to her daughter with a cup of orange juice, offering it to her daughter. "You still drink this, don't you?" She inquires, and Pyrrha sweetly smiles, accepting the cool drink with her hand.

"Thank you." She thanks with a smile, taking a sip as she holds it in her hands. Juno sits down next to her, drinking the same drink she has always had, just like her baby girl.

"Wow…I don't think I have actually ever been to Beacon in person…stunning place." She softly says as she looks around, at the beautiful buildings around them, but the scaffolding and destruction around them…does obscure its beauty.

"It was…" She says.

Juno nods her head. "Yes…the Grimm have a way of ruining things, don't they?" Juno inquires and Pyrrha remains quiet. Juno looks at her and she sighs, still feeling guilty for the punishment she inflicted on the girls that bullied her daughter. "Are you still…afraid of me, Pyrrha?" She inquires, knowing this to be the case.

Pyrrha hangs her head as she answers. "You ruined their lives, mom…I don't even know what they do now." She states.

"They hurt you, broke your heart. I don't have time for bullies, they chose their own fate when they refused to test me." Juno snarls with anger in her eyes.

"You could have punished them…not put their families in a debt their grandchildren will have to pay off." Pyrrha reminds, but she shakes her head.

"Punishment must be given to those who deserve it, they did." She states, but Pyrrha sighs. "Remember when I showed I could counteract your semblance? How upset you were?" Juno inquires, and Pyrrha looks down at her knees.

"Yeah." She replies.

"Well…I could never ever bring myself to let those bullies…those little brats…get away with what they did. But when they attacked you…and you refused to fight back because you were scared…I snapped. I couldn't…couldn't face the thought of you crying yourself to sleep any longer." Juno explains, then Pyrrha looks at her.

"But you always said that forgiveness is the best thing in the world." Pyrrha claims as she raises her brow, and Juno sighs.

"Just because I told you that…does not mean I believe it…I simply want you to be better…than me." Juno says as she looks at her daughter, for she has clearly used the power of the Nikos Name to break many people who have stood in her path. And she is also a very lethal warrior, a Spartan just like her husband.

And her daughter.

"But…that boy…I saw the way you two looked at each other." She kindly says with a smile, looking at her daughter and she blushes immediately.

"N-No…" She lies pathetically.
"You never were a good liar…"

"I'm…I'm worried about him…Dad…he's…he's extreme with his beliefs, you know that." Pyrrha says, and Juno shakes her head.

"He is very protective, but you must understand something – your father was raised by a Spartan and the only way he raised him was by the sword. Nothing more, he tried to be a better father but at the end of the day, all he has ever known from his childhood is isolation and combat. You can't blame him for carrying some of that into his parenting." Juno explains, and Pyrrha shakes her head.

"That's not the problem…I don't want Jaune hurt." Pyrrha states with concern.

"He won't hurt him…he would never hurt anyone that you care about. Your happiness is always his priority. It might not seem it, but it is. I love your father with every fibre in me…and I know his flaws, and his strengths. And I must say…we have raised one beautiful and kind little girl." Juno kindly says to her daughter, stroking her ponytail.

"I am…so proud of you."

Pyrrha tears up as she smiles, hugging her mother, Juno kisses her cheek affectionately as Anaximander approaches. Pyrrha looks at her father, and then at Jaune in the distance.

He smiles, turning and walking away so she can connect with her parents again.

A smile grows across her face, accepting her parents once more.

Ruby

Sat on a bench…

Ruby sits there with tears in her silver eyes, seeing all these mothers with their kids, lovingly tending to them. Kali with Blake and Juno with Pyrrha, looking around to see Neptune also on his own until Eryka walks up to him to make him feel better. Seeing Sun also on his own, his parents are nowhere to be seen.

Even Jaymes…

His father never showed up, and probably for the best, considering what they have heard about his father. But all Ruby wants is for her mother to be here and hug her, to tell her she is proud of her. She sniffs as she sits there, until a warm hand touches her shoulder and she turns, to see Glynda standing there. "Hey…” She softly says and Ruby smiles.

This is the first time she has seen Glynda since her outburst after Sun and Jaymes got in that fight.

"Oh…hey, Professor." She sniffs, wiping the tears from her eyes as she sits there, then Glynda walks round and sits down beside Ruby, looking at all the parents there. She looks at the motherless daughter and smiles.

"You okay?" She asks her, understanding her pain.

"Yeah…just wish my mom could be here." She sighs and Glynda smiles, remembering that lesson that Ozpin taught her.

To always look after people.
She puts her arm around Ruby and lets her lean against her, as a good teacher should. "Me too."
Glynda agrees.

Being that mother figure today that Ruby has missed for so many years.

For once…

There is some positivity in the air.
Neptune

He stares down at the many pages of the book he has opened up at his hands, his orange goggles resting atop his forehead. Blue hair spiked up slightly and his blue irises gliding across each page. He glances up at some of the workers in here, repairing the rest of the ceiling that collapsed that day, using cement to bind the supports back together. There are a couple other students in here studying, now that the Library is open for people to use as long as they stay away from where the construction workers are.

The book which rests on his table is a nonfiction block about the history of Remnant, a lot of it is jumbled but he has always been intrigued by it. And since Sun has been wanting Blake to see him as a guy that just wants to be there for her and understand her, he wants to try new things, improve on his reading skills and such. Neptune however has started reading simply out of habit from seeing all those books that Blake has gotten him over time. And ones he has been sharing with her.

Well, until recently.

Neptune is many things, but a blind fool is not one of them, Sun has been acting pretty distant lately and being quite detached from them. There are times where he acts more like himself, but Sun has a way about him, a way that feels real, but most of the time it has merely felt like he is doing it for their sake and not his own. To say he is worried about him is a major understatement, but at the end of the day he has been with Scarlet and Sage, so he has been spending some alone time on his own.

Because he has his own problems on his mind, not only the fear of what happened during that battle, all the corpses they have had to find…but also just his own insecurities. Feeling like he always needs to be cool, it may sound silly, but it all comes down to him wanting to make others happy. Or down to how he does not want to feel like he is a normal kid, he has always wanted to stand out, to be remembered.

His blue eyes dart back and forth across the pages, reading about the past of Beacon and Vale.

_The King of Vale hundreds of years ago, named Thaddeus Rex, fought in the Great War first hand. He was a man that showed no mercy to his enemies and would always defend his people, to do the right thing. No man would win against him, no Grimm would ever land a hit on him. Wielding a sword that would slice straight through hundreds of Grimm and felt like every strike would trigger earthquakes and tsunamis._

_The blood filled the rivers of Vale that once ran with stunning glistening blue water, filled with fish that would go about their daily lives. But after the war ended, all life in those rivers died. The plants crumbled from the ashes, the blood polluted that water and killed everything that lived inside of it._

_Secondary Disaster has always been the most prevalent killer in wartime, diseases spread like wildfire across entire kingdoms. Latching onto people no matter the class, no matter the skill, no matter their history, age, gender, sexuality, race, it mattered not. Nobody was safe from the plagues._
**King Thaddeus Rex devised a plan to stop this.**

*He ordered every soldier, every man and woman, to wear masks to protect themselves, and collect every single corpse that was left behind. Whether they were on their side or not it did not matter, the rot does not choose which side to infect. The people followed him, for he did the same with them. He was not a man that would sit down and happily give the orders and watch from a distance whilst drinking wine.*

*He went with them and cleaned up the ashes of war, taking thousands of corpses and creating hill sized mounds of death to be burned to dust in droves. The stench of all that burning rotten flesh thickened the skies, black smoke caused the days to turn to night for what felt like months, but it was in fact only two days. Some people died from the smoke, others could not take it, but Thaddeus stayed head strong and devised another plan.*

*He believed that everyone should be equal, no matter what. They created a new safe haven away from the destruction that befallen the old Kingdom, and thus they named it Beacon.*

*A Beacon of Hope for all people who followed him.*

*That Beacon expanded over the years, long after the death of King Thaddeus Rex and very soon after, it became the Kingdom of Vale.*

*With it’s Shining Beacon at the heart.*

“Hey Neptune.” Weiss’ voice, tender and sweet despite coming from her naturally cold body, makes the young man jolt with a gasp. He turns and sees her walking over to him with her beautiful white hair tied up into her off-centred tail as always. Her eyes almost seem to glow with a bright blue, and her smile as loving as ever, the affection makes him stumble and stutter as he closes up his book.

“Ah! Oh! Hey Weiss.” Neptune grins, trying to hide his concerns but doing it awfully badly. Weiss smiles as she walks over, and she sits down in the chair right next to him, putting down one of her books she has. A Notebook she has where she has been writing down her ideas and feelings, she opens it up with her pen in her hand, biting onto the lid gently to pop it off.

“You alright?” She asks him with a tender voice.

“Hmm? Yeah, oh yeah, I’m fine.” He lies, chuckling awkwardly as he blushes nervously at the girl, he has a huge crush on, too scared to admit it.

Both to her and everyone.

Because nobody forgot the red handprint on Jaune’s face when he tried to ask her out for a date that one time. Nearly killed him.

Weiss raises her brow as she glances at him, seeing him padding his fingers on the front cover of that book he was reading about King Thaddeus Rex. The two sit there as a pregnant silence falls upon them, then Weiss brings something up she has wanted to say ever since the dance, and since that they are getting ready for another one to lighten the mood. Hopefully all that joy will cause the Black Smog to retreat and leave the Kingdom.

Weiss looks at him. “Neptune…I…” She softly stammers, and it is as if all the blood in his body just went cold with nervousness, he can hear the shyness in her voice. Not something that can be mistaken. “…I wanted to say thank you...”
He raises a brow with a confused look on his gormless face. “Huh? Thank me for what? If this is about us letting you stay in our dorm a while then please don’t, it’s the least we could do.” Neptune explains with a smile on his face, his kindness, all of their kindness has always warmed her heart, something she has rarely experienced from people across the world.

But that’s not what this is about. “N-No, this isn’t about that…although we are grateful.” Weiss smiles toothlessly to him, making his heart flutter to see that beautiful look on her face. “No… actually I wanted to – uh – say thank you, for being honest with me…y’know, back at the last dance?” She says to him and he pauses, remembering how he shut her down, and how Jaune gave him the inspiration to go back and talk to her about it. To explain his insecurities with her and that he was sorry, and clearly it worked.

But as always, Neptune is a gentleman and would never let a girl thank him and stand there and accept it. He would never want someone to do that, because they do not owe him a thing. “You don’t have to, Weiss. Jaune was right, I was a jerk for doing that…because of my own problems.” He scoffs.

“Oh Neptune…you are many things. Silly? Yes. A dork? Definitely…but a jerk is not one of them.” She reminds, and he shakes his head, scratching the back of his neck as his insecurities keep eating away at the back of his mind.

“I turned you down because of my own pride…I hold that too high Weiss…because I don’t want people to think I am normal.” He says with a sigh. “I’ve always wanted people to remember me fondly, to see me as a cool guy, someone they could like.”

“I just want people to like me.”

Weiss looks at him then she gently caresses the top of his hand with her digits, making him nearly gasp from feeling her hand on his. “Everyone likes you Neptune, if anything I think more people like you when you are acting normal.” Weiss explains with her touching voice reaching his heart.

“No…” He softly sighs, burying his head in his hands.

“Oh yeah, trust me.” She states with a smile.

“No, Weiss…you don’t understand. I have always looked up to my sister, Eryka? I have always trusted her, always wanted to be like her. She’s pretty, best fighter I’ve ever seen, has a pet Eagle, was taught in the mountains. Me? I’m just some kid.” He sighs as he sits there with his elbows pressed against the table.

“So? What’s wrong with that?” She inquires.

“Because everyone will look at me as the runt of the litter. It’s what life is like in Mistralian Academies, if you are not strong or have a good personality you tend to be alone…I don’t wanna be alone.” He sadly says, staring down at the table where that book sits before him. “I just want to matter.”

“I know…and that’s why I asked you.” She reveals, he looks at her with a confused expression.

“Huh?” He asks.

“I asked you to the dance…because you are like me.” She says to him with a gentle smile on her face. “I always felt that my family’s name would get me friends, but quickly I realised they were just after the money. Or after my looks…but when I first met you, I could tell that that wasn’t the case. And you’re not the only one with insecurities.” She says as she touches the scar over her eye.
ever so softly.

He notices the way she touches that scar, he has always wondered how she got it, because she has never told him…or anyone really. Only very few know about it, her team being the extent of most.

Something sparks in Weiss, as her eyes suddenly widen and a bright smile forms on her face as she gasps, looking at Neptune. “I’ve got it!” She squeaks, and Neptune stares at her with confusion and almost fear.

“Um…okay?” He replies.

“I want you to help me prepare the party on Saturday!” Weiss says to him with a smile on her face, and Neptune chuckles as he stares at her.

“Me? Trust me you do not want that, Scarlet still hasn’t forgiven me for last time.” Neptune chortles, and Weiss stammers, then continues.

“I’m gonna let that one go by, guess I’d rather not know.” She giggles.

“Nope. I got suspension for three weeks.” Neptune states.

“Gods…” She grumbles, until getting back on the task at hand, after getting blindsided by the Vasillias Train. “Anyway! You can help us, I was gonna note down some ideas in here, but with you here with me, we can share ideas!” She squeaks, and Neptune leans back in his chair as he slides his book out the way.

“Oh, okay. I thought it was with like…making drinks or something.” Neptune stutters.

“Making drinks? What kind of party did you plan?” She inquires.

“Hmm? Oh nothing, no need to tell that story.” Neptune replies with the shrug of his shoulders, trying to change the subject…but like a moth to a light…nothing will shirk the Schnee’s Curiosity.

“Um…please do.” Weiss requests with a bright smile, and Neptune groans.

“You’ll never trust me again.” He groans.

“I’m willing to test that.” Weiss assures, and he sighs, shaking his head.

“I…We…Agreed it would be a cool idea to allow alcohol in the party we set up. I didn’t expect though, the word to have gotten out and for every single student to show up. We had a…little riot on our hands at the end.” Neptune describes, making Weiss laugh, almost guffawing at how a simple idea could have possibly gone so awry.

“How did that even happen?” She cries out, until the Librarian glares at her and shushes her extremely loudly…it feels like a stab to the abdomen from how sudden it was…so the timid little Schnee nods her head and whispers the question again. “How did that even happen?” She petitely whispers.

“Well…damn near everyone got drunk and it was up to us to try and calm them all down. Didn’t work, everyone got into fights, one guy was punched through the double doors…and then the riot went into the streets. Nothing too serious…just a few broken windows…a stolen lampshade…a flipped car.” Neptune lists as he remembers it all far too vividly, and Weiss’ eyes burst wide open.

“Flipped Car?” She questions in a whispery voice.
“Mhm, big dude named Shane Huckleberry. Flipped it with ease, until the Police showed up and calmed the situation down. We had three weeks detention for causing that by accident.” Neptune concludes with a sigh, lowering his head down. Weiss giggles beside him, hugging his arm as she sits there, and his eyes widen again, going red with nervousness as he feels body against him.

She is…warmer than he expected…sure he has held her hand, but the rest of her body is not as cold as he thought.

“Well then…I guess I won’t have you in charge of drinks.” She giggles, tapping his nose with her pen.

“Good plan, but have Ren in charge of food. He always knows what to get…or make.” He chuckles as he looks at her.

“Don’t let Nora know, otherwise there will be pancakes galore.” Weiss giggles, able to smell the aroma of pancake mix in the air just imagining it. Nobody can resist the pancakes crafted by that Kuroyurian.

Not even the healthy diet heavy Weiss Schnee.

Weiss mutters as she flicks through her book before finally finding the map of the food hall, and she sets it down on the table. Neptune looks at it as she carefully unfolds it, clearing her throat to explain some of the stuff that she already has planned. Some red circles with her smooth and perfect handwriting crafted upon it. “Okay, so we already have ideas of where we want the speaker systems and all that. Same place as last time, easier and worked well for everyone. However, we were thinking that maybe we should move some of the tables and chairs around to make a bigger dance floor, felt a bit cramped last time.” Weiss explains as she points to where the areas are, Neptune nods his head.

Weiss taps the pen against her nose ever so gently as she thinks aloud. “Just where can we move them? Can’t put them too close to the front otherwise you can’t get in. Not behind the stage otherwise you can’t see anything.” Weiss sighs.

That’s when Neptune uses his genius. “Why not have some on the balcony? Nobody bothered going up there last time but Jaune and Pyrrha.” Neptune suggests.

“Balcony…” She mutters as she looks over the blueprints, then she sees the area of which he describes, the circular balcony. It is quite large too, with the first floor attached to it as well. “That could work…nice view of Beacon and Vale too.”

“Then we can free up some space.” Neptune suggests, and Weiss smiles as she looks at him.

“See? You are good at this.” She says to him.

“Eh, not as good as you.” He defends, and she rolls her eyes with a smile, playfully slapping his shoulder. “Ouchy!”

As Weiss goes over some areas, she pauses and glances at him, turning and she pushes her hand through the hair that blocks her scar, lifting it so then he can see the whole thing. “This scar? I got it when I was fighting a Grimm that was captured and held by my father. My sister was training me, so after some persuasion he let me fight it.” Weiss explains, and Neptune gently caresses her cheek, feeling the scar on her forehead.

“W-Why did he have a…Grimm captured?” He asks her.
“A Geist, it possessed a statue of armour, and used it against us. We managed to trap it inside of the armour with dust. Father wanted to sell it for a high price, business first as always. Buuut, Winter knew I wanted to improve, and I was already quite good. So, this was to be my final lesson before she decides if I should go to an Academy.” Weiss explains, understanding and remembering her training with her older sister as if it all happened yesterday.

“I take it you chose Beacon over Atlas?” Neptune asks her.

“Mhm, I just wanted to see somewhere different than the Atlesian Wildlands outside my window every day.” She sadly states, staring down at the ground.

Everyone has heard about the Atlesian Wildlands, the uncharted zones of the richest Kingdom on the planet and fifty seven percent of it has not even been seen by explorers. Or it has and none of them have ever returned to tell the tale. Storms there are so strong that C.C.T Connection is completely impossible, and the Grimm are so populous inside the Blizzards that they are practically invisible to the naked eye.

Right up until they have leapt onto you.

“Do you miss Atlas?” Neptune asks her curiously, making Weiss scoff.

“No…not for a second. My father is there, a man who cares more about business than his family… and my mother cares more about her wine…I’ve got my brother who has more schemes than he has brain cells. All I have there is our Cake Butler.” Weiss explains, and Neptune raises a brow with curiosity.

“Cake Butler?” Neptune asks her with a chuckle.

“Yeah, you never had one?” She asks him.

“Nope.” He chuckles with a smile.

“Oh gods, you uncultured dunce.” She giggles, and he laughs with her. “Well he did more than make cakes…even though he did that really well. He basically raised Winter and I…not so much Whitley…my dad brainwashed him a long time ago.” She explains with a heavy sigh.

“I’m sorry.” Neptune apologises, feeling bad for her. He always had a feeling she had a rough past with her family, the Schnees have a pretty well-known name for how they do things. And since she is so different to the allegations faced towards her family, it really shows she must have hated being raised by them.

“Don’t be…I’ve got you.” She sweetly says to him, looking right into his eyes. His heart flutters when she says that, she really does love him, and he loves her.

Why are they not doing anything about it?

“And just so you know, Neptune…you don’t need to act cool for me to think you look cute.” She compliments with a smile, and he blushes hard, nearly going full red with shyness, looking away from the beautiful girl sitting so close to him. What he cannot see, is that she is blushing too, because she realised that she just admitted that she has a strong attraction towards him.

“T-Thanks…” He stammers, and she smiles, and as they both look down at the blueprints for the party’s layout…

…Weiss presses her head softly against his shoulder, closing her eyes.
Neptune looks at her, and all he wants to do is kiss her…but he has so much else on his mind. “It’s not just…my insecurities on my mind.” He says, since they want to be honest with each other. Weiss softly opens her eyes as she listens to him.

“It isn’t? What’s wrong?” She asks him.

“It’s Sun…I think he and Blake are having problems.” He sighs.

Weiss’ eyes both suddenly burst open and twitch with disbelief and anger.

“ARE YOU KIDDING ME? JUST FIXED ONE RELATIONSHIP!”

Her voice echoes and then she gasps, covering her lips as the Librarian looks at her.

“Ssh.”

Weiss sticks her tongue out her as a response.

Pyrrha

Her long red ponytail blows in the gentle breeze of Vale, walking with her parents down the street. Her father feels so out of place as he walks past all these normal people. Whilst he wears his Spartan Gear, always ready for combat every single second of every day. It is how he was trained, to prepare for any eventuality, and with the Black Smog still lurking around the outskirts of Vale, it is also quite a likely scenario if the mood in the Kingdom does not improve.

A man walks past him and looks at his armour. “Nice cosplay, man!” The civilian compliments, throwing Anaximander through a loop as he walks past him, furrowing his brow, looking back at him, about to ask what he said, but luckily Pyrrha has become pretty used to those kinds of comments.

“Don’t mind them, dad…a few people in Vale are not as…culturally educated as they are back home.” Pyrrha softly giggles as she looks at some of people. They are adorably foolish, but unlike the people of Atlas they are not all ignorant.

Arrogant?

Sometimes.

But not selfishly ignorant.

“The people here really do not wear much armour on patrol, do they? That boy Jaune Arc wears some but the amount is damn near unacceptable.” He scoffs, and for once she does agree with her father on the criticisms, he has on Jaune.

“On that we can agree, I really want to get him an upgrade someday. Maybe go the same blacksmith.” She softly says, thinking of an idea, then Juno gently squeezes her daughter’s hand.

“Maybe give him that as a birthday present.” She suggests, and Pyrrha gasps with realisation of how good of an idea that is, since Jaune is such a hard person to get presents for since he is quite easy to please.
“That’s a good idea…I might do that.” She squeaks with happiness, they turn the corner and before them is the house with the forge burning outside, glowing orange molten metal and the rhythmic pounds of hammer against bronze steel. The three of them approach the Blacksmith, a Faunus with curved Taurus Horns, and long black hair tied back into a short tail. He has one strand of hair hanging over his left brown eye. And a scar across his cheek, cutting through his dark brown skin. He scratches his thick beard and looks up when he sees them approaching, a smile growing on his face.

“Ah! Hello, Miss Nikos. Pleasure to see you again, and you are here just on time, I have nearly finished completing all the repairs for Milo. Give me a few minutes and I shall bring it out to you.” The Blacksmith says to her, she smiles and politely thanks him.

“Thank you, Adhara.” Pyrrha thanks, the older – probably forty-seven-year-old – Faunus man turns and walks back into his house, finishing up the repairs done for Milo. She walks with her parents over to the bench by his house, sitting down as they wait to see his work. Anaximander looks around at the place, then at his daughter beside him – a lot has changed since he trained her, not just her getting older but also her personality.

Even he can see she has improved, even starting to think maybe the teacher was right, that she needed friendship earlier on in her life.

In fact, her words have been eating away at him for quite some time now.

He then looks at some of the markings on the house, the weapons he forges and many other things, so the question comes to mind. “Is he from Mistral? His products look very Mistraalian.” Anaximander comments, Juno nods her head in agreement.

“I was starting to wonder that, even his house looks quite Mistraalian.” Juno adds to his previous question, Pyrrha nods her head since when she came here with Jaune and Professor Port they learned a few things about him. “The school offered…well…demanded that they pay for the repairs to my weapon. One of our teachers, Professor Port took us to meet him, they are old friends. He came here because of the way Faunus are treated in Mistral by many people.” Pyrrha explains with a saddened sigh, her parents both have the same reaction.

“Atrocious, people like that should be punished.” They both say with anger, hating bullies more than anything. Knowing that their daughter was bullied hurt more than anything, and Pyrrha will never forget what her mother did to make sure they never laid a hand on her again.

“I know, there was once a guy at Beacon who was a bully to people. And Faunus…but…he has really turned over a new leaf. I think the attack on Beacon helped him rethink the way he acts, now he helps people and wants to make it right.” Pyrrha explains, showing how much she actually admires Cardin now for how much right he has made since the wrongs.

“Well, I admire his determination to make things right.” Anaximander admits; however, Juno is not as forgiving as him.

“Well, maybe he shouldn’t have been so cruel in the past.” She states with an angered voice, she has no time for bullies, whether they have aimed for redemption or not. Anaximander gazes at the weapons forged by Adhara, from swords to axes to hammers, all adorned with fantastically beautiful Mistraalian Markings in their bronze, steel grey or other coloured metal skins.

He exhales though his nose, looking to his daughter. “So, how have you been doing with your weapons? Last I saw you training nobody could get close to you…I have heard you have received some impressive grades lately.” Anaximander asks her with inquisitiveness in his voice.
“I’ve improved, testing my strengths and weaknesses against my enemies…I’ve also been teaching Jaune how to improve as well. He has always wanted to better himself, so I thought I would teach him what I know.” Pyrrha explains, and Anaximander chuckles beside her.

“Makes you feel like you’ve accomplished a lot, doesn’t it? When you can teach someone else the things you know?” He asks her, and Pyrrha looks down at the floor, a small smile forming on her face.

“A little bit.” She confesses.

Anaximander chuckles again as he remembers back to a moment when he was training her to become a lethal huntress. “Do you remember that time when we were training, and I slipped over on that banana peel you left on the floor?” He asks her curiously, Pyrrha groans as she buries her head in her hands.

“Are you never gonna let me live that one down?” She asks him.

“No, because it worked. Whether you meant to or not.” He chuckles, since because he did not watch his footing he fell over in the process.

“Yeah, I guess it did. Didn’t stop me from feeling terrible about it though.” She says sadly, no matter how much time goes by she will always be this sweet and almost innocent little girl. Juno looks around at the city that they have found themselves in, and the tower of Beacon Academy shining at the very centre of it.

“So…what do you think of Beacon? Do you like it here? Before the attack, I mean?” She asks her, since obviously this place is still trying to heal from the wounds it suffered from the Battle of Beacon. Pyrrha looks around at the portion of Vale that they have been visiting, the Grimm did not really get here but the damage can still be seen by the few that managed to break through the defences. Griffins and Nevermores were the main reasons behind this, but the Grimm Dragon was also responsible, dropping Grimm across the entire city.

She has seen the stranded, heard about the plagues starting to spread like wildfire across the Kingdom from the attack, the number of orphans, widows and widowers out there whom have lost so much.

And if they do not push the Black Smog away then they will attack once more.

Pyrrha exhales, answering her mother. “I do, it is a nice place…it might not look it right now, but the people here are good. I am glad though that the people of Vale have been working together. Sure, you get the odd criminals taking advantage of the situation, but mostly people are banding together to try and make things better.” Pyrrha explains to them with a smile, and Anaximander nods his head.

“These people…everyone here…they deserved better than this.” Anaximander states, tapping his thumbs against one another.

Pyrrha nods her head and she sighs sadly.

“They did.”

However, her memories of this place have not been tainted by the Battle of Beacon, and the damages done to so many lives. Her memories are still there, and they will never cease to warm her heart every time she thinks about them. “It isn’t all bad though…I’ve got my friends. Jaune, Nora and Ren…Ruby, Weiss, Blake and Yang. Sun, Neptune, Sage and Scarlet. They are all my friends
here, helped me break out of my shell. Showed me that I don’t always have to be the Invincible Girl every day.” Pyrrha states as she touches her long tail of crimson red hair.

Anaximander hangs his head slightly as he hears her say that, he can tell that she wishes she had more friends when she was younger…whether she says it or not…it is clear. “We met Jaune but what about the other two? Ren and Nora?” Juno curiously inquires, tilting her head as she asks her daughter her question.

“Well…Ren is like the…wise member of our team. He knows so much about so many things, especially with Aura. He doesn’t talk about his past much, but from his clothing…he seems like he was raised beyond the Kingdom of Mistral.” Pyrrha explains, unaware of the past that he and Nora share with the Creature of Grimm known as the Nuckelavee.

“Like the Kuroyurians and the Oniyurians.” Anaximander remembers, the rich members of Mistral who were unhappy with the ways in which the Kingdoms were being run.

A story Pyrrha has not heard.

“The who?” She asks him.

“I was a child when I heard about what happened, you see there was a man and his family…his name was Yuri. He and his family, along with many others, did not agree with the ways in which Mistral ran things. They believed that Humans and Faunus should be treated equally, but with so many in Mistral feeling differently, they found themselves in a losing battle.” Anaximander explains, and Juno sighs, nodding her head as she remembers it all.

“They tried to fight for the rights of Human/Faunus Relations in Mistral, but their campaign failed. But they still had many on their side.” Juno adds.

“What did they do?” Pyrrha inquires.

“Yuri decided he had enough of Mistral and all the politics, he took his wealth and started two new cities East of Mistral in Anima. Kuroyuri and Oniyuri, two locations of which he and his brother commanded. A few Huntsmen went with them and they started teaching their own warriors, warriors taught how to survive in the wilderness. They hoped one day it would form a Kingdom of their own…one where both Humans and Faunus could live in Harmony.” Anaximander explains.

He pauses, remembering it all so well, and Pyrrha can tell from the sadness on his face that clearly things did not go well. “The Grimm…they attacked them, didn’t they?” She asks him, and he sighs, nodding his head.

“Unlike Mistral, the two colonies lacked the Natural Defences that the Kingdom had…all it took was one bad day and the Grimm attacked both of them in full force. Very few survived but some did make it out. Mostly children, children with no mothers or fathers.” Anaximander concludes, they both look forward to see Ren and Nora walking around, hands held gently together as they help some of the workers repair the damaged school.

“I…I won’t ask him. It is up to him if he does…but you may be right…he could be from one of them.” Pyrrha admits sadly as she sits there.

“And Nora?” Juno asks her.

“Well she has known him ever since she was a kid, practically inseparable. If they were from one of them, they must have survived together…shouldn’t have had to though.” Pyrrha states, and they both shake their heads.
“No…not something a child should have to endure.” Juno agrees.

“I…I can’t imagine Nora having an upbringing like that though, she is always such a ray of sunshine. Always making people happy…and gods forbid you try and challenge her to a workout competition. I thought I could…big mistake.” She giggles, and Anaximander chuckles, sounding impressed.

“Is that the little orange haired girl?” He asks her.

“Mhm.”

“Wow…I like her. Someone that small with that much strength?” He chuckles, which makes Pyrrha giggle.

“Gods you sound like me when I lost to her, I really thought she was some kind of goddess.” She giggles.

“Maybe she is.” Anaximander jokes.

Pyrrha sits there as she remembers when they were getting her ready for every single match of the Vytal Festival, the ways in which they helped her, psyched her up. That was what she meant when she needed them, sure she could handle the odds but…she would have never made it as far as she did without the support of her teammates.

The door opens up and the three of them turn their attention to Adhara, emerging with her new blade wrapped up in some cloth. “Here we are, all finished up. Works just like you remembered it…fine weapon you brought me. Lots of fun challenges, enjoyed every second of it.” Adhara chuckles, the three Nikos Warriors rise up and approach the worktop where he sets the new weapon down.

They approach as he reveals it, unfolding the wrapped-up sword, and revealing it rested down on the table. It looks so new, even better than the original, something even her parents seem to agree with. Adhara truly is a master Blacksmith, for he has always made plenty of money-making weapons the Huntsmen and Huntresses that either do not have the skill or know he will make them a formidable weapon.

Currently in its Xiphos form, the blade has stunning Damascus Forged steel inside of it, alongside with bronze mixed into the alloys, keeping its beautiful colour. Mistralian Markings adorned across the curved blade, she gently picks it up and gazes at it, feeling the razor-sharp blade. “All three forms can be shifted into as well; the rifle was the fun part. Trying to get all the mechanical pieces in place.” Adhara states as Pyrrha grasps the hilt and squeezes it, the blade extends and then the whole thing seems to stretch out into its spear form. The spearhead opens up at the end, the sunlight gleaming across the edges.

Red and Bronze metal bringing the colour back to her weapons, something that felt so lost, so long ago. It really feels like she is back now, after feeling lost for so many weeks, ever since she learned about the Fall Maiden…

Something she still has not gone into that much…

Trying to keep that knowledge buried.

But now?

She feels like herself again, having her weapons back, it brings a tear of joy to her eyes. “Thank
you.” She sniffs with a smile.

Jaune

His blue eyes stare up at the statue atop that impressive fountain in the middle of the Beacon Courtyard. Feeling so small as he stares at the Warrior with that sword in his grasp, the Grimm falling around him. He slowly looks down to the plaque built into its base, inscribed into the metal plaque is his name.

King Thaddeus Rex

Hero and Saviour

Shining Example for every Huntsman and Huntress

The King of Vale truly did bring a lot of faith to the people of the new world, giving them the belief that they needed to move forward. And this statue has stood for centuries after his death, maybe even a millennium, and it is still just as clean and perfect as it was when built. People still look after it even now.

“Hey, Jauney-Boy.” Cardin greets from behind him, Jaune turns round to see the much larger yet kinder Huntsman approaching him, his mace still held onto his armour where the magnetic strips keep it attached. His bronze hair gelled up as always and a slight stubble forming after his growth spurt.

“Hey, Cardin.” Jaune replies as he looks back to Thaddeus Rex’s statue in the square.

“How’re you doing, man? Haven’t really had time to talk since you got back, Yang doing okay?” He asks him curiously, Jaune looks and smiles.

“Yeah, she’s…well it’s gonna take some time for her to get used to things. She lost her arm after all.” Jaune says, Cardin nods as he crosses his big arms.

“Still can’t believe that happened, I wanted to have a chat with Ruby about it. See how she’s been taking it…man…I dunno what drives her but gods she is inspiring.” Cardin chuckles, making Jaune chuckle as well, since everyone thinks the same of that adorable little cinnamon roll.

“I know…the girl is incredible. And she’s only turning sixteen next month.” He chuckles, and Cardin raises a brow.

“Really? When is it?” Cardin asks him.

“Halloween.” Jaune chuckles, making Cardin laugh as well.

“Makes sense, she is a little terror sometimes.” They both laugh over the situation, crazy to think and see how far their friendship has come from Cardin being a bully to him. “So…whatcha doing staring at the old statue?” Cardin asks him and Jaune looks at the Plaque again.

“It’s Thaddeus Rex, the old King of Vale.” Jaune tells him, and Cardin looks at him with confusion.
“Sorry man, reading’s never really been my strong suit.” Cardin states.

“Well thousands of years ago, when Vale was still new, he was the King around here. He was a hero, fought in every battle, tended to every wounded person. Whether they were civilians or soldiers. He never cared for the whole – rich people above poor people. Humans or Faunus? Didn’t matter to him, he always believed there were two sides to the coin. People and the Grimm, and that only one should be left standing.” Jaune explains to him, with so much adoration in his voice, then he exhales.

“That’s the kind of Huntsman I wanna be…it’s why I faked the transcripts…because I wanted to become a heroic warrior.” He tells Cardin, and the Former Bully who blackmailed unleashing that information against him looks at him with guilty eyes.

“I’m sorry.” Cardin apologises.

“For what?” Jaune asks, basically forgetting it happened.

“For…you know…using you the way I did.” Cardin sighs, and Jaune shakes his head, gently pushing his shoulder.

“Shut up, Cardin. Water under the bridge…you’ve really turned over a new leaf, everyone has noticed and prefers it.” Jaune says to him, and Cardin raises a brow.

“R-Really?” He asks him.

“Oh yeah, Yang was surprised when she heard. Pyrrha said she admires how you’ve put so much effort into changing your ways.” Jaune explains, but he sighs as he stares at the floor.

“I doubt everyone has…I don’t expect Velvet or her team to see me the same way.” Cardin states sadly, and Jaune shakes his head.

“C’mon, Cardin. Give them time. It took me some time to forgive you, I’m sure Velvet can.” Jaune assures.

“Maybe…” Cardin says, then the Winchester Huntsman realises why he came over here. “Oh yeah! Jaune, wanna join us for a drink at this bar my team scoped out? Not gonna get wasted…just been a long week, y’know?” Cardin asks him, surprising Jaune to hear him offer such a thing.

“Really?” Jaune asks.

“Sure, why not? The place can survive without us here for a few hours. Sun, Scarlet and Sage are coming too.” Cardin tells him.

“No Neptune?” Jaune inquires.

“No, he said he’s helping Weiss prepare the Party.” Cardin says with the shrug of his shoulders.

“Oh, okay. Good for him.” Jaune says with a smile, still feeling proud that he managed to give Neptune the push he needed to go and talk to Weiss honestly.

Clearly it worked out.

“So…wanna join us? If you don’t drink beer, they do soft drinks.” Cardin assures, and Jaune smiles.

“Sure, why not?” Jaune agrees.
Ironwood stands at the glass of Ozpin’s office, seeing Glynda with Ruby, talking to her on the bench where she found her sitting. He smiles as he sees her looking after the poor girl, then seeing Jaymes on his own. It is probably better if that poor boy does not have any of his parental figures around him right now, considering the things he told Glynda about his Father and Uncle.

But no matter what, every single time he looks down at the school, his attention turns to the Black Smog in the distance, always seeming to move closer with every day that passes by. Or…an even more terrifying possibility…the they are increasing their numbers. He shudders at the thought, straightening his tie as he stands there, then he turns to hear the sound of his Scroll activating and buzzing away on the desk.

Ironwood furrows his brow, then slowly approaches it, looking down at the scroll to see the name that is calling him.

_Qrow Branwen_

His eyes widen, and he picks the scroll up and answers the call, since he has not heard from the man in quite a long time, ever since they departed, and he went on his search for Emerald and Mercury. “Qrow? It’s been a while, how are you?” He asks him, as a friend would in a time like this.

“I’m fine, James. I need to talk to you, because I’ve found something.” Qrow explains, and from the sound of the wilderness around him, he must be somewhere in the woodlands of Anima. If the trail has led him all the way over there then the two of them must be moving very fast to get away from the Atlesians.

And maybe even the Black Gallows.

Curiosity piqued, Ironwood sits down as he listens to what Qrow has to say to him. “I’m listening.” Ironwood responds, listening to every single word that Qrow says to him.

“I’ve been following their trail for a while now, visited a few inns where they stopped off, even had a chat with an Information Broker. I’ve been close on them now, must be hours behind them.” Qrow explains and Ironwood raises a brow with confusion.

“Then why are you talking to me if you are this close?” He asks him with concern.

“That’s what I am about to say.” Qrow responds, stopping Ironwood from going any further. “I found their tracks, and before they were actually hiding their tracks. Not enough for me to not notice them, but still. I dunno if you can’t tell but I’m in the woods…they were calm for one second, walking on a dirt path. But it looks like something spooked them.” Qrow explains, and Ironwood now is trying to find an explanation of what would have scared them.

“Grimm?” He asks him.

“That’s what I thought but there are no tracks behind them, and I thought maybe it was a sniper, but I haven’t found any impact points anywhere. Not in the trees, nothing. They must have seen something that scared them.” Qrow explains, and Ironwood now is trying to find an explanation of what would have scared them.
It couldn’t have been people, they can handle bandits and even if it were bandits Qrow would be able to see their prints clear as day.

“What if it was an Airborne Grimm? Like a Nevermore or a Manticore? Or hell, maybe even a Geist that hasn’t possessed anything yet?” Ironwood suggests, since all of these things do not tend to leave prints.

“Couldn’t have been an Airborne Grimm, James. Either the forest would be damaged from it trying to get them…and even then, they don’t attack forests like that. The Nevermore in the Emerald Forest was out of the ordinary but even then, it only attacked when the trees were cleared. And Geists leave impressions in the ground from the force of the energy that they are made up of, none of that either. Ground is fine, only disturbed by their prints.” Qrow explains to him, leaving Ironwood completely speechless, unable to find an explanation.

Qrow is right about everything, Nevermores and other Airborne Grimm rarely attack people in woodland, too dangerous for their wings. And if it did the forest would be damaged. And Geists practically never go after people without possessing something first.

“Then…what the hell are they running from?” He questions.

“Wait, James, here’s the scary bit.” Qrow states, James can hear the sound of Qrow walking, clearly following their trail. “The two of them made it a while in the forest, but then there was a point where they started to panic. Prints are all over the place…then…they’re gone.”

Ironwood slowly stands up with fear in his eyes. “Gone?”

“Yeah, no prints anywhere. No disturbance in the ground for a ship or Grimm to pick them up. They just…up and vanished. And no, it wouldn’t have been Raven, her portals leave scorches in the ground, and she would have no use for them in the Branwen Tribe. And they were being chased…they’ve just…disappeared without a trace.”

It gives both of them chills.

Never before have they ever encountered something that can just…abduct…people like this, with no clues whatsoever.

“I…” James cannot even find the words. “I don’t know Qrow…”

“Neither do I…what now? Emerald and Mercury are a bust.” Qrow states.

James sighs, knowing it would be useless to track them now. “Come back to Beacon…”

“What? I can still sear-”

“Qrow…we need you back here, things have kinda gone to hell since you left.” He states.

“Since I left? You sure bringing me back is a good idea?” Qrow asks him.

“We need all the help we can get, Qrow. The Black Gallows are here, and I don’t trust them. A courier for that Jaymes Ickford Kid was bringing some better Schizophrenia Drugs for him so there are no further incidents. But he turned up murdered and all the drugs were ruined. No tracks either, whoever did it knew to cover their scene.” Ironwood explains, getting a sigh from Qrow on the other end.

“It’s never easy is it?” He says.
“That’s been my experience.” Ironwood chuckles.


“Ruby’s…alright…she’s struggling a bit, but I think she just misses her mother.” Ironwood sadly says, and Qrow sighs as well.

“Me too.” He agrees.

“Sorry Qrow, I know the two of you were close.” James states.

“She was happy with Tai…that’s all that mattered…” Qrow states, his voice breaking at one point as he thinks about Summer. James smiles as he looks down at Ruby, hugging Glynda sweetly.

“She reminds me of her a lot, y’know?” Ironwood states with a smile.

“I know.”

Jaune

A few hours later…

The sun is starting to set, meaning the Shattered Moon will soon be in the sky, watching over the world of Remnant every single day. Cardin and Jaune walk down the street, a slight drizzle falling from the skies as they wear their casual clothes. Jaune wears a nice white shirt with a black waterproof jacket over it, whilst Cardin wears a white shirt and a blue jacket over it. “So, you’ve never drank before?” Cardin asks him curiously.

“Nope, been too worried to know what I’m like under the influence of the devil’s drink.” Jaune chuckles, making Cardin laugh too. The two of them look ahead to see Russel, Dove and Sky approaching them, in their respective clothes as well. And behind them are Sun, Scarlet and Sage.

“Hey, you made it.” Dove greets as he walks over to them.

“C’mon, let’s go get something to drink.” Cardin says, walking to the doors, Sun approaches Jaune and pounds his fist to his as they walk through the doors. Luckily not many people are in there, but the Bartender is still serving as he wipes down the bar. Playing in the background, mixing with the incoherent conversations between different people here in the bar is some delightful piano jazz. He looks up and sees them entering, then Cardin takes out his scroll to show him their identification. Since on the bar there is quite a nice sign.

Huntsmen and Huntresses get a 10% Discount!

“Ah-Ha! Thank you for your service, gentlemen!” The Bartender cheers them on as they approach the bar, pulling out their stools to sit down and order their drinks.

“Thanks for this, by the way.” Sage thanks with a smile, taking off his coat.

“Oh, it’s the least I can do for you all. The kind of stuff you all have to go through every day, especially after what happened a few weeks ago.” The Bartender says as he gets them some glasses.
“Feel so appreciated.” Jaune chuckles.

“So! What can I get you all?” The Bartender asks them. They all look at the assortment of drinks available.

“I’ll get a beer.” Sun requests.

“Beer.” Scarlet also asks.

“Whiskey on the rocks.” Sage requests.

“Ooh, I like your thinking, Sage. I’ll have the same.” Cardin agrees.


“Umm…I’ll have a water tonight.” Dove says, deciding to stay teetotal.

“One of those Sodas, actually. Those look good.” Russel requests, and the Bartender nods his head.

“Just got these half an hour ago, freshest one first.” The Bartender chuckles as he slides it across the bar table to Russel’s open palm. Finally, Jaune is the one left to decide, he nods his head, deciding what he wants.

“I think I’ll go with the Apple Cider.” Jaune asks, and they all look impressed by him, since he said he wasn’t going to drink anything alcoholic.

“Look at you.” Cardin chuckles.

“Why not? Heard this stuff is nice anyway.” Jaune says as the Bartender fills up the glasses, sliding them over to each of their hands. Jaune catches his as it approaches, looking at the faint fizz in it. Sun immediately takes a sip from his beer bottle, exhaling in delight.

“Ahh…been needing that lately.” Sun says with relief, and they all nod.

“Cheers, here’s to living to see another day.” Cardin toasts, and they all raise their glasses.

“Cheers.” They all say in unison, clinking their drinks together.

“You boys need anything else, holler and I’ll be right over.” The Bartender says to them as he continues to work the bar table, speaking with new customers that start entering. Jaune takes a sip of his Cider, initially shocked by it from the taste…but…then he likes it. Sun nods his head, patting his back.

“Well as you said, we’ve earned this after everything.” Jaune says.

“So then, how’s everyone been doing lately?” Scarlet asks as he presses his crossed arms to the table, looking at them all. Russel chuckles as he cracks his neck.

“Been putting some of our Academy Training to good use, had to fight off a few Grimm that have wandered back into the city. Dumb bastards.” Russel chuckles.

“Yeah I’ve seen a couple of them lately…alright here’s a good question for you.” Jaune says as he puts his glass down. “Best Grimm you’ve taken down so far?” Jaune asks him, and they all ponder on that.
“Hmm…the Nevermore on the Amity Arena is a big one for me.” Sage chuckles.

“Oh yeah, you and Yatsuhashi delivered the killing blow, didn’t you?” Cardin asks him.

“Yes, damn that bastard was tough.” Sage states as he remembers how massive the creature was, did not wanna go down without a fight.

“I think my personal favourite has gotta be this nasty Beringel we faced in the Battle.” Dove comments, remembering it quite well.

“Beringel?” Jaune inquires.

“Big Gorilla Grimm, tough as hell too. But managed to take it out, stabbed it through the head in the end.” Dove describes.

“Yes, he’s gotta be up there. Tough as hell…I mean I think I already know what you’re gonna say, Jaune.” Cardin chuckles.

“Ursa Major?” Jaune presumes.

Cardin nods. “Yeah…still amazed that I managed that.” Jaune states, and Sky looks over to him with his beer in his hand.

“Got a mighty good swing on you.” Sky tells him as he points the brim of his beer his way.

“Ah, I was lucky.” Jaune defends.

“Lucky, my ass. I saw it, thing was about to eat me when you took that thing head on!” Cardin cheers him on.

“Well I couldn’t let the Ursa chew you up, that was Nora’s job.” Jaune jokes, making all of them laugh at that.

“Very true…surprised she never did break my legs.” Cardin comments.

“Oh, I bet she was close to doing it. We had to hold her back most of the time.” Jaune chuckles, remembering some of the times. “Now she is interested in breaking Ickford’s legs.” Jaune states.

“Ugh, don’t even say that name. I mean I’ve heard the kid’s got issues…but…I dunno, I guess I hate seeing the old me in other people.” Cardin states as he takes a drink.

“You’ve changed, you all have.” Jaune assures.

They nod their heads as they drink, then Scarlet comes up with a curious question. “Y’know, I’ve always wondered this. Sage and I became Huntsmen because we wanted to help people, Sun because he felt it was his duty and at first for Neptune it was, so he could be recognised. Why did you guys want to be Huntsmen?” Scarlet inquires the four members of Team C.R.D.L.

“Well…our initial reasons weren’t all that noble.” Cardin admits as he looks at the rim of his glass. “Me? I wanted it so then I would be the infamous Cardin Winchester…only the Battle of Beacon made me realise fame didn’t mean a thing against the Grimm.” Cardin explains with a heavy sigh, they have all seen some terrible things from that day. Things that will stick with them for the rest of their lives.

“Well I wanted to be Huntsman because I wanted to be rich…I came from a pretty poor upbringing, y’know?” Dove reveals as he looks over at them, sighing as he remembers back to those days.
“Skill, I just wanted to be better than everyone else.” Russel admits, keeping it at that as well.

“To be stronger.” Sky states as he remembers back when he was weaker. “I…didn’t really have the most supportive mother. She liked to offer her teachings with her fist.” He explains, feeling sad about it as well.

“Sorry, Sky.” Scarlet apologises.

“Well it’s all in the past now. Now, though, we agreed we wanna be Huntsmen for a new reason. To help people, to stop things like the Battle of Beacon from happening all over again.” Cardin states as he circles the brim of his glass with his finger. He stares at his reflection in the whiskey that the ice cubes clink together inside of.

“I’d drink to that.” Sun agrees as he takes a sip.

“We just…wanna make things right.” Cardin says as he holds the drink in his hand, then Jaune pats Cardin on the back.

“You have.” Jaune assures.

They keep drinking some of their drinks when Russel decides to ask Sun something since this question has been on his mind…and everyone has seen the two of them together. “Sun…how are things between you and Blake?” Russel asks him, and Sun sighs.

“I…I dunno.” He groans.

“Uh-Oh…trouble in paradise?” Dove asks.

“You could say that.” Sun states.

“Alright, c’mon, what’s on your mind. What’s happening?” Jaune asks him curiously, and they all look at Sun.

“Wow, putting me on the spot, huh?” Sun asks them.

“Yeah, we wanna help.” Cardin shrugs as he finishes up his glass, setting it back down on the table.

Sun sighs. “Well…I asked her today if we were gonna be…together, together…you know?” Sun says to them.

“Oh no, did she turn you down?” Sage asks him.

“Well that’s the thing, I don’t know. She didn’t say anything…I asked her if I was wasting my time, chasing after her all the time. So, I walked off and let her be with her parents.” Sun explains, and they nod their heads, understanding why he is so concerned.

“Sun…she may just be confused. From what you’ve said she has been focused on going after the White Fang, and that Adam guy that cut off Yang’s arm.” Sage suggests as he looks at him.

“Yeah, at the end of the day Blake has always been like that. Ever since we first met her, she has always stayed focused on things that she felt were important. She has always shoved the people she loves away.” Jaune explains, and Sun looks at Jaune with curiosity.

“Do you…really think she thinks that way about me?” Sun asks him.
“Oh yeah…why else do you think she keeps pushing you away. I don’t know specifics, but I think that she and that Adam Taurus guy have a past.” Jaune states, since she never really told his team about him.

But she did tell Team R.W.B.Y.

“Give her some time, Sun. Let her think about what she really wants.” Cardin suggests.

Sun nods his head. “Yeah…okay…Thanks guys.” Sun says to them.

“C’mon, let’s get another round. Yo, Bartender!”

Eryka

It’s time…

The moon is in the sky and the sun has fallen behind the horizon. With some of the students going to a special lesson with Professor Port on combat now that most of the repairs have been complete, most of the Black Gallows soldiers are watching over the demonstration there. To make sure that nothing goes wrong.

Killian was among them.

Eryka and Winter both approach the office building that was deployed, the one that he interrogated Pyrrha, Jaune, Cardin and Sun inside of. They both keep their wits about them, Dulcis gliding over their heads as every second passes by. “You ready?” Eryka asks Winter as they both approach the door, then Winter pulls out her scroll that holds Dutch’s pass used to enter his office.

“Yes…remember keep your wits about you. We cannot afford to be spotted.” Winter advises.

“Don’t worry, Dulcis has us covered, he will warn us if anyone approaches the office.” Eryka promises, then she stands up against the wall, her Bow in her hand at the ready, an arrow in her grasp. Winter cracks her neck just in case, holding her scroll to the scanner on the door, then it beeps…green light flashes, thankfully. The door slides open and they both enter the office, Eryka aiming her bow carefully as they walk inside, Winter keeps her sword drawn and pointed up.

“Eyes peeled…” Winter whispers.

“C’mon, let’s just figure out what the bastard is hiding and get the hell out of here.” Eryka advises, walking in and keeping her eyes on the shadows to make sure that there are no Black Gallows Soldiers guarding anything. But luckily for them, their theory was correct, that most of the soldiers are currently watching over the Demonstration right now.

“Clear.”

“Yup, nobody’s here.” Eryka sighs with relief, holstering her bow. “Alright, you’re the Atlesian Specialist – where should we start?” Eryka asks her.

“We need to search his files, he must have something to explain the reasons behind what he is up to. Hopefully some reports on what his soldiers have turned up on the dead Courier.” Winter states as she approaches his desk, sitting down in his chair as she opens up some of his drawers, pulling
out some files. She opens it up and flips through the pages, mostly seeing some stuff she does not understand. Reports on mission debriefings, weapon designs and other things.

Including some kind of syringe. “Hello…” Winter softly says.

“What is it?” Eryka inquires.

“Turns out the Black Gallows have a better Science Division than Atlas does, they have some Aura Amplifier Syringes…does what it says on the tin I guess.” Winter scoffs as she flicks through more of the pages. Eryka opens up some of the file cabinets and she pulls out a large stack of them, searching through each and every single one. Finding faces on certain ones, including some that are familiar.

They search for a few minutes…

Then as Eryka searches through that file…

She sees their faces.

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**Name: Pyrrha Nikos**

**Age:** 17

**Occupation:** Huntress, taught by her father and then trained at both Sanctum and Beacon Academy

**Affiliations:** Jaune Arc, Nora Valkyrie, Lie Ren, Ruby Rose, Weiss Schnee, Blake Belladonna, Yang Xiao Long

**Crimes:** Murdered Penny Polendina, proving my case further

**Notes:** Has a romantic involvement with her leader, showing cases of fraternisation in her position, and seems to contain a case of low control of her powers

**Certainty of Control:** Fractured

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**Name: Jaune Arc**

**Age:** 17

**Occupation:** Failed every test at his Academy, lied and gave false manuscripts to the Beacon Staff, currently training at Beacon Academy, let inside by Professor Ozpin’s permission

**Affiliations:** Pyrrha Nikos, Nora Valkyrie, Lie Ren, Ruby Rose, Weiss Schnee, Blake Belladonna, Yang Xiao Long

**Crimes:** Falsifying Records, possible threat to his team and the safety of civilians due to inexperience

**Notes:** Also has a romantic involvement with his subordinate team member, Pyrrha Nikos, and clearly does not follow the rules

**Certainty of Control:** Impossible
Ruby Rose

Age: 15

Occupation: Trained at Signal Academy and by Qrow Branwen and her father, was allowed entrance into Beacon Academy at an early age by Professor Ozpin

Affiliations: Weiss Schnee, Blake Belladonna, Yang Xiao Long, Qrow Branwen, Jaune Arc, Pyrrha Nikos, Nora Valkyrie, Lie Ren, Sun Wukong

Crimes: Withheld important details of Cinder Fall’s involvement for her own adventures, underage recruitment

Notes: Lost her mother at a young age, seems to suffer from loss, and have Silver Eyes that were activated at the end of the Battle of Beacon

Certainty of Control: Unlikely

Eryka keeps flipping through the pages, then lands on one that sends shivers down her spine from what she reads. “By the gods…” She stammers, then Winter turns to look at her.

“What is it? What have you got?” She asks her, so Eryka holds the file and just gives it to her.

“Read it…” Eryka stammers, covering her mouth with disbelief, so Winter clears her throat as she begins to read what she sees.

“Jaymes Ickford…Age Seventeen, trained at Sanctum and Haven Academy, joined Beacon Academy after the Vytal Festival because…”

“Keep reading.”

“…because of the incident, he was not allowed to return back to Haven…” Winter looks at Eryka with confusion. “The boy suffers from an extreme case of Paranoid Schizophrenia, one that has started to mix with his semblance of Electricity. If he does not take his medication the Paranoia consumes him, turning him practically into a completely different person who sees threats all around him. The incident at Haven shows…potential?”

“Yeah…it gets worse…”

“This is the opportunity we need for the world to see these Academies for what they really are, ticking time bombs of students with little to no background research…then when one is let loose…hundreds will die…”

“He wants to use Jaymes as bait, think about it, Winter. The courier with his meds winds up dead from a mysterious assassination and then the Black Gallows block your people from investigating it further? Meds that could help him?” Eryka explains, and Winter staggers back with disbelief.

“Oh, by the gods, it all makes sense now…we need to warn Glynda and Ironwood now!” Winter states, turning to the door.

Only to see Killian standing there with a chilling smirk on his face, standing in the shadows as he slowly claps his hands, appearing from out of nowhere. Dulcis could not even see him, or smell
him…no warning whatsoever. “I’m afraid Ironwood and Glynda are too far away for you to contact them, go ahead attempt to use your scroll.” Killian suggests as he points to her scroll. Winter holds her scroll…only to find that the signal has been blocked.

“You…this is all because of you…” Winter stammers.

“I had a feeling you would try something, Miss Vasillias…but the loyal Winter Schnee? I didn’t see that one coming…fair play, you’ve surprised me.” Killian chuckles as he enters the room and closes the door behind him, his hands held behind his back as he stares at the two intruders. “You know it is rude to snoop around where your nose does not belong.”

“Yeah well…never could resist breaking the rules every now and again.” Eryka scoffs as she holds out her hands. Killian chuckles, nodding his head, then he looks at the scars on her knuckles.

“Boxer?” He asks her.

“Yeah…” She answers, so Killian shows his hands and the scars that scatter his own knuckles.

“Same here, did you also do the illegal boxing in Anima?” He asks her curiously, Eryka stares at him with her stern eyes, but plays along.

“Yep.” She answers.

“How many did you win?” He asks her.

“Hmm…lost count somewhere around thirty-four…guys they threw at me were lousy.” She comments, making Killian chuckle as he walks around.

“You see therein lies the difference between you and I, Eryka. I fought, gave it my best in my early days…but I could never win. Was never strong enough.” He explains to them as he walks around the office, sliding his fingers across his desktop.

“Well clearly you won at one point.” Eryka comments, making him chuckle.

“I certainly did.” He states, his breathing starting to weaken until he grabs onto the respirator in his neck and he squeezes the trigger, pumping the drugs back into his system to repair the damage, the metallic breath echoing through him.

“And now you wanna control all these kids? Is that what this is?” Eryka questions.

“Not exactly.”

“What the hell is this, Killian? Using that kid as a weapon?” Winter questions as she slams the file onto his desk.

“Not as a weapon, per say, Miss Schnee. More like an example, of how the Huntsmen Academies are too dangerous under the guidance they are at now. That much power under such an unbalanced mind?” Killian scoffs as he stands before them, hands outstretched. “You see…have you heard of a man named Jack the Ripper?”

Winter and Eryka glance at each other, knowing that they have been caught by him…so they play along. “Sure…killed nearly a hundred people on his rampage from Beacon, your point?” Eryka replies.

“Well he was once a student at this prestigious Academy, taught under the guidance of Professor
Ozpin. I was only a child when it happened, never interested in the life of a Huntsman, but then Jack came along. He was unstable, loved to watch things get torn apart...at first it was simple things, like a piece of thread or a leaf. But then it became spiders and insects...then rats and bigger animals. Then eventually...he snapped and did something similar to another student. He cracked, and went on a rampage, leaving shredded remains everywhere he went.” Killian explains to them.

He steps forward. “My parents included...so I vowed that every Huntsman would be controlled.”

“I’m sorry for what happened, Killian, but one man does not mean every single student here is the same!” Winter argues.

“Who said it was just him that drove me to this point?” He questions, and the two of them pause. “Why...the two of you simply prove my point.”

“What are you talking about?” Winter questions.

“Sneaking around, breaking the rules, looking into things you shouldn’t...it was the same things that Jack the Ripper did.” Killian explains, before he enters his next explanation. “There have been countless examples of Huntsmen and Huntresses becoming more of a threat to Human and Faunus Life than a benefit. Raven Branwen turning on Ozpin for example, becoming the leader of a bandit tribe.”

He continues to list them. “Jaune Arc falsifying his records and becoming a mediocre leader, Ruby Rose allowed into Beacon under age by Ozpin because of her eyes. Qrow Branwen being allowed in, despite his Semblance. And yes, Ozpin knew ahead of time. Jaymes Ickford is the perfect example of a boy that is a contact grenade not being secured inside of a moving truck on a bumpy road. Eventually he will blow up, and get people killed.” Killian explains to them, and Winter tries to defend it, only for him to continue listing all the instances.

“Team R.W.B.Y deliberately withholding useful information on our enemy for their own goals of fun when in the right hands it could have fixed the situation and prevented this. Pyrrha Nikos being easily manipulated into killing another student. Ozpin allowing rogue Huntresses and a Huntsman into the school with no background checks, allowing the fall to happen. Blake Belladonna allowed entry despite her affiliation to the White Fang, and believe me, this is the very few that happened recently. There have been thousands of incidents in these academies over the years...so now I am going to show the world what happens when these students...all that power...is not controlled.” Killian explains as he walks towards them.

And the terrifying thing is...

They can understand his reasons...because he is right...Ozpin has been arrogant, he has allowed all these students into these Academies with no background checks detailed enough to deny entry.

He just lets them all in.

“The Huntsmen and Huntresses in all the Academies...they must be controlled...to prevent further loss of innocent life.” Killian states, then Winter yells in anger at him.

“YOU DON’T KNOW THAT!” She screams, and Killian grits his teeth, rolling his eyes and his jaw.

“I am the only one...who knows this. You see it takes patience to make a Commander, the patience to watch and wait and thousands die in single years every single time from noticeable coincidences. If nobody else will do the dirty work, then I will – because THIS IS FOR THE
GOOD OF REMNANT!” He yells, so unexpectedly from his calmly spoken voice it makes both of
them jolt with fear of him.

“And the two of you are just two more examples to my list.” Killian snarls.

“What did Jaymes do?” Eryka questions.

“What?” Killian questions.

“Your file said he did something at Haven…what happened?” Eryka questions, so Killian nods his
head, pulling out his scroll and activating a recording. They turn their heads with shock when they
see the footage.

Of Jaymes pressing his hands against his head in distress, purple and red lightning crackling across
his whole body, they cannot hear what he says due to the lack of audio, but he is screaming. But at
the end, he suddenly unleashes an explosion of lightning from his body, killing a few students and
cutting the feed. “He caused a power outage and killed six students…he never took his medication.
The school was going to expel him, but I made sure that he was sent to the Vytal Festival…and
what he did was never revealed.”


“How do you think?” He asks her inquisitively.

“You killed them?” She gasps.

“I did what I had to, to maintain the lie.” Killian explains as he walks around them, closing the
recording down. “And I made sure he made it into Beacon…his team know of what happened, but
I made sure they swore a vow to never speak of it. Or they would die like the others. They have
held their end of the bargain…now I can use him the way I intend to. A bomb…in the form of a
student. Practically ingenious, wouldn’t you say?”

Eryka suddenly punches Killian right in the nose with her bare knuckle, knocking him back and
Winter draws her sword.

But Killian smirks, revealing a button on his table that he slams his palm onto, the two of them
gasp as these devices fold out from the walls, blasting electrical lightning into their bodies to stun
them. He pulls a napkin from his pocket and wipes the blood from his nose, leaning down to
Eryka. “You see…I never won by playing fair…but you never asked me if I was a cheater.” He
states, turning and walking away.

“Killian! You won’t win! My men will find out what you did!” Winter screams.

“Oh, sweetheart…your men…are dead.” Killian reveals, and her eyes widen with shock and
disbelief. “I have someone on the ground, who can take out people no matter the rank without them
realising. Tonight, the world will see the truth, as that boy triggers the Black Smog to attack
again…this time…everyone will believe me.” Killian states as he walks away from them.

“You’re a maniac!” Eryka screams in pain.

“No…I am a visionary…but we do have a maniac with us…and they take the stage tonight.” He
chuckles menacingly as he walks away from the two of them, snapping his fingers to the two
solders outside who have appeared. “Arrest them and take that damn Bird up to the ship with
them. Clip its wings if you have to.” He states, and the two soldiers enter, and Eryka screams as
she sees one of them holding Dulcis by the neck with a dart in him.
“Let him go! Let him go!” Eryka wails, and Killian looks back at them as the soldier knocks Eryka out.

Winter scowls at him. “I will do…what I must…to ensure order.” Killian orders.

“No!” Winter screams.

Until the stock of the rifle hits her in the head and knocks her out.

Killian walks away…his master plan about to come to fruition.

And nobody knows.
The pain rattles through her head, across her temple and it even feels like it is in her teeth. Whatever that device was it managed to shut down her aura instantly or block it out for a few seconds. The fuzzy feeling seems to give her the sense of pins and needles in different parts of her body, slowly rising up as she looks around. Blurry vision slowly returning from the darkness of unconsciousness. She presses her hand to where the pain throbs, looking around slowly, to see Eryka still unconscious inside of the cell they have been locked inside of. She can also hear the faint cries of Dulcis in his cage, jumping and swinging his wings as he tries to get out of there.

Then she sees him sat outside of their prison cell, holding some kind of metal ball in his hand, one that he is shifting the pieces on its outer casing over and over again. Like some kind of brain tester, using just one hand as he does it, thinking away as he shifts the pieces. His onyx coloured eyes glance round when noticing her moving, and as he takes a breath it is extremely raspy, so he uses his other hand and squeezes the trigger in the device…pumping the drugs back into his respiratory system that keeps him alive.

He throws the ball up and catches it as he looks at Winter, who glares at him with gritted teeth, reaching for her sword, only to realise that they have confiscated it. “Welcome back to the land of the living, Specialist Schnee.” Killian says to her, not showing a smirk on his face at all, just staying straight faced as always. She groans, shuffling back and pressing her spine against the cold metal wall…feeling the vibrations of its engines.

“Where are we?” She questions with fear.

“The Shadow of Broken Promises, my dear. Shortly we will be departing Beacon and returning to the Black Gallows.” Killian answers as he juggles the ball around from hand to hand, before catching it in his right hand, resting that same arm on his knee.

“Why…why haven’t you just…killed us?” Winter questions, touching the purple bruise on her head where that soldier smacked the rifle against her head to capture her.

“The Black Gallows are not against the safety of Remnant, Winter – we are here to ensure its survival at all costs. That does not mean we leave bodies in the wake of every location we go, kill every single person who has tried to dig up our secrets. We lock most of them away, and kill those that have no use to us or the world.” Killian explains, and it seems like his morality just gets greyer and greyer…soon there will be no morality left in the man.

Just duty no matter the cost.

“So…what? You’re just gonna lock us both away in some maximum-security prison in Atlas somewhere?” Winter presumes, since the Atlesian Wildlands would be a smart place to hide. Nobody has ever gone there and come back to tell the tale, and the amount of Grimm that lurk around there make it even harder.

“Interesting hypothesis, but you will find the truth soon enough.” Killian assures as he crosses one leg over the other, staring down at her where she may lay.
“If you ask me, it would be easier to shoot us.” Winter states, making him chuckle.

“Do you want me to?” He asks her curiously.

“Not particularly, but I’d rather that then have to stare at your men for the rest of my days.” She huffs, rolling her large blue eyes. He chuckles, leaning forward and pointing to some of his men stood across the way from him.

“Do you know who my soldiers are? The majority of them anyways?” Killian asks her with true inquisitiveness in his voice. Winter looks at the two soldiers standing guard, as if they have lost all humanity in them.

“Poor souls converted by your silver tongue?” She presumes, making him chuckle once more.

“Hardly…they chose this.” He states, and Winter raises a brow. “Every single soldier you have seen, the ones that walk past you, the ones with all their abilities? They are all people who once tried to unveil our secrets, damage the safety of this beautiful world…all of them are convicts from the Black Gallows.” He reveals, and Winter’s eyes widen with concern, then she stares at the soldiers again.

They have been known to abduct psychopaths, mass murderers, dangerous criminals or people who tread into the wrong territory. But never in all her days did she possibly predict that the soldiers they have seen are the same people. “What? Why the hell would they choose this?” Winter questions with disbelief in her voice, Killian leans forward as he tells her.

“Our prison cells…we have designed them to break people and their soul…for everything that surrounds you is black. The walls, the ceiling, the floor, the windows…and there are no lights. Pure. Darkness. It does not take long for the inmates to start going insane, clawing at their eyes and faces, trying to kill themselves.” He begins to explain, remembering it all as if it were yesterday. “But…give them hope…open the door so they can see light again…and just speak to them. Give them food, offer kindness…and they quickly begin to respond. We extract every bit of information out of them…and at the end of it…we offer them a choice.”

“Death or servitude?” Winter guesses with a raised eyebrow.

“Freedom…or Employment.” He corrects, replacing the word servitude with employment. “Every single soldier you see before you has been reformed, some with some traumatic memories, yes…but all of them have a life. Some have families, girlfriends, boyfriends…children. Because we gave them a choice.” Killian explains to her.

“But surely they would choose Freedom?” Winter presumes.

“Very few do, some do…and they are living peaceful lives out in Remnant somewhere. We keep tabs on them but leave them alone. Because they have learned their lesson. The Black Cells have reformed countless souls, even the most deranged.”

He pauses as he remembers something. “Well…except for one.”

“One?”

“Yes…he never really did recover…we are still trying to understand what makes him…crack.” Killian replies, and Winter scoffs.

“If you think you will do that to us…you’re wrong.” Winter challenges, and Killian shakes his head.
“Many claim that, before they spend a few hours in those cells. You see the one you are in right now is only temporary, but the problem with the Black Cells is that you lose track of time instantly. I believe one prisoner lasted a whole thirty minutes in his cell before he gave in. He thought he was in there for days.” Killian explains, leaning back against the spine of his chair, leaving Winter quite scared now.

He continues to figure his little puzzle toy out in his hand. Winter looks at the ball in his hand and she tries to focus on something other than her fear of the Black Gallows and those Black Cells.

“What’s that?” She asks him, he looks up at her and smiles.

“My stress toy…” He answers, then exhales through his nose. “My father gave it to me…you see a long time ago I always struggled to pay attention to the simplest things. Such as lessons or even the television…so my father bought me this little ball and said it would help me focus. Train my mind to solve puzzles without losing…focus.” He explains. Continuing to use his hand to push the pieces round like clockwork, clicks and sliding sounds softly resonating from the metallic ball.

“I never had something that fancy…I just had a ball…a bouncy ball when I was a kid.” Winter scoffs, missing that thing right now.

“I’ve never stopped using it, I can figure it out eventually, but the thing is, there are so many permutations that when you reset it, the randomisation is completely unpredictable. The damn thing is great for degenerates like me.” Killian chuckles, continuing to use it with his hand, then finally he solves this puzzle. The pieces click together, and it opens up, revealing nothing inside…but the challenge is the real reward. But from the opening it is clear that people can put little rewards in there.

Sweets maybe, codes for video games or simply fortune cookies.

But Killian merely enjoys the challenge of it puzzle, the patience it requires and the focus of finding the answer to every little problem. Winter glares at Killian and she narrows her blue eyes. “You won’t win, Killian. Your plan will never work.” She states, and Killian raises a brow as he looks at her once more.

“Really? How do you figure that?” He inquires curiously, lifting a leg and crossing it over his other knee.

“You won’t be able to convince the world that your ideas are the way forward. The Huntsmen and Huntresses have given so much to protecting their lives, the world would turn on you in an instant…and besides how would you aim to control us? Planting chips in our heads to control our choices? Replace us with your soldiers? Robots?” She lists with anger in her voice.

“Oh please, with robots? Control Chips? Did you not see what happened at Beacon, Winter? That would cause an even bigger catastrophe, hundreds of thousands of soldiers against us? Controlled by a virus?” Killian questions, crushing her argument. “No, what I have planned is something more practical, something that would not only fix the problem but also improve the effectiveness of the Huntsmen and Huntresses.” Killian explains, and Winter narrows her eyes.

“And that is?” Winter asks.

“Ever heard of the Spartans of Nikos? The old Order that has lived in Mistral for thousands of years, fought of legions of Vacuo’s finest during the Vytal Festival with merely three hundred warriors?” Killian asks her, and Winter nods her head.
“Yeah, they all died but still decimated over one hundred and eighty thousand troops. Vacuo has steered clear of Mistral ever since…and the survivors became the family known as Nikos now.” Winter recites, she has read her history books, and it is all true, Thaddeus Rex was not the only valiant warrior back then. The Spartans of Nikos, an old city that once stood in the Mistraalian Deserts, were noble and lethal warriors.

“Yes, but three hundred of them destroyed thousands. Imagine if we had thousands of Huntsmen and Huntresses trained the way that the Spartans were trained? Reared from birth in the art of war, knowing nothing else – and only when they were eighteen could they decide if they wanted to learn more about the world. About love, family and adventure…but warfare will always be instilled in them.” Killian explains, clenching his hand into a fist.

“You mean to adopt a forbidden strategy for every Huntsman and Huntress?” She questions, and he nods his head.

“It does not have to be forbidden any longer. The students may find love as Pyrrha’s father did before her, finding Juno when he was twenty-six…she was twenty. But she could always calm his flame when he returned from battles…their daughter on the other hand…she keeps betraying the ways of her ancestors with Jaune Arc.” He explains, and Winter shakes her head with disgust.

“You can’t just erase human nature, Killian. They are children, and children will always rebel, will always want to try new things.” Winter states.

“The Spartan Children never did…” He states, and Winter sighs. “And they followed orders, there would be no need for a control chip in their heads, for warfare will be all they know. And death would never be something that they would fear, and they could make the sacrifices needed in combat for the protection of the innocent.”

“When the world hears about your plans…they’ll –”

“The world?” Killian questions, standing up slowly as he walks towards her cell, glaring down at her with fiery onyx eyes. “The world will approve, because when Jaymes shows what his level of power can cause when uncontrolled…when untamed…the very people you have sacrificed yourselves to protect, will turn against you. They will want you all to be controlled, or imprisoned. Times are changing, Winter Schnee. You can either let the changing tide pull you away or you can adapt…and survive the change with the rest of us.” Killian explains, as he turns and walks away from her.

His words…

They stick in her head.

*The world will approve, because when Jaymes shows what his level of power can cause when uncontrolled…when untamed…the very people you have sacrificed yourselves to protect, will turn against you.*

*They will want you all to be controlled, or imprisoned…*

*Times are changing, Winter Schnee. You can either let the changing tide pull you away or you can adapt…*

*…and survive the change with the rest of us.*
Blake

In a dormitory given to them for their time at Beacon…

Kali and Ghira both are making their bed together with the sun fallen behind the horizon and the night claiming the day. Ghira has slid a pair of beds together and they only just fit his huge body, whereas Kali can fit quite comfortably onto the bed next to him. They have also got a pair of bed covers over the double bed too, both wearing their nightwear as they prepare for sleep. “I miss my bed.” Ghira sighs, like a child as he scratches his muscle and tides up the pillows so then they are in the right and comfortable place.

“Oh quiet, you…it’s only been one day.” A currently toothpaste muffled Kali slurs from the bathroom, wearing her nightgown made of white silk around her small frame, her makeup taken off and yet she still looks incredibly pretty. Ghira raises a brow with confusion since he barely even understood what she just said over the sound of her brushing her pearly white teeth.

“Huh?” Ghira replies, and Kali sighs exaggeratedly, white and blue toothpaste filled her mouth.

“I SAID – IT’S ONLY BEEN A DAY!” She exclaims, still a bit muffled but a little easier to understand, where most men would be scared, he just rolls his eyes.

“These beds hardly even fit me.” Ghira complains, feeling like the beds are about to collapse underneath him.

“Our bed back home had to be especially designed for you.” Kali reminds after spitting the toothpaste from her mouth and washing it out with some water. She walks back into their bedroom and she lifts the sheets and climbs into bed with her husband, putting her arms round him and resting her head against his warm bare chest. “Maybe…you’ve put a little weight on.” She whispers softly with a smile, and his eyes widen.

“What? You don’t think that do you? I’ve been working hard.” He whimpers, but Kali giggles with a smile, kissing him affectionately on the lips.

“Don’t worry, chubs – you’re my chubby hubby.” She whispers, poking his nose with a smile, and he chuckles.

“You’re a mean woman.” He says with a smile, caressing her short black hair with his large hand.

“Oh, I am better than you deserve.” She reminds with a giggle in her voice.

A knock on the door cancels their flirting that they have been sharing, so the two Belladonna parents look to the closed wooden door. Kali sits up and responds to the knock. “Yes, hello? You may open the door.” Kali assures, the handle gently turns, and they see the white-haired Weiss Schnee peek her head round and see the two parents in bed.

“Oh! I’m sorry, I never meant to disturb you.” She apologises, making Kali and Ghira smile, instantly liking the girl – despite everything that the Schnees have done to the Faunus. But they know of her, and also that she is nothing like her father and the things he has done, otherwise Blake and Weiss would be on much rockier ground.

“Oh, don’t worry, honey, it’s perfectly fine. How can we help you?” Kali inquires curiously.

“I’m looking for Blake, have you seen her? She isn’t in the dorm we’re sharing.” Weiss states,
since she is smart enough to check Team S.S.S.N’s room first of all things. Kali and Ghira glance at each other, and they both look clueless.

“Sorry, honey – she said she was looking for her friend…Sun?” Kali inquires with curiosity, and Ghira narrows his eyes with a soft growl, his protective fatherly nature taking over with every single second that goes by.

Weiss bites her nail softly, then she gasps when in the corner of her eye, the black-haired Huntress walks down the hallway, pausing when Weiss stares her right in the eyes. She quickly looks back to her parents with a forced smile. “Sorry to bother you.” She squeaks, shooting away from their view, the door slamming shut.

Ghira and Kali both lay in bed and look at each other, Ghira sighs as he lays down on the bed as Kali sits there with concern. “I still don’t like that boy.” Ghira reminds.

Kali rolls her eyes and groans aloud, grabbing her pillow and slapping it down into his face with a soft thud.

Blake stands there with slightly fearful eyes as Weiss comes storming towards her, Ruby walking round behind the Faunus. Ruby pauses and her silver eyes bulge wide when she too sees the Schnee practically charging towards Blake. “Um…Weiss? You can stop now, you can stop, please!” Ruby squeals until Weiss points right at Blake’s face, causing the Faunus’ cat ears to perk up with her eyes bursting wide with shock.

“Seriously? I can finally rest easy now that Jaune and Pyrrha are no longer being adorably difficult, and now you and Sun are having problems? You know you might have to pay me to be a relationship counsellor!” Weiss exclaims with annoyance, and Blake stammers with disbelief, unable to figure out where to start.

Ruby sighs, realising that it is nothing important at all really, just more relationship nonsense. None of them have any idea about Eryka and Winter being arrested by the Black Gallows, and currently about to be sent to the prison nobody knows the location of. However, it is also nearly midnight with the Shattered Moon in the sky, meaning that people are trying to sleep right now. “Weiss…people are trying to sleep.” Ruby softly coos, poking her fingers together gently with a nervous look on her little face.

“It’s…complicated…” Blake stammers as she tries to find an answer, but Weiss sighs.

“Complicated? Pyrrha and Jaune were complicated but we sorted it out…you and Sun? What could possibly be wrong with you two?” She questions, and Blake sighs, knowing how angry Weiss will be when she tells her why she is being like this…especially after the last argument they had.

“I am looking for him now, I messed up, okay? But…Weiss…I…I need to stop him…” Blake admits,

“Who? Sun?” Neptune asks her. “He’s was last with the other members of Team S.S.S.N except for Neptune, Jaune and C.R.D.L, getting a few drinks.” Ruby answers.

“No…I mean Adam.” She reveals, making both Weiss and Ruby groan with annoyance. “What do you expect from me, guys? He hurt Yang, stabbed me and got people killed. He will not stop. I can’t let him hurt anyone else.” Blake states as she stands in the hallway, stammering heavily.

“We talked about this, Blake. We talked about this!”

“I know we did, but I changed my mind. Every day I look around, and I see people suffering,
people who have lost their families because of the attack that he has a hand in causing.” Blake explains, thinking of all the orphans on the streets, the people dying from sickness, and the piles of burning corpses to try and stop the spread of disease from getting any worse. He has caused so much misery to the people of Vale.

“You agreed, we would look after each other. Now I know Sun can be an idiot, but he loves you, he would do anything for you. You deserve to be happy, so why are you letting Adam take over your life?” Weiss questions.

As the two of them argue, Ruby sees Neptune walking towards them with his arms moving slowly at his sides. He looks just as concerned as the silver eyed girl, but then she feels the sensation of her scroll vibrating in her pocket. Her brow furrows and she draws the scroll, pulling it out and looking at who has just sent her a message.

“…that is not the same thing, and you know it!” Blake argues.

“Guys…” Ruby softly says.

“If you continue down this path, Blake, then Adam wins.” Weiss states.

“Guys…” She repeats.

“How does that even make sense? I am trying to stop him!” Blake argues.

“GUYS!” Ruby suddenly yells, making both of her teammates jump, and they look at her as she holds her scroll, staring at the message.

“Ruby? What’s wrong?” Weiss inquires. Instead of using her voice she turns the scroll round and shows the name of the sender to them all.

**ROUGE DANIELS**

“It’s Rouge…she’s never spoken to me before.” Ruby states, and Weiss scowls with anger, since she does not know the full story about Jaymes, so she still hates his guts.

“What does she want, has that ass-faced-donkey-butt pulled another stunt on Pyrrha?” Weiss snarls, but Ruby presses play on the message, since she has never had a conversation with her. The message begins, and her timid voice emerges from the speakers of her scroll, speaking clearly but with worry clear.

“Ruby…I know…I know we haven’t spoken before, but…Jaymes is missing. And I know he is no friend of yours and I can understand that, but it is extremely important we find him. Peony and I looked at his medication and something is not right about it – we think they are placebos. We had hoped we could fix the situation before you came back but all his pills seem to be tampered with. If we don’t find him something very bad could happen…please…Peony is out in the courtyard looking for him. Can you meet me in our dorm room? There must be something we missed.” Rouge begs, then the message comes to an end, leaving them a bit freaked out. Because Rouge has rarely ever spoken, let alone to them…meaning if his pills are placebos and they are this worried, his condition must be extremely dangerous.

“That…doesn’t sound good.” Neptune slowly says, looking at Weiss.

“Okay…I’ll meet up with Rouge and help her. The rest of you go and look for Peony and help her, we need to find him and his pills fast. Dunno why, guess we’ll find out.” She sighs.
“You sure, Ruby? There are four of us here, we can split up, two and two.” Blake suggests with concern in her sweet voice.

“It would make more sense to have three people out there with Peony. You don’t need three people searching for pills in one Dormitory.” Ruby states with the shrug of her shoulders.

“Well, no time to lose. C’mon.” Neptune says as he jerks his head back to get him to follow. Weiss and Blake look at Ruby then at each other.

“Okay…let’s find Ickford.” Weiss agrees, nodding her head and rolling her eyes, since she is disgusted by him.

Ruby turns and walks down the halls to find Rouge.

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**Jaymes**

_Screaming at me…_

_Whispering about me…_

_Judging me…_

_Scared of me…_

_Hating me…_

The whispers have gone from being a force that strikes when Jaymes is unaware to an unending cascade of sinister voices inside of his mind. With his hands shaking erratically and him practically stumbling through the academy, he falls and presses his hand against one of the cars parked in the car park. He presses one hand to his head of purple hair, tearing up from how much it hurts him, hearing the voices refusing to stop whispering about him, about his fears and concerns.

But there is no pain at all, if anything it is like his mind is being stretched in ways he has never felt before, like there is a crowd inside of his mind right now, all whispering and screaming at him. He looks around and despite the fact that he is alone he keeps seeing threats all around him, from the lights that shine, and he clenches his hand into a fist, gritting his teeth, crackling electricity coursing across his body like a river. His muscles tense, energy glowing inside of his veins as they push against his skin.

“Get out of my head! Leave me alone! Go away!” Jaymes cries out with desperation, feeling as if there are thousands of insects crawling across his skin at every single second, making him scratch his skin with his nails. He stumbles again as he trips on a can that has been rolling along, and the voices start screaming.

_You’re gonna die! Destroy it! Get rid of it! Now! Now, Jaymes! Do it!_

With terror he blasts a bolt of purple and red lightning that melts and blows the can into smithereens, and the shrapnel flies up and slices across his cheek, drawing blood. He stammers, touching the hot sticky cut on his cheek, feeling the pain practically throbbing in his head right now.
You’re hurt…they want to hurt us…every single one of them…

Just like he did.

A voice appears inside of his head, different to the sinister versions of his own that keep whispering to him, delusions and hallucinations filling his mind with false beliefs and feelings. As he turns, he sees something horrifying with his eyes, as a corpse appears before him, maggots dropping from her flesh and her hair practically hanging by a thread. Her voice is there but has been malformed by some kind of demonic possession, that his mind has constructed for him.

He whimpers with fear as he looks at her. “M-M-Momma?” He whimpers with tears in his eyes, but fear as well as that.

“Why are you failing me, Jaymes? Why did you let him die?” His mother questions with a snarl, and Jaymes cries out with anguish.

“I tried to save him! I swear!” He whimpers.

“He was begging you to save them…why did you want him to die?” She snarls with disgust in her voice as the maggots and spiders crawl around her body. Suddenly her body begins to crumble into the insects that crawl towards him, causing him to scream with horror, staggering back, but when he turns to run, he sees someone else standing behind him.

A taller person, a man with dark eyes and a scowl on his face, matching the same facial structure of his own but much older. With a pair of metal legs as well, since he lost them in the force. “You made your mother a promise. A promise you have abandoned…do you remember what happens when you lie?” His father snarls, and Jaymes starts to cry, collapsing to the ground, hugging his knees with terror as the hallucination of his abusive father stands before him.

Judging him.

“I tried to help him! But I couldn’t!” He cries out, unable to get the death of Forrest from his mind, since it was his duty to protect his cousin as a team leader, and he failed. Now he is constantly paying the price for it, as a weapon created by a cruel Commander.

“You’re worthless, you contribute nothing to the world. You have no reason to exist…you are a failure.” His father’s hallucination whispers with a snarl, causing him to scream at him with fury and pain.

“Leave me alone! Go away! Why are you doing this to me!” He bellows with anger, springing up from the floor, only to find that the hallucination of his father has disappeared, but the whispers have not. They are clawing away at his mind, making him taste the terrible irony twinge of blood on his tongue, but there is no wound that could cause it. As he walks, his perception of the world seems to stretch, as cars that are parked in the street look like they are far away, but they are in fact right in front of him, causing him to bump into one of them.

The car alarm suddenly blares over and over, the lights flashing repeatedly as the car calls for its owner.

Worthless idiot!

We’re gonna get hurt now!

He’s coming for you!
They’re coming for you!

Gonna lock us away forever…

Gonna kill us…

They won’t harm us…

Jaymes bellows with furor as he channels the purple and red lightning through him once more and blasts the bolt directly into the car, a bolt so powerful that it blows the car up. Throwing chunks of burning metal around him but luckily not one of them hits him. The tyre engulfed in flames bounces past, but then he looks ahead…

The voices agreeing with him.

They need to understand us…

They need to see us…

They will fear us…

They will hurt us…

They will kill us…

Unless…we show them what we’re made of…

Jaymes snarls with anger as he clenches his hand into a fist, the electricity crackling constantly across his body with his gauntlets on his wrists. The clockwork shifts, ready for a fight.

And he walks towards Professor Port’s Classroom where the demonstrations are currently under way.

Sun

Unaware of Jaymes on the very brink of mental breakdown…

The lone Monkey-Tailed Huntsman walks down the corridors, unable to go back to his dorm room in case if Blake is there…so he finds himself just…drifting. Feeling so alone and love-sick, just wanting Blake to see him the way he sees her. He loves her more than his heart can take but it just feels like he is just running into the same wall over and over again, expecting something to change.

It hurts like nothing he has ever felt before, deep in his soul and his heart, the feeling of loving someone and the fear of them not loving back. What he does not realise is that she does have feelings for him, but she is just too scared to admit it – because of the fact that Adam is still out there, and his threat still carries weight.

As Sun walks down the corridor, he peeks round the cracked door to Team J.N.P.R’s dorm, opposite to the destroyed remains of the dormitory that once belonged to Team R.W.B.Y. However, the workers have done a great job so far of fixing everything, the burned and shattered furniture has been removed and it has been taped off for work. Concrete and new supports repairing the ceiling, soon the plasterers will be in to reinforce the walls. Inside of the other dorm
room, he can see Ren beside Nora who has fallen asleep, he gently caresses her orange hair, and
kisses her forehead lovingly.

He looks over and sees Sun standing there, so Sun steps back. “Oh, sorry.” He apologises, Ren
gets up and he walks to the door, stepping out and standing out in the corridor with Sun.

“It’s alright, she was just having a nightmare.” He admits, and Sun raises a brow with disbelief.

“Nora? A Nightmare?” Sun asks with disbelief.

“Yeah…well…we both didn’t have the luckiest upbringing.” He admits with a saddened smile,
Sun is not a fool – he can tell what he means by that, so he does not press him with any questions.
Sun just kindly nods his head.

“Well I guess I can’t do much sleeping either.” Sun sighs, pressing one hand to the side of his head,
since his mind is racing over Blake and the Battle of Beacon.

“Wanna take a walk?” Ren asks him.

Sun ponders, and them smiles. “Yeah, sure…we don’t get to hang out that often, do we?” Sun asks
him as they both start walking down the hallway, to the door to go outside and walk to the
Destroyed Districts of Vale.

“Never really get the time…always something going on.” He chuckles in agreement, and Sun nods
his head.

“That’s Team R.W.B.Y in a nutshell I guess.”

Jaune

“The Grimm are creatures to be feared, yes, however they are all just as weak as any other adorable
kitten.” Port jokes, causing the crowd of students to laugh to his comedy. Whether they actually
find it funny or not is besides the point. Port is doing the very thing that the school needs the
students to feel right now – normality. They may have hated his lectures at first, but after the Battle
of Beacon…this sense of normality is simply what they need right now. To take their mind of the
Black Smog that lurks in the distance.

Pyrrha sits beside Jaune, her hand gently resting on his as she leans her head on his shoulder with a
pretty smile on her face. He whispers softly to her as they watch him give out his speeches. “Do
you think he drew the Grimm on there, or did someone else?” He whispers softly, making her
giggle with a bright smile on her face.

“Probably Professor Oobleck.” She giggles.

“Ahem!” Port exclaims, causing the two lovebirds to jolt and their eyes to widen. “You see the
Grimm are many things, but brave is not one of them. For example, did you know that a Beowulf is
scared of getting its tail cut off? Apparently, it hurts like you wouldn’t believe for the poor thing!”
He laughs gallantly.

The large crowd of students watching as they write notes in their books chuckle with him, Pyrrha
smiles as she rests her head back on her boyfriend’s shoulder. None of them aware that the door has
just slowly and quietly opened, and Jaymes is now in the building with them. His veins in his arms crackle with purplish red lightning, his whispering in his head seeming to build and build more and more.

Ruby

She moves with a quick pace, passing by multiple dormitories, two of which being Team C.R.D.L and Team C.F.V.Y, all of them either asleep or about to go to sleep right now. She taps her finger against her leg as she walks, and as she finds the person of interest. She is standing alone with one leg pressed against the wall, looking at Ruby with relief. She approaches her, and Ruby speaks. “Rouge…why is this so serious?” Ruby asks her, until Rouge suddenly presses her hand against Ruby’s mouth to silence her.

Ruby stands there with a confused and shocked pair of eyes staring at her new friend she has made. Rouge points to the dorms, clearly meaning that they do not want to wake anyone up. So Ruby nods and follows Rouge to where their dorm is, and Rouge pulls out her key.

Weiss

Weiss opens the door and she looks around for where Peony could possibly be at. Rouge’s message said she was at the courtyard, meaning she could be by the Colonnades. Weiss strokes her long tail of white hair that has fallen over her shoulder and her chest, she turns to look at Blake then at Neptune. “Rouge sounded pretty worried, let’s make this quick.” Neptune advises as he looks around, and the three split up to find where Peony could be searching for Jaymes. Weiss has her fist clenched tight, despite the fact she is trying to help find him she still hates his guts.

She will always hate bullies, no matter what problems they have, to her a bully should be punished for being cruel to someone else, simply to make them suffer. Neptune calls out for her, hoping she is nearby. “Peony! You out here?” Neptune calls, his voice echoing across the academy, luckily not waking anyone but enough for her to hear. Or at least they can hope so if she is here in the Colonnades.

“Peony!” Blake also calls, whereas Weiss stays quiet, listening carefully and checking every single inch of the courtyards for signs of Peony around them. She closes her eyes as she listens, then with her aura it increases her range of hearing, managing to close in on something…the sound of a young woman panting heavily.

Like she is scared.

She turns and sees her, wandering on her own with her hands pressed to her head, holding something in her hand. “Peony!” Weiss yells, and the sharp shrill causes Peony to jolt like she has been shocked with some electricity.

“W-Weiss? What are you doing here?” Peony questions, acting strangely confused.

“We heard Jaymes is missing, and that it had something to do with some faulty pills? What’s going
“I thought you all resented him for his mistake, why are you trying to help?” Peony questions, and Weiss scoffs.

“Oh, he’s still a scumbag who should be punished, I’d just rather see it.” Weiss snarls with anger in her voice, getting a glance from Blake, but Neptune is a hundred percent with her on this. Then Peony laughs with a similar resentment now directed towards her.

“Oh wow, that’s a lot coming from you Schnee. Did it ever occur to you that he makes mistakes just like everyone else can? How about you, Belladonna? You know what her family has done to the Faunus?” Peony barks with anger, protecting her Team Leader viciously, and Blake looks at Weiss, then at Peony.

“I do…and it doesn’t matter.” She states.

“Doesn’t it? How can she be forgiven for her mistakes when he had one lapse in judgement and said a few things he shouldn’t?” Peony shouts again, and Neptune shakes his head.

“He targeted Pyrrha when she was suffering with depression! That is completely different!” Neptune defends, not only taking Weiss’ side but also his friends’ sides. But none of this convinces her, and at the end of the day – she knows Jaymes, better than they ever could. She knows about his Paranoid Schizophrenia whilst nobody else in the world does.

“Easy to judge a book by it’s cover isn’t it when you don’t look under the first page.” Peony scoffs with narrowed eyes, and Weiss narrows her back at her with judgement filling her expression.

“What the hell are you talking about? He probably just has some sort of random disorder that makes him a bigger asshole than usual.” Weiss scoffs.

“Thanks, no really, that’s nice. Being the bigger and better person right, now aren’t you?” Peony snarls, and Blake huffs, pushing the two apart before another fight starts out in the Colonnades.

“Stop it! We’ve had enough fighting. Peony, Ruby got a message from Rouge about trying to find Jaymes, something to do with defunct medication pills.” Blake explains, then they see that same look of confusion on her face again…then it looks like betrayal.

“She never returns my calls, but she goes to you? Wow, guess friendship counts for nothing.” Peony snarls as she clenches her hand into a fist, now the confusion is shown on the faces of the trio.

“Uhh…huh?” Neptune questions, so Peony explains.

“She hasn’t returned my calls since your team and Jaune’s went to visit the blonde girl who broke that kid’s leg. She’s been avoiding us for some reason ever since.” Peony explains, and Weiss looks at Blake with concern.

“Ruby went to her alone…” Weiss states.

“Why would she not return your calls?”
The destruction of Vale’s Outer Districts is something that will never stop bringing horror to the minds of hearts of even the hardest Huntsmen and Huntresses out there. Sun and Ren both walk carefully, weapons at the ready since the Grimm are confirmed to lurk around here sometimes. But there is something very different about tonight, because the night looks darker than normal.

They cannot see the stars, only a faint glow of the Shattered Moon.

“So, Blake is giving you a hard time?” Ren asks Sun, and he sighs, scratching his head of blonde messy hair, nodding his head in agreement.

“Mhm…hasn’t really talked much since she got back. All she ever talks about is finding the White Fang and stopping that Adam guy.” Sun explains, looking almost depressed about the subject.

“She’s just being protective, Sun…when we were together at Yang’s, she had some pretty nice things to say about you. She was blushing uncontrollably.” Ren tells him with a smile, and Sun’s eyes widen with hope, that look of depression being wiped away almost instantly. Even blushing himself, that the girl he has a huge crush on might feel the same way about him.

“Seriously?” He asks him.

“Yes, just give her time. She saw Yang again after what he did to her, it was bound to bring back some memories.” Ren reminds, but as they walk, they both stop in their tracks, blood turning cold from what they see behind the chain-linked fences at the very edge of the Districts.

The Black Smog…

They can actually see the Grimm now, and they only at this moment realise that the reason behind the lack of stars visible, is because of the smoke from the Grimm. It is blocking the sky right now, and they are skulking about, waiting with saliva drooling from their jaws. Grimm of so many kinds, from Beowulves to Creeps and even Nevermores landed down on the ground with soft snarls leaving its beak. “What the hell…are they doing here?”

“Like sharks to blood…they are waiting for a taste. We’re running out of time…” Ren states as he stares at the monsters. But as Ren stands there, he notices something in the rubble in the direction of the fences…

A hand sticking out of the concrete and rebar…

His eyes widen, and he rushes towards the rubble, and Sun follows him. “Oh, come on, can there be enough dead bodies now!” Sun begs as he helps Ren pull the rubble from the body buried underneath. Sun grabs a large slab and hauls it from the body…and their eyes widen with shock and horror.

“It’s…”

“Rouge…”

They both say it at the same time, staring at the impossible corpse of Rouge Daniels who has been buried underneath this rubble. Her body still fresh, could not have been left for a day or two. “How…when…” Sun stammers, but Ren notices something else, keeping his cool as he crouches down to her corpse in the rubble. The look on her deceased face looks like that of sheer terror…and her throat…
“Her throat…it’s been slit.” He states, looking up at Sun.

“And the rest of her body is fine…this happened recently…someone is covering this up.” Sun states.

“Who?”

Ruby

Pain…

Pain shockwaves across her whole body from the blade that has just stabbed into Ruby’s stomach, causing her to yelp in agony, her silver eyes widen as she coughs up blood in the process. Ruby grapples onto Rouge’s arm that holds the serrated blade that has been stabbed into her, so deep the hilt is pushing against her skin. Blood pours from Ruby’s belly, and it drips into the floor and over Rouge’s hand. “Rouge…w-why?” She stammers with tears in her eyes, not wanting to die.

That’s when she reveals herself.

Like glass shattering, shards of illusion begin to peel and crumble away before Ruby’s very eyes, the black sleeve, the black hair and the green eyes fade away and reveal the pink and brown hair and eyes. The white coat and the insane smirk on her silent face, Ruby’s eyes widen with horror.

It’s…

“Neo…” Ruby whimpers with fear, seeing her lift up the scroll that sent the message, and playing it again, revealing that the one Ruby had was cut down.

“There must be something we missed…” It is Rouge’s voice, then the recording continues. “Now…please…let me go, I won’t say a word! Just please! I don’t wanna die! Please!” Rouge shrieks in terror, only for the sound of a blade slicing through her jugular to follow, and the horrific choking gasps…and blood pouring out in gallons from her neck. Falling onto the floor, and the recording ends.

“N-No…” Ruby whimpers, but then Neo kicks her in the chest, causing Ruby to scream out a cry, landing on the floor, covered in her own blood as she crawls across the floor, trying to scream but the pain is too bad.

And Neo is following her, blood leaking down from the Blade.

It was Neo, she assassinated the Courier, killed Winter’s Specialists…

She is Killian's Maniac.

Jaune

Nobody knows that Neo is here, that Rouge has been murdered and that Ruby is currently dying at
Jaune and Pyrrha are both currently in Port’s Class, and he claps his hands together, the happy couple completely unaware that Jaymes is just behind them with his weapons at the ready. Trying to focus, using his coping mechanisms but none of them are getting the voices out of his head. “Now then! Time for a demonstration of the fighting styles you can adopt. Miss Nikos!” Port calls out and Pyrrha lifts her head from Jaune’s shoulder. “You have always been eager in the past to offer training with your superior skills – would you agree to showing what you have learned again?” Port asks her, giving her one hundred percent a choice in the matter.

She looks up at Jaune with a smile, and he smiles back, squeezing her hand. “Go ahead.” Jaune says, and as she stands up, that’s when Jaymes’ hand suddenly shoots up from behind her in the group.

“I would like to challenge her in combat.” Jaymes volunteers, and Jaune pauses with shock, his eyes widening when he looks over his shoulder to see Jaymes springing up from his seat. Pyrrha looks at him, and they have been mending the situation with each other, but she is not blind. She can see that something is not good with him right now due to the sweat and how tired he looks.

“Mr Ickford? I’m surprised to see you here, is this your first time in one of my lessons?” He asks curiously.

Don’t answer! It’s a trick!

He’s judging you!

The people in here hate you, that want you dead. Don’t drink anything this place gives you, they want you dead. The food is poisoned, we could be poisoned!

He tries hard to push the voices from his head, his eyes glassy and bloodshot, something that Port can see, but he also knows the delicacy with a condition like his. He needs to simply not provoke a reaction out of him, so he smiles and nods…feeling like he has been backed into a corner. Because if he denies him the opportunity it could set him off. “Of course, is this good with you, Miss Nikos?” He asks her, but the look he gives her…it is screaming say yes. So Pyrrha nods her head, and smiles to Jaymes, knowing something is not right, so she acts as politely and calmly as possible.

“It would be my pleasure.” Pyrrha assures with a smile, with Milo and Akoúo magnetised to her back, she walks down the steps towards the small arena that his office has. Jaune watches Jaymes with his hand close to his sheathed Crocea Mors leant against the other person’s chair right now.

Only now has Jaune noticed as well…

The Black Gallows soldiers are gone, there are no soldiers in her anymore, so he is even more on edge than ever before. Killian’s plan is under way, and if it goes his way it could trigger a second attack. As Jaymes walks past people, some of them look at him – but none of them give him nasty looks or make any nasty comments. But the Schizophrenia starts to form it all for him, sending false messages into his brain. Some students in his mind look at him and speak, even though they do not. “You are trash, I hope you die.”

“You don’t deserve to be here.”

“You are a mistake.”

“Why don’t you just end it already?”
The voices seem to be exploding in his brain, but he squeezes his eyes shut as he tries to ignore them, standing at the other end of the arena, and he clenches his fists, veins glowing purple and red, turning redder as he gets angrier. “Okay, from what I have shown you, please demonstrate how the fight would go.” Port requests, and he holds his hand between them. Pyrrha smiles gently to him.

“And…fight!” Port exclaims, beginning the fight.

Pyrrha uses her polarity and draws Milo and Akoúo to her hands, black energy surrounding the blade and shield, standing at the ready. Jaymes activates his weapons, the plates of metal that form his bracers shift and move down, the clockwork forming a pair of tomahawk axes over his hands, ones that channel his lightning through.

And his violet eyes faintly shimmer with electricity.

**Weiss**

“What do you mean she hasn’t been seen since we left? Do you think she followed us? Nobody was at Yang’s house apart from us and her dad.” She states, unaware that her mother was most likely watching over her like she always does. As creepy yet touching as that is, but Peony shakes her head.

“I don’t know, but we are getting off task, okay? I don’t know what Rouge is up to and I don’t care, what I care about is finding Jaymes. Because we are all in danger if we don’t.” Peony explains to them all.

“In danger? What the hell are you talking about?” Neptune interrogates.

“Jaymes…he has a mental illness.” Peony begins to reveal, and Weiss looks at Blake and Neptune with a bit of concern apparent on her face right now

“A…illness? What kind of mental illness?” Weiss inquires.

“It’s called Paranoid Schizophrenia – it is a chronic mental disorder where the person loses touch with reality. In his case, he sees threats all around him, treats himself like dirt if he never takes his pills. That combined with his semblance…if he cracks…like he did last time back at Haven…” She whimpers with fear, biting her nails.

“H-Haven? Semblance? What have you been hiding from us?” Weiss interrogates, walking forward.

“I made him a promise, to keep him safe no matter what! Because they demanded that I never tell a soul about what happened.” Peony whimpers, glancing up at the Shadow of Broken Promises above their heads right now.

“What happened?” Blake sternly questions.

Peony bites her lip, trying not to say it…but she gives in. “He snapped…his semblance is electricity, but it is complicated, because it is different depending on his emotions. Sometimes it is soft if he is happy or not apparent…but when he is scared or angry…he can kill people, he has killed people. He knocked out the entire city of electricity, he basically became an Electromagnetic
Pulse.” Peony whimpers, remembering it all too well, that’s when she slowly pulls her shirt down, revealing the electrical burn scars that scatter over her right breast and her shoulder.

“By the gods…” Neptune shudders.

“The Black Gallows arrested us…locked us away in black cells for a day…I nearly lost my mind, and so did Jaymes…but then he let us go and told us to never speak of this…” Peony tells them.

“Who did?” Weiss inquires.

“Killian.” Peony answers. “He threatened to kill us if we breathed a word of it.”

“The Commander?” Blake questions.

“He’s planning something, but I don’t know what! Jaymes is in danger, and so is everyone here! We need to find him before it’s too late!”

**Jaymes**

Their fight has concluded, and the lightning still crackles across his hands as he remains down on one knee, panting with sweat dripping off his nose and hair. Hitting the floor, the sound of water impacting the ground echoes, and the whispers keep on growing and growing in the back of his mind. Pyrrha stands at the other end, still holding her weapons as she sees him down on the ground, unable to hear the whispers in his head.

*They’re laughing at you!*

*They hate you!*

*They wanted her to kill you!*

*She still might…*

*Don’t mess this up as well…*

*Don’t fail again…*

“And as you can see students, because Pyrrha used the slide-and-dodge tactic, Jaymes was unable to use his weapons as he hoped he could. Meaning she could land a few hits.” Port explains as he walks towards Jaymes on the floor. “Thank you for the demonstration, Jaymes.” Port kindly states as he gently pats him on the shoulder.

*He’s attacking you!*

Jaymes snaps, lightning crackling inside of his violet coloured eyes, he spins round and suddenly blasts two bolts of purple and red lightning that explode against his chest. Port grunts, the impact throws the aged professor like a ragdoll and he crashes right into the blackboard. Jaune suddenly stands up and Pyrrha gasps as Jaymes staggers to his feet, the audience scream with shock.

Port, with the lightning crackling over his aura protected body, quickly holds up his hand, his eyes wide with fear after hearing the screams. “DO NOT PANIC! PLEASE STAY CALM!” Port begs to everyone, but as Jaymes spins round he sees a hallucination of Pyrrha lunging towards him,
when all she actually did was hold out her hand to try and calm him down. He swiftly spins round and blasts a bolt at her, but Pyrrha blocks it, and the bolt rebounds into him, making him stagger back.

Port freezes…blood turns cold…because she hit him back.

Pyrrha knows she has messed up now…

Because now the whispers are now dug so deep into his brain that he is now saying the very same things being whispered into him.

“You…hate…me…”

Pyrrha calls out to him but nothing gets through. “Jaymes! Listen to me, it’s okay!” She cries out. But it is all muffled by whispers.

“Sun…attacked me…”

The lightning builds and builds, turning from purple to full red now.

“Jaune…hates me…wants me dead…”

Jaune’s eyes widen as he holds Crocea Mors in his hands, slowly drawing it in case it goes wrong.

“Pyrrha…lied to me.” He states, staring right into her eyes now, and Pyrrha gasps, stepping back as he snarls, his voice turning as crackled and deformed as the electricity.

“No…I meant every word, Jaymes. I said I understand!” She begs him, no lies in her words.

“You’re the pretender…you lied to me!” He repeats with fury in his voice, his veins glowing.

“I never lied to you!” She begs.

“You all hate me, you hit me, you want me dead…”

He collapses to his knees, electricity sparking out from his body constantly, burning the ground.

“You’RE ALL MY ENEMY!” Jaymes howls as he throws his arms back, and his eyes unexpectedly shine bright purple and red, blasting a powerful pulse of energy from his body, blowing Pyrrha and everyone off their feet, cutting the power across the entire school in the process.

Screams echo throughout the classroom…

…and then…

…and like sharks to blood…

The howling of the Black Smog rises.

And they come…
Like Sharks To Blood

Ruby

Words cannot even describe the pain that she is going through right now. The pain of feeling a jagged knife puncturing through your stomach like that, feeling that cold blade tearing through organs and draining blood from her body like some kind of slaughterhouse…she is about to cry. Tears trickle from her silver eyes, unable to fight the pain that vibrates through the inside of her body, like she is being branded by a flame constantly from the inside out. The blood covers her leg and now her abdomen, unable to get back up, like she has been paralysed from the pain.

Behind her, the familiar face of Neo grins with pure insanity in her pink and brown eyes, slowly walking towards the young Silver Eyed Warrior desperately trying to escape the psychopath. Blood slowly creeping down the blade and trailing on the carpeted floor behind her. Every movement brings her extreme discomfort, but she fights the pain, biting her lip hard as she pushes through it. She slowly crawls back up to her feet as Neo walks towards her, then Ruby swings round to punch her.

But Neo ducks under her fist, then catches her arm, pulling her right into the curved blade of her dagger once more. Ruby screams in agony, eyes bursting wide once more with tears pouring down them.

Pink and Brown…one would not combine the two colours and expect it to become such a terrifying image.

But this may possibly be the very last thing that Ruby Rose will ever see.

As that blade punctures deep into her stomach, Neo slowly twisting the blade with a demented smile on her face, forcing it deeper, blood gushing out from two holes in her now. “N-Neo…please…I didn’t kill him!” She whimpers in pain, finding it hard to even raise her voice anymore as the blood begins to cough up from her mouth. But Neo is having absolutely none of it, as she takes her boot and kicks her right in the stomach again.

It is like a cascade of agony that rushes through her body…but there is something about that blade that is unlike anything has expected. She cannot use her aura to repair the damage, it is like that blade has been coated in some sort of venom like old warriors did to cripple their enemies. As she crawls, she focuses her aura as best as she can on the two stab wounds, her aura flickers but it is not strong enough anymore.

Something from that blade has entered her bloodstream and it is blocking her aura from healing her.

Neo walks towards her again, slowly moving one boot in front of the other, before slamming her foot down to Ruby’s spine. Ruby lets out another cry of agony, and Neo then presses her knee to her neck. “Please!” She screams. “I don’t want to die!” She cries out, fully bawling now, she never expected that when confronted with death that she would beg it not to…she always thought that she would be stronger than that.

But in the moment…
When death was coming…

She could not help but beg for forgiveness.

Neo grabs onto Ruby’s black and red hair, yanking her head up and showing her throat, taking the blade and pressing the serrated edge to her jugular to slice it clean open. She grins as she slowly starts to cut, the skin cutting slightly and blood leaking out.

Until suddenly a large man erupts from behind, tackling Neo at full force, and they both tumble off Ruby, saving her from her very near death. The man grabs onto Neo as he rolls over, then throws her body across the hallway, she slams against one of the open doors and breaks it down. She crashes down into the ground, snarling with anger as she stares at the person that just ruined her chance to cut Ruby’s throat.

Ruby gasps with disbelief, as it is Cardin who comes to her aid, crouching down and making sure that she is okay. “Ruby...are you...” He stammers and pauses when he sees how much blood has poured onto the floor right now from her two deep stab wounds in her tender belly. He presses his hand to the wounds to stop the bleeding, but turns again when he hears Neo getting back up, drawing her Umbrella and resting it on her shoulder. The rumbling of footsteps running gets the three’s attention, they all turn to see Team C.F.V.Y turning the corner.

“What’s happening? Ruby? Cardin?” Velvet gasps with a scared voice, then Yatsuhashi grits his teeth in anger as he draws his sword. He did not forget the threat that the poor Bunny Faunus’ team made towards him, so Cardin closes his eyes as he waits for Yatsuhashi to hurt him for what this appears to be him hurting Ruby. But then, he stands beside Cardin, glaring at Neo.

They are not that foolish to ignore the pink and brown-haired knife wielding murderer just across the hallway from them. “Who the hell is that?” Fox snarls as he draws his Tonfas, gritting his teeth as he also stands with him. Cardin looks at Ruby and then at Velvet, he releases Ruby and draws his Mace, spinning it through his fingers and Coco draws her Chaingun.

“Velvet, get Ruby to Glynda.” Cardin orders as he glares at the killer, who paces back and forth slowly with her umbrella resting on her shoulder, with that insane smirk on her face. She has really gone off the deep end now, she was always quite deranged, but something has happened between that time.

The loss of Torchwick has really blown the lid off.

Velvet does not argue, she just immediately helps Ruby up, even picking her up, showing that the Bunny is indeed strong enough to lift up the flower. “Stay safe!” Velvet begs, and Cardin glares ahead at Neo.

“You too.” Cardin replies.

Neo rolls her neck with a loud crack as she draws her other blade from her umbrella, smiling with pure insanity on her face as she stands before them.

Cardin, Coco, Yatsuhashi and Fox stand at the other side, weapons at the ready. “Well…this wasn’t how I thought my evening would be going.” Coco scoffs, making Cardin chuckle.

“Me neither.” He agrees.

The four unlikely allies roar as they charge towards the silent assassin.
The terrified cacophony of screams echoes from the Demonstration Lecture Room, and the distant flashes of purple and red lightning flicker through the windows of the building which can be seen outside. Inside of the building however is complete and utter chaos, every single student inside is panicking, running into each other as they attempt to make their escape from the doors. Port opens them, making sure that every student gets out of there, but the howling roars of the thousands of Grimm growing louder and louder, the crunching of trees being toppled over by herds of massive Goliaths. Their trumpeting roars reverberating through the air as they slam the trees down, shattering them into splinters under their unstoppable weight, thousands upon thousands of Creatures of Grimm swarming from the darkness and through the destruction paved by the Goliaths.

But inside of the building…

A battle has just ignited inside, Jaymes crackling with electricity across his entire body, his eyes glowing a deep purple fire. His voice deformed by the crackling voltage that flows through his veins. Jaymes roars, flicking his wrist and blasting a bolt of purple and red lightning straight into the raised shield of Pyrrha Nikos, the impact throws her across the small arena Port had built for his demonstrations. She crashes into the ring of concrete that builds the arena, and she slams across it, shattering the concrete and crumbling it onto the ground. Pyrrha rolls onto the floor, falling from the devastated wall, covered in dust and the crackling purple and red electricity coursing across her aura coated body.

Pyrrha groans, despite her aura and her shield protecting her, the electricity still buzzes in her bones and her muscles. She stares at her shield, seeing the smoke trailing from glowing hot bronze steel. She winces and recoils her hand swiftly from the shield after touching it, the electrons shocking her finger. Pyrrha looks at Jaymes once more as pieces of broken concrete fall from the wall she was thrown into. Jaune charges towards Jaymes and he swings his shield at him, desperately trying to avoid dealing any serious damage against him. But as he swings his shield, Jaymes stops the attack with his inclement hand, a metallic bang erupting from the impact against his hand.

Jaune’s eyes widen when Jaymes glares at him with a viciousness in his eyes, the electricity building and building across his entire body, channelling across his arm and into his arm. The storm suddenly jolts into Jaune and blasts him away from him with a grunt, he slides across the ground and slides up to the wall. Jaune snarls as he presses his hand to his head, feeling his skin pinching from the biting volts. But this time as Jaune looks up, he sees Jaymes sprinting towards him, and they can hear voices echoing within Jaymes somehow…his semblance is literally channelling his Paranoid Schizophrenia.

“They are trying to kill you! Don’t let them hurt you any further!” The voices yell, and none of them even sound like Jaymes, or if they do, they are very different, more sinister than that of his own.

“They only want you destroyed! Destroy them instead Jaymes! Don’t let them hurt you!” The voices continue to yell, Jaune draws his sword from his shield and he deflects the first attack from Jaymes. The Schizophrenic Sufferer wields a pair of highly advanced tomahawks, ones that he seems to be able to channel his semblance through. He swings them straight at Jaune, until suddenly after he clashes the blade across Crocea Mors, he throws one of the tomahawks at him.
Suddenly, a lasso of electricity erupts from his hand and wraps around the detached hilt of the tomahawk, swinging it round and slamming it at Jaune. The impact clangs into his shield and he flies through the air and crashes down right next to Pyrrha, who is also getting back up. “Well…at least everyone is out of here.” Pyrrha softly says with a smile, she rolls her neck and pops the bone, still aching from the electricity.

“Seems Jaymes really does have a problem…” Jaune stammers as he looks up at the student as he staggers, the electricity now violently crackling across and out of his head. The forks of molten light crackle against the walls and the ceiling, like he is about to explode again. The lightning has already shattered the windows, and injured a few students who were hit by forks.

“Paranoid Schizophrenia.” Pyrrha tells him, and Jaune looks at her with concern.

“What? How do you know?” Jaune asks her with confusion.

“I had my suspicions, he told me he had a condition a few days ago when Eryka first showed up at the school. But I only figured it out now…listen, I think his aura is actually projecting the voices!” Pyrrha explains, reaching down to Jaune and helping him back up to his feet, they both listen carefully, and they can indeed hear the deformed voices erupting from the in pain Jaymes Ickford.

He screams in agony, the feeling of a thousand bugs crawling all over him has now become absolutely unbearable. There are even tears in his violet eyes as he screams, as he keeps seeing the flashing images and hallucinations of his dead mother, his abusive father and the corpse of his cousin. Everything piling up on top of him.

Then they can hear their voices. “They hate you! Everyone hates you!”

“If nobody will protect you then protect yourself from them!”

They are all shouting at him, feeding this dark delusion into his mind. He stumbles and staggers, like he is trying his hardest to fight against the thoughts, but nothing is working. Then he seems to stop being in pain, for at least a moment, staring straight at them with furor. “Okay…we need to snap him out of it. Any ideas?” Jaune asks her, and Pyrrha mumbles to herself as she looks at him. At the end of the day this is a mental condition, they might have to knock him out and restrain him so then they can inject a suppressant inside of him later on.

“We need to knock him out, tie him up with something that’s strong but not conductive. We really need to hold him down, so we can find something real to give him, to get these voices out of his head.” Pyrrha explains, using her polarity to pull her weapons back into her hands.

“I doubt knocking him out will be easy, Pyrrha.” Jaune states, looking at her then at Jaymes again, seeing him pacing back and forth, his eye twitching and scratching his itchy skin. Despite that there is no real itch there to begin with, voices still whispering through the electricity that courses through his body.

“No, it won’t, but we need to give him everything we’ve got. Because with a semblance like that, his aura must be extremely strong.” Pyrrha explains, since offensives on a scale like this need a lot of it to deal that much damage output. Defence have a lot but not in the same way as the offensive, because they need it to attack, rather than hold back enemy fire.

“Okay then, we wear his aura down and knock him down. Let’s do this, partner.” Jaune says with a smile, looking to his girlfriend who nods to him. Jaune forms his shield and lifts it, pointing the edge of Crocea Mors towards their foe. But they do not wish to hurt him, only to stop him from getting himself hurt. Jaymes lets out a deadly cry of rage, as he suddenly launches one of the
tomahawks from his gauntlets, the cogs and pistons shifting the metal so then it can be thrown like
that. He extends a whip of lightning from his arm and it wraps round the tomahawk and he does
the same for the other. He slashes both of them towards the pair with great force and aggression,
the electricity burning through everything that stands in his path.

Pyrrha rolls aside just in time, using the skills she has developed over the years to her advantage,
just managing to avoid the attack. The tomahawk slams into the ground, then she jumps high in the
air, throwing Akoúo towards him and it bounces against his chest, making him recoil and snarl
with savagery. Jaune jumps and he swings his sword downwards with great effort, slamming it
down against the metal gauntlet he wears, his purple aura crackling around the blade. Jaymes
snarls at him, then he screams with anguish, letting out a powerful pulse of electricity from his
body as he crackles more and more. “LEAVE ME ALONE!” He wails, and the shockwave throws
him up into the air, forks of energy crackling against the ceiling, shattering pieces of plaster and
concrete down and into the floor. As Jaune falls he takes his shield and lands on it, crushing a
couple seats in the process. He has learned a few good moves from Pyrrha, and one of them being
his landing strategy.

Pyrrha thrusts towards Jaymes and she slams her knee against the side of his head, to make him
stagger. As she lands, she spins round and slices across his purple aura again and again, ducking
down to avoid the tomahawks that are bound by those electrical cables he has formed. One of them
just misses her ponytail and cuts clean through the blackboard that Port uses. The electricity leaves
scorch marks inside of it as well, Pyrrha throws her shield at him and it bounces off his head, then
lands back in her arm.

Jaymes bellows, using his electrical chained tomahawks and he swings one towards her, the
electricity wraps around her arm and she gasps in pain, seeing her red aura crackling around the
source of damage, constantly repairing itself. Jaymes takes her and swings her round and throws
her directly up into the ceiling. Pyrrha grunts, her back slamming against it then she falls, dazed for
a second, before she returns back to the land of the living. She throws her shield once more at him
and it bounces against his arm and returns to her polarity. She uses it and surfs on its surface,
sliding across the floor as she fires Milo repeatedly at him.

“She’s shooting at you!”

Jaymes’ hallucinations are no longer a mystery, they all know of his condition now, and all they
want is to help him. All past mistakes aside now, this is his life, not the monsters in the back of his
mind, creating threats all around him. Jaymes grows into a roar, unable to fight against them,
blasting a bolt straight at Pyrrha, this time she kicks Akoúo upwards and uses it as a shield, her
polarity keeping it up in the air. The purple and red lightning explodes upon contact, flashes of
lightning spreading out from the hop-like shield that was floating in mid-air. Pyrrha reaches out
with her Polarity once more, throwing it down at his foot so then it can bounce back up to chest
level. She then kicks it right into his chest, knocking him back.

Jaymes staggers back, but then he lashes forward with his tomahawks, wrapping the lightning
around Pyrrha’s body and pulling her towards him. “You lied to me…you said you understood
me!” Jaymes roars with anger, but with everything he says she can faintly hear the Schizophrenia
in the back of his voice, saying something similar.

“She lied to you, she said she understood you!”

“I didn’t, Jaymes! I meant every word!” She strains in the lightning.

“You should have died on that tower.” Jaymes snarls with hatred in his voice, a hatred that is not
his own.
“She should have died on that tower.”

Jaymes goes to throw her into the wall with force, until Jaune suddenly rushes into his side with his shield raised, slamming it right into his side with all his might. Jaymes grunts in anger, staggering and releasing her, and dropping the Tomahawks onto the ground with no lightning wrapped around them. Jaune swings his shield round and smashes it across the side of Jaymes’ face, to make him stagger back from him. He immediately slashes Crocea Mors, just as Pyrrha showed him, right foot forward and keeping one shield up beforehand. Jaymes growls, channelling lightning up into his hand and swinging it towards Jaune, blasting a lightning bolt at him. But Jaune blocks it with his shield, holding it back as Jaymes focuses that attack constantly onto him, the hot and powerful energy burning across the shield, pushing him constantly across the floor.

Jaymes has his teeth gritted, but he has no idea that this is the opportunity that Pyrrha needed to get back in the fight. With her Polarity she pulls Milo back into her hand and she shifts it from Rifle Form back into its Xiphos form, slashing up Jaymes’ back, slowly but surely breaking his aura down. They may still have some way to go before he is in any position to get knocked out right now.

Both of them work together beautifully, taking shots one at a time against Jaymes since he cannot challenge both at once, but he gives it his best. He forms the lassos and pulls his Tomahawks back to his grip, slashing them round as they battle. Pyrrha jumps up in the air, dodging the tomahawks that swung her way. She fires Milo a few times at him when in its cross formed Spear and Rifle, the bullets slicing across his aura. Then he deflects some of the hits from Jaune, but both manage to get a few hits in. Jaune turns hard, swinging the sword and slashing against his head, making him stagger and right into the boot of Pyrrha.

Jaymes staggers, falling to his knees with a growl of anger. “We’re trying to help you, Jaymes!” Pyrrha begs.

Jaymes’ eye begins to twitch, and he growls in anger.

“They cannot help you. None of these idiots and liars can help you…only we can help you.” The voices whisper into his head, soft enough that they don’t even notice.

Crackling purple and red slowly starts to build across his body, growing and growing then he stares ahead with feral rage. “Nobody can help me…NOBODY!” He erupts with fury, releasing a powerful blast of energy from his body as he screams with anguish, it throws the two back and they crash down into the ground. Jaymes rises up and he swings his cabled tomahawks towards them both, and with all his might he swings the two of them around the whole class room, then throwing them both into the wall.

The wall shatters like glass, exploding and they are both thrown down into the ground, chunks of concrete falling with them. Dust plumes from the hole in the wall and they slide on their sides, eventually coming to a stop. They both groan, finding each other’s hands desperately. “Are you okay?” Pyrrha asks him weakly.

“I…ow…think so.” He groans, they both turn to see him standing in the hole with his fists clenched.

They are not done yet.
Cardin holds his mace with both hands as he swings it at the cartwheeling Neopolitan, whom dodges it with grace. She then rolls underneath him and kicks him right in the back, swiping upwards with her Umbrella, jumping in the air and kicking him in the back of the head with her heeled foot. She shatters into shards of glass as Yatsuhashi smashes the huge sword downwards at where she was stood, confusing him and Coco as their aim their weapons ahead, Coco’s Chaingun slowly spinning to life as she searches for her target. But she has just vanished.

Until a tap on her shoulder gets her to turn, meeting the fist of the same assassin. The impact causes her to flinch…but then it also breaks her glasses in half. Coco cracks her neck as she throws them from her face. “Now I’m pissed.” Coco states, firing her Chaingun straight at the silent assassin. Neo suddenly draws her umbrella and opens it, blocking the bullets with the armour lined fabric, walking towards her slowly. She begins to accelerate into a run, using her surroundings to her advantage, jumping and running across it. She then thrusts towards Coco, landing on her shoulders and jumping back onto the floor. She twirls round and smacks her across the cheek with the weapon.

Fox yells with anger as he slashes the tonfas at her with speed and agility, in which Neo steps back, moving her body with the Umbrella resting on her shoulder with a grin. Neo moves like a ballerina, gracefully twirling and dancing almost during her fighting style, eyes switching colours depending on her style. Whether she is being defensive or that switch colours, and right now they have switched as she backs up from the fast and vicious attacks of Fox Alistair. Neo spins her Umbrella round, right through her fingers, eyes now reverting to attack, as she slams her opponent’s blades aside with ease. She blasts forward, and she rolls across his back, then she strikes him over and over again with the tip of her Umbrella, a long needle-like blade extending from the tip, stabbing into his aura over and over again.

If it were not for his aura, he would either be dead or be nudging it right now. She slashes across his cheek and the aura repairs the damage quickly, but it angers Fox. She thrusts towards him, but then he ducks down and punches her right in the chest which knocks her back, until she breaks away again. She has been using her illusions more and more lately, meaning she is getting stronger with her skills and the usage of her semblance.

Coco watches the way that Neo moves, and she stammers, knowing that she cannot risk firing her Chaingun when inside of the Dormitory Block, the other students have not got their auras up yet since they have no idea there is a fight going on right now. She could accidentally kill someone from firing bullets through the walls and killing them in their sleep. She transforms her Chaingun back into its handbag form and she grits her teeth. Yatsuhashi and Cardin both charge towards Neo who seems to emerge from the carpet, merely an illusion though. She slides under the legs of Yatsuhashi and she kicks him in the back of his leg to bring him to one knee with a grunt. Yatsuhashi snarls, taking his huge bronze sword and swinging it round at where she was stood, only for her to disappear, jumping onto his back. She twirls round, before she jumps and wraps her legs round the neck of Cardin, holding on as she slams her elbow down to his head.

Cardin grabs onto her hips to try and pull her off, only for Neo to take her – rather miniscule – body and she forces them both to the ground, throwing him across the hall. She gets up and runs towards him, jumping and landing on his chest on her knees. She presses one of her blades to his neck, cutting into his orange aura with a grin. Until Coco smacks her in the side of the head with her handbag, she rolls off Cardin and rises back up, holding her knives in her hands. A new addition to her arsenal, a bunch of blades with some kind of poison coating them.

But clearly, they cannot puncture through aura when it is up, only malfunctions it when already
injected beforehand. Good to know, because that means they can take a hit without it being fatal.

Coco skilfully utilizes the handbag to avoid the sharp blades from Neo, letting them scrape off the metal then she kicks up against the Pink-and-Brown-Haired Assassin’s arm, making her recoil back. Then Neo twirls round on the spot and throws one of her blades towards the Fashionista Huntress. Coco leans back, letting the knife soar right past her head. Fox growls in anger, swinging one of his tonfas up and cutting the blade in half as it moves towards him. Coco goes to swing at Neo, but the smaller fighter uses her Umbrella to stop her arm that wields that handbag from hitting her. She then kicks her in the stomach and chest repeatedly, before jumping and swinging round, kicking Coco right in the ear, making her collapse in pain.

Yatsuhashi grabs onto Neo’s hair and with a powerful roar he swings her round and smashes her straight through the closed door to a Dormitory. Some of the students inside scream with terror as the Assassin crashes into the room. One of the girls covers her face with her bed sheets with terror, then Yatsuhashi keeps his blade pointed at Neo’s face, then he looks at the students. “Get the hell out of here! Get your weapons and be ready! Did you not hear the roars?” Yatsuhashi yells at them, sounding angry but that is more directed towards Neo on the ground, looking up at him with an insane smirk.

Cardin enters as well, pointing his mace at her face. “Why the hell are you here? Why did you attack Ruby?” Cardin yells in anger, completely unaware that she is a mute, so Neo just raises a brow and points at her closed mouth, but that just confuses him. “Huh?”

She suddenly spins round and kicks his mace, then grabs a pillow and smacks it into Yatsuhashi’s face. It was one of the softest attacks he has ever known an enemy to ever make on him. So, in return he does the same, grabbing a pillow and hitting her with it.

Before they even know it, they have started a pillow fight.

Of death.

Because Neo takes one of the pillows and holds the corner, spinning it round with a grin as she compacts all the feathers inside into a ball, basically making a flail. Then she swings it and it smacks right into Yatsuhashi’s cheek, knocking him over with a grunt. “OW!” Yatsuhashi explains, then Cardin looks at him then at Neo who just smiles.

“Wow…didn’t think I’d see the day a pillow would be brought to a fight.” Cardin chuckles, having to admit that he is impressed by her ability to turn something as comfortable as a pillow…into a mace.

Neo, on the other hand, does not let the comical moment pass, as she winks at Cardin before sprinting forward and kicking him in the jaw. Cardin staggers back before he swings his mace round with a bellowing roar, just missing when Neo ducks down, punching him three times in the chest, then drawing her Umbrella once more as she slams it across his face. Yatsuhashi takes Cardin’s place when he falls, swinging his sword with great force at Neo, and immediately coming around with a downward strike. Neo dodges both with her Umbrella held up to her back, grinning away as she easily dodges their attacks.

She turns her eyes to the books, so she throws some of them into Yatsuhashi’s face, then she jumps up and kicks him in the head. But as Yatsuhashi steps out of the way, Fox unexpectedly lunges towards her, punching her with enough force to shatter the windows around them. She smashes through the window frame behind her and she falls out, crashing down into the ground, then she spins round on the spot as Cardin jumps through behind her, roaring as he brings the mace down. The impact creates an almighty explosion that shatters the ground and throws her into the air,
giving him the chance to grab her by the heel and swing her round, smashing her back down into the ground. He quickly follows up with another downward strike with his mace, but when he hits her.

She shatters away.

Cardin growls in anger as he lifts the heavy mace from the floor, looking around as Team C.F.V.Y jump down beside him, each of them landing around him with weapons drawn – bar Velvet of course, since she is still getting Ruby to Glynda to help her. “Where’d she go?” Coco questions as she transforms her handbag again, pointing the multi-barrelled beast of a weapon at the outdoors surroundings.

At least now she has less chance of hitting someone bar her target.

Cardin looks at Coco, also trying to find her. “I dunno, she just vanished again.” Cardin replies, and Coco growls with annoyance.

“This girl’s really beginning to piss me off.” Coco hisses.

“Tell me about it.” Cardin chuckles, listening carefully for any signs of her moving in the bushes. The howls of the Black Smog can still be heard as they make their way towards Vale and the School, nothing is stopping them now. They have tasted the blood of terror, and that is all they need to gather the strength to launch their second attack.

Who knows if they will survive this one?

Yatsuhashi looks at Fox then at Coco, but the sounds of movement have ceased from all around them. Silence has now fallen, and Cardin walks forward slowly, listening but the many roars of the Black Smog getting nearer and nearer is still in their mind. “Where is she?” Coco questions, but then he crouches down, and he looks down at the ground…seeing that there are some tracks,

Headed towards the tower.

“Oh no…” Cardin stammers.

“What?” Fox questions as he steps forward, he looks back to the team.

“She’s going after Velvet and Ruby.” Cardin states, and Coco’s eyes widen with fear.

“Oh, gods no…”

Weiss

They are running out of time, and they have not even seen the state that Jaymes is in, and nobody has a clue that Ruby has been stabbed by Neo apart from Cardin and C.F.V.Y. But the Black Smog closing in is all the motivation that they need to get moving right now. Weiss, Blake, Neptune and Peony run as fast as they can towards the chamber of which Oobleck teaches in, but he must be in a panic of his own right now. Everyone can hear those roars, it is like the wind, nobody can mistake that sound.

Or the rumbling of all those monsters charging closer and closer, toppling over trees.
Weiss pants as she runs, she has never had the best endurance due to living in Atlas, the cold weather has weakened her muscles over the years and she never really did cardio. Something that has affected her combat style now since she loses strength extremely easily and after not much time at all. Blake and Neptune look at each other when they hear the cascade of roars echoing from the forests that lurk nearby.

They are getting closer and closer.

Very soon they will be inside of the school…they could already be in the city right now for all they know. People could be getting killed and eaten alive at this very second. But they do know that if they do not find something for Jaymes at this very second then they will have a bigger problem on their hands. He has already been set off but now he is a threat, a threat they do not want to kill though. None of this is his fault or his doing, it is all his Paranoid Schizophrenia coupled with his semblance. All of that combined and it makes him blind to friends of foes, he just sees enemies all around him.

They all slam the doors open to see the panicked Doctor Bartholomew Oobleck stumbling as he attempts to find an answer to this problem, as he taps his head with fear for the safety of the school and the city. “Doctor Oobleck! We need your help!” Weiss begs him as she runs inside, and the Doctor looks at them, pressing his hands to his head as he sits down in his chair.

“It’s happening again…I had hoped that we would have some time to prepare…but now we have nothing. And the Black Gallows are leaving us, and those Atlesian Soldiers are nowhere to be seen!” Oobleck yells out in anger, confusing the four students that stand before him. They look at each other with puzzled expressions before looking at the good Doctor once more.

“Wait…the Black Gallows left us?” Peony questions, walking outside and looking around – that’s when she sees the Black Gallows Wasp Ships flying overhead, returning to the Shadow of Broken Promises. Which has Winter Schnee and Eryka Vasillias currently locked away aboard. Peony looks totally betrayed by this, all these advanced soldiers that should be helping them are just leaving.

Blake watches them leave and she narrows her eyes. “Then we handle this ourselves, if they wanna be cowards then let them. Doctor, we need to search the medicine lockers you have.” She begs and Oobleck raises an eyebrow.

“For what?” Oobleck questions.

“Jaymes Ickford, we know that he suffers with Paranoid Schizophrenia, and we believe he may have snapped. From what Peony has told us it could be cataclysmic…” Blake explains to him, a fact that he and Professor Port already knew about since they were all there with Ironwood to discuss it with Glynda. After the revelation of Jaymes suffering with the condition was made apparent to them all.

“You want to see if we have any medications?” Oobleck asks her.

“Yes…you must have something, right?” Blake asks with concern and he sighs, pinching his brow.

“We did…but they were taken from us.” Oobleck states, as the courier was murdered by Neo when he was bringing them to be stored in Jaymes’ room.

“What?” Weiss questions, and Oobleck sighs as he decides to fill them in – not like confidentiality of the matter really seems to mean a thing at this point. He sighs and explains.
“We knew of his condition, for some reason it managed to slip past our regulations, because it was kept from his file. So, when he told Glynda after the fight he had with Mr Wukong, Ironwood made sure that the best medicine was provided to keep him stable. We sent a Courier to ensure it arrived safely in his room.” Oobleck explains with his arms crossed.

“What happened?” Neptune asks with concern, holding his rifle in his hands, feeling on edge with the Grimm getting closer and closer.

“He was assassinated before he could get there, and all the medication was ruined.” Oobleck explains, bringing a huge sense of defeat upon them all. Oobleck stands there, but then he seems to have some kind of realisation. “Besides…your teammate came by…didn’t say much but she brought a bottle of defectives back with her. Put them inside my storage.”

They all pause, and their eyes widen. “When?” Blake questions, starting to notice a chilling similarity from the stories that both Yang and Blake told about a silent killer.

“During the weekend recently, when you were round Miss Xiao Long’s.” Oobleck states…and it all comes hitting the two like a truck when they realise. They both look at Peony with concern…because if she took her form…then where is she?

Unaware she was murdered.

“Neo…that girl Ruby and Yang fought…she worked for Torchwick!” Blake gasps, and Neptune raises an eyebrow.

“Wait, what are you talking about?” Neptune questions.

“Ruby said she saw her change her outfit and appearance…it was her semblance or something like that. It wasn’t dust, it was untraceable…she was at the rally with the White Fang too! That girl!” Blake realises as he paces back and forth, only now realising that the girl that helped Roman get away after the Rally was the exact same girl that fought Yang on the train and fought Ruby on Ironwood’s ship before Roman was killed.

“Oh gods…we never found her body.” She stammers.

“And she’s gonna be gunning for Ruby…if Roman was her boss then she would be out of a job.” Neptune states, wisely finding a lot of links in how it could be the same girl.

“It all makes sense now…why Rouge was being so quiet!” Weiss agrees as she presses her hands to her head…then she and everyone else looks at Peony with a hint of grief for her. Because all of them know now…that this must mean that her very good friend is dead now, Neo is not one to leave behind any loose ends.

“Peony…I…” Blake softly says, but Peony shakes her head.

“We…We need to focus on Jaymes. If this girl showed up here with a bottle, then it must have been the real thing! Why didn’t she just ruin them like she did the others?” Peony stammers with confusion, desperately searching for the answers that are just not appearing for her. They all think and think and think, and amongst all of that, Oobleck realises something as he walks around.

“Perhaps…she couldn’t ruin it in such a discrete way. Perhaps…it has to be injected and cannot be dissolved into water like that can. At the end of the day we have trackers on every single drug bottle or syringe. She could tip away the pills but break apart a syringe? It would set off alarms…” Oobleck realises, and their eyes widen.
“But replace it with a fake…” Weiss realises, and Neptune nods his head as he snaps his fingers to her.

“…and no alarms would be set off. Perfect crime.” Neptune realises, chuckling with awe. “Gotta admire her ingenuity.”

“I can’t say I can…” Peony states with her anger and sorrow forced back, causing Neptune to feel bad as he lowers his head.

“Sorry.” He apologises.

“We need to find that syringe, where is it?” Blake asks Oobleck, he immediately turns, and they follow him towards the steps that head down into that storage room. He picks up his keys by the door and he unlocks the door, opening it to see the many storage shelves with countless different medications available. They have been eating through them extremely fast lately, a lot of medications from Atlas are left over but most of it has been given to the civilians who have contracted diseases or are injured from the attack.

“What is it called, Doctor?” Neptune asks him as he starts searching through the many different medicinal drugs in here.

“Chloricriptine. It should be in a box, has a small vial with orange liquid in it and has a syringe next to it.” Oobleck answers, moving some of the many boxes out of the way. Peony also keeps searching up and down the shelves to search for this syringe injected drug. It must be in there somewhere, otherwise he will never start to come down.

“How fast will this calm him down, doc?” Neptune asks him.

“Well it won’t clear his symptoms – he will need a lot more before that happens and repair his routine. But this will help him gain control again.” Oobleck explains, understandable because he has been struggling with it for what has been nearly two weeks. “I’m impressed he managed to keep it bay for as long as he has.”

“He is stronger than anyone gives him credit for.” Peony snarls with anger, giving Weiss a glare, and for once – Weiss actually feels like she deserved that.

“Enough, Peony. We can discuss our mistakes at a later date, first let’s survive this night!” Neptune yells, then he hears the voice of Blake calling out to them.

“Found it!” She calls, and they all turn to see her holding the box in her hands, she opens it and holds the vial with relief. And luckily there is also a syringe tucked away inside of the box as well. She gives it to Oobleck and he holds the syringe, gently poking the needle through the soft cap and pulling the Chloricriptine into its chamber.

“Very good, Miss Belladonna. With this amount of it…it should stabilize young Ickford. Come! We haven’t time to lose!” Oobleck says as he runs up the steps to his classroom and eventually, they get outside. It seems like every minute that passes by the roars of the Grimm get louder and louder. As he stands there, he turns to see a few Huntsmen and Huntresses running past and one of them stops.

“Doctor! We could really use your help! The Grimm have breached Vale!” One of the students yells, and Oobleck stares at the syringe and then at the Huntsman.

“Go! We’ll handle Jaymes!” Blake assures, and he nods, walking over to her and placing it in her hands.
“Just one injection, no matter how much he wants another one to supress the symptoms, just one. Otherwise he will die from an overdose.” Oobleck tells her, and Blake’s hands are shaking erratically…but she takes a deep breath and exhales, calming herself down.

*I can do this…*

*No more running away…*

“I can do it, sir.” Blake assures with a smile.

“No sirs or misses today, Blake.” Oobleck tells her as he pulls his coffee thermos out and extends it, allowing the flame to ignite from the tap. “We are all brothers and sisters in nights like these… been a hell of a November hasn’t it?” Oobleck asks them and they nod. “Good luck.”

“And to you…Oobleck.” Blake replies with a smile, and Oobleck nods back with a similar smile, spinning his staff through his fingers as he follows the younger students who are heading out to what could be their second real encounter with these monsters.

They all turn to where they can see and hear the flashes of the storm between Jaymes and Arkos.

“Come on…we’re nearly out of time.”

*Jaune*

The storm blasts straight into his shield as he holds his shoulder against it, pressing his palm against it too. He strains, as Jaymes screams with rage as he attacks Jaune, the voices screaming through him. But Jaune begins to walk towards him despite the cascade of electricity thrown his way. He takes the chance, realising he is actually reflecting it like a beam of light shone upon a mirror. He angles it, burning through some of colonnades, bringing one of them to the ground with a thunderous bang as it crumbles to dust. He finally scrapes the beam of volts across Jaymes’ chest, the impact knocks him back and he grunts.

“Jaune!” Pyrrha calls out as she runs towards him.

“You got it!” Jaune agrees, holding his shield above his head so then Pyrrha can jump onto it. He thrusts her up and she jumps, soaring high into the air, twirling round as she throws Akoúo towards Jaymes. The circular shield bounces off his face and as she lands, she rolls, running beside Jaune towards him. His aura cannot possibly be much stronger, they have been fighting him for what has felt like hours now.

But at the same time, they are running low on aura too, and with the Black Smog closing in, they need to take down Jaymes before it is too late. Jaune smashes his shield straight into Jaymes to stun him for a second, giving Pyrrha time to deal some heavy blows. She slashes her Xiphos upwards and it slashes across the aura, then she kicks her shield into his head and then she slashes up with the sword, transforming it into Spear form, swiping it across his face this time. He grunts in anger, staggering from the impact.

Jaune shields her from the sudden attack from Jaymes, blasting a bolt at her. “*She will betray you again! She is not your friend! We are her enemy!*”

“Don’t listen to them Jaymes! You are not their puppet! You are Jaymes Ickford!” Pyrrha yells as
she jumps up and kicks him up the jaw, trying to snap him out of it, but without that syringe he will never hear a word that they say to him. Jaune slashes Crocea Mors across his chest then turns with a hard swing that knocks Jaymes across the ground. Quickly remembering his training, he lifts the shield to block the next attack, but Jaymes’ advantage here is that he is unpredictable.

He forms his whips again but this time he savagely takes those Tomahawks and he swings them like they are chains, smashing them down and down over and over again. The axes carve straight through the ground, lightning earthing out from every single attack made their way. Jaune gets knocked to the ground from one of these strikes, so he crawls back from the deluded Huntsman who tears up the courtyard at his feet. Pyrrha springs towards him and she grapples onto him from behind, hauling him back as hard as she can, using Milo to choke him as she did with Cinder.

Jaymes growls deeply, crackling his voice as he charges his emotive electricity up, blasting her from him and pushing Jaune across the ground. Jaune topples back to his feet, stabbing the blade of Crocea Mors into the ground so he can slow himself. Pyrrha crashes down into the ground and rolls across the floor, groaning as she looks at her scroll, seeing both her and Jaune’s aura are getting near the end of their strength, flashing red. They both stare at Jaymes as he staggers…

He is looking much weaker.

“You can’t help me…nobody can! Everyone has hated me for what I am!” Jaymes screams at them, and they can hear the heartbreak in his voice.

“That’s not true…” Jaune groans, pressing his hand against his knee as he gets back up. Jaymes turns and glares at him, the boy that hates him the most, seconded by Sun and Weiss. “…because I know how it feels to be an outcast. So does Pyrrha.”

Jaymes looks at Pyrrha and he grits his teeth as he stares at her, then at Jaune again. “You don’t know what it’s like! To not know what is real and what isn’t! To see the very people who are dead blaming you every day!” Jaymes screams, channelling more energy into his hand. “YOU DON’T KNOW!” He roars, blasting a bolt towards Jaune, the impact blasts him off his feet and he crashes down into the ground. He swings his tomahawks towards Jaune and one of them stabs straight into his shoulder, Jaune screams in agony as it breaks clean through his aura.

Pyrrha’s eyes widen with horror as Jaymes swings him round and smashes him right into the fountain. The concrete cracks upon contact and he groans, pressing his hand to the wound as Jaymes walks towards him with a vicious look in his eyes. He raises his hand up and the lasso of lightning carries the tomahawk down towards him, until suddenly a voice yells from behind him. “Jaymes!” Peony screams, sprinting towards her Team Leader, she slashes her two swords across his legs and he grunts, falling to one knee as his weak aura continues to keep him protected.

She swiftly rises back up and she slashes the other sword towards him, stopping one of the Tomahawks, but he catches her and kicks her right in the chest, knocking her to the ground with a growl. But as he turns, he sees Neptune sprinting and jumping, bouncing off Schnee Glyphs that form before him, bouncing up and across them towards Jaymes. He jumps up in the air and rides another floating Glyph, firing his rifle right at Jaymes, hitting him in the head so then it can stun him.

Neptune jumps down, and he aims his rifle right at him, ready to change forms if he must. Pyrrha groans, slowly getting back up with her eyes focusing on Jaune but then she cries out in pain from her throbbing pain in her ankle returning…it still has not fully healed from her fight against Cinder. And yet she still managed to put up one hell of a good fight against Jaymes.

But luckily the cavalry is here, and Weiss rides another Glyph towards them with Blake beside her,
sprinting at great speed. Blake throws her grappling hook and she swings round one of the
colonnades towards Jaymes. He turns and gets kicked right in the chest from Blake, hitting him
hard, so hard it knocks him to the ground. He growls with anger as Peony swings her sword at him,
slashing across his aura, but then he catches the second swing, glaring at her.

Unable to even recognise her. “Jaymes! It’s us! Ignore the demons in your head!” She yells, only
for him to roar with rage, wrapping more lightning whips around her body so then he can swing
Peony round and throw her straight through a Colonnade Pillar. The whole pillar collapses down to
the ground with dust everywhere. But Peony glares at him with gritted teeth, sprinting towards
him.

Weiss casts more Glyphs but these ones are very different, black glyphs that form around his
wrists, making it impossible for him to form his lightning whips again. He growls in anger, and
they can all hear the voices panicking. “They are trying to take us from you again! Don’t let them
take us!”

Blake wraps her grappling hook around Jaymes and she uses it to hold him down whilst Pyrrha
finally can use her polarity on his Gauntlets. She holds out his arms, keeping him restrained whilst
Jaune, despite being wounded holds onto one of his legs as best as he can. Peony transforms her
swords and they extend with a chain inside, wrapping them around one of his arms to hold him
down despite his struggles. Neptune grabs onto his other arm, holding on for dear life.

Weiss looks at Blake who strains behind Jaymes, who roars with anger as he tries to break free
from their hold. “Blake! The Syringe!” Weiss yells, so Blake nods to Neptune. He takes Gambol
Shroud and holds tight whilst Blake takes out the syringe and she extends the needle, looking at his
neck.

She stabs the needle into his neck and she plunges the drugs right into his system, and they can
hear the effects. “No! Don’t let us go! They’ll kill you! No! ARGHHH!” The demonic voices howl
through his crackling body, but then…they fade away completely…and Jaymes gasps, the
crackling receding from his entire body. He collapses to his knees with a groan and everyone
releases him, he looks around with terror, realising what is happening.

“Oh, gods no…what have I done? Oh gods…” He whimpers…none of what just happened has
been recollected in his memory. He still twitches and scratches at fake itches, just as Oobleck said
he would. But this is definitely better than what he was just like. “Oh no…this is all my fault!” He
whimpers, burying his face in his hands.

“No, it wasn’t, Jaymes…we were wrong. It was Neo.” Weiss tells them, and Jaune looks up at her
with confusion.

“Neo?” Jaune asks.

“That girl you four fought? When you were tracking Roman?” Pyrrha questions with confusion.

But before they can even continue…

Blake hears her scroll vibrating, she pulls it out and her eyes widen…

It’s Sun.

She answers it and hears his voice.

“They’re coming! The Grimm are here!”
Yang

The day they left her house…

Yang stares at her bike…

…and she clenches her metal hand into a fist with narrowed eyes. But little did she know that Taiyang is standing right behind her with his arms crossed, looking at her. “I never said that you were ready.” He says with her with a grin, and that makes the young Xiao Long Boxer grin.

“Oh yeah?” She asks him. “Gonna try to stop me?”

Taiyang chuckles, rubbing his still aching arm. “No, I’m still too sore after our last fight. I’m an old man after all.” He winks with a smile, and Yang approaches Bumblebee, sliding her new metal fingers across its metal skin. She truly feels like she has become a part of her beloved bike… especially with the new paintjob she gave her cybernetic arm. “I just…I just want to know something.”

Yang turns and looks at him.

“What?”

“Are you ready?” Taiyang asks her.

She looks at herself in the mirror, in her new outfit she has put together. She is wearing a tan jacket with orange lining and gold edging, unzipped halfway to show an orange crop top. The coat has darker brown short sleeves, a thick collar that completely encircles her neck, and two long gold-trimmed rectangular tails which are also detachable. She also wears fitted black pants, and her hair has been let down again like her original outfit.

Around her hips and over the tails of her coat is a brown belt, which has two pieces of dark brown material trimmed in gold attached to it. The first covers from her left hip to the back of the belt and is folded over the belt, and the second is attached from the right hip and almost around to the other piece of material. She wears knee high brown boots with gold caps on the heel and toe, with the heel cap attaching to a gold strap across the front of her ankle, and a gold zipper on the upper half of the front of the boots. A single small buckled strap is on the upper outside of her boots, and a purple bandana tied around her left knee. A pair of black fingerless gloves with long brown cuffs reaching to mid forearm complete the outfit.

She clenches her metal hand into a fist. “I’m ready…and I’m gonna be there for my sister. I’m done hiding.” Yang states with confidence.

Taiyang smiles proudly. “That’s my girl.”

Little does she know today…

That Beacon is under siege…

And Ruby is in great danger.
Sun

His blue irises stare towards the coming destruction, hundreds of thousands of Grimm just sprinting towards the fences. The Beowulves slam their bodies against the chain linked fences, biting and clawing their way through. Sun and Ren’s eyes widen as they prepare themselves, looking around and realising that they are the only people here. And that the Grimm are attacking all the fences all at once, practically throwing themselves against the fences. Ren’s eyes focus onto the ground as he notices the ground rippling and rupturing from something tunnelling its way underneath the buildings and fences.

The ground explodes, and they see the Creeps bursting up from beneath them, roaring monstrously as they stand there, pacing back and forth before sprinting right at the two Huntsmen again. “What the hell’s happened? What do we do?” Sun panics as he draws Ruyi Jingu Bang, spinning the staff through his fingers, and Ren narrows his eyes, pulling Stormflower from his holsters, aiming them at the attacking Grimm.

“I don’t know, but you and I are the only things standing between the Grimm and the civilians behind us. It’s not enough but if we can hold them off long enough for help to arrive then that is what we do!” Ren tells him, but their eyes widen when they hear the deep roar of the Shadow of Broken Promises moving over their heads. In the hope that it will offer them assistance, disappointment and a look of betrayal is all they are given as the huge vessel – still holding Eryka and Winter right now – starts moving away from the school.

And the Black Gallows are pulling out pretty much immediately, making Sun grit his teeth and scoff. “So much for defending the people. It’s up to us.” Sun agrees preparing himself and calming his heart down with steady breathing. The first of the Creeps jumps forward, biting down at Sun, but the Monkey Faunus spirals round and clatters the creature across its armoured face with the staff. It grunts and snarls, staggering aside, only for Sun to beat the head with a hard-downward strike, and he disengages the locking mechanism in the chains, so then he can fire the Gun-Chucks into the soft spot in its head. The Creep evaporates away into ashes in the wind, but they keep coming, the chain linked fence is doing its best to buy them time, but bigger Grimm are coming.

They can hear the trumpeting howls of the massive Goliaths approaching as they topple down the trees with every step that they take. Sun gasps, because a Creep jumps at him and bites down onto his Bo-Staff, bringing him down to one knee, viciously trying to rip the metal weapon from his grasp. Ren tackles the creature, stabbing both blades on his green pistols into the side of its head, one right through the eye and breaking its neck with a fast twist, killing it swiftly. Ren pulls Sun back up and fires Stormflower at another Creep that just made its way through the fences. They just keep coming as the other Grimm slash against the chains that block them from all that terrified food inside.

Ren rolls across the back of one of the Creatures of Grimm, a larger version of the Creep which is most likely a Creep Major. As he rolls across its back Sun strikes with his Bo-Staff, recoiling the creature into the firepower of his duel pistols. The green projectiles shred through the armour plating and it staggers with a roar, black smoke bleeding from the wound. It roars at Sun as it jumps up and buries its head into the ground, digging towards him as it turns over the dirt beneath all the concrete. As it bursts out it slashes the long tail at Sun, but he stops the attack with the
spinning defence of Ruyi Jingu Bang. He steps back, pummelling the creature back with every fast swing he makes with the staff, then he unlocks the chains once more, spinning them quickly as he batter it with shotgun blasts bursting out from the smaller barrels. The shrapnel digs deep into the softer glowing red tissue within, and to finish it off he jumps in the air and kicks downwards, slamming its head straight through a spike of rebar sticking up from all the rubble that surrounds them.

Ren watches every step that he makes as the other Creep runs across the chunks of concrete that litters the ground, biting down at him. “Mind your step!” Ren calls out, practically bouncing across the destroyed terrain, much like the mountains he and Nora must have fled to after the destruction of Kuroyuri. The Creep lunges for him with a bellow, only to slip and fall, impaling its own neck onto a piece of rebar that protrudes from out of the ground. Ren rolls across the ground and throws one of his Stormflower Pistols towards a Creep, the blade digs into its shoulder and it snarls as it staggers. Ren sprinys back towards it, jumping and catching onto the pistol wedged into the plates of bony armour that surround its head. He twists it and pops a plate of armour from its body, creating a screech of pain from it, making it stumble as the black fog pours from the wound. He stands atop the armour and presses the barrels against the soft tissue he broke into, firing both pistols into its head to kill it as quickly as he can, blowing a hole in the side of its head effectively.

The Creep collapses to the ground with a heavy groan before it disintegrates away, and he holds his pistols up, standing back-to-back with Sun as they stare at the other Creeps that burst up from the ground before, walking across the rubble with snarls. Sun and Ren both keep their eyes on the Creatures of Grimm that surround them, viciously growling with saliva drooling from their partially open mouths. “What the hell are Creeps even doing up here? They’re subterranean…” Ren comments with confusion, bringing up a good point – the Creeps should not be up here, and they should’ve never been up here when they attacked last time. They are blind, armour plating covers their eyes, they focus on vibrations and their hearing.

“I dunno, man…this is bad...just like last time. They are attacking with intelligence. I’ve seen individual Grimm fight like that but not entire hordes like this.” Sun states as they wait for the Creeps to make their move. Hearing the snarling sounds that they make, it is easy to tell when a Creature of Grim is about to attack because it makes a snarling sound just before it does it. Just like when a person grimaces before making their first move. The Grimm are no exception of this, but they have extreme numbers on their side.

Ren listens carefully, practically blocking the rest of the world out, even Sun questioning things as he stands there. “Where the hell are the Gallows? The Atlesians and their defences? They should be online…” Sun stammers but his voice fades away from Ren’s focus, waiting for one of the Creeps to make their move.

The faint growl from one is all the hint they needed.

He focuses and they all attack at once with combined roars, one of them jumping towards them both, in which Sun grits his teeth and swings his staff upwards. The impact knocks the creature backwards and flips it through the air, it crashes down into the ground and rolls across the rubble but gets back up. Ren grips Stormflower tight, and the two Huntsmen stand close to one another as they attack the Creeps. One of the Creeps charges forward towards Ren but he rolls out the way and Sun jumps, performing an impressive backflip, firing his Gun-Chucks at the Creeps. The shells puncture deep into the armour plating and it staggers back, only for Sun to slam both his hands together with a smirk, and his Via Sun Forms glow bright, diving down towards the Creep, grabbing onto it and restraining it. Giving Ren the time he needs to make his attack, throwing
Stormflower and sending the blade deep into the skull of the creature.

Ren slides across the ground, thrusting his palm into the head of another Creep, using his well-trained aura to his full advantage. The pulse of energy from his soul blasts the creature back, he swings his leg round and kicks a chunk of rebar filled concrete towards the creature. It explodes against its head, throwing the rebar through its head, nearly killing it. The Creep staggers back and snarls with the black smoke trailing from its head, only for Ren hook his blade underneath the throat of the Creep, rolling over its back, and cutting a laceration into it’s jugular so deep that it nearly cuts its head off. The black smoke billows through the wound and it collapses with a pained roar.

The Monkey Faunus Huntsman rolls across the ground as he dodges the charge from one of the other Creeps and he roundhouse kicks the attacker in the head to stun it. Quickly he spins his Gun-Chucks round with great speed, firing them from time to time to wear its strength down. The Creep growls in fury as it bites at him again, only for Sun to connect Ruyi Bang and Jingu Bang together, and he spins it round so then he holds it straight and vertically. He jumps up in the air, gripping the Bo-Staff in both hands, and he stabs the staff straight through its head so hard that it erupts out the other side and blows the armoured skull from its cranium. The Creep roars in agony until it disintegrates away underneath him, ashes of smoke trailing away into the wind as he pulls his staff from the ground.

Ren blasts another in the head, finishing it off and it staggers onto the side. They both look at each other and nod…until they turn to the fence and their eyes widen as they hear the sound of the ground being tunnelled. Suddenly the ground explodes and a huge Deathstalker emerges and blows the fences apart, even throwing some of the Grimm outside it through the air. A couple Beowulves fall and impale themselves onto pieces of rebar that stick up from the piles of rubble. The Deathstalker lifts its huge pincers and screeches viciously as it snaps them over and over again, the stinger glowing bright yellow. “Oh, you’ve gotta be kidding me…” Sun whimpers as the Grimm start flooding into the destroyed district. In a moment of panic, he and Ren both retreat from the Black Smog, and Sun pulls his scroll out and Blake is at the top beneath his team.

He holds the scroll up to his ear as the Grimm howl behind them, smashing through buildings and sprinting after them. “Sun? Where are you?” Blake fearfully asks him, only to get Sun’s voice screaming right back.

“They’re coming! The Grimm are here!” Sun yells, only for the Deathstalker to stab its stinger into the pillar of a building and throws it straight at them, ripping it from the roof. The building collapses with a heavy bang, even crushing a couple Grimm in the process. The Deathstalker roars as it swings its tail and throws the pillar at the two Huntsmen. Ren’s eyes widen, and he tackles Sun to the ground to prevent him from being hit by it. His scroll falls onto the floor and slides to a stop, only to get crushed by the pillar.

Ren and Sun both look back at the Black Smog that charges into the Destroyed District of Vale, and they are breaking through the Chain Linked Fences everywhere, larger Grimm toppling them down. Then they watch the trees as Nevermores, Griffins and even the Manticores from Mistral – and a few Sphinxes glide across the night sky, roaring and bringing terror everywhere as they flood towards the city and the Academy. “The army…it’s bigger than last time…” Sun whimpers with terror, but Ren smacks Sun’s face to snap him out of it.

“Focus, Sun!” Ren yells, then he points at the Grimm that charge through and head towards them. “We need to stop them from getting into the city!”

“It’s just the two of us! How the hell can we stop that? We’ll be torn apart and barely even affect
them.” Sun states, but then they hear the roar of a monster in the distance growing louder and louder. Their eyes turn to something flying through the trees, its wings slicing them down like massive knives. The creature erupts through them, revealing itself to be a huge Sphinx, massive black feathered wings toppling over wings and snarling. But what really shocks them is what rides the entity, rising up and staring them down with glowing red Grimm eyes.

Floating metal comes together, held together by black smoke and crackling red energy within, just like that of a Geist. In its grasp it holds a long black sceptre, its eyes focused on Ren specifically as the Sphinx flies directly at them. The unknown being jumps off and dives straight for Ren, the Sphinx pulling away and heading towards the populated city. The entity slams straight into Ren, totally ignoring Sun and grabbing Ren by the throat, dragging him across the ground, and slamming him up against a building so hard it sends cracks across it.

“DID YOU THINK YOU WERE SAFE?” The Grimm yells at him, a dark and almost demonic voice erupting from the entity. The fact it can speak sends chills of terror straight through Ren as he sees the eyes glowing bright red, speaking full words and a sentence. Sun swiftly gets up and smashes his Bo-Staff across the side of the creature’s head so hard that it staggers from the impact and releases Ren to the floor, giving him time to gasp and breathe. Dark bruises pressed against his throat where the unknown form of Grimm attacked him, nearly crushing his windpipe. Sun roars as he jumps and slams his staff across the entity’s face again, more like a helmet in fact, made up of a thousand pieces of metal. The shards ripple but return back to where they should be, and it slashes its long Sceptre across Sun’s bare aura protected chest so hard it launches him back a few steps, and it brings its elbow back up into his jaw, before kicking him in the centre of the chest, which launches him through a building wall.

Sun groans, sitting forward to see the entity walking towards him. It must stand at least ten feet tall, made up solidly of metal, like the Giant Armour that Weiss had to fight but this thing is very different. The Giant Amour never said a word, this thing can speak, and it speaks again, the dark voice snarling almost ferally. “Your kind will not survive us this time, you will all die screaming!” The entity roars, but Ren picks up Storm Flower and he jumps up, stabbing them both into the entity’s back and making it stagger forward with a grunt, it stumbles forward as Ren fires the two pistols into its back to try and drive the Geist from it. Whatever kind this is, it must be extremely intelligent and ancient to speak full sentences like a normal person can.

The Geist reaches back and grabs Ren by his tail of hair and throws him straight into the ground, stabbing the ground where he was stood, but Ren rolls out of the way just in time. Ren looks around, wide-eyed as the Grimm are completely ignoring their presence, their entire existence. They are all splitting up equally, half of their army is storming into Vale and the rest is charging towards Beacon Academy. Ren gasps, ducking down just in time as the Geist swings the huge bladed sceptre round and just misses his head by an inch, cutting some of his black hair off in the process. The Geist channels red lightning through the Sceptre and blasts it straight at Ren, hitting him in the chest and blowing him across the ground.

Ren groans in pain as he lays there.

“Ren!” Sun yells, sprinting through the building towards the huge Geist and he starts swinging the Gun-Chucks with great skill, yelling as he fires them at the same time, expensing shells all over the place. But with every shot he makes towards the Geist it takes that six-foot-long Sceptre and deflects every single one, backing up from the boy. Sun yells, connecting them back into Bo-Staff form but the Geist catches the staff in his hand then grabs him by the neck, picking him up with ease.

“Tell me where Jaune Arc is hiding.” The Geist snarls with savagery clear in its voice, and the
question shocks Sun with pure disbelief in his eyes, staring into its red eyes with confusion.

“What…the hell are you? Grimm can’t talk!” Sun stains but the Geist does not seem to share the patience, taking the Sceptre and pushing it slowly towards his chest.

“I can kill you right here and now…aura is like a bubble…and with enough time and force…it can be punctured.” The Geist snarls viciously at him, and Sun grits his teeth in pain as his aura begins to flicker around the tip of its Sceptre against his pecks. “One last time: Where is Jaune Arc?”

“Why the hell do you want him? Actually, never mind, here’s your answer.” Sun states, gathering up a ball of saliva in his mouth and spitting it into the armoured helmeted head of the entity.

“Then you have chosen your own fate.” The Geist snarls, until Ren jumps up and stabs one of his blades into the side of its head, the Geist roars in anger and pain, staggering back as it releases Sun to the floor and tries to grab onto Ren on its back. It reaches back and slams him down into the ground with great force, nearly shattering his aura from the single blow. The Geist growls, reaching down to pick up the Sceptre that it dropped, ripping Stormflower from its head. “May you find peace in the Afterlife.” The Geist snarls, until a fireball suddenly explodes against the Geist’s chest, knocking it back and sending it crashing straight through an abandoned car, crushing it with ease.

It gets back up and spins the Sceptre through its fingers, scraping the curved bladed edge across the ground, seeing the Students with their weapons starting to fight against some of the Grimm. But Port and Oobleck stand before the entity with angered expressions on their faces. “A Geist? Never knew they could talk.” Port chuckles.

“Neither did I. Sun, Ren? Are you okay?” Oobleck asks them as he holds his Thermos tightly.

“Still breathing…Professor they are getting to the city!” Sun warns.

“I am sending all the students there now to help the soldiers. Jaune and the other students still in the Academy will defend the grounds.” Port answers as he aims his Blunderbuss at the Geist that stands tall.

“Then we need to kill this thing.” Ren states as he gets back up with gritted teeth.

“Most peculiar. Been studying their kind all my life and I have never seen one that could speak before.” Oobleck comments, as if he is actually in awe by it.

“The Queen will have that sword, no matter the cost.” The Geist threatens, mentioning something they do not even understand. The teachers and students look at each other but they do not even think to ask. Because they know that from its stance it is not about to give them anything.

“Whatever it’s talking about, let’s make sure it never gets it.” Port states, sprinting towards it with the others.

Jaune

Unaware of this new form of Grimm – or at least a very old Geist that has learned how to speak – Jaune stares at the distance where the black smoke has now invaded into the Destroyed District, and some of it is headed both their way and towards the main city where people are right now.
Their screams can be heard all the way from over here at the Academy, the terror of the oncoming Black Smog is just fuelling their attack more and more. Jaune turns to see Team C.F.V.Y running over to them, excluding Velvet due to her being with Ruby right now.

“This is bad…the Black Smog are attacking.” Jaune comments with fear in his blue eyes, knowing that this is all going wrong. He grips his sword tight, also squeezing his wounded shoulder that thanks to his strong aura, it is now repairing the damage quickly. Jaune looks down to see Jaymes still on his knees, recovering from his outrage from his Schizophrenia, his hands shaking with terror as he hears the roars of all those Grimm in the distance.

“What do we do, Jaune?” Nora asks him, still rubbing her eyes from being woken up so early by the battle. “Where’s Ren?”

“He’s with Sun!” Blake gasps with terror as she presses her hands to her head, pacing back and forth with worry for her friend and the boy she has a strong crush for now. Nora stares at Blake with fear, her reaction is enough reason to instil concern in her heart for Ren’s safety.

“Where’s Sun?” Nora inquires wide eyed, and Blake points at the Destroyed Districts of Vale, and Nora’s eyes widen with horror.

“He’ll be fine, Nora. We’ve survived worse odds.” Pyrrha assures, but Cardin scoffs as he walks over to them, shaking his head.

“I dunno, Pyrrha. Last time we were lucky thanks to Ruby, but with her being in the condition she’s in right now I doubt we’ll –”

“What? What happened? Where is she?” Weiss fearfully asks her, and Neptune stares at Cardin with concern as well, stepping forward.

“I don’t know what happened, but she was on the ground, covered in blood – she was stabbed by this pink and brown-haired chick.” Cardin describes, Weiss and Blake stare at each other with total shock and disbelief on their faces.

“Neo…it is Neo…crap!” Weiss exclaims with terror, pressing her hands to her head as she paces back and forth.

“Velvet’s with her, getting her to Glynda at the moment. She must be in the tower by now…but…that girl, she got away from us. Tricky little thing.” Coco describes as she reloads her Chaingun she holds in one hand – Weiss stares up at the tower and narrows her blue eyes, tightening her grip on Myrtenaster.

“Okay…I’m going after her. I need to protect her, she’s my best friend.” Weiss states, and Blake walks forward.

“I’m coming too.” Blake states.

“No, go with them and help Sun and Ren. We need as many people on the field right now. And hopefully my sister will show up, Neptune’s too.” Weiss states, all of them completely unaware of their incarceration in the Shadow of Broken Promises that is trying to make an escape right now.

“That’s a good plan, Weiss. We split up. Half of us stays here at the Academy and the rest head to Vale.” Jaune suggests, then a familiar voice catches them off guard as he approaches, loading his pistol.

“Always had a good mind on you, Mr Arc.” Ironwood announces himself and they all turn to see
him, and Jaymes looks at him with fear in his eyes.

“Oh! General…sir this is…” He stammers.

“It’s fine, Jaune. No need for formalities between us. We are all the same rank here now.” Ironwood assures before turning his attention to Jaymes on his knees right now.

“I…I’m so…so sorry. This is all my fault…I didn’t…didn’t mean to.” Jaymes whimpers, terrified of his own actions, but Ironwood shakes his head and smiles, gently patting the young man’s shoulder.

“It’s not your fault. This was all part of someone’s diabolical plot. Someone had been sabotaging your medications, Jaymes. To make you crack.” Ironwood explains to him, and Jaymes’ eyes widen with disbelief, and Peony squeezes her eyes shut, looking at the General.

“I think we know who, sir.” Peony tells him.

“You do?” He asks them.

“There was this girl who worked for Torchwick, pink and brown-haired girl. Her name is Neo, she had a semblance to mask herself with illusions. Used it in combat too, we think she has been disguising herself as Rouge the past two days to personally tamper with his medications.” Blake explains, remembering back when they fought her on the highway, what Yang told them on the train and the battle Ruby had against Roman and Neo on his ship. “They were the ones who took control of your ship and the Atlesian Knights, sir.”

“Damn it…no wonder we never found her. If she could hide herself then she could have walked right past our soldiers.” Ironwood growls in anger.

“She’s trying to kill Ruby, sir. I need to help her.” Weiss begs him, Ironwood looks at her.

“Done, go Miss Schnee. If she has been injured, she will need all the help she can get.” Ironwood explains, and he turns to see the door from the tower opening and Glynda emerging with her hands covered in Ruby’s blood. Their eyes widen with terror and Weiss stops in her tracks, heart pounding a hundred times a second as she sees all the smudged blood covering her hands.

“No…please…” Weiss begs her.

“She’s alive and Velvet is by her side. I gave her the highest end drugs I had in the office, thanks to Ironwood. She should be up in half an hour…if nobody gets to her.” Glynda explains, and Weiss’ eyes widen.

“Did anyone pass you on the way up, Professor?” She asks her.

“One of the students I asked me to help get medicine for her.” Glynda answers, and Weiss’ eyes widen.

“Oh, gods no…” She whispers, running past Glynda and heading up the stairs. Glynda turns with widened eyes.

“What’s wrong?” Glynda inquires.

“Did Velvet tell you she was attacked?” Ironwood asks her.

“Yes, but she said her team had her under control.” Glyndapresumes.
“We nearly did, she got away.” Coco states as the rest of Team C.R.D.L arrive to Cardin’s side.

“She can disguise herself as different people too.” Blake adds with concern, seeing Weiss enter the tower and making her way up there. Glynda turns to go help her, realising she could have just let the Assassin go straight to Ruby. But Ironwood stops her, making her turn to face him.

“Glynda, we need you down here. Not up there... if it is this Neo girl – Weiss can handle her.” Ironwood states, and Glynda stammers as she looks at Ruby’s blood on her hands.

“My... Ruby... she needs...” She stammers, but Ironwood gently takes her and holds her shoulders, looking right into her eyes to calm her down. Her heart beating heavily and fast.

“She needs her friend... but you need to help us. Without your help this school... the city... it won’t stand a chance.” Ironwood states, looking back at the incoming horde of Grimm that are tearing their way through the world right now. Nothing is going to stop them – unless they bravely stand in their path and fight them tooth and nail until there are none of them left standing.

Glynda sighs, looking down at her belt where her Crop is attached, she pulls it from its clip and looks at it, purple energy coursing across it and she narrows her green eyes sternly. “You’re right... let’s push these bastards out of her home for good this time.” Glynda agrees, and Ironwood smiles.

“That’s better, there’s the Glynda I remember.” He chuckles, drawing his Revolver and flicking the chamber out so then he can load some fresh bullets into it, clenching his Cybernetic Hand into a fist.

“So, what do we do?” Jaune asks him, since he is the General, he would be the right man to ask for help in this kind of situation. They all look up as a huge Sphinx flies overhead, roaring deafeningly into the sky as it circles around the tower, with Manticores and Griffins following its calls.

“As you said, Mr Arc. We split up into two sections. One team secures Vale, makes sure the civilians get to the Evac Point at the Airport. We need to keep the fighting focused here on Beacon Soil.” Ironwood explains as he holds his pistol in his hand.

“And how do we keep them here?” Jaune asks him curiously. Ironwood stands there as he watches the Black Smog finally moving into the city, after all this time that black smoke no longer pollutes the forest. His eyes turn to the school and he sighs, turning back to Pyrrha and then he nods his head as an answer. He puts his fingers to his ear to contact someone.

“Winter... Winter do you copy?” He asks her, but nothing but static comes through, none of them aware that she and Eryka have been taken by Killian after they tried to uncover the truth of their being here. “Winter?”

They all look at him with concern. “Come on Winter... where are you?” He questions.

“Could the concentration of Grimm be scrambling comms?” Pyrrha asks him curiously.

“Possibly... but...” He stammers. “I have a possible idea, but it is incredibly risky.”

“James, we need all the time we can possibly give to the Valerians right now.” Glynda explains, pointing at the invading Grimm, that could be closing in on the innocents right now.

“We open the Vault beneath the school...” He suggests, and Pyrrha’s eyes widen with fear, and so
do Jaune’s. Both of them were there but this is the first time anyone else has ever seen that place. The placed Pyrrha had hoped she buried and forgotten, about the Fall Maiden and everything…but she never did. She just never wanted to talk about it.

“Huh? Vault? What are you talking about?” Blake questions.

“It’s…a long story.” Pyrrha states, and she gives Pyrrha a look of confusion.

“What? You know?” Nora questions, but Neptune sighs as Scarlet and David come running out with their weapons.

“It doesn’t matter! Sir…why is this Vault so important?” He asks him, and Ironwood looks at Glynda, as if he is asking her if he can tell them – they can be trusted after all. They are true Huntsmen to their very core.

She nods.

Ironwood sighs and he tells them all the truth, the truth about what lurks underneath the school. “The attack on the Academy a few weeks ago was not by chance, it was by motive. They were after something we have hidden underneath every single Academy. An Artefact…a Relic.” He begins to explain, and their eyes widen with confusion. “A Relic with such power that it could change the world, and the Grimm are drawn to it. The Grimm were indeed attacking the School, but their forces focused on the School alone when Ozpin opened the Vault for Pyrrha.” Ironwood explains, and Nora looks at Pyrrha.

“Huh?” She asks him.

“We had someone down there, a young girl named Amber…I cannot explain all of this right now – but she had immense power and Cinder was after that as well. But as soon as Ozpin opened that door, that Wyvern woke up and all the Grimm turned and headed straight for Beacon. All the M.E.C.Hs headed for Beacon as well. It was how the whole city did not get wiped out and only that one District.” Ironwood explains, and they all look stunned and desperate for answers.

He sighs, massaging his brow. “I promise…we will explain this all to you if we survive this. You have a right to know now…you have proven your worth. But we need to keep them from the people of Vale. And opening that Vault is the only way to do it.”

Jaune stands there, and the very subject makes his skin crawl, he looks at Jaymes, and even he begins to rise, pulling his Tomahawks back to his hands with his lightning, nodding to Jaune now. “I’m with you, Jaune.” Jaymes assures and looks at Pyrrha. “And you…Pyrrha.”

“Okay…do whatever it is you have to do.” Jaune states. “We will hold off the Grimm already here. Blake, take Peony, Nora S.S.S.N and C.R.D.L with you. The rest of us hold them here.” Jaune explains to them as he draws his sword.

“When I open the Vault…well…I will contact you through Scroll. When I do…run. Get back to the school as fast as you can. The Grimm will turn fast, it will be like bait to them. Get back to the Courtyard with every Huntsman and Huntress you can. I will contact my men and order them to bring every weapon.” He explains. Then he stops and has a smile on his face. “We also came here to retrieve Atlesian Tech and Weapons from our fallen ships after the battle…I’m sure that if a few disappeared off the list the Government wouldn’t mind.” He states with a smile, turning and walking towards the Tower where the elevator resides to get to the Vault.

Jaune exhales, mustering his bravery, looking at Nora and smiles. “Good luck everyone.”
“You too, hopefully see you in a bit.” Blake assures, running ahead with C.R.D.L, S.S.S.N, Nora and Peony. Jaune looks at Pyrrha and he walks back and forth, with Jaymes standing beside them and Glynda with her Crop at the ready.

“Alright everyone… we may have the easier job, less Grimm headed here now. But we still have our work cut out for us. It’s not gonna be easy, I won’t lie to you. But we survived an attack from these monsters before. And I’ll be damned if they’re gonna tear us down this time.” Jaune speaks with triumph in his voice. “But I know we can do this, we are Huntsmen, we are Huntresses. It doesn’t matter who we once were or the things we did – we are the protectors of Remnant. This day will either be remembered as the day Beacon was destroyed forever – or the day that Humans and Faunus worked together and tore the Grimm down one by one.” Jaune explains.

“We can do this, so long as we do it together. And make sure that they don’t take anyone else.” He states, remembering Penny, and poor Rouge who recently lost her life. Jaune gently lifts Pyrrha’s head with his thumb under her heart shaped chin so she looks into his eyes. “Anyone.” He repeats. Pyrrha smiles and she nods her head.

He turns and faces the incoming Grimm, Jaymes ignites the lightning across his body and his eyes glow – but now he is in full control. Glynda tightens her grip, and C.F.V.Y prepare their weapons as the monsters get closer and closer. Pyrrha raises Akoúo and aims Milo over her shield and Jaune lifts his shield and tightens his grip on Crocea Mors.

“This is the day we’ve been waiting for everyone. Let’s not disappoint them.” Jaune states, as he charges with them, all of them yelling with power.

And courage.

Blake

She is running out of time and she knows it, every second wasted could be a second where Sun could be killed. Or Ren or any innocent person – she will not let anyone else she loves to get hurt like Yang did or suffer the same fate as Penny and Rouge and Forrest. She holds Gambol Shroud in her hands as she sprints, her long locks of jet-black hair dancing behind her as she sprints, listening carefully as C.R.D.L, the rest of S.S.S.N, and Nora run alongside her. Her amber eyes widen when her feline senses detect something approaching, and she looks up with a gasp, seeing a Griffin diving down towards them, landing directly in front of them in the middle of the street. The creature roars viciously at them, the airborne Grimm are already attacking the populated centres, they need to get the Vault open as quickly as possible to prevent any further loss of life.

Blake throws her grappling hook and wraps it around the pole of a lamppost, swinging around the Griffin as Cardin jumps up in the air with a powerful bellow. He slams his mace downwards into the top of the Griffin’s skull so hard that it kills the beast instantly, thick black smoke erupting from its body as it collapses with a groan. He rolls off its body and keeps with her, turning the corner and their eyes widen when they see the Ancient Geist battling against the teachers, Sun and Ren. Sun spins his staff through his fingers to deflect the red energy blast the creature attacked them with, but it swiftly spins the Sceptre round and blocks the attack from Port’s axe. Sparks burst from the impact of steel on steel, and the Geist growls deeply at him. It kicks him square in the chest and slashes the sceptre upwards, throwing Sun up into the air in the process. The Geist retreats for a few seconds, jumping and bouncing off the buildings that surround it, stabbing the
Sceptre into the wall and swinging its ten-foot-tall body upwards, onto the roof of the building.

The Geist points the tip of its Sceptre directly at the new warriors that have arrived to help, and they all hear it speak in that terrifying demonic voice. “Burn their home to cinders.” The Geist growls its demand, and beneath it they see the Grimm charging towards them, a wide variety of them as well. Blake narrows her eyes as she grips her Katana tight, and rushes forward, helping Sun back up, checking him for wounds as the others battle against the Grimm. Nora does the same for Ren, checking if he is okay.

“Are you okay, Sun?” Blake worries, checking his chest for any wounds and he chuckles with a sarcastic smirk.

“If you keep at it, I will be.” He jokes, making her shyly smile, but then she looks into his eyes, holding both his hands.

“I’m sorry…I didn’t mean what I said…I was wrong. We fight together…we stay together.” She assures with a gentle smile, and her words warm his heart, and burns a fire within him he needed. She gently presses her forehead to his and closes her eyes, both of them ignoring the Grimm that attack. Sun smiles, looking back into her eyes.

“That’ll work.” He agrees, she pulls him back to his feet and they both turn to the Grimm, seeing Ren and Nora back up as well, nodding. “Let’s show these bastards what happens when you mess with our turf.” Sun states, looking at his team and nodding. Neptune extends his rifle into Trident Form and he sprints towards a Beowulf that lunges towards him. The blue haired Huntsman slides underneath the Creature of Grimm, and as he rises back up, he stabs the electrified fork into its spine, killing it instantly. The Beowulf roars in pain from the attack, and he rips it from the evaporating body, slashing the long weapon across the face of the second Beowulf behind him. It roars in anger as thick smoke trails from the scars, and he spins it through his fingers, letting it transform back into Rifle mode, lowering his goggles with a confident smirk.

He engages his semblance, and adrenaline flows through him, allowing him to move faster than normal and focus his senses thanks to the yellow goggles he wears. Time seems to slow down, as he marks each of the Grimm he has in his sights. The Beowulf, a Creep, a Boarbatusk and three other Beowulves. He pulls the trigger six times, firing six fast shells of dust into his targets, nailing all of them between the eyes and killing them all instantly. Neptune smirks as he rests his rifle on his shoulder, knowing he is so cool. He turns as an Ursa swings its huge paw at his head but Scarlet fires his grappling hook into its neck, swinging round and yanking it down towards him. The Ursa stumbles as the Pirate stabs it straight in the gut with his Cutlass.

It snarls in anger as the blade punctures straight through it, Scarlettwists it round and then rips it out, jumping in the air and aiming his Flintlock Pistol at its head, firing it and making it stumble from the shot. He swings round and throws the Cutlass and it moves blade first into the eye of the Ursa, killing it swiftly. The beast topplies to the ground with a defeated groan, Scarlet runs to its corpse as it fades away and pulls the sword from where it was lodged, deflecting the claws of a Beowulf, then cutting its hand from the wrist off, making it yelp in pain, but to die as he thrusts the blade into its heart. He crosses his other arm holding his Flintlock Pistol over his blade and fires it into the head of a Creep that was charging towards him, slowly pulling the blade from the dead Beowulf.

Sage jumps up in the air over him and slams his huge sword down into the ground so hard that cracks explode across the ground. An Ursa miss-steps and gets its leg caught into the fissure in the ground. He swings round and in that one move he beheads the huge Bear and also a Beowulf to his left, two heads fly through the air and land beside him. He holds up his sword to stop the attack
from the Deathstalker that thrusts the stinger towards him. The barb bounces off the blade and he
smirks at the creature, taking the sword and thrashing up upwards as it swings a Pincer at him,
cutting its arm off in one move. The huge Scorpion shrieks in agony from his powerful attack, and
as it lunges the stinger at him again, he takes the sword and slams it downwards, cutting the
glowing yellow barb clean off. Finally, he jumps up into the air, soaring over the Deathstalker and
he holds his sword above his head, plunging it downwards as he roars, stabbing it straight through
and pinning it into the ground.

He pulls the blade from its head and looks to his boyfriend who smirks. “I knew there was a reason
I loved you.” Scarlet chuckles, and Sage flicks his green hair.

“My smouldering good looks?” He asks him.

“No couldn’t have been that.” Scarlet cheekily responds as he fires his grappling hook, swinging
round and slamming both his feet into the chest of a Beowulf, knocking it down to the ground.
Sage chuckles, swinging the sword and cutting another Creep clean in two. A knife flies right past
him and Sage jolts, seeing Russel sprinting past as the blade stabs straight into the shoulder of the
snarling Beowulf behind him. He jumps at it and spins through the air like a sawblade, slicing
straight through the creature, cutting it clean in half in that single attack. He rolls past it and pulls
his other knife from its burning away cadaver. He looks at Sage and nods his head, Sage responds
with the same thing.

Russel looks ahead, seeing the King Taijitu rising its head up with a growl and he smirks, looking
at Dove who runs up and fights alongside him. They both charge towards the overgrown snake,
and they begin fighting the two heads. The Black Head thrusts towards Russel whilst the White
keeps its eyes on the flanking Dove. Russel crosses his blades over and blocks the Snake’s attack,
making it recoil backwards. It slams its head downwards at where he was stood, only for Russel to
jump up in the air and stab one blade into the side of its head, holding on as it writhes around. He
drag the blade down the side of its long serpentine body, dealing some impressive damage to it.

The White Head bites down at Dove but he slashes the sword across its snout, making the large
snake roar in pain from its wound that glows bright red within. The huge snake snarls in anger, and
thrusts forward to try and take him out, but he rolls out of the way, then stabs his sword into the
side of its long white scaled body. The Snake rises up with him holding on, and he slashes into the
throat and aims the sword into the wound, pulling the trigger and firing bullets through the two
blades, dealing immense damage into the weak tissue underneath the stronger scales. The Taijitu
hisses, twisting its long snake body round to try and get to him, but he jumps up in the air and
throws his sword up. He swings his foot over the hilt and kicks it down into the roof of its skull,
stabbing straight through and sending the White Head of the Taijitu crashing down to the ground.

Russel slides across the snake as he prepares to make his attack, holding both daggers tight before
blasting off and zooming straight for it. He stabs them both right through its eyes, making it roar in
pain as the world goes black for the snake, writhing its head around as it tries to shake the little
human off its body. He pushes his legs against the back of the creature’s neck, preparing for the
killing blow, firing the shells behind him and shifting the chambers of dust round into fire. The
flames ignite across his curved daggers and he spins through the air like a sawblade, horizontally to
behead the Taijitu, finally killing it completely.

Russel lands on his feet as the beheaded Taijitu Skull crashes to the ground behind him, blowing
the dust from the destroyed buildings everywhere, he rises up and looks back at its corpse as it
dissolves away into the black smoke. He nods to Dove and he nods back, flicking his sword
through his fingers.
Ahead of them are Cardin and Sky, battling against Boarbatusks and some Griffins that have decided to ferociously pick a fight with them. Cardin roars, swinging the mace over his head with one hand so hard that when the mace crashes into the ground it creates a cascade of explosive power that shatters the ground into the Creatures of Grimm. The shrapnel from the explosions shreds their bodies and he swings it upwards, taking out a Boarbatusk in one swing. He then brings it down onto the head of a Creep, crushing its skull instantly. Sky on the other hand battles against a couple of Griffins that have picked a fight against him.

Sky swings his Halberd upwards with great force, slicing straight through the beak of one of the large four-legged Griffins. They both roar with anger at him, and one of them jumps towards him, but he steps aside and slashes it across its side, making it collapse. It rolls across the ground but gets back up, snarling at him as it paces back and forth, extending its large black feathered wings as it roars at him, the tail arching over its back pointed at him with a long spike of bone protruding through the black pelt. Sky rolls out of the path of the other Griffin, jabbing it in the leg with his Halberd, making it squawk in pain. He jumps in the air and slams the weapon downwards into the neck of the creature, nearly beheading it, causing its head to dangle by loose sinew from its spine. The Griffin collapses with a groan, killed by the lethal attack from the Huntsman, and the other stares at him with a growl, roaring as it charges towards him.

He steps aside and swings the Halberd across the front of its face, cutting the whole creature clean in half, finishing it off. He pants, looking back at Cardin as he grabs a Beowulf by the throat, lifting it off the floor as he takes his mace and crushes the head of a small Deathstalker with it, killing it instantly. He takes the Beowulf and with a powerful bellow he smashes its body down into the ground with all his might, then curb-stomping it with his huge leg, shattering its skull like glass.

They both nod at each other and they keep moving.

Nora screeches with power as she takes Magnhild, swinging it over her head and slamming it downwards into the ground where multiple Grimm, all of them pulverised by the pink shockwave of dust. She stands there with the Hammer in her grasp, swinging round and smashing it across the face of an Ursa. The large bear collapses to the ground, and Blake swings round and stabs her sword straight into the heart of a Beowulf. They all stand close, seeing more Grimm flooding in around them.

Blake looks up at the building where she can see the entity looking down at them with that Sceptre in its hand.

They have never seen a Grimm that could speak before.

But why is after Jaune?

Ruby

Atop the Tower in Ozpin’s Office, Velvet is with Ruby, her stomach has been bandaged up and the drug that Glynda gave her has been doing its work. Velvet has Ruby’s blood all over her hands after having to sew up the wounds and stop the bleeding with pressure, but luckily, she has started to stabilize. They both look out the window with terror, seeing the Grimm flooding the city and now beneath them in the school. They watch as they see Jaune, Pyrrha, Jaymes, Glynda and the rest of C.F.V.Y holding them off below. The constant roar of Coco’s Chaingun heard as a drone of fire
beneath them.

But as they wait, Velvet’s ear flicks up when she hears someone at the door, but Glynda is already down there and the student has not come back with the rest of the medical supplies. But from the sound of the blade being drawn, her eyes widen, and she turns to Ruby. “Take cover!” Velvet yells, then the doors bust open, and Neo thrusts forward straight for Ruby. Ruby cries out in pain as she throws her body off the bed and hides underneath it, Neo’s blade collides right into the holographic copy of Penny’s.

Neo stares straight into Velvet’s eyes with gritted teeth, and the timid Bunny Faunus holds her back. She may be sweet and seem vulnerable, but nobody lays a finger on her friends and gets away with it. Velvet slams her head into Neo’s face to get her back, forming more of Penny’s swords and she holds her hands out, ready to battle against her enemy in here. “Stay away from her.” Velvet demands, and Neo grins maniacally at her as she cracks her neck and jumps at her once more. Velvet swings all the swords at her and Neo shatters into shards of glass, deflecting the blades with her Umbrella. She steps back and dodges the many blades with great speed and skill, her pink and brown hair dashing in the wind from every movement she makes, kicking Neo in her leg to bring her down to one knee. She slashes her dagger right at Velvet’s throat but the Faunus cartwheels back to avoid it, managing to kick up Neo’s wrist to make her release the knife. Neo narrows her eyes and Velvet scowls at her. “Looks like you’re weaker than last time.” She deduces, since Neo’s speed is not as impressive as before. It must be linked to her semblance and aura. Neo grits her teeth as she sprints towards Velvet and spins through the air with her Umbrella in her grasp striking downwards with it to hit her in the head, but Velvet forms Myrtenaster and blasts a shockwave that deflects her attack, and she jumps upwards, kicking at Neo, but she still has skills up her sleeve. She dodges her kick and returns the favour with another once, kicking her hard. She slams into the glass and grunts, Neo blasts towards her with the blade in her Umbrella extended, only for a Black Glyph to catch onto her heel.

Her eyes widen with disbelief and she turns, seeing Weiss behind her with a scowl. “I don’t think so.” Weiss states as she points Myrtenaster at her. Neo narrows her eyes, but Weiss blasts a pulse of energy from her glyph that throws Neo across the office and she crashes against the wall. Weiss yells in anger as she attacks Neo, thrusting Myrtenaster towards her, and jabbing at her spine, only for her to shatter away, and her eyes widen. Neo suddenly wraps her legs around Weiss’ neck and throws her body down to the ground, launching Weiss into one of the pretty plants that Ozpin would like to have in his office. Weiss sighs as she pushes her hands against the floor. “I hate this girl.” She states, looking ahead at the cocky Neopolitan walking towards her with her Umbrella resting behind her neck, smirking away as she approaches.

But Velvet grabs Weiss’ hand and pulls her back up to her feet, and she nods to her. Both fighting to protect Ruby from the person attempting to kill her. Weiss glares at her and holds Myrtenaster tight. “Why are you trying to kill her? She’s done nothing to you!” Weiss yells at him, but Neo narrows her eyes in anger, then the shards of illusion form around her body, making her rise in height and even change gender. Her hair shortening and turning orange with a pair of green eyes staring them down and a hat atop her head, her Umbrella forming into Melodic Cudgel. Creating the illusion of Roman Torchwick.

Weiss now understands, but also knows that it was not Ruby’s fault. “She did not kill him, Neo.” Weiss states, then she speaks the cold truth as always. “Torchwick killed himself.”

The illusion suddenly shatters, and Neo erupts out, spinning through the air as she slashes her blade straight at Weiss with anger. Weiss blocks and parries her attack, kicking Velvet in the mouth to
make her stagger back. Weiss blocks every strike, then she pushes Myrtenaster forward and forms a powerful icy shockwave to push Neo back. Now it is her turn to deal some damage, jabbing her with her fencing skills, slashing across her strong pink aura as well. Neo rolls back and she glares straight at Ruby and grits her teeth. Neo sprints towards her, and jumps, grabbing onto Ruby and tackling her straight through the glass. Weiss’ eyes widen as she sees Ruby fall.

“RUBY!” Weiss shrieks, sprinting to the hole in the glass and jumping out immediately, not even hesitating. She dives down towards Neo and Ruby, seeing Neo punching Ruby in the face, but Ruby fighting as well. She grunts, swinging her fist right into Neo’s face and kicking her right in the chest. Weiss forms a Glyph behind her and she uses it to catapult herself towards Ruby, zooming straight past Neo. She catches Ruby and hugs her close, forming a Glyph that acts as a net, catching them before they hit the ground.

As Neo falls, she turns and sees a Nevermore flying towards her, she grits her teeth and stabs her Umbrella straight into its wing, causing it to fall with a shriek. As she falls, she jumps and slams into the ground, weakening her aura some more but not killing her. Neo presses her hands to the ground and looks at Ruby with gritted teeth, seeing Weiss checking her body, luckily the wounds have not ruptured. But Neo is still getting back up somehow, refusing to give in. Weiss gets up and stands before Ruby, protecting her best friend with her life. “I won’t let you hurt her.” Weiss states, and Neo grits her teeth as she walks towards her.

But then…

Suddenly a missile explodes into Neo, knocking her over with a grunt. Neo looks ahead and her eyes widen, and so do Ruby’s and Weiss’. Jaune, Pyrrha and the others turn as well, the explosion causing them to realise they fell from the tower. Then they see the smoke clearing and someone emerging.

Long glowing blonde hair and stern lilac eyes staring directly into Neo’s, clenching her cybernetic fist and human one. “Get away from my sister.” Yang snarls, firing Ember Celica behind her and blasting straight towards Neo, punching her across the face with force. Neo slides back and dodges the second and swings at Yang, thinking she can beat her like last time. But she has learned thanks to her father and Pyrrha, dodging her strikes and returning with more to Neo, breaking the girl’s aura with every punch.

She swipes her leg under Neo’s legs, knocking her down and Neo’s eyes widen, seeing that metal fist arched back, glowing with black and yellow paint.

Yang smashes her fist with all her might, sending Neo crashing into the ground.

And finally…

Knocking her unconscious.

Yang pants, sighing with relief, and looks at Ruby and Weiss…smiling as she runs to them and wraps her arms around them. Velvet walks down the stairs and emerges, seeing them all standing there, and she smiles.

“You came back…” Ruby tearfully says with joy.

“Of course, little sis.” She assures with a soft voice.

“I’m not going anywhere.”
Ruby cries with joy in her beloved sister’s embrace, also holding Weiss close too. Jaune stands there with the others, the wave of Grimm that attacked has stopped for now, just in time as well so then they can have this touching reunion. Yang kisses Ruby on her forehead, holding her close, seeing the blood that covers her clothes after Neo stabbed her with her knife over and over again. If it were not for the equipment that Glynda used to stabilise her she would be dead right now. Glynda approaches with a smile, seeing Yang standing before them after all this time being missing, and Pyrrha smiles as well with her hand on her hip to see her back on her feet.

Jaymes stands with his Tomahawks in his hands and he looks down at the ground sadly, still feeling guilty for everything that has happened – even though he was just a tool being used by Killian to prove his point. As Jaymes stands there, he feels the hand of Peony gently rest on his shoulder and he sees her kind smile and he calms his pain. Both of them have lost a lot…a best friend…a cousin…but they are not stopping, they have not given up.

Coco smiles with her hand on her hip, seeing Velvet walking over to them and looking relieved to see that Ruby is okay – and stunned to see Yang again. None of them ever saw her arrive, they were too busy fighting, she must have snuck her way in to get past the attacking Grimm. “Are you alright, Ruby?” Yang asks her little sister, checking the bandage that has been wrapped around her body. Ruby winces in pain as she grabs her side, pressing one knee against the ground.

“Yeah…my…my aura is starting to fix me up again.” She admits, the crackling from the poison that affected her as ceased to cause her aura to malfunction has ceased. Now her vitals have stabilised, and she wipes the sweat from her head, venom no longer affecting her body. Ruby reaches down into her pocket and pulls out her scroll, selecting Crescent Rose and calling it. The locker roars across the sky and lands right in front of her, the door opening so then she can get it.

“Are you sure you can fight? You sustained a heavy hit.” Weiss advises nervously and Ruby smiles as she nods her head.

“Thanks to Glynda and Velvet, the stuff they gave me killed the venom, helped my aura rebuild.” Ruby states, although she still needs a minute to recover. But Ruby looks back up into her sister’s lilac eyes, happy to see her, happy does not even describe it well enough. Ecstatic perhaps, her heart filled with joyous butterflies, wrapping her arms around her big sister once more. She holds on tight, closing her eyes with a smile and Yang holds her close, caressing her black and red hair. “I missed you, Yang…” She sniffs, then she looks at her metal arm, seeing her wearing it now. “You’re arm.”

“Yeah…you know Dad, basically pestered me until I did.” She giggles with a smile, and Ruby giggles too.

“Sounds like dad.” She admits, nodding her head. Jaune walks over to Yang and he smiles.

“It’s good to see you back, Yang.” Jaune compliments as he approaches her, and she smiles, hugging him tight and smiling to Pyrrha, clearly able to see that they are both trying to be together again.
“I’d say it’s good to be back, Vomit Boy – but…what’s happening?” She asks them all as she looks around, seeing the destruction and the Black Smog invading the city and the Academy. Jaymes lowers his head with regret as he stands there, and for a few seconds they all attempt to hide the fact that Jaymes’ outburst was the cause of the panic. But Jaymes speaks up as he lifts his head, expecting full judgement from Yang.

“It was my fault.” Jaymes bravely tells her, and Yang looks at him, not recognising who he is yet, but as soon as he says his name it could possibly set her off. She raises a brow and looks at Jaune, pointing at Jaymes with her metal finger.

“Who’s the purple dude?” She asks him.

Jaune looks at Jaymes and he sighs, since he expects her reaction as well, so he looks at her and answers. “Jaymes Ickford.” He answers, and Yang’s expression turns from curiosity to anger, knowing of the stories of what he did to Pyrrha, bullying people and even hearing and some of the things he said to her sister. She clenches her fist and grits her teeth, taking a step forward, about to batter him into the ground.

“YOU! I HEARD ABOUT WHAT YOU DID, YOU LITTLE BRAT!” She yells in anger, but Jaune stops her with his arm, holding her back from the afraid very brave young man who just told her he is the one responsible for this mess. Jaune shakes his head to Yang, and he holds her still.

“We know what has been happening now…and it isn’t as simple as we thought.” Jaune states, and Yang looks at him and now shows the expression of confusion. Last they spoke about Jaymes he sounded like he was ready to cut his throat with Crocea Mors if he ever laid eyes on Pyrrha ever again.

“Huh?” She asks him, glancing back at the afraid boy standing behind him, by the shoulder of Pyrrha too who does not look concerned by his presence at all. If anything, she is checking their surroundings for any Grimm about to make a second attack. Glynda looks at Yang and then at Jaymes, shrugging her shoulders and mouthing the words – that’s just her way – to him.

Jaune looks back at Jaymes, and he nods, fine with him telling her about his condition now. At the end of the day maybe it would be best for people to know about it, perhaps that could have stopped this whole mess from being started in the first place. “He suffers with Paranoid Schizophrenia, he was scared of Pyrrha and when he gets scared, he gets angry. That was why he got mad at her that one time.” Jaune explains, and Yang looks up at Jaune with confusion and she lowers her fists and steps back, looking at Jaymes again. And now that she knows this it starts to show a bit better, the scratching of his skin and the tick in his movements.

“That…one time?” She asks, since she assumed, he bullied her every single day, but in fact he only targeted her once, and then they went at him for payback the second. Which caused the fight between him and Sun in the first place, and they were lucky that only a few Beowulves showed up, or else it could have been much worse.

“Yes…but everyone assumed it was every day. It wasn’t his fault...” Pyrrha agrees, also defending Jaymes in this case, something that he never expected her to do. “It was the condition…and Neo’s.” Pyrrha states as she looks at the unconscious girl on the ground, and Yang looks back at her. She sighs, closing her eyes and nodding her head, turning to face Jaymes and she walks towards him. He shrinks down – but what he didn’t see coming was for Yang to give him a hug. His eyes widen with total disbelief from that, his violet eyes looking at them with confusion and then at her long blonde hair.

“I’m sorry…I know what it’s like to be blamed for something you didn’t mean to do.” Yang states,
remembering what happened with Mercury. Jaymes slowly accepts her hug, hugging her in return, and when they break apart, she steps back and turns back to her sister who slowly gets back up, seeing Yatsuhashi giving her Crescent Rose. Yang stands in the middle of them all, seeing Glynda with a smile on her face. “After the amount of crap, you had to clean up thanks to me, I’m surprised you’re happy to see me, Miss.” Yang jokes, making Glynda chuckle.

“Don’t think you’re still not in detention for not doing your homework I set you three months ago.” She reminds, and Yang gasps with disbelief.

“Oh, come on, seriously?” She questions.

“Mhm.” Glynda nods her head with a smile, and Yang smiles in return – feeling like she is finally back at home, despite the Grimm attacking.

“It’s good to be back I guess.” Yang shrugs her shoulders, looking at Weiss and Ruby. But then she notices that her partner is not here, checking her surroundings for her cat-eared friend. But no matter how many times she looks for her she cannot find her. “Wait…where’s Blake?” She asks as she searches for her, and Ruby looks around too, not seeing her either, but Jaune knows.

“She went after Sun. She wanted to help you Ruby, but I told her she needed to go with the others and help Sun and Ren. It’s where Nora is too, and the rest of Team S.S.S.N. Cardin and his team are with them too. Keeping the Grimm from getting into the populated regions of the city.” Jaune explains, and Yang sighs with relief, and she also knows that they need to stay here and defend the grounds of the Academy.

The Grimm may not be here at this very moment but that does not mean that a second wave is incoming. She looks down at her Ember Celica Gauntlet, and the barrel that extends from the metal plates that hide them from the rest of the world. She thrusts her arms downwards and they activate, ready to battle. “Well…I’m done running.” Yang states as she nods to them all, and Ruby smiles with joy.

“There’s the Yang I remember.” She says with happiness. Ruby stands tall again, picking up her scythe and spinning it round with scowls in her eyes. She turns and sees the Atlesian Soldiers nearby.

Glynda points to the soldiers. “Take the girl to the cells, lock her up. Make sure she doesn’t get out. We’ll have plenty to ask her if we survive this.” Glynda orders, and the soldiers nod, one of them runs over to her unconscious body and lifts her over his shoulder, running off to the buildings left behind by the Black Gallows. Some of them are cells to hold any prisoners that they may find.

Jaune looks over his shoulder, hearing the howl of the Grimm approaching and a huge Sphinx banks round through the clouds, landing on top of the colonnades, roaring down at them with the long white snail headed tail arching over its back, hissing at them with its forked tongue extending. Ruby looks at Yang and Weiss and she nods her head to them. “Been a while.” Yang says to her with a wink.

“It has…” Ruby agrees.

“You sure you’re good?” Weiss asks her and Ruby cracks her neck and glares at the creature, her aura has repaired the wounds enough for her to fight now.

“Definitely.” She assures, and she looks over her shoulder to Team C.F.V.Y as they get their weapons ready, Jaymes and Peony do the same with Glynda at the head of them, her crop in her grasp and a scowl focused on the Grimm that come charging towards them. Some of them they
have never encountered until now, but as Yang said.

“We’re done running.” Yang repeats.

The Sphinx bellows at them, its huge Nevermore Wings stretching out before their very eyes, and the Grimm make their attack again. Jaune and Pyrrha stand back to back and they look lovingly into each other’s eyes, and they both run towards the Grimm with Ruby, Weiss and Yang. Weiss glides across the Courtyard Grounds on her Glyph formed. She thrusts forward with a triumphant yell, stabbing Myrtenaster straight into the chest of one of the Beowulves. The beast roars with pain from the impact of the long blade that stabs straight through its black hide, she twists the blade and ducks down to dodge the tail of a large Lizard-Like Grimm. It stands on its hind legs and roars with a hissing sound, spines covering its back and some of them shoot out like quills.

Ruby spins Crescent Rose through her fingers to cut the spines down before they could even hit her. The shards bounce and slide across the ground, and she fires the rifle behind her, riding the recoil towards the creature, slashing across its chest, making it stagger and snarl in anger. Black smoke pours from its wound and it blocks the next attack from Weiss with its armoured forearm. Weiss backflips away from the beast as it slashes at her, and as it goes to attack her again, Ruby jumps over its head, arching her weapon behind her back, spinning down towards it like a saw blade, slicing straight through its torso, cutting it clean in half. The monster roars in agony as the impact kills it instantly, black smoke pouring out from its back as it fades away and she lands down with her knee pressed against the floor.

Ruby looks up through her black and red hair that falls over her silver eyes, watching as Yang charges forward towards the Creatures of Grimm. Her skills never faded, they have actually improved, firing Ember Celica behind her body and sliding under the swing of an Ursa’s clawed paw. The beast roars in anger as it slams its huge fist down into the ground, blasting the dust across the floor, and Yang fires herself up above the beast, pulling her arm back and shooting back down into the back of its head. The Ursa roars in pain as it plummets back to the ground, cracking its head against the floor, cracks spreading across the floor. It slides along and as it gets back up, Yang punches straight through its head with all her might. She listens carefully, and lifts her metal fist, stopping the clawed slash from the Beowulf behind her, grabbing onto its wrist and twisting it round. She swipes her leg across its skinny ones and knocks it down to the ground, and as it falls – she thrusts her other fist down into its head, firing Ember Celica at the same time.

The beast is killed, and she rises up, staring ahead at the Grimm that charge towards them, and she raises her fists with narrowed eyes. Ruby smirks and Weiss nods to her, forming multiple glyphs in the air for Ruby to run and jump across, bouncing towards the horde that is incoming. She takes aims her rifle at the Creeps and fires on occasion, nailing a couple of them before she jumps off and transforms her rifle back into Scythe Form. She spirals through the air after launching from one of Weiss’ Glyphs she conjured and slams her curved blade down into the heart of one of the creatures, killing it instantly. She gasps as a Boarbatusk begins to spin, rolling towards her at the speed of a bullet.

Until Weiss conjures a Glyph between its path and Ruby, stunning it as it collides into the magical aura fuelled symbol. It shatters when the beast crashes into it. The Boar rolls across the floor and grumbles, only for Weiss to dart towards it and stab it in the belly with Myrtenaster, dragging it across the ground. She twists round and throws it into a couple of smaller Beowulves. She gasps as the huge Sphinx stands on the rooftops of the Amphitheatre and the Dormitories, jumping off and landing down onto the courtyard now. It shrieks at her and the snake lunges towards her, but she pushes Myrtenaster upwards and forms a protective barrier that makes the creature recoil back.

The Sphinx snarls as it stands before her, but Coco blasts her huge Chaingun at the beast, shredding
some of its skin with the bullets but with a growl it extends its near bullet proof feathers to shield itself from her firepower. “Stay back from that thing, Weiss!” Coco advises as Fox cracks his neck and charges ahead, slashing one of his tonfas across the throat of one of the Beowulves that attacks him. He knees another Beowulf in the abdomen to make it flinch and she slams both her fists into its chest, the explosion of the punch shatters it like glass, and he walks through the smoke with a glare towards the others. Yatsuhashi stands beside him and nods as he draws his sword and they walk towards the attacking creatures. Some of them they have never actually seen before.

One of them appears to be a Grimm Wildebeest, in fact there are quite a few of them. With armoured heads and long horns that stick out its skull, it also has some armour on its back in places, but it still has weak spots just like the Boarbatusk so then it can move fast. The Grimm Wildebeest slams its head towards Yatsuhashi but with his sword he lets the horns crash right into the bronze blade, sparks burst out and a metallic twang echoes from it as well. The creature stumbles and groans, giving him to time to aim for its weakness he could swiftly spot – not only is the underside uncovered but there is a lack of armour around the neck, so it can move its head.

He roars, swinging the blade downwards with all his might into its neck, beheading it and the beast collapses to the ground, turning to smoke and ash as its artificial existence fades away into the wind. Yatsuhashi growls as he lifts his sword from the cracked courtyard ground. Velvet stares ahead at the attack and she gasps, seeing more of these creatures charging into the fray.

“One! Look out!” Velvet exclaims, naming the Wildebeest Grimm. Named Chargers for that is the primary attack, for they do not even bother with their jaws, they just knock their enemies over and ram them with their horns. Yatsuhashi gasps as one of the Chargers charges through the smoke and slams its head directly into his chest, throwing the massive Huntsman across the ground, tumbling and rolling across the floor. But he throws his sword into one of the pillars and he catches onto the hilt to stop himself from rolling any further and he growls. Swinging the sword round and stabbing it right through the head of one of the charging Grimm. And despite the Charger having so much armour, the blade breaks straight through the plates, and kills it instantly.

Yatsuhashi pushes the beast from the corpse and he looks ahead with widened eyes as he sees a Griffin flying directly at him and Velvet gasps when she sees it going for an attack. “Yatsu! Look out, Griffin!” Velvet screams and Yatsuhashi smirks as he tightens his grip on his sword as it flies towards him.

“I got this.” He assures, as he walks towards it, and then thrusts the blade forward and stabs it right through the mouth. The Shriek of the Griffin is instantly silenced, and its body keeps cutting through the blade, he falls to one knee and pushes the blade upwards, locking his arm in place as he keeps cutting through its body. Finally, the whole beast slices cleanly into two halves that crash into the ground before him, and he rises up with a sigh of relief, smoke trailing from his armour as he stands tall.

Velvet stares at him with total disbelief.

Now she stares ahead and narrows her eyes with anger towards the beasts that charge towards her, one of them being a Beowulf. She opens her box and summons the mace that Cardin uses – despite everything he did to her in the past she still took a snap of his weapon. She has also learned his fighting style too. She swings the mace upwards and breaks the head of the Beowulf apart, swinging round and throwing the weapon straight into the head of one of the Chargers, killing it instantly. She then summons a copy of Crescent Rose like she did when fighting the hacked into Paladins, and she fires towards them, spinning through the air and cutting multiple Grimm down in one fell swoop. She lands beside Ruby and they both look at each other – smiling with joy at their weapon choices.
Their moment is shattered when an Ursa Major goes to attack Velvet from behind, but Coco saves her with the machine gun fire of her personal Chaingun, blowing its head apart with the firepower she carries. The beast collapses to the ground with a bang, and she nods to Velvet, transforming the massive weapon into its much smaller counterpart. She kicks a Beowulf in the crotch and slams the bag downwards into the roof of its skull, before swinging round and knocking a Creep out of the air.

A monstrous roar however takes her attention off the smaller Grimm, and she sees it jumping down from the building, slamming both its fists against its chest as it whoops unnaturally. “What the hell is that?” Coco questions, but suddenly the lightning lassoed tomahawk wraps around its big muscular arm and stabs into the bicep. The beast roars in pain, staring at the owner, seeing Jaymes holding on with gritted teeth and it pulls him hard, almost launching him towards its teeth. Only for the lethal Huntsman to dodge as he corkscrew spins through the air and swings around its torso, wrapping the lightning whips around its large body. The electricity burns against its flesh as it staggers from the attack the boy dealt to the beast.

“It’s a Beringel! Don’t worry, Jaymes and I’ll handle this one!” Peony assures, slashing her Chainsword across the face of one of the attacking Griffins that lunges towards her, cutting its head from its shoulders, electrical dust crackling within the long rod that the razors are attached to. She flicks the blade and the rod shortens back into the hilt, allowing the sectioned blades to connect back into one. She sprints to her leader’s aid as the Beringel reaches back to grab onto him, throwing his body down into the ground with force. Jaymes tumbles across the floor and groans, pressing his hand against his head in pain, staring ahead to see his friend by his side. “Are you alright?” She asks him.

“Yeah, c’mon!” Jaymes orders, sprinting towards the beast as he pulls his tomahawks from its body, causing it to stumble from the action of yanking those weapons from its body. Peony jumps high in the air and slashes the sword across its face to make it stumble some more, as Jaymes takes his long lassos of lightning and he slashes his tomahawks across its body repeatedly, leaving long streaks of purple electricity in its wake. The Beringel roars in pain from every single attack, but as Peony goes to stab it with her sword, it catches her blade and snarls at her. She grins, extending the rod so then she can wrap it around the wrist of the beast. She throws her body downwards, cutting its hand clean from its arm, making it roar in agony from the pain of losing its arm.

Jaymes jumps up in the air and he throws both of his axes down into its chest, using them as anchors to pull his body in with the lassos. He kicks the beast in the chest in order to stagger it, and he nods to her as she bounces off the damaged ground, jumping up and wrapping the rod around its throat. She pulls down with all her might, and he takes his axes and jumps off, pulling it away from her with all his might, allowing the razors to cut clean through the black biomass with ease. The Beringel staggers and groans, its head falling from its shoulders and black smoke rising from its crumbling form as it collapses to the ground. “Well…that sure was a thing.” Peony chuckles and Jaymes softly chuckles too as he turns to the rest of the Grimm and readies himself. “Come on! Admit it.”

“Yeah it was cool.” He admits with a sigh.

Glynda glares through her glasses at the coming annihilation, tightening her grip on her crop as she approaches them. Her cape blows in the wind as she channels power through the weapon, and she swings it upwards, shattering the body of one of the Chargers with her almost magical abilities. It erupts into black smoke, extinguished immediately from her lethal attacks, and as she thrusts it forward, she casts a pulsating shockwave of purple energy that stuns a few of the creatures, throwing a Beowulf into a rod of steel sticking out from the ground. It roars in agony as it lays there, eventually dying on the place of which it was impaled.
She stares at the debris that is scattered across the place and she raises her crop upwards, using her telekinesis to lift it all up, spinning the chunks of destroyed concrete into the air as she stares them all down and then launches the debris past all her allies and friends, killing the horde of twenty different Grimm instantly. The debris shreds them, and they all fade away, she glares at the Sphinx as it swings its massive wings, appearing to retreat, but only by a small amount, watching them from the skies as it glides around the school.

Jaune pushes his shield forward, charging towards a Boarbatusk that charges towards him, and just as it is about to hit him, he smacks it across the face with the shield, causing it to fall past him. As it rolls across the ground, he digs his sword into its stomach and cuts it open like a bag. Smoke rises from its dissolving body and she ducks down to dodge the swing from the Beowulf that attacked him. He pushes the blade of Crocea Mors right up its ribcage, causing the beast to roar in agony from the feeling of a steel blade being run through its body like that. He slices upwards, cutting it clean in half, finishing it off.

He gasps when an Ursa suddenly swings the paw at his face, only for the polarity of Pyrrha wrapping around his shield and lifting his arm to protect him from its attack. He staggers after the impact and he swings across its other paw, cutting the paw from its arm. Pyrrha lifts a piece of rebar from a chunk of concrete, launching it straight through the bottom of the creature’s head, killing it instantly. Pyrrha rushes to Jaune’s side, throwing Akoúo hard towards the next Beowulf, but as she stands there her eyes widen, seeing the wave starting to retreat again.

“The hell?” Jaune questions, looking at Pyrrha with confusion, but as they look ahead, they can see Blake and the others retreating back to the school.

And stood at the head of where they were fighting…

…is that Ancient Geist.

Blake

Moments prior…

Blake crosses Gambol Shroud into an X shape to stop the bladed sceptre of the ten-foot-tall Ancient Geist that swings downwards at her head. The blade lodges between the two halves of her weapon, the scabbard and the katana blade hold its sceptre back with all her might, however the entity is not only much larger but also far superior in strength to Blake is. The Geist also makes little to no sound, which honestly makes it all the more terrifying, because most Grimm roar and growl all the time. But this thing is almost deafly silent until it speaks or needs to make a sound. The curved edge of the tip of the Sceptre pushes closer and closer towards her eye and she gasps, trying to keep it at bay.

Suddenly Cardin grabs onto its neck with his Mace, pulling it away from Blake and trying to slam it down to the ground, but just like Blake even his might is not enough to topple this titan. It is made of heavy chunks of steel after all, it may be hard to knock it down in the first place. The Entity staggers back and reaches back to Cardin on its spine, grabbing onto his head with its hand and throwing it over its shoulder and straight into the ground with force. The ground cracks from the impact of his muscle crashing down into it, sparks bursting from the contact of his armour against the tarmac. He rolls over and gasps, seeing the Geist spinning its huge Sceptre that is as long as he is tall, and stabs it downwards at where his head was.
Cardin rolls out the way just in time, causing the Geist to miss, so it swings the huge spear round and slashes it at his face, only for Cardin to block the attack with the mace. But the impact was still too much for the guy to stand again, for it throws him across the battlefield and crashing through a wall. He rolls across the ground and groans as the dust and silt from the shattered bricks slides off his body. Dove runs to his leader’s side and pulls him back up to his feet, all of them staring at the entity with shock at how strong it is. “How the hell are we meant to best this thing?” Cardin questions with a strained voice, seeing it standing in the middle of them.

It acts like a Knight or some kind of Praetorian Guard, like it is following the orders of its masters, attempting to retrieve something or protect the person who commands it.

Perhaps that is what this thing is…

A Praetorian Knight.

Blake stands beside Sun as they watch the Knight pacing back and forth with the Sceptre still in its hand. It still acts with honour, not attacking them when they are not ready, it wants them to fight with honour and die and honourable death, something no normal Grimm has been seeing doing before. Oobleck charges the fireball up in his thermos and he blasts a shot directly at the Praetorian Knight, but as it turns, its body suddenly shatters into a thousand pieces, the black smoke within holding all the pieces and allowing the explosive shot to fly straight through and explode into the building behind it. The shards of metal spiral round and it zooms around the area before coming back together, landing right back on the ground with the Sceptre still in its grasp, staring at them with that emotionless armoured face.

“That…that’s just cheating.” Sun complains with a shocked face, and Nora grits her teeth in anger as she glares at the entity with Magnhild in her grasp.

“Then we smash it to bits!” She yells, sprinting towards the entity, and Cardin does the same, hoping that it can’t take on two people at once. But now they all charge to attack it, because it must struggle against multiple warriors at once. Nora jumps up in the air with Magnhild held over her head as she slams it down towards it, but the Praetorian Knight spins the Sceptre round and blocks her strike, the impact being so powerful that it actually did blow the plates that hold the Sceptre together apart for a second. But the Geist smoke just pulls the pieces back together, allowing it to do the same to Cardin, and then it kicks Nora in the face, before charging some kind of pulse in its fist, and slamming it down into the ground.

A shockwave of red energy blasts them all away from it, and it backs up, holding the Sceptre in both hands, before tapping it down against the ground, backing up from the enemies. That is when they see the Grimm returning from the darkness, charging towards them, and the Praetorian Knight jumps upwards and lands on top of one of the buildings, staring down at them. This thing is definitely a leader, because it used the pulse to get them away, meaning it can be killed by them. But it needs to coordinate the Black Smog’s attack onto the students. “Yeah, that’s right, coward.” Sun challenges but Blake nudges his elbow with her own.

“Don’t jinx us, please.” She requests, and he nods his head.

“I take that back!” Sun calls up to the Praetorian Knight, and the entity just stares down at them as it grasps the Sceptre by both hands. It clearly does not want to fight them personally unless it must do so, it has its duty and it is doing it. Sun stares forward with Blake beside him as the Grimm come charging towards them, a Beowulf leaps towards him with a roar and he ducks down, and she shimmers away into a shadow. She appears behind the creature and throws her grappling hook into its spine, pulling herself towards it and kicking it in the back with both feet. It crashes into the ground with force, and she drags the blade of Gambol Shroud through the back of its head. The
Beowulf dies fast, and they all keep fighting.

The Praetorian Knight watches them from above but gets shot in the side of the head by a Student with his friends, aiming their weapons at it as they stand there. The Praetorian Knight slowly turns its head to face them and turns the Sceptre through its fingers, stepping forward. The huge metal and concrete combined chunks that comprise the body held together by powerful telekinetic black smoke shudders softly as it moves. The Praetorian jumps off the building, and lands right down in front of them, the pieces seeming to shatter and fall apart right in front of them. One of them scoffs, smiling to his friends as he looks at the Knight’s remains where it fell and totally failed.

“What a piece of crap!” He laughs, only for the Sceptre to suddenly form and protrude straight through his back, erupting out his ribcage and lifting him off the floor as it begins to form back into the Praetorian Knight. It holds him off the ground and lets his blood pour from his wound and to the floor as his friends’ whimper in terror as they watch him die. It throws his corpse from the Sceptre and walks towards them, swinging the Sceptre round as one of them screams in terror, trying to deflect the hit. However, these students are not fully trained, and also do not have the patience and skill that the others have toned.

The Knight swings the blunt end of his Sceptre upwards with great force that cracks against the chin of the student, knocking him to the ground. Another lunges forward with her axe, swinging it straight into the arm of the entity, only for the pieces to come apart around the axe and grab onto her handle. It rips it from her grasp, swinging round and burying it right into the top of her head, killing her instantly. Blood pours out from her head and brains as the Praetorian leaves her split skull and body to collapse to the ground so then the Grimm can feast upon it.

The Praetorian Knight ducks down to dodge the attack from a Student that jumps down at him from behind, going to stab it from the back of the head with his spear, yelling as he does it. The boy slams down in front of the Knight, and it grabs him by the neck, using its metal thumb to push and break his neck instantaneously. The crunching pop of the bone in his neck sends shivers down the remaining three students’ spines as they watch it drop his lifeless body to the ground. It channels red energy through the pieces of metal and debris that it has collected to form its body, for it is still a Geist at heart. It takes the Sceptre and swings round at great speed, the curved edge of the sceptre slices straight through his cheek and blood sprays out from his face, and as he staggers the Knight takes the blade of the Sceptre and shoves it down the back of his neck, killing him fast.

The Praetorian Knight may be evil but unlike the other Creatures of Grimm, although it does not seem to enjoy watching people suffer. So, it kills people as quickly and as painlessly as it possibly can, not only that way they do not suffer but it also does not mean that they can fight back. A quick death is both merciful and logical in combat. It takes its hand and forms the black smoke that it is comprised of, pulling a chunk of concrete towards its hand and throwing it into the chest of another student, before throwing the Sceptre into the exact same spot, pinning him to a destroyed building and killing him instantly.

The last is a woman, terrified and tries to crawl away from the Praetorian Knight as it holds out its hand and pulls the Sceptre from her friend’s corpse back to its hand. It walks towards her slowly and it bows its head to her, before seeing her weapon and pushing it over to her side. Giving her the chance to fight for her life, honour to the end. Tears pour from her scared eyes, she knows that if she will run it will kill her, so she grabs onto the sword and the Praetorian Knight readies itself as she picks up her blade. She shrieks, swinging the sword right at it.

Only for her blood to splatter and her scream to cease as it beheads her, breaking through the sword in one hard swing.
The Praetorian Knight bows its heads to the students, showing them great respect for their valiant efforts to try and destroy its form in combat. But they were not even close to being prepared to take this thing on, even trained Huntsmen and Huntresses are not fully capable of challenging a Praetorian Knight in the field.

The Praetorian Knight looks upon its works with despair, before turning away from their corpses and returning to the place of which it was commanding the forces of Grimm to attack.

Port swings his axe with all his might, roaring as it beheads the Beowulf which had lunged towards him, its skull flies through the air and he smirks, kicking it across the floor and sending it tumbling and bouncing right into the face of the Creep that was charging towards him. He just seems like he is enjoying this as he shoves the barrel of his blunderbuss right into the open jaws of the beast and pulls the trigger. The head quite literally pops like a balloon, black smoke everywhere and he waltzes through the smoke with a smile, swinging the axe over his head and burying it into the top of the creature’s head. The Charger which was about to ram him collapses pretty much instantly from the axe head that was buried into its head.

Oobleck spins through the air as he shoots past his testosterone fuelled friend, casting flames from the tip of his weapon. As he flies through the fiery cyclone burns the Grimm beneath him to ashes in the wind. He stops at an explosive boom, sliding across the ground as he swings his Thermos Staff round and smashes the skull of a Boarbatusk, breaking the armour and killing it instantly. He turns as a Deathstalker erupts from the ground in front of him and he glares at it, smirking as he ignites the Thermos and unleashes the fire upon the beast. The napalm sticks to its face and it staggers back as it shrieks, giving Blake the time to throw her grappling hook and wrap it around the tail of the monster, slashing her sword across the stinger and causing it to fall down and stab straight through the top of its head, killing it instantly.

Black flips through the air and plunges the blade down into the heart of a Beowulf, pinning it against the ground and ripping it from the fur. She raises her magnum and fires it at the others that attack them, hitting each Creep in the heart as they charge towards her. Nora fires her grenade launcher at the Ursa that snuck up behind her without her even realising, the pink explosion killing it before it could even bite her. Nora smiles to her Faunus friend and sprints towards the Griffin that glides towards her, cheering like a superhero as she smashes it down the top of its head, sending its corpse plummeting down to the ground at great speed. The Griffin eventually rolls to a halt and tries to attack, only for Nora to swing her hammer across the side of its face so hard that it kills it instantly.

As she lands though, a King Taijitu suddenly goes for the kill, until Sage grabs onto Nora’s hand and throws her up into the air, stopping the fangs with his sword. Nora whoops as she sails above the creature, and then she holds Magnhild over her head.

“SMAAAASH!” Nora cheers, crushing one of the Taijitu heads in one strike, killing that half instantly. The Black Skull turns and roars in pain, and lunges straight towards Sage. The huge member of Team S.S.S.N steps aside and swings his sword downwards with all his might at the perfect moment, beheading it and sending the head crashing to the ground at great speed. The skull disappears into smoke before their very eyes, and Cardin sprints alongside Scarlet David and Neptune. The Blue Haired Huntsman pulls his yellow goggles down and engages his semblance, adrenaline accelerating his movements to the point that time appears to slow down for him. He jumps in the air and targets multiple Grimm, hitting all of them in a row with his Dead-Eye Semblance.

The Grimm fall from the blue pulse rounds, turning to dust, and Cardin nods to Scarlet, grabbing onto him just as Sage did for Nora and throwing him as far as he can. Scarlet aims his grappling
hook attachment on his Flintlock Pistol and he fires it into a flagpole on one of the buildings, swinging round and drawing his sword, stabbing it straight into the chest of a flying Nevermore that was about to launch fatal feathers at them. The Nevermore shrieks in agony as he holds on, and he pushes his pistol against the underside of its jaw, pulling the trigger. The shrieks of the massive Corvid end with the gunshot, and he jumps from the beast as it crashes down into the district, killing a few Grimm in the process.

Scarlet lands and he rolls beside his boyfriend, standing back to back with Sage as they battle against the Grimm together, but they just keep coming. They seem to be endless and the massive ones have not even shown up yet. This is only the first wave of the beasts that are coming for them. They have not even seen one of the Goliaths, but they can hear their roars in the distance.

All the while…the Praetorian Knight watches their efforts against the forces of darkness.

Cardin roars, crushing the head of one of the Boarbatusks that charges towards him, and Sun suddenly saves him with a hard kick into the side of a Beowulf’s head, knocking it over. He swings his staff hard across its face, then detaches the Gun-Chucks, spinning them fast and hard, firing shells that dig deep into the corrupted biomass of the monsters that start swarming them. Blake fights alongside him, slashing their faces and legs from their bodies. Russel spins straight through the body of one of the Griffins that flies towards him, cutting its leg and wing from its body and grounding the creature. It roars in pain until Sky jumps off one of the buildings with his Halberd in his hands, stabbing it straight through the skull to finish it off.

The body crumbles away into smoke before them and he swings round and stops the attack from a Beowulf, scraping the Halberd across the claws and cutting its head from its shoulders with the swing. Dove fires his sword with gritted teeth as he yells, ducking down and stabbing the Beowulf through the neck, and they all back up as the Grimm keep charging towards them.

But as they stand there, they hear their scroll link to the Academy activate, with Ironwood’s voice coming through. And at the very same time, the Grimm seem to change their course of attack from the city, and they all turn to the Academy. The Praetorian Knight stands there, and slowly looks over its shoulder of metal and concrete, staring at the academy. “Everyone back to the academy! On the double!” Ironwood orders them, and they all look at each other and then at the Grimm.

Whatever he did, it has kept their focus away from the civilians. “Do it…go!” Blake yells, and just as she does the roars of the Goliaths suddenly get louder and Ren freezes when he hears another roar that sends chills down his spine. One he has not heard for a long time, but Nora grabs his hand and they both run to follow them. The Goliaths are here, and they have smashed the whole forest down to get here, with thousands more Grimm behind them.

Now they are no longer spread out.

They are heading for Beacon.

Eryka

“So…who’s idea was this again?” Winter asks as she sits in the cell, whilst Eryka prowls back and forth at the bars of their cell, trying to find a way out. Eryka groans with annoyance at Winter’s complete defeatist nature, rolling her eyes as she turns and stares at her partner trapped in her as well.
“Mine.” Eryka answers.

“Great plan this was.” Winter states.

“Hey, how was I to know that bastard can walk amongst the shadows?” She questions with confusion.

“There are better ways of outing someone than robbing them, Eryka.” Winter states with a heavy sigh, since she comes from a people and a family where everything was bought, not stolen. And Eryka gives her a stern glare, clenching her hand into a fist as she stares at her perfect blue eyes. She walks towards her and shows Eryka the faint scars on her face from her time living out there.

“See this, Winter?” She asks her, and Winter raises a brow. “When I ran from my family and took Neptune with me, I did what I had to…so then we could survive. I fought in rings, I stole from people. You? You were born in the Schnee Mansion with fifteen butlers!” Eryka argues with disgust at her, she has always shown some resentment for the Atlesians but really it is more jealousy of everything she had when she was younger and the little that she and her brother had.

“Actually, I was born in Atlas General.” Winter corrects, and Eryka narrows her eyes in anger.

“And I was born in the woods.” She states, and Winter looks at her with disbelief. “My mom only had my father with her, and he barely ever helped her because he is one of the weakest men I have ever met.” Eryka states, pointing down at the Schnee Specialist on the floor right now. “You can judge me on my past choices all you want, Schnee – but don’t ever think you’re better than me just because you came from a rich family.”

Winter stands up and stares her down. “I am not judging you of everything, I am just saying that maybe if we discussed the plan a bit more, we could have gained access to his information in a smarter way than we did.” Winter clarifies, trying to calm the situation down but it is clear that when Eryka is stressed she gets angry. And with her beloved Eagle in custody right now and been threatened to have his wings broken so he can never fly again, she is furious.

“What other way was available for us?” Eryka questions.

“I-I don’t know, but if we thought about it.” She stammers, but Eryka suddenly grabs her by her wrists and pins her against the bars, staring right at her. And as she does it, she glances at the guard stood down the hallway from them with a rifle in his hand. She leans over to her ear.

“Pretend I said something to piss you off…I have a plan.” Eryka whispers, and Winter quickly catches onto what she is up to now. She is not angry for the sake of being angry, she is playing a role here. To get the guard with the card to open their door attached to his belt, one she could get if he approaches them. Winter comes up with something and grits her teeth with fake anger.

“DON’T YOU SAY A WORD AGAINST MY SISTER!” Winter yells, headbutting Eryka and making her stagger back. Eryka groans and she grits her teeth, staring at her and swinging her fist straight at her face. Winter ducks down and punches her in her lower abdomen, then grabs her by her blue hair and pins her against the bars, holding her up against it.

“MAYBE SHE SHOULD BE LESS OF A BRAT!”

“WHY YOU LITTLE-”

As they play fight in the cage, the Stockholm Trooper walks towards them with his rifle in his hands, staring at them with confusion. “Will the two of you give it a break?” The Stockholm Trooper questions, only for Winter to punch Eryka in the stomach and Eryka wraps her arms
around her to act like she is wrestling with her, pulling at her white hair.

“I HATE YOUR HAIR!” Eryka growls in anger.

“AT LEAST I HAVE STYLE!” Winter yells back.

“AT LEAST I HAVE TITS!” Eryka replies almost childishly.

“YOU ARE A TIT!” Winter retorts, just as childishly.

The Stockholm Trooper slams his rifle against the cell door. “Shut it!” The Trooper yells, but Eryka suddenly turns with a smirk and grabs his collar and smashes his face against the door so hard it immediately knocks him out and he falls to the floor with a heavy thud. Or at least he would of if both she and Winter had not reached through and grabbed his body before it fell. They quietly lean his body against the side of the cell, and Winter reaches into his pocket and pulls the key-card from his pocket and slides it across the scanner on the door, unlocking it and opening the door for them.

They both step outside and they look around, Winter bends down and picks up the Stockholm Trooper’s Rifle, and some of his magazines. Her outfit choice at the moment might not be the best for rifles but it will have to do. She checks the current mag and it is still full, so she loads it back in. “Y’know…you’re kinda hot when you’re angry.” Eryka compliments, and Winter scoffs.

“Hell, you haven’t seen nothing yet.” Winter replies.

Eryka walks across the hallway and Winter follows her, trying to figure out where they are. She peers round, and they can see that there is an elevator there but no guards at the moment. They must be on break at the moment – perfect timing. “Let’s go.” Eryka whispers, moving quietly across the hallway and pressing her back against the wall and she looks at Winter. “And for the record…you’re not wrong. That plan did kinda go to shit.” She chuckles.

“To put it mildly…but now we have a chance to get back. We need to get to where they have our weapons. And Dulcis.” Winter states.

“I bet they will be in the same place, he counts as a weapon. I swear to all the gods I will butcher every last one of these bastards if they have hurt him.” She snarls in anger, clenching her fist, and Winter gently touches her shoulder to calm her down. Eryka looks at Winter and she nods her head.

“I doubt they would, that bird is one of the feistiest animals I have ever seen.” Winter chuckles.

“Just like me then.” She chuckles, they both keep moving and by the elevator there is a sign that labels the areas of the ship.

D.1 – Hanger Bay

D.2 – Engineering Deck, Cannons & Shells, Shields and Life Support

D.3 – Prison Deck, Confiscation Cell, Drone Manufacturing

D.4 – Armoury, Garrison, Medical Bay, Crew Quarters

D.5 – Shield Generator, Void Warp Core

D.6 – Bridge and Observation

Luckily, they are on the same deck as where their weapons and Dulcis must be held, but that also means there are other soldiers and most likely Drones around here. Eryka sighs, and looks at
Winter, nodding her head. “So…we get Dulcis and our weapons…then what?” Eryka asks Winter, since she is the strategist here.

“We take one of their ships in the Hanger and escape.” Winter answers.

“I’ve seen the Hangers from the ground. The doors are closed, we’ll need to open them somehow.” Eryka states, and Winter smirks, opening her palm and forming a Glyph, looking into Eryka’s blue eyes.

“I’ve got an idea.” She assures.

Then the P.A activates, and they hear the sinister voice of Nathaniel Killian speaking over the comms. “All hands, prepare for Void Warp Travel in thirty minutes.” Killian states, and they look at each other with shock.

“No time to lose, c’mon!” Eryka suggests.

Ironwood

His metal hand presses against the Vault moments before he made the call, seeing the doors opening up and revealing the dark green and repaired Vault underneath the school. The Relics hidden inside of many different kinds, weapons that could be used for destruction hither to undreamt of if held in the wrong hands. And at the very end of the hall is a sword in a stone, left there for years.

The Praetorian Knight was after a sword…

He sighs, and he holds up his Scroll to his ear and he makes the call as he gets back into the elevator now that the Vault has been opened. “Everyone back to the academy! On the double!” He orders as he stands inside of the elevator and he draws his Revolver from his holster, looking at the chrome and exhaling, wishing it could have been longer from when he last had to use this weapon. But the times are changing and as he said, there is a great war coming.

After some time waiting, the doors open, and he walks out of the C.C.T tower and approaches the students that are waiting outside, seeing Blake and the others retreating from Vale and returning to Beacon. And with them are many other students and Huntsmen who stayed, alongside Atlesian Soldiers that were not assassinated by Killian’s orders. “How many weapons do we have?” Ironwood asks Glynda as he emerges, seeing her approach him.

“Around 20. Are you sure these mortars will be enough?” She asks him, and he sighs, seeing the Huntsmen also getting ready to use them.

“I don’t know…I just hope we can hold this place long enough for our forces to get the civilians in Vale to safety.” Ironwood hopes.

“If they break through…she’ll be able to get to the Relics.” Glynda states.

“I know…but let’s make sure we don’t let them get into the Vault.” Ironwood says, and Glynda nods her head in agreement. Ironwood nods to the students, trusting them as he walks past them all, then he looks at the thousands of Grimm that are waiting around the school right now, all of them staring right into their eyes. And at the front of the Black Smog is the Praetorian Knight with its
Sceptre in its hand and pressed down against the ground.

“Sir?” Blake says to him as she looks back at the entity. Ironwood looks at her and then the Praetorian Knight.

“Yes, Blake?” He asks her.

“That thing…it can talk.” She tells him, and he looks back at the entity, seeing it staring straight at them. Ironwood sighs, and he walks towards it and Glynda follows.

“Wait, what’re you doing?” Sun questions.

“See what it wants.” Ironwood answers and Glynda stays beside him as she and he approach the Praetorian Knight. Their walk feels like it was miles long, but in fact it was only a few yards away from them. They stand before the army of Grimm, and the Praetorian Knight approaches with its huge Sceptre in its hand.

“You opened the Vault?” The Praetorian Knight asks him with its dark voice, and Ironwood chuckles, stunned that Salem has created another entity to surprise them.

“Remnant’s Rightful Queen will forge what she must to fix this world.” The Praetorian Knight states, and Glynda exhales.

“Why are you here? Do you coordinate them?” Glynda questions.

“I have been tasked by our Queen to retrieve the sword you have hidden underneath this Academy. Our Queen is not truly merciless – she has agreed to accept terms with you.” The Praetorian Knight states, the three of them talking of things that nobody else behind them even knows about. Ironwood stares at the entity and he answers.

“And what may these…terms…be?” He asks it.

“That you give up the Sword. Provide Salem with what she wants, and we will leave. Nobody else has to die, there is no further need for any bloodshed.” The Praetorian Knight states, and they both look at each other, then Ironwood looks back at the brave men and women ready to defend this school at all costs.

Ironwood stares it right in its eyes. “I’m afraid – we will be forced to decline your offer.” Ironwood tells it.

The Praetorian Knight bows its head with respect.

“Then bloodshed…it shall be.” It states, as it turns and walks away from them, and they both do the same, walking away from the Black Smog. They get all the way back, and not one Grimm attacked, showing the honour that the Praetorian Knight carries, allowing them to prepare before launching the attack.

“Did they surrender?” Jaune inquires.

“No, not exactly.” Ironwood answers and Jaune sighs.

“Of course not.”

The Praetorian Knight takes its Sceptre and slams its down into the ground twice, creating two loud
bangs. Then they watch, feeling their hearts beat harder and faster as the smoke of the Black Smog moves towards them and the quakes of their movement gets louder and louder.

Ironwood draws his Revolver, and aims at them, and everyone prepares. “Hold the Academy! Together!”
Time is drastically running out for Beacon, and they can hear the war that is beginning against the Creatures of Grimm beneath them. But the roars and the gunfire and explosions are just getting fainter and fainter the further away the Shadow of Broken Promises gets from the Academy. So, Winter and Eryka are both moving as fast as they possibly can, running down the hallways with their sleeves pushed up, ready to fight with their hands. Something they are going to need to do right about now.

They both slow down with widened eyes as a bunch of Stockholm Troopers sprint down the hallway and raise their fists, glaring right into their eyes with their fists held up. They stand in the tight hallway, waiting for them to make their move. Winter and Eryka look at each other and they both nod, knowing what to do. They may have no weapons, but they have both trained in the arts of war with their knuckles and legs. The body is still the greatest weapon of them all, because it is always with you.

The soldiers stand tall and their helmets fold over their heads, disguising their voices with the distorters built into the auditory speakers. They clench their armoured fists, they could almost certainly beat them down, but it all depends on their skill. Winter and Eryka look at each other and they both nod their heads with smirks. “Well, this isn’t fair…for them.” She says, and the squad of Stockholm Troopers charge forward and one of them swings his fist with all his might, but as the two Huntresses charge forward, they display their superior skills. Eryka ducks under her foe’s swing and punches him in his gut, causing him to stagger. It is clear that these soldiers did not have time to grab weapons, but that does not mean there will be any reinforcements without weapons coming as well. The soldier hunches forward from the impact of her fist to his chest, and she swings her leg round and slams the back of her heel into the side of his head.

As Eryka spins round in the tight corridor, Winter ducks down as well, just missing her leg, then she runs forward and jumps up, pressing her foot against the wall to jump higher, and as she comes down, she punches another soldier across the face, knocking him down to the ground. She slides across the metal floor and swipes her arm under the leg of the other, knocking him over beside his friend. She punches down into his helmet with all her might, cracking the glowing red visors that construct his helmet.

These soldiers are only the standard ranked infantrymen and even then, they are still quite tough for even skilled Huntresses to combat. They are named Raven Talons, and they fight with vicious precision. One of them grabs Winter by her white hair and swings her round, slamming her face into the wall with force. His voice distorted by the helmet, he growls as he forces her head into the white painted wall. Winter presses her hands against the wall, gritting her teeth in anger as she pushes her head away, feeling the metal plated hand of the soldier squeezing the back of her head. She slowly turns her head with anger, slamming her elbow into the mouth piece and cracking the fixed oxygen mask, meaning these guys must be used to fighting in hazardous locations as well. The black smoke shimmers across his body from underneath the armour, but as Winter swings her fist at his head he ducks down and punches her in the chest.

She slides across the floor and the soldier dashes towards her in a cloud of black smoke for a few seconds, just like how Ruby does but instead of petals it is some form of artificial smog. The
Raven Talon swings his fist right at her face, but she leans back at a total ninety degrees, her white hair falling behind her head as she kneels there, and the soldier moves past her. He swings again but she blocks his attack with her forearm, then jumps up and wraps her legs around his head, rolling downwards and throwing him towards another who came charging towards her, knocking him onto the floor as well. The armour scrapes across the floor and as soon as he goes to get up, she kicks him against his face extremely hard, cracking the visor and he grunts, rolling across the floor.

Eryka roars as she repeatedly punches a soldier in his sternum, throwing up to six well placed shots with her bare knuckles into his ribs. The Stockholm Trooper staggers back, when suddenly a sharp blade extends from his forearm, staring her down as he paces back and forth. She scoffs, cracking her neck at the unprofessional tenacity of the soldier to bring a blade to a fistfight. “Well that’s just cheating, asshole!” Eryka yells, and the soldier yells with his voice distorted with a metallic tone. He swings straight at her face and the blade crackles with electricity coursing across the blade. The blade growls as it swings right past her, and she pushes him aside, punching him in the side of the head, before swiping her leg across his. He falls to the ground and before making a fatal mistake he thrusts upwards to try and stab her in the leg.

Eryka jumps up in the air and presses her legs against the wall, boosting down towards another soldier, punching him in the face and performing a perfect backflip that sends her boot clattering up his jaw. The impact throws him back and he staggers away from her, before dashing forward and punching her in the face. She lands in the arms of the soldier with the blade, seeing the crackling blade moving towards her throat but she grabs onto the Raven Talon’s forearm, holding him back. Her sapphire eyes dance over to Winter, seeing her battling against three of the soldiers.

She ducks down from one of their fists as it caves into the wall and rips out the cables that damage the lights around them, causing them to flicker more. She then grabs the soldier by the face and pushes him away from her, before jumping in the air, flipping forward and slamming her foot downwards onto the top of the soldier’s head. He grunts, falling flat onto the floor, but he slowly begins to get back up, she gasps, catching the fist of another soldier in one hand and grabbing onto his whole forearm with the other. She twists his arm round and creates a popping sound inside of his arm, and he yells in anger and pain, and she throws him down to the floor after tripping him with her slender leg.

“Winter!” Eryka calls out, before grunting in pain as the Raven Talon that threw her punches her in the stomach over and over again, leaving nasty bruises on her underneath her shirt. She spits into his visor but takes a punch to the cheek, causing her to spit out blood. Her aura cannot withstand this level of combat for long because of how thin it is, meaning Winter is the one that can last the longest against these guys when it comes down to hand to hand. However, Eryka has learned how to take a hit without needing her Aura to protect her, and she has also learned how to fight dirty and with unpredictability.

Winter reaches her hand out, and the soldier with the fists suddenly sees a glyph form around his arms and he gasps, as Winter grits her teeth and sends a shockwave of energy into his body that throws him across the hallway, sliding to a stop. The shocked soldier stares at his friend, giving Eryka the chance to throw her head back into his helmet, then swing her arm round, knocking him back. Winter returns back to her partner’s back, standing back to back as the Stockholm Troopers get back up. They lift their fists and the soldier with the blade extended paces back and forth, the electricity still crackling away. “We don’t have time for this.” Winter tells her, knowing they have thirty minutes until Killian sends the Shadow of Broken Promises through a portal to gods know where.

“Then we need to show these thugs whose boss.” She says and Winter smirks, glancing back at
her.

“I like the way you think.” Winter says to her.

“That the only thing?” She flirtatiously inquires.

“Make it out of here alive? Ask me that again.” She says, then the soldiers charge forward, and they swing as well. Eryka slides under the legs of the soldier with the blade and she jumps up onto his back, pulling him back by his face. Whereas Winter pushes the punch from one of the soldiers aside and returns the blow with one of her own. She jumps and does a dropkick into the Raven Talon’s chest, knocking him down to the floor with force. He grunts as he crashes to the floor, but yet again rises back up, swinging his fists repeatedly at her. She backs up and pushes him into another soldier.

Eryka pushes her feet against the spine of the Raven Talon, making him stagger forward before she picks up a fire extinguisher and throws it straight at his face. He grunts, staggering back as she runs at him. She tackles him down to the floor, but he vanishes into a cloud of smoke, appearing behind her and pushing the blade down towards her. She gasps, rolling out of the way and crashing against the wall. She gets up fast, taking a punch to the face by another soldier, spitting blood into his visor to partially blind him. She swings round and smashes her hand into the side of his head with great force, making the Raven Talon fall to the floor but just like the others he refuses to stay down.

Winter on the other hand grabs a Talon by the head and throws her knee upwards into his visor, already cracked this shatters it and sends him falling to the floor, only for her to kick his head like a football, knocking one of them out finally. She staggers, both of them getting exhausted from the constant fighting, needing some time to recover, but they don’t have time, and are still standing. Meaning the fight is not over yet, and Winter moves towards another soldier that rushes her and goes to punch her in the face, only for the elder Schnee Sibling to jump up and spiral down and punch him in the head, also falling to the floor in the process. A Raven Talon suddenly gets up and roars as he blasts towards her in a cloud of smoke, grabbing Winter by the throat and dragging her across the floor before smashing her against the ground repeatedly.

“Get off her, asshole!” Eryka yells, as she takes the fire extinguisher she threw earlier and swings it against the side of his head with all her might. The metallic bang from the impact pushes him off the Specialist and Eryka ducks down from the next punch and brings the cannister upwards with both speed and force, throwing him up in the air. As he comes down, she smashes it downwards into the centre of the helmet, knocking this one out as well. She gasps, turning and throwing the extinguisher yet again towards the bladed Talon, but he cuts it clean in half, spraying ice-cold carbon dioxide everywhere. He sprints towards Eryka and thrusts the blade towards her and she catches it in her hands, using her aura to block the electricity, but before it could be broken, Winter jumps up and quickly finds the power source. She punches into it and rips the cables out, stopping the electricity from flowing any further.

Eryka grits her teeth together in pain as the blade cuts into her skin and flesh, causing blood to pour from the wounds and down the blade. But the soldier holds her there and viciously elbows Winter in the nose, giving her a nosebleed as she falls to the floor. The Raven Talon roars with fury, swinging round and throwing Eryka across the hallway. Winter smiles, casting another Glyph while on the floor as the Talon walks towards her to kill her. The glyph forms ahead of Eryka’s flight path and she presses her feet against it, abruptly being shot forward by the ability inside of it. She soars through the air and arches her fist back, and swings it forward with full force, punching the Talon in the head so hard it dents the metal and shatters his glowing red visor, knocking him to the ground and leaving him unconscious. Eryka tumbles past him and groans, looking at her
slashed open hands but her thin aura is starting to do the necessary repairs.

Winter rubs the blood from her nose, panting in exhaustion before spitting some of the blood from her mouth. Now there are only three of the Raven Talons left, and they are looking just as fatigued as they are. But they do not even seem afraid like most enemies would at this point, they just seem like they are emotionless robots now. Whatever Killian and the rest of the Black Gallows have fed into these prisoner’s minds…it has taken full control. But simply following orders should not have to be a killable offence unless left with no other option.

Winter glances at Eryka and she looks at her, both battered and bruised, but still standing. “You good?” Eryka inquires.

“Been…and looked…better.” She admits with a chuckle as some blood trickles from her nose.

“Just another day in the office.” Eryka replies.

“Yes!” Winter agrees, before she ducks down from the punch of the soldier that swings right at her head again. Eryka rushes forward and grabs one of the soldiers by his collar piece, punching his face three times before kicking him in the chest to knock him back. He staggers back and presses his hand against the wall, before charging forward and grabbing Eryka and slamming her up against the wall, throwing punches into her side a couple times. She grunts before kicking upwards into his crotch, creating a high-pitched squeal from the soldier. And Eryka finishes him off with a jump in the air, sending her boot down the top of his head, his face bouncing off the floor, knocking him out.

Eryka coughs, winded on the ground from landing on her back like that.

Winter on the other hand is still up and fighting, taking a punch to the cheek from one of the two she is fighting. As he swings at her again, she casts a glyph under her feet, sliding across the floor and swiping him off his feet. She jumps up and tackles the other onto the floor as she uses the same Glyph to blast her body towards him. As she grabs onto him, they both slide across the floor, and she stands on his chest, before kicking him in the side of the head with all her strength in her body. She staggers back and presses her back against the wall, panting with ragged breaths, seeing the last one getting back up, running over the unconscious bodies of his allies.

Winter blocks his punch with her forearm and then counters with a harder punch right to the side of his head, making him stagger back. She punches him again, and again, and again, before finally hitting him hard enough to knock him out, causing him to fall to the ground.

And Winter does the same, groaning as she pushes her hands against the floor, slowly getting back up, pressing her knee against the ground as she gets back up. She flicks her white hair over her eye and she sighs with relief now that they finally can recover from that fight. She presses her hand to her aching stomach where she got hit multiple times. She walks over to Eryka who has finally caught her breath again, breathing normally. She crouches down and helps her back to her feet.

“Y’know…when I said we were gonna get to know each other…I imagined more drinks.” Eryka admits as she gets up, both of them exhausted.

“Like I said…after this is over…I’ll buy you one.” She assures, smirking to her as they walk towards the Armoury. They both walk inside and see a man stood there, not looking in their direction and not wearing his helmet. He somehow did not hear all the commotion or simply thinks that they won the fight and are on their way back. As he stands there, checking over the rectory, Dulcis is in his cage. He double takes when he sees Eryka and is about to screech with his wings out with happiness. Until Eryka holds her finger up to her lip and gently shushes the bird. The Eagle looks at her with confusion, then looks at the soldier.
All Eryka has to do is take her hand and press her thumb against her four digits and open her hand a few times – telling him to scream. The Eagle looks at her and for a second looks like he smirks, then Dulcis looks at the man and does exactly that. He suddenly starts shrieking extremely loudly, causing the guard to jolt as he stares at the angry eagle that yells at him. He opens his wings inside of the cage as he squawks. The Guard grits his teeth, staring at the Eagle. “I swear to god, if you don’t shut the hell up, I promise you I will clip your wings.” He threatens, but Dulcis doesn’t listen, he just keeps screaming at him. “That’s it!” He yells, until suddenly Eryka’s hand smashes his head into the lockers with full force, causing them to rock in the process, and knocking him out immediately. She stands above the guard and scowls at him.

“Don’t ever threaten my baby.” Eryka snarls, walking away from his body and to the cage, trying to open it. “Don’t worry, honey…I’ll get you out.” Eryka assures, but the whistle from Winter gets her to turn. She throws a key to her, and Eryka catches it, and it fits into the lock. “Thanks.” She pants, flustered with worry for her Eagle. She lets him walk onto her arm and she checks his feathers and his wings.

“What’re you doing?” Winter asks her.

“Checking that they didn’t break his wings…no…no damage.” She sighs with relief, holding her beloved bird close, kissing the top of his head affectionately. The Eagle closes his eyes in her embrace, something that surprises Eryka. She might not know about birds as much as Eryka, but she knows a few things.

“I didn’t know Eagles cared for their owners like that.” She says to her.

“Most don’t, but Altum Eagles are different. These guys are way smarter and tend to travel in pairs for life. He sees me as his mother, you see. I imprinted on him, and for some reasons with Altum Eagles that is the best way to raise them. They need to trust you with all their heart. They tend to pair off with a mate for life…but trained the right way…and they will never leave their owner’s side.” She explains with a smile, seeing her bow and pouch of dead mice on the table where she would feed him.

Eryka scoffs, seeing the Eagle now staring at the bag. “But…he does love me for food as well. Don’t you, big baby?” Eryka coos as she tickles the top of his head, making him wiggle on her arm with excitement. Winter smiles, looking around as she searches for their weapons. She opens the lockers one at a time, finding some rifles, a pair of green sickles…and finally! Her sword, hidden inside of one of the lockers with her belt of dust shells. She sighs with relief, picking it up and loading one of the fire shells inside the hilt. Unlike Weiss’ revolving chamber, she can only fit a single shell into the hilt, however it works for her.

Eryka feeds Dulcis one of her dead rats she bought for him, and he swallows it whole, then looks up at her. She sighs, rolling her blue eyes and picking it up. “Just because I was worried about you.” She says, throwing it to him, and he catches it in his sharp beak, swallowing it whole. “Fatty.” She giggles as she picks up her bow that was leant against the side of the cage and finding her shells of telescopic arrows and attaching them back to the belt. She hangs her bow over her shoulders and Dulcis stands on her shoulder as she returns back to Winter’s side.

“Alright…what’s the plan, Wints?” She asks her curiously, and Winter smiles to her pet name. Like it or not, Eryka is beginning to grow on Winter…like a tumour.

“We need to get to the hanger, steal a ship and get down there. We have around fifteen minutes. Those goons didn’t help our escape plan much.” She states with a chuckle, and Eryka nods her head.
“I can find a ship and take it.” She tells her.

“Alright, I’ll handle the doors.” Winter states, since the Hanger Bay doors have massive armoured doors that close to prevent enemies from boarding. Eryka however looks at her with confusion.

“How? The controls will be heavily guarded. I know you’re a badass and all…but these guys don’t screw around.” She states.

“I’m not going for the controls.” Winter tells her as her aura repairs her wounds and returns to full strength.

“Huh?” Eryka questions.

Winter opens her palm, forming a small glyph. “I’ve got a plan.”

Pyrrha

The Praetorian Knight stares into their souls, almost collectively as it slowly walks towards the centre of the Academy where the circle of Huntsmen and Huntresses are defending it. Ironwood draws his Revolver and Glynda nods to him, and they both charge towards the Grimm at full speed. At their side are other elite warriors: Pyrrha Nikos, Jaymes Ickford, Professor Port, Doctor Oobleck and Yatsuhashi. Everyone else are holding the centre of the school with the weapons that were provided by the Atlesians after scavenging the wreckage of the ships that crashed after the Battle of Beacon.

From massive Mortar Cannons to brawling Machine Guns deployed and a Prototype Gauss Cannon, they are using the very best technology money can buy. Sun and Velvet both share a Mortar Cannon, loading a shell into it and turning the crank. Sun aims down the sights before firing it into the sky. The shell whistles above their heads and as it begins to fall, the roar suddenly silences with a pop, exploding in the air and raining smaller projectiles into the battlefield. The Grimm explode into tiny pieces beneath the raining hellfire, whilst thousands of fresh and superheated fire dust crystal bullets come spraying across the courtyard. Beowulves and Creeps feel their flesh be torn apart by the storm of bullets unleashed upon them.

A bullet bounces off the shoulder of the Praetorian Knight and it does not even flinch, it just stares at Ironwood who sprints at him. He moves incredibly fast, like a speeding car on the motorway and he jumps up in the air. He channels dust through his cybernetic arm and the Praetorian Knight readies itself as it backs up, spinning its Sceptre through the puddle on the ground, spraying molecules across the cobblestone. Ironwood pounds his fist down into the ground, blasting a powerful shockwave that knocks all the Grimm back. Ironwood glares at the monster and he fires his pistol at it repeatedly, but the Praetorian Knight spins its Sceptre through the floating metal and cobble fingers, cutting the bullets down before they can even reach its body. It immediately rushes forward and kicks him straight in the chest, knocking him backwards but as he tumbles, he lands back onto his feet, firing a shot that hits the Knight in the head. It recoils back and snarls, the armour hovering over the dark red energy inside of its skull.

The Praetorian Knight sprints towards the Headmaster of Atlas Academy and jumps up into the air, holding the Sceptre over its head and stabbing it down into the ground, creating a powerful red pulse of energy that blows him off his feet. But as he floats in the air, he spins and lands back on his feet, sprinting back at the titan. He slides underneath its legs as it stabs the sceptre downwards
at where his head was, and he fires the gun into the floating pieces of metal and it snarls, turning to face him. He swings the sceptre’s blunt end towards his head, but he catches it with his cybernetic hand, staring into its demented eyes, before pushing it aside and jumping towards its face, punching it straight in the forehead.

Pyrrha charges with full speed as a Mortar crashes fire down close to her, and she slides across the torn courtyard, throwing Akoúo towards a jumping Beowulf to knock it out of the sky. As she slides up to it the bullets from the machine guns firing at the epicentre shred straight through its flesh, killing it instantly. She pulls Akoúo back to her hand, and she also turns to see Ghira in the battlefield. He roars as he extends his Panther Claws through his hands and he jumps towards a Beowulf and digs them into its throat, slashing its head from its shoulders before rolling across the floor and slashing a Creep across its face, fighting alongside some other Huntsmen who agreed to help him. Fox and Russel in fact.

Pyrrha gasps, coming back to the world at large as she raises her shield and stops the Creep that just erupted through the ground and landed right behind her. It bites down onto her shield and tries to pull it from her hand, so instead with her Polarity, she launches it off, then as she extends Milo into its Spear Form, she pulls it back. The Creep roars with anger before silenced by the spearhead that punctures through its head and kills it instantly. It crumbles to dust in her hand and she holds Akoúo in her hand, looking around as she sees everyone fighting together.

Glynda jumps down and blasts a collection of purple energised shockwaves towards the Grimm, knocking them all down with force. She slides underneath the claws of an Ursa Major which roars at her, snarling as it runs around and goes to jump and crush her. She channels her arcane power and then thrusts her crop forward with gritted teeth, blasting not only the purple shell but also a collection of shards of rubble. The rubble stabs through its body and she rolls out of the way as it crashes to the ground before fading away. Glynda’s green eyes widen as she hears the roars of the Goliaths getting nearer, seeing them toppling over the buildings in the Destroyed Districts of Vale, their trumpeting howls echo for miles as they approach. But there are other monsters incoming as well. She narrows her eyes and pushes her glasses back up her nose as she stares the incoming monsters down, casting a spell of her semblance into the sky, forming a small storm that sends strikes of lightning forged from dust down into the charging Grimm. Beowulves and Boarbatusks roar in pain as they get struck by the forks of superheated light, killed quite swiftly too. She then rotates her Crop round and launches glowing purple spikes of energy towards the charging Grimm, killing them as they approach.

She stands tall as her cape blows in the wind, looking at Pyrrha and giving her a nod. She walks further to the attacking Grimm and Pyrrha narrows her eyes. She thrusts herself forward and jumps in the air, spinning gracefully before launching her shield towards the Grimm once more. It bounces off the head of a Charger, stunning it for a second until she slides across the floor and slices her Xiphos through its legs, and then catches her shield, slamming it down into the back of its head. The Beast collapses and fades away into ashes, more mortar fire comes crashing down into the battlefield. “Look out, Pyrrha or you’ll get your hair singed.” Yang warns, and Pyrrha catches on, turning to see Yang on the Battlefield now, in what appears to be an Atlesian Paladin. One that was not in the battle luckily, and it has what appear to be flame throwers.

She blasts the fire from the cannons into the monsters that attack, setting them all alight on napalm and the thick black smoke rises into the air as they cook away. The Beowulves cry out as they fade away, and Yang looks down at Pyrrha. “Go on, P-Money! I got this!” She assures as she continues to unleash her fury, laughing almost maniacally as she kills the Grimm one by one. Ruby on the other hand is up on the tower with her Sniper Rifle, picking Grimm off one at a time. She has a clear line of sight up here, taking each of them out with terrific precision. She fires at hits an Ursa right through the eye, managing to kill it quite literally – instantly.
She cheers with happiness, jumping up and thrusting her fist in the air. “Ruby!” Weiss yells on the mic.

“Sorry.” She replies.

Jaune watches the battle as he walks across the Defence Point where most of the fighters are right now. To be called in when needed, and until then will be using the weapons provided by the Kingdom of Atlas. For once are helping a great deal. Sage picks up his sword and kisses Scarlet lovingly before he charges out. Scarlet jumps up onto the Gauss Cannon and he aims down the sights, charging up a shot as he aims at a Beringel that battles against Yatsuhashi. The shell fires, ejecting out from the side, and the powerful bolt of energy shoots across the terrain, puncturing clean through the armour of the Beringel and killing it in a single shot. Yatsuhashi turns to Scarlet who salutes him, so Yatsuhashi raises his sword in the air.

The huge Warrior turns around and stares at the charging Beowulves and grips his sword tight, roaring as he swings round and slashes across the chest of the Alpha Beowulf that lead its pack, cutting it clean in half. He then catches another by the throat and lifts the beast off the floor before stabbing his sword downwards in between the shoulder blades of the third Beowulf, killing it instantly. Yatsuhashi roars with brutish fury as he rips its head from its shoulders with ease and drops its decaying body to the ground. He gasps when he sees Ironwood tumbling past him and then seeing the massive Praetorian Knight jumping down towards him to stab him in the heart with the Sceptre. It nearly does, until Yatsuhashi stops the tip of the Sceptre, scraping across the curved metal and then slashing it upwards across the face of the monster, knocking back, actually sending it flying. It falls towards the ground but flips through the air and sticks the landing, rising back up as it stares at the two of them.

“This thing is really pissing me off.” Ironwood growls as he clenches his fist, loading some fire dust into his knuckles.

“Want some help, General?” Yatsuhashi asks him as he holds his sword behind him, glaring the Knight down. Ironwood cracks his neck and smiles, because he has not had a good fight like this for a long time.

“Would be a pleasure, Mr Daichi.” Ironwood assures with a smirk, as the Praetorian Knight sprints towards them again, and they both charge towards it. Ironwood looks at Yatsuhashi and the large student already has a plan, he grabs onto Ironwood and swings him round as he charges his fist up. He throws the General towards the Praetorian Knight and Ironwood roars, sending a powerful hook right under its jaw, the shockwave rippling its body and blowing it back. It crashes to the ground and this time Ironwood lands on his feet, aiming his pistol at it as it rises back up. It spins the Sceptre through its fingers and aims it at them before darting towards them.

Pyrrha sees them fighting against the Praetorian Knight and she grits her teeth, turning to see her Mother and Father fighting back to back. Just like Ghira and Kali who has also appeared on the battlefield. She slashes the Grimm up with a pair of electrified daggers, jumping and rolling across the back of the Beowulf before slitting its throat. Ghira punches a Beringel in the head before tackling it to the ground, crushing its head with his huge hands. Pyrrha’s parents on the other hand have adopted the age-old Spartan Strategy, shields held up and using their spears to stab the Grimm that charge towards them. Juno smashes the shield across the face of the Boarbatusk that spins towards them, and as it slides across the floor on its back, she stabs down into its belly to kill it. Whereas her beloved husband takes his sword and swings it downwards, across the face of the Beowulf which attacks him. He then headbutts the other that attacks him. As it staggers back, he pushes forward and plunges his Xiphos into its chest, killing it instantly.
He draws his collapsible Spear on his belt and he extends it, the spearhead opening up and then he aims as a Nevermore shrieks as it flies straight towards them, about to launch Fatal Feathers. He roars, launching the spear towards it and it stabs straight through its heart. It swings the wings before falling to the ground with a world-shaking thud. The sharp feathers fall towards them and he turns to his wife. “Shield up!” He yells, they both hunker down and raise the shields above their heads, allowing the huge feathers to slide off their metal casings. The feathers land around them and her father sees the Spear in the ground where the Giant Nevermore crashed, the smoke fading away to reveal it. He pulls it from the ground and stabs it right through the head of another Beowulf that goes for the kill. The spear erupts out the other side of its head, killing it instantly as he rips it out, fading into smoke.

They have been fighting for years, like Ironwood they have probably missed having a good fight like this.

Pyrrha smiles and turns back to the Grimm behind her. She sees Jaymes fighting against a Deathstalker and she narrows her eyes, sprinting to his aid. He forms his lightning lassos, wrapping one of them around the pincers, swinging round and landing on its head. The Deathstalker roars as it moves around, trying to grab him. It goes to plunge the stinger down into his head, but she saves him, throwing her shield towards the stinger, causing it to stagger, He turns and sees her running to his aid, and he nods, jumping off its face and landing down before its four eyes. It roars at him as it slams the stinger down at him again, but he rolls backwards to avoid it, his lasso of energy pulling his tomahawk back into his hand. He holds them tight with gritted teeth, his purple hair crackling with his semblance in better control than it was before.

Pyrrha zooms forward and she uses her shield to deflect the incoming pincer, batting it aside and slashing her Xiphos form for Milo across its eye, causing it to roar in pain. It stumbles around a little as the deep cut blinds the one eye that she managed to hit with the blade of her sword. It snarls at her viciously, but then Jaymes looks at something that is very plausible, the stinger can be restrained by his lassos. “Pyrrha! Up!” Jaymes yells, remembering what he heard Jaune say during their fight against Team B.R.N.Z during the Vytal Festival. Pyrrha nods her head and she hold her shield above her head for him, and then blasting him up into the air.

He spins through the air and throws his tomahawk towards the arching tail of the Deathstalker, then attaching himself to it with his electrified lasso. He lands down and with all his might he yanks the tail downwards, splitting some of the armoured plates that surround the limb. He holds it down and the creature roars with anger, held in his grasp like this. It writhes around, trying to break free, then Pyrrha jumps up in the air and extends Milo into its spear form, throwing it down into the top of its head. Not plunging deep enough she turns to Jaymes. “Do it!” She says, and he is smart enough to know what she means.

Metal conducts electricity.

He extends his other arm and blasts purple and red lighting from his palm and connects it to the point of conduction, blasting it straight into the overgrown scorpion. It roars in pain as it cooks from the electricity that burns it alive from the inside out. Eventually it dies, burning and crumbling away. Jaymes and Pyrrha both pull their launched weapons back to their hands and they look at each other. “Good work.” Pyrrha compliments with the nod her head.

“You too.” He replies with a smile.

Across the battlefield, a swirling bellow of fire blasts towards the Creatures of Grimm, and as the impacts of each strike kill the creatures, he slides across the ground and presses his hand to his hat on his green hair. He turns and spins his thermos through his fingers to deflect the attacks from a
Beowulf that jumps towards him. Oobleck backs up from each of the attacks, not even looking that phased. But then he charges the flames up and blasts the Beowulf into an Ash-Wulf. It stands there for a second like a cartoon character before crumbling to dust and he grins. He spins his thermos round and smashes it across the face of a Beowulf behind him, killing it instantly. Port suddenly comes in, cheering with what actually sounds like joy as he beheads a Beowulf with his axe and then blasts a Creep with a single shot.

During the whole battle, Jaune’s eyes widen as he looks ahead, seeing the buildings being toppled over and something begins to emerge from the darkness. The Praetorian Knight slams its Sceptre down into the ground twice…again. And the echo rumbles across the battlefield, revealing the monsters.

A Sphinx glides across the destruction and lands onto the battlefield, roaring as the Manticores also glide round to attack.

But something else emerges before the Goliaths do.

And Ren’s eyes widen with horror, and so do Nora’s.

“Oh no…”

Two massive creatures trot out from the thick black smog, glowing red eyes and deep snarls, long humanoid arms dragging across the ground on their bodies and the four hooves of a Horse of some kind. One of them however has a humanoid slumped over the side of the horse with no head on its shoulders, looking like it is dead, but the Horse viciously snarls at them. It snaps its jaws together as it stands there, and the second is covered with bony plates of armour. And like the other the Horse stands tall, but the slumped down Imp rises up. This second one has razor sharp Sabred teeth and curved Ram Horns on its head. The Horse also has a pair of sabre teeth.

The Imp lets out a nightmarish howl, and Ren names the two beasts.

“Nuckelavee…”

The Headless Horseman and the Sabred Rider both roar as the Horses rear back and howl, before charging into the battlefield with full force, riding right past the Praetorian Knight, and the Goliaths have entered the Academy, roaring as well with the creatures continuing to unleash wave after wave.

They do not have the strength or ammo to keep this up.

They need backup.

Killian

He watches from the security feeds from Vale inside of the bridge, his hands behind his back. He does not smirk though, because he takes absolutely no joy in this. But as he stands there, he raises a brow when he sees a distress signal from one of his men. “Report.” He demands, so the soldier does as his commander demanded.

“The prisoners have escaped…” The soldier reports and Killian’s eyes widen, and he suddenly turns.
“WHAT?” He bellows, yelling so loud he begins to breathe raggedly, falling to one knee as he wheezes, grabbing the handle and pressing the button to send the medical dust into his lungs to repair the damage. His breathing quickly returns back to normal and the pain subsides, and the soldier continues to explain.

“They got out, I don’t know how. We tried to stop them, but they beat us. They are trying to escape through the hanger.” The soldier reports, and Killian stands up.

“Send everyone to the Hanger, to stop them.” Killian demands with a snarl in his voice.

“E-Everyone, sir?” The operative asks.

“EVERYONE!” He roars again, and everyone does as he commands, rushing off to stop them. He then grabs his throat again, his breathing still continuing to get worse, feeling his chest collapsing in on itself.

He glares with anger…and fear.

“I will not fail.”

**Eryka**

The largest of the Black Smog Army have arrived at Beacon, there is no cause for delay.

The elevator dings as it reaches the Hanger Level, and the two Huntresses sprint out into the huge room, looking around at the many ships to choose from. Winter looks at Eryka and points at her as she holds her sword in her hands. “Tell me when you’re ready.” Winter orders as she stares at the doors, exhaling a shaky breath as she looks around before jumping down. Eryka runs across the bridge towards the many ships she needs to find. By one of the ships is a pilot and she takes her bow and swings it straight across his head, knocking him out. Dulcis glides across the hanger above her head, watching her every move as she moves towards a chosen Airship.

She knows which one she needs to take, because there was that file that they read back in Killian’s office. It had one of those Syringes for medical usage that boosts people’s aura when they are at critical levels. What Winter is about to do will drain her aura as fast as the alcohol poured into a raging alcoholic’s body. Eryka slides down one of the ships, and that was a military one, not Medical like she needs.

Winter stands before the doors and she exhales softly, holding her sword in her hands as she stands tall, waiting for Eryka to give her the signal that she needs to begin her plan. Eryka sets her eyes on the Medical Ship, but there are two guards with rifles. She draws one of her telescopic arrows and fires it straight into the leg of one of the Raven Talon Soldiers, bringing him down to the ground with a grunt. Eryka jumps across the crates one at a time as the soldier starts firing at her, she jumps and spins through the air, launching an arrow that lodges right into the barrel of the rifle. She then lands and squeezes the button on her bow, sending a powerful charge of electricity into the rifle and detonating the dust inside the magazine.

The explosion throws the soldier against the ship and he bounces into it, and she slides across the ground and punches him straight in the face. Dulcis suddenly dives down and grabs onto the shoulders of the guy who she shot in the leg since he was reaching for his pistol. He then carries
him over some wastage and drops him into it, specifically so then he can smell bad. Eryka smiles to her bird and he continues to circle around. Eryka clammers into the ship and she sits down, looking around at the controls. “Okay…done this before…just use the sticks.” Eryka mumbles to herself. She presses her fingers to her earpiece connected via Scroll to Winter’s. “I’m ready!”

Winter breathes slowly, closing her eyes. “Grandfather give me strength.” She mutters to herself as she draws her sword, sliding her finger down the blade, twirling round and bringing the blade down to the ground, forming two Glyphs. One beneath her, and a massive one before her. She grits her teeth as she forms the massive entity of white light as Eryka takes off, and it reveals itself to them all. It is a huge Creature of Grimm that has somewhat humanoid features but also has a pair of huge Taurus Horns on its head and lets out a monstrous roar. It takes its huge muscular arms and thrusts the fingers into the doors, pushing them open as it roars, and so does Winter, screaming as she holds it open with her own strength. The metal gears strain as she forces it open.

Winter holds it for as long as she can as Eryka lifts off and flies towards the exit…not smoothly either. It has been quite a long time since she last flew an aircraft, so it is a bit wobbly. “Whoa…” She stammers as she flies out of the ship, and then Dulcis glides down towards Winter and grabs her by her shoulders as she yells with fury. As soon as Winter is pulled from the ground to get back to the ship, the massive Summoned Minotaur fades away into thin air and the doors begin to slam shut.

Dulcis and Winter just make it through as the doors slam shut and lock together.

The bird flies towards the Wasp that Eryka stole and the rear door opens up. Dulcis releases Winter and she rolls across the floor and the bird lands onto a box as the door closes. She lays there unconscious, her aura totally drained from her body. Eryka sets the Wasp to Auto-Pilot and she runs over to Winter’s side, kneeling down next to her, gently tapping her cheek. “Winter? C’mon, Winter talk to me.” She demands as she shakes her, but she doesn’t wake up. But then she has an epiphany, looking around for the syringe. “The shot…the Shot!”

As Eryka begins to search for the syringe with the aura amplification properties, the eagle hops down and walks over to Winter’s side, looking at her and gently nudging her with his beak, trying to wake her. But she is still out of it right now. “There!” Eryka cheers, finding her desire and holding the syringe of the stuff. She runs back to Winter’s side and she holds the syringe, checking for no air bubbles in the drug, squirting it to make sure it works.

She finds a vein and holds the needle against the vein. “This better work.” She says, since they need her down there. She plunges the needle into her arm and injects the drug into her system. And it works immediately, her aura begins to glow, and she gasps back to life, holding Eryka’s hand tight. She then looks at her other hand.

It slowly opens…

…forming a Glyph.

**Neptune**

The Praetorian Knight is winning.

The Grimm are attacking in full force now, to the point where the plan to hold them off the
original way is proving to be impossible. They are running out of ammunition too fast right now. Ruby has had to arrive back down on the ground, spinning her scythe through her fingers, slashing them repeatedly with every hit, but as she fights a Beowulf suddenly knocks her over and bites at her face over and over. She yells in anger, pushing the barrel of her sniper rifle into its snapping jaws and pulling the trigger, blowing its head apart.

Whereas Yang in the Paladin is unleashing everything, blasting all the flames and firing missiles from her pod built into the shoulder of the suit. The small missiles explode upon impact, dealing immense damage to the Grimm Numbers, but as she battles against them, she is suddenly ripped out from the cockpit by the long extending arm of the Sabred Rider, pulling her out and swinging round, throwing her across the courtyard.

She yells as the Grimm begin to swarm her, but she fires a missile at them to free herself, punching all them that try and attack her. Nora shrieks as she fights beside Ren who slashes them with Stormflower, jumping in the air as he plunges the curved blade into the top of the creature’s head. The Beowulf roars in pain as it collapses to the ground and fades away into smoke whilst Nora smashes the Charger with her hammer then fires Grenades from it as she changes its form.

Ironwood keeps firing his Revolver with Glynda at his side, firing at every single one of the Grimm that starts to smash through the lines. The Goliaths roar as they smash through the colonnades with their huge bony tusks, trumpeting constantly. Weiss slashes Myrtenaster at every single Grimm that attacks, standing beside Neptune who has been using his Dead-Eye Semblance constantly to nail these attacking Grimm. Sun strikes fast and hard against them, ducking down when Blake says so, slashing round and killing the Grimm constantly.

Jaune roars as he smashes the shield into the faces of the Grimm, fighting alongside Pyrrha, Anaximander and Juno, using the Phalanx Method against the Grimm but even that is not working against the sheer number of them that keep attacking. Ghira and Kali both yell as they battle against them as they keep charging. Jaune grunts as a Boarbatusk suddenly breaks through and knocks him into the swarm and they attack him. “Jaune!” Pyrrha shrieks as some of them bite against him, trying to shred his aura down.

Neptune also gets hit, grabbed by a Beowulf that pulls him in and he fires at them repeatedly, despite Jaymes also slashing his tomahawks at them as hard as he can with Peony at his side. “Neptune!” Weiss shrieks as she reaches out for him as he slashes at them with his rifle. He holds one of the Grimm back and the swarm all jump towards Sage. He swings the massive sword and slices a bunch of them in half, but they still manage to topple the huge warrior to the ground, trying to tear him apart.

“There’s too many of them!” Coco yells as she holds the trigger of her Chaingun down constantly, cutting as many of the Grimm down as she can.

Neptune holds his rifle up, and the Beowulf bites down onto it viciously, growling as it bites at him over and over again. He screams with distress.

This is what the end looks like.

Ironwood fires his pistol, when suddenly a ship crashes down and explodes into the side of one of the Goliaths, leaving a huge hole in the side of it. It roars in agony as it collapses, the fireball wrapping around it and collapsing down onto one of the buildings. They all stare at the impact with disbelief, when suddenly the Grimm are totally annihilated by flames that roar overhead and totally ignore the rest of them. The one attacking Neptune dies and he gasps, seeing it flying overhead.
Huge wings of fire and a call that they all recognise as he burns the army of Grimm down and the Praetorian Knight stops as the bird returns to sender.

The flames extinguish, and she catches the arrow and Dulcis lands on her forearm. She smirks as she steps off where they landed, holding her bow in one hand with Winter beside her. Eryka stands there with a smirk on her face and they all stare with awe-struck smiles on their faces. Neptune grins with joy, seeing his heroic big sister arriving at the perfect moment. The Praetorian Knight stares at them with the two Nuckelavees stood behind him, snarling viciously.

Winter draws a new arrow and Dulcis takes off. “Sorry we’re late.” Eryka tells them, and Winter spins her sword through her fingers as a hundred Grimm charge towards them. She forms her glyph and summons the Minotaur once more, still pumped on the drug Eryka gave her, it forms, and she does not even break a sweat. The Minotaur jumps towards them with a powerful roar, its fists held above its head, slamming them down into the Grimm.

Decimating the group.

The Praetorian Knight tightens its grip on the Sceptre, then spins it round. “If that is how it is…” He states, pointing the Sceptre ahead and the rest of the Black Smog attack, lead by the Forsaken Striders.
The Commander of the Black Gallows stands at the head of the bridge with his hands behind his back, containing his own anger as he stares at the holographic live projections of the Councillors who are all demanding answers from him. Councillors from Vale – who are currently cowering inside of their posh and rich bunkers whilst everyone else is being evacuated to safety – are practically yelling at him. Whereas the others from Vacuo, Atlas and Mistral are merely wanting to know where they stand in this whole situation, not one of them apart from the Councilwoman are concerned about the welfare of the civilians and the Huntsmen and Huntresses battling against the Black Smog right now.

He rolls his eyes as they argue with each other, if there is something that he and the other Hunters beneath him right now can agree on – it is their utter resentment for Politicians and their selfishness. He stands there, waiting for a moment in this arguing where he can chime in and shut them up. The Councilwoman stares at him and leans forward, her hand on her pregnant belly with worry. “What are the Black Gallows going to do about this, Killian?” The Councilwoman questions, and finally everyone goes dead silent, giving Killian the floor.

He scoffs as he looks at them all. “Oh – I am allowed to speak now?” He asks them as he steps forward, his hands hovering over his chest as he approaches the many holograms. The Atlesian Councilman scoffs in return, shaking his head at the Commanding Officer of the Black Gallows. “This is not a joke or a game, Commander!” He argues, making Killian laugh.

“Oh finally, you say something that doesn’t sound like total horseshit for once.” He laughs at the stupidity of these politicians. They all stare at him and he paces back and forth with his hands still behind his back, and his eyes glare at each and every one of them. “Because none of you have said one thing about the survival odds of the civilians in Vale. All I have heard so far is your concerns for the stock prices and the economy for the world!” He chuckles, shaking his head with disgust at him.

“The Economy is the most important factor for the survival of the world. When the C.C.T went down our economy collapsed for a few weeks and we are still trying to repair the damage.” The Atlesian Councilman scoffs.

“Exactly, I agree. We must think of what is important.” The Mistraalian Councillor scoffs, whereas the Vacuo Councillor just does not seem to be bothered by any of this information. He is just sitting there calmly with his legs crossed on his table, eating some food he was served. Killian glares at them all – the man might have extreme methods to prove his points about the dangers of the Huntsman Academies – but he also knows the value of civilian life. He may be sacrificing Vale, but he is only doing it to destroy the Huntsmen, not the innocents. They are just a tragic side effect to his actions, and he takes no pleasure in it – and these people are only worried about how quickly they can fill their wallets.

“And human or Faunus life is not important?” Killian questions as he paces back and forth.

“Human life is all that matters, all the Faunus have ever done is cause problems. We’re all better off without them.” The Atlesian Councillor claims, in which that really gets the attention of Vale...
and Vacuo who both glare at him. Clearly these people must have close friends or family that are
Faunus and they stare at the man in total disgust.

“Shame on you…” The Valerian Councillor hisses as she clenches her hand into a fist.

“What? The White Fang are nothing more than a bunch of Faunus degenerates, they caused the
attack in the first place.” The Atlesian Councillor states but the Valerian Councillor shakes her
head.

“Sienna Khan claims otherwise!” She argues.

“Oh of course she does, for all we know this attack is down to her as well.” The Atlesian
Councillor states, despite the fact that the real perpetrator behind this attack is standing right in
front of them. He paces back and forth, listening to their constant arguing and it angers him more
and more.

“Have you ever fought on the front lines before, Councillor? Have any of you?” He asks them all,
and none of them raise their hands, not one. All of them have never even touched a handgun in their
lives, and he can quickly figure that out when he sees a pistol on the desk in front of the
Mistraalian Councillor. “You, Councillor. Tell me how do know if there is a bullet in the chamber
of that pistol?” He asks him, and the Mistraalian Councillor looks at the gun and he picks it up,
looking at it and it is like he is looking for the revolving chamber of a Revolver. Killian glances to
one of his soldiers and he gestures to him, to let him borrow the handgun.

The Stockholm Trooper obediently gives him the pistol and Killian holds it up to the camera, and
he pulls the slider back, revealing the bullet inside of the chamber. They all stare at him with
confusion of whatever his point may be. “Someone with just an inkling of real knowledge would
know this – and yet you are all sitting there trying to tell me how to do my job. When I have been
doing this longer than you can imagine, fighting in wars you have never even heard of.” Killian
explains as he actually takes the gun apart piece by piece without even needing to look down and
check, and he holds all the components in his hands. And still without looking down he puts it
back together, and hands it back to the Stockholm Trooper and then holds his arms behind his
back.

“And you’re point is?” The Vacuo Councillor questions with confusion.

“That the only one of you that I actually have a bit of respect for is the very Councillor inside of
this Kingdom right now. Because her concerns are not about money or even her own safety…but
about the people. She may be safe in her perfumed bunker, but there are still people up there
fighting and dying to keep the place safe.” He explains, despite being the one to bring this attack
on their shoulders. However, that does not mean he has respect for them as soldiers, no matter what
side he has been on he has always shown that level of respect to his enemies. All of them are
soldiers, fighting for what they believe is right, whether it be money, protecting people or even to
just serve another Tyrannical Dictator.

The Councillors are all left speechless from Killian’s words as he paces back and forth slowly, his
eyes darting to each of the four one by one as they sit down in their comfortable locations. Whilst
he is standing to attention like a seasoned officer would. “The Huntsmen are holding the Academy
right now, but they won’t be able to hold them for long. I will send in my forces to stop this attack
from getting any worse. However, I want Valerian Forces to fight as well, show the people that
their governments will not cower behind their Paid Warriors to fight their battles for them.” Killian
explains, staring straight at the Valerian Councillor.

She nods her head but says nothing, all due to her intimidation felt towards Nathaniel Killian.
He stares at them and narrows his onyx coloured eyes with gritted teeth. “And if you ever think you can order me on how to do my job...then I won’t be there to save you when the Grimm come clawing at your door next time.” He threatens, and he turns and walks away from the holographic projections of the Councillors, leaving them with those words in their minds.

Killian stands there, closing his eyes as he exhales, standing by the pedestal where his cup of coffee sits with steam still rising from it. He suddenly yells with an unexpected rage, grabbing the cup and throwing it across the bridge, causing all the operatives to freeze in shock. “YOU LET THEM ESCAPE? How? How could you let this happen? Turn this ship around and bring us back!” He yells with anger, and the pilots of the Shadow of Broken Promises nod their heads in agreement. The huge Black Cruiser turns around, sharper than any other Airship would be capable of doing.

He stares down at the smoky battlefield that is Beacon Academy.

“It’s a good thing I created a Contingency Plan in case this ever happened.” He states, narrowing his eyes with clenched fists. Killian is no fool, he would never risk the truth coming out about what he did when Winter and Eryka escaped...the question is what will this Contingency be?

**Jaune**

The Nuckelavees are on the battlefield.

**Codenamed – Headless Horseman and Sabred Rider.**

The two of them march across the courtyard towards the two Teams – R.W.B.Y and J.N.P.R with Eryka and Winter at their sides. Ren glares at them with gritted teeth before he draws his trusty Stormflower pistols. It may not be the same monster that took his mother and father from him. But they are still just as horrific and evil as they march closer and closer with their long arms dragging across the ground by their marching hoofs. Then they stand before them, exhaling through their bony jaws, curved serrated canines protruding down from the jaws of the haunting animosity that stands before them. And by its side, less armoured with bony plates than the Sabred One is the Headless Horseman, with the imp drooping down from the horse that stands there. The body dead and with its head cut from its shoulders, and the dark howling groans of pain leaving the open jaws where the flames crackle within it.

The Headless Horseman’s Eques bellows at them with rage, igniting flames that burn across the jaws that form a demonic grin on the horse’s face. It paces back and forth around them whilst the more aggressive and armoured Sabred Rider suddenly charges towards them. It roars as it charges, and the Imp rises up when the Horse jumps and staggers across the ground, lunging its long extending arm towards their faces. The impact hits Yang straight in the chest and throws her across the battlefield, swinging round as it lets out a monstrous bellow of pure fury. It rears back after releasing her and the Horse bellows to the Shattered Moon that watches the battle from the sky.

The Praetorian Knight watches before it returns to the fight, battling against the great warriors.

The razor-sharp claws of the Nuckelavee’s Imp cut deep into the cobblestone floor and Yang looks up as her long puffy blonde hair falls over her eyes, and she flicks it out her face. She pushes herself back up and lifts her fists, watching the two beasts that circle them. “What the hell are these things?” Yang questions.
“Nuckelavees…but I’ve never seen two of them working together before. They are always too solitary and kill other ones they come across.” Eryka explains as she watches the beast with her bow drawn, watching its every move. She can focus her senses so acutely that she can hear the very breath from the beast as it walks around them, snarling deeply at them with anger showing in the Horse’s burning red eyes. Whereas the Imp is still hanging from the body like its Headless Partner.

Ren glares at them with pure hatred, and Nora does the same, holding her hammer in her hands, ready to break every single bone in their bodies. “This is not gonna be easy, Nuckelavees are deadly even for a whole platoon of warriors to challenge. We need to be smart.” Winter advises as she holds her sword, watching the beast as it circles them. Suddenly the Horse of the Headless Horse roars, and charges towards them, galloping with savage viciousness on its face as it jumps towards them, cracking and pulverising the ground beneath it. It sidesteps across the cobblestone as it just misses Ruby and Winter, biting down at where they stood. Jaune raises his shield with gritted teeth and Pyrrha is with him.

And Pyrrha has quickly caught onto something about the Sabred Rider that the Headless Horsemen does not have. “It must be two organisms, when the Horse moves the man riding it goes limp. Must be why the Headless one is moving constantly, someone already beheaded it.” Pyrrha deduces as she aims her rifle at the creature that paces. She fires at the Sabred Rider, but the Imp abruptly bats the bullet out of the air before it could get close. And the bullet ricochets off and it continues to circle them.

“We need to kill these things, here and now.” Pyrrha states.

“Agreed!” Ren roars, and he charges towards the Sabred Rider suddenly, with Nora at his side but they are attacking out of turn. The Nuckelavee’s Imp atop the Horse roars at them with a terrifying howl, and it thrusts forward and smashes Ren out of the air and pins him down onto the floor. As Nora jumps up and goes to smash its head in with her huge hammer, the Headless Horseman comes out of nowhere and jumps, kicking her in the jaw with its hoof, landing and stepping over the fallen Huntsmen who have died here. The Horse roars violently at them as it scrapes its hoof across the stones, ready to charge again.

Pyrrha thrusts forward and she slashes the arm of the Sabred Rider, causing it to snarl and pull the arm back, retreating from her and the body hangs down from the huge horse. It gallops around them, smashing through the rubble that has fallen during this battle. The two huge Nuckelavees continue to circle them, keeping two teams and two skilled Huntresses distracted whilst the Praetorian Knight orders the rest of the Black Smog to hit the centre of the Academy. “We need to work together, Ren! Whatever the problem is, we need to focus!” Jaune orders as he pulls him up from his feet, Weiss doing the same for Nora.

“These things…are monsters…” He says, and since he has never shown this level of anger before now, then it must mean that these things are truly evil and did something terrible to him once. Weiss glares at the Headless Horseman and an idea hits her, because this thing does not have the Imp on its side like the Sabred Rider does…it is all just the Horse in command right now. She narrows her eyes, and she casts one of her black glyphs and it lands on the floor, causing the area of floor where the Horse gallops across become increasingly slippery.

The Horse cries out as it falls and crashes across the ground, tumbling and crushing the ribs of the Imp that once shrieked on its spine. Ruby looks at Jaune and they both have an idea. “The Headless Horseman is already down the Rider…we just need to kill the Horse. We do the same for the Sabred One, then we kill the Rider and then they are both dead!” Jaune cheers as he raises his shield.
“It’s a plan.” Yang agrees with the nod of her head.

“A risky one, I doubt these things are gonna give up without a fight, they are testing us right now.” Eryka deduces from the way that the monsters are circling them, and the Headless Horseman is quickly getting back up, growling savagely at them.

“It’s all we have.” Blake states as she holds Gambol Shroud in her hands, watching the beasts as they circle round. Jaune and Ruby look at each other and then at the two Nuckelavees.

“We can do this.” Ruby assures.

“Sounds good to me. Come on! Let’s kick these things back to the hell they came from!” Eryka exclaims, and she draws her brow and fires an arrow towards one of the huge beasts, and they charge towards the group. They all disperse at once, preventing an easy massacre for the two Nuckelavees. The Forsaken Striders gallop across the terrain and the Headless Horseman charges towards Pyrrha who spins her spear through her fingers. She glares at the beast and she sprints towards it as well. The Horse jumps up and slams its hooves down into the ground where she was stood which would have most likely have killed her, biting down at where she was stood. As she slides underneath it, she stabs right up the stomach of the Horse and it roars in pain as she drags it across, and then slides past the beast. She holds Akoúo in her hand and she throws it towards it, and it snarls, as the shield bounces off its armoured face and heads back to her arm.

It goes for her again, and nearly bites down on her head, if not for Blake swinging around one of the colonnades and grabbing onto her, pulling her out of the path of the huge beast that just attacked her. The two girls swing through the air and Blake nods, allowing Pyrrha to push herself from her feline friend. She blasts down towards the Nuckelavee, but as she heads towards it, the creature turns and unexpectedly roars, blasting fire from its mouth. Pyrrha gasps, and she lifts her shield, blocking the flames from hitting her as she lands on its back. She stands on the beheaded Imp and she transforms her spear into Xiphos form as it starts to buck her off. She yelps as it throws her off and she crashes down to the ground. Blake suddenly comes swinging down and she kicks both her feet into the side of its head. The Beast stumbles from the impact, snarling as it staggers, and Blake rolls away from the beast.

But this time, it growls and kicks her hard in the face, knocking her over from the sudden impact, and that time it was not a shadow. Blake groans as she rolls across the floor, her lip cut and bleeding down her chin and she gasps as she looks ahead, seeing the massive monster charging towards her at full speed, feeling the weight of the titan reverberating through the ground. But as it is about to get to her, she notices that Weiss is coming to her aid with her Glyph helping her slide across the ground and she pushes Blake out of the way, then casts the ice across the stone to cause the Headless Horseman to fall. The impact of Weiss’ wind dust blow pushes her Blake away from the monster’s path, and as she planned the Nuckelavee hollers as it crashes onto its side, the black ice causing it to slip on its hooves. The creature tumbles onto the ground, rolling over its dead beheaded imp on its back.

As it tries to get back up, Jaune stabs the creature in the neck with his sword, but Crocea Mors’ blade is far from large enough to deal any level of damage deemed dangerous to the Horse. It
glares at him as it rises up and his eyes widen, it rips its neck from the blade and then smacks the side of its large head against Jaune, knocking him across the ground. It stares at the four of them as they get back up, ready to fight the beast again. The Nuckelavee creates a chilling growl, deep and guttural – almost like it is laughing actually.

It sends shivers down their spines, but they are not about to give up.

“We need to down this thing.” Weiss says as she readies Myrtenaster.

“Knock it down, and we need to find the weakness in the Horse.” Jaune deduces as he raises his shield as Pyrrha taught him. The Horse paces round them, waiting for them to make their move whilst it licks its wounds, snarling deeply at them.

They all charge towards it and it roars, doing the same.

On the other side of the battle, fighting against the Sabred Rider, Eryka rolls out of the way of the huge and armoured creature that had just jumped towards him, shattered the cobblestone beneath it, throwing it up in the air, and sliding to a halt as it smashes through one of the Colonnades. The Imp rises up and shrieks at her, before lunging its arm forward towards Eryka, but she rolls out of the way again, pulling her bow back and firing an arrow, one that slices right across the face of the creature, the only reason it did not go all the way through is because it moved, dodging the shot. It shrieks in pain and agony, yelling so loud that it creates one hell of a powerful shockwave.

Ruby fires herself towards the Nuckelavee and she slashes across the face of the Horse, however unlike the Headless Horseman, this thing is far more armoured, and the impact just knocks the head aside. Ruby crashes to the ground and as she tumbles she slams her huge scythe down into the ground to try and slow herself down. She aims her rifle and fires it at the horse in the vain hope to topple it over. It growls softly as it stares at her, and walks forward, and the Imp clenches its three-digit hands into fists, before swinging round and heading straight for Ruby. The impact pins her up against the wall, and it pulls her forward, swinging towards the jaws of the Horse.

But before the teeth could puncture her flesh and be devoured alive, she never feels it chew down. Because Yang is now pushing her hands against the open jaws, keeping them open despite the weight of the horse bearing down on her. She falls to one knee as she keeps Ruby from being ripped apart by the monster, and Nora grabs onto her, pulling her from the jaws of the beast. Ren roars with rage, jumping towards the Imp as he presses his feet against the Colonnades and blasts down into the beast, stabbing both his Stormflower Pistols into his chest, holding on as he stands on the back of the horse. The Imp glares at him with its curved razor canines scraping against its bony jaws. It creates a deep and horrifically husky groan as it stares into his kind irises.

But as it stares at him, the arm rises up behind him and goes to grab him, but Eryka whistles, and Dulcis dives down, slashing the Imp across the face with its claws. The Imp recoils, three deep slashes imbedded across its face where the thick black smoke pours from the wounds of. Ren slashes across the body of the beast and he goes to shoot it in the head to kill it, only for the Horse to suddenly buck him off. Ren falls from the creature and heads towards the ground. Until a Glyph saves him and pulls him away from the constant slamming hooves of the beast that is about to charge again.

Winter swings her sword through her fingers, charging forward with Eryka and they both take on the Sabred Rider together. It jumps towards them, using its immense weight to shatter the ground beneath its body, and it sidesteps round, the Horse biting at where Eryka’s head was. A lone Beowulf jumps towards her and she takes her Hunting Knife, stabbing the creature in the head. She then hooks her bow underneath the jaw of the Beowulf and draws the bowstring with one hand,
firing the arrow into the chest of the Nuckelavee. The beast of nightmares roars in pain, since the arrow lodged into a place that is not as armoured – its underside.

The Beowulf fades away into smoke and Eryka extends another one of her telescopic arrows, and she looks at Winter and her friend nods. Winter forms a Glyph that throws Eryka up into the air and she fires one of her arrows that has an ignited arrowhead, and she fires it. The burning arrow soars down towards the Sabred Rider and punctures through the hide, igniting that portion of its flesh. The flames burn through and it roars in anger as it now has a collar of flames around its neck, smoke rising from the body. Yet that does not kill it, the Nuckelavee just keeps coming and refuses to make any kind of retreat.

Ruby sprints round the Sabred Rider and keeps firing Crimson Rose at the beast, hitting it in its flesh and Nora starts doing the same with Ren, firing their weapons at it as well. The grenades explode against its tough armoured hide but does not seem to do that much damage to it. “That’s it…” Winter deduces as she stands there, holding her sword, knowing her skill here with a team comprised as it is, would be better suited for support thanks to her semblance. “Everyone, keep running around the Sabred Rider! It can only attack one person at a time!” Winter calls out, and Yang smirks, nodding her head as she engages Ember Celica once more, sprinting round in the circle, firing whenever she can. The shells impact the armour and flesh, but the Sabred Rider growls and stares at Ren, seeing him running around it, firing his pistols repeatedly at it.

The Nuckelavee lunges forward and grabs onto his hands, pressing the palms of its unnatural claws against the barrels of his pistols to stop them from firing. Yang fires her shotguns into the ground to send her flying into the air. She punches the Imp across the face three times, and as it goes to grab her, she shoots again, dashing out of the way. She slides across the ground as it lands, and the Horse growls viciously at her, and charges forward, but she runs at it as well. She drops down just as Pyrrha did to the Headless Horseman, sliding underneath it and firing up at its belly as it roars, and then she rises back up and fires multiple missiles from Ember Celica at it. They explode upon contact and the Horse recoils from every blast, but it just seems to enrage it, causing it to roar with pure fury as it rears back.

The Imp swings round and slams its hand into Yang, and she holds up her wrists, and it latches onto her forearms, lifting her off the floor and swinging her round, throwing her with all its might. She flips through the air, but with a well-placed shot she corrects he trajectory, blasting herself right back and punching the Imp right across the face, knocking it down the side of the Horse’s body. The Imp is not dead as it rises back up with multiple cracks in the armour plating. Yang smirks at the beast, before sticking out her tongue at the monster. The Horse roars at her viciously, so loud her blonde hair blows from the wind, and she coughs.

“Oof…your breath is terrible, buddy.” She snarkily says to the beast, before it charges towards them again. But as it charges, Ren suddenly throws Stormflower and it spins round, stabbing into the kneecap of the Horse and it yells out in pain, falling forward and crashing down to the ground, Yang rolls out the way just in time. It slides across the ground and the Imp groans, seeing Ren running towards it to kill it. The Imp pushes one of its arms against the ground so hard it starts to push the Horse back up, and with the other and sends it forward, slamming into Ren’s chest, lifting him off the floor, but he stabs both of his blades into the wrist and he yells with rage, cutting deep into it and slicing the hand straight from its wrist.

The Imp shrieks in agony as the Horse gets back up, growling as it stares at Winter who sends in more Glyphs, and Ruby blasts towards it at great speed, Nora beside her. Nora jumps up in the air and spins like a saw blade and a hammer attached to it, smashing it down into the ground so hard it blasts multiple pink explosions through the stone that causes the creature to stumble. Ruby takes her Scythe and in a red blur she spins through the air, slicing through some of the plates and
blowing some of them off. Black smoke billows from the wounds, and Ruby lands, sliding across the floor, smirking at the creature as it stands there.

The Imp rises up and snarls, righting its spine as it extends the arms, and they all charge towards it, when the Sabred Rider suddenly spins around at great speed, stretching out its arms and knocking them all to the ground with great force. They all crash to the ground and groan, their bodies aching from the impact. The Nuckelavee stands there, and charges directly towards Winter, and bites down at her, but she stops the jaws with her sword, holding it at bay, for as long as she can.

The Headless Horseman on the other hand is still holding its own despite lacking the Imp on its back. Nevertheless, this Nuckelavee has learned how to adapt without the company of the imp on its spine. The headless Horseman walks towards the warriors that charge towards it, and Blake jumps up in the air, then jumps again off the shoulders of her own shadow as soon as the Headless Horseman unleashes the cascade of flames from its roaring jaws, decimating the spot where her shadow was once at. She flips through the air and slashes across the main of smoke and the back of its neck. She lands on its neck and slides across the muscle, firing her pistol at it as she slides down. She jumps off and fires her pistol in the air, landing down on the ground. She stands tall and nods to Weiss, who throws a Glyph to her and it forms beneath her – giving her the Time Dilation ability.

She stares right into the burning eyes of the monster, channelling her aura with the power that Weiss’ Glyph has given her, and then she spins through the air at great speed, launching multiple purple arcs of aura that crash into the Horse, burning into the flesh. The Horse staggers from the impact, and Pyrrha sprints to Jaune, jumping onto his shield, and he launches her high in the air.

She spins through the air and fires her Rifle down at the monster beneath her, launching multiple bullets into its thick hide. The Nuckelavee roars with rage as the bullets puncture through the muscle but it steps aside and blasts flames around its body, creating a circle of fire around its legs, keeping them all at bay, before something begins to change. The tail that hangs from its back begins to extend, and they see multiple razor-sharp quills extend as well. The Horse suddenly leaps out and launches them straight at the Huntsman and Huntresses. Weiss deflects some of them, but one slices across her cheek, cutting her skin open and some warm blood leaks from her face. Jaune rushes towards the Nuckelavee and holds up his shield despite the many quills shot towards him, and he smashes the Headless Horseman across the skull, causing it to stagger from the strike. He swings Crocea Mors hard and slashes against the thick muscular hide the creature is comprised of.

The Horse snarls and it stares down at Jaune, breathing fire right into his raised shield, and the fire blasts around him as he holds his ground despite feeling the force of all those flames slowly pushing him across the ground. The Nuckelavee finally stops and he pushes his sword forward and stabs it straight in the throat. The Headless Horseman roars in agony, rearing back and swinging around with Jaune still holding on by the hilt of his sword. It swings and throws him from its body, and it turns to see Pyrrha standing there.

The Headless Horseman brays, and charges straight towards Pyrrha, and she transforms Milo into her spear form, and she waits for the right moment. It gets closer and closer with every single gallop, about to rip her apart with its sharp teeth. That is when she does it, throwing Milo as hard as she can and jumping out the way. The spearhead stabs straight through the centre of the Horse’s head and splits the skull so suddenly that it kills the creature instantly. The Horse’s roars are silenced instantly, and it goes limp, crashing down into the ground with a heavy boom, sliding to a stop eventually after leaving deep cracks in the ground. Pyrrha looks back at the fading corpse of the Headless Horseman.

“One down…” She pants, seeing Jaune jog over to her side and help her back to her feet, and she
looks into his eyes with a smile, gently pressing their heads together lovingly.

“Nice work.” Jaune softly says to her as he caresses her cheek with his thumb.

“You too.” She giggles with a smile.

With one Nuckelavee down that only leaves the Sabred Rider which is proving to be much harder to defeat because of the Imp on its back and the fact it has far more amour than the younger brother. The Imp grabs onto Winter and swings her round and smashes her through one of the damaged Colonnades, causing it to collapse. Eryka whistles and calls in Dulcis who dives down and stabs his talons into the spine of the Imp, making it shriek in pain and turn to face the Altum Eagle. It snaps its jaws, nearly biting off one of his wings but he dodges the beast’s jaws, flying round and calling out to Eryka. She sprints and she extends the blades in her boots, jumping onto the side of the beast, stabbing her boots into the flesh. The Horse snarls in anger as it feels the cold steel puncture through the flesh and she aims her bow at the Imp, but it stares down at her, grabbing her and ripping her from where she was, throwing her down into the ground so hard it breaks her aura.

She tumbles and groans, staring ahead at the huge beast, and looks at Nora as she charges forward. She fires her grenade launcher and then transforms it back into her Hammer Form. She takes the huge weapon and swings it round, smashing it across the jaw of the Horse, and it stumbles from the impact. The Sabred Rider roars with fury, rearing back as it kicks its legs back and forth with a deafening cry. It swings the clawed hand at her, but she dodges it, staring at it as it charges towards her. Ren yells with fury as he fires his pistols at the legs of the creature and Ruby does the same, trying to knock the monster down. But nothing seems to bring the beast down.

However…

…Nora’s hammer has caused the armour to crack on multiple occasions, just as Yang’s cybernetic fist did to the Imp’s face. Eryka quickly adds two and two together – realising they have been going at it the wrong way the whole time. “Guys! I’ve got it!” Eryka calls out as she picks up her bow. Ren looks at her as he jumps off the creature, keeping it surrounded as it stands there.

“What is it?” Yang asks Eryka.

“Hitting with blades is not working! But force does, when you punched it, the armour cracked. And when Nora hit the bastard with her hammer it did the same!” Eryka tells her, and Yang looks at her cybernetic fist – the thing she once was so scared of using – is now their best bet.

“I think I see what you’re getting at!” Yang calls back.

“You two can take down the Horse, and that will leave the rider defenceless!” Eryka deduces, and Winter rises up from the rubble, shaking her head to get the rubble from her head.

“I can summon a Nevermore to fly them over it.” Winter tells her.

“We need to keep it still though! It won’t just stand there for us.” Ruby reminds.

“That’s our job, Ruby! I have my knife, you have your Scythe. Ren I’m gonna need your help holding this thing down!” Eryka tells him, not only because she only has a knife, but this thing is way stronger than she is. Ren nods and they both stand side-by-side, and Winter smiles, seeing that Eryka does have a sense for strategy as well. But it is easy to forget she has survived in the mountains for years, meaning she knows how to fight beasts like these.

Except this time…she is not alone anymore.
They begin their plan to kill the Sabred Rider, and they keep getting the big Nuckelavee’s attention, running around it more and more. “Hey! Ugly! Your horns look really stupid!” Ruby calls out as she runs across the toppled over Colonnades, hearing Yang laugh in the background supportively.

“Good one, Sis!” Yang calls out.

“Thanks, Yang!” Ruby calls back, and the Sabred Nuckelavee roars furiously and it launches its arm towards Ruby. She takes her chance, firing her rifle down into the ground to shoot up in the air, then spiralling her scythe through her fingers and blasting downwards, slamming the Scythe down and pinning the arm against the rubble. The Nuckelavee shrieks in agony as it feels the bone inside of its arm snap like a twig. It staggers and the Horse writhes around in pain as it stands there, then Ren and Eryka both fire their weapons at the creature. An arrow digs deep into the soft tissue underneath the plates, and it snarls in pain and anger. It stares at them and does the same, lunging straight at them.

Eryka jumps up in the air and draws her knife, the lunar light from the moon gleaming across the serrated edge before she stabs it downwards into its wrist, pressing her knee down into the hand, holding it down as hard as she can. Ren stabs the blades of both Stormflower Pistols into the arm as well, keeping it down as well, restraining the Imp from swinging its arms. Eryka looks at Winter and nods to her partner.

“Ready?” Winter calls to Yang and Nora, and they both nod. She stabs her sword down into the ground and summons the Glyph, forming the Nevermore and both of them gasp with amazement.

“That is Sooo cool!” Yang gasps. The Nevermore shrouded with Schnee Light calls to the sky with a powerful screech, swinging its wings and grabbing the two of them with its talons, lifting them high above the Nuckelavee and the creature looks up at them with anger, roaring constantly at them.

“READY!” Nora cheers, and Winter pulls her sword from the ground and the Nevermore fades away, dropping them and they both spin through the air. Yang pulls his cybernetic fist back, yelling before gritting her teeth, and Nora swings her hammer over her head as they swing towards the Horse’s head. “SMAAASH!” Nora yells, and they both collide their weapons right into the skull of the Horse, crushing the bone plates and killing it instantly, the legs give in and the neck snaps. The Horse collapses to the round and lays there, leaving only the restrained Imp behind that Ren walks towards, staring at it with narrowed eyes.

Nora pulls Magnhild from the skull of the beast, staring down at it and then at the Imp, walking up with Ren. She looks at him and she holds his hand, and he unsheathes his knife on his leg. He looks at it and looks at her. “It isn’t the same one…but…” Ren says, as he looks at her and she smiles lovingly, kissing him on the lips.

“Together.” She tells him, also holding the knife. And together, they both stab the blade straight through the eye of the roaring Imp, and finally it is silenced.

And the last of the two Nuckelavees crumbles and burns away into a tall pillar of smoke, rising high into the sky.

They both sigh with relief and hug each other lovingly.

Yang smiles, looking at her fist and…it is starting to grow on her.
The Praetorian Knight

The entity stands tall, with its fist clenched as it watches the Forsaken Riders fade away into pillars of smoke. It watches as it sees the other Huntsmen and Huntresses battling together. And it holds the Sceptre in its hand all the while, watching the battle raging on around it. The Praetorian Knight looks at its hand and then at multiple King Taijitus about to attack alongside multiple other Creatures of Grimm.

It opens the forearm, and a Creature of Grimm flops out from the arm with a wet slapping impact onto the ground. It is some kind of squid like creature, falling to the floor and covered in some kind of dark residue, that looks extremely oily as well as it lays there. The creature slides across the floor and the Praetorian Knight walks away from it, as it approaches the many Taijitus. The tentacles around its body suddenly extend and they wrap round the bodies of the Taijitus and it pulls its little body into them, and it does not look at the black smoke that forms around them.

But the Huntsmen and Huntresses can see it…they can see it all.

The biomass of the Grimm begins to forge together, forming into something new. This is something that they have never, ever seen before. It is combing them all into some kind of Hybrid, combining Creeps with multiple King Taijitus with the armour and stinger of a Deathstalker. And to make things worse, it has six heads, rising up and roaring with the flames of a Manticore blasting from every mouth.

It has become…

A Hydra.

The giant Creature of Grimm, this abomination, stands up with four huge legs, after devouring one of the Goliaths as well that was nearby. The tusks also protrude through its chest and it charges forward, attacking the school with great power and speed, blasting flames from all the jaws of the mutated King Taijitus now on the battlefield. The Praetorian Knight keeps walking as the Grimm Air Force fly overhead as well as the Hydra attacks the Academy, lead by the same massive Sphinx.

A rare breed – named a War Sphinx. More armoured and more dangerous than a normal Sphinx, meaning this thing will not be easy to kill. The Praetorian Knight walks towards the Academy, moving slowly and calmly, one of the Goliaths roaring beside it.

Until from out of nowhere a missile collides into the ear of the huge creature, and it roars in pain and anger. It staggers and turns with some of the other Grimm. The Praetorian Knight looks over its shoulder to see where that missile came from. Ironwood stands there too, covered with black blood from the Grimm, hearing his Scroll Connection get a voice coming through. “General Ironwood! This is Vale Wing! We will keep the skies cleared for you! And you have a…friend…I guess, who wants to lend a hand as well!” The Lead Fighter Pilot tells them, and through the smoke relief fills the Huntsmen and Huntresses, seeing a large squadron of Fighter Jets from Vale’s nearby Air Base blasting into the sky, firing missiles and machine guns at the many airborne Grimm that are attacking.

“Boy am I happy to see you!” Ironwood replies with joy in his voice, but then he looks at the smoke, seeing who this friend is. “No way…”

A chain suddenly wraps around the throat of a Beowulf and it chokes, until she beheads it with a
hard yank and the corpse collapses to the ground. She walks over the corpse and stares at the battlefield, connecting in. The leader of this unexpected army is a female, Bengal Tiger Faunus with orange eyes, dark complexion and wild black, chin-length hair with an asymmetrical bob style. Her Faunus trait manifests as an extra pair of ears, and her body is adorned with numerous tattoos resembling tiger stripes. She wears four golden earrings on three of her ears, one each on her human ears, and two on her left Faunus ear, as well as a small jewel on her forehead.

She is seen dressed in a form fitting black dress with light green accents on the rims of the outfit; the dress leaves most of her back open, has two long splits on the side which reveals a pair of black shorts, a shorter split in the front and a small squared keyhole. Over the dress, she wears a back-revealing red cape with gold accents, as well as a green waist cincher with red rims that has a black belt over it, which fastens a green pouch on her right hip. Aside from that, she wears black stockings in conjunction with green sandals that have red laces which are tied to her calves, as well as a black elbow length fingerless glove on her right hand.

She presses her hand to her red cape and pushes it off, so it does not get in the way of combat, and she speaks to Ironwood. “This is High Leader Sienna Khan of the White Fang – and I do not stand with Adam Taurus and the attack he led many weeks ago. We are here to make things right.” Sienna tells them all, and Blake back at the Courtyard widens her eyes when hearing her voice.

A young woman walks beside Sienna. She is a young woman and a chameleon Faunus. In her normal appearance, her skin has somewhat darker spots on her arms, legs, stomach and face. Her brown hair is tied back in a ponytail that curls at the end like a chameleon's tail, and her eyes are a light grey with a faintly bluish tint. Her Faunus trait grants her the ability to change the colour of her skin, hair and eyes, allowing her to blend in with her environment. Her colours also appear to change in response to her emotions, as seen as she glares at the Grimm with anger, turning red and her hair turning fiery gold as she clenches her fist. Sienna looks at her with a smirk. “You ready to kick some ass, Ilia?” Sienna asks her.

“Oh…more than ready.” She agrees, and they all charge forward after Sienna lifts her fist and thrusts it in the air theatrically. The entire White Fang Army erupt through the smoke, with trucks and countless weapons, firing at the Grimm.

“No…” The Praetorian Knight stammers with disbelief, seeing the reinforcements arriving in such great numbers.

“Ha-Ha-Ha…” The voice of Sun Wukong chuckles, and the Praetorian Knight looks over it’s shoulder at him, seeing him standing there with Doctor Bartholomew Oobleck with him and both of them confident that they can take him on. All three using staffs against each other, and the Praetorian Knight spins the Sceptre through its fingers. “Didn’t expect that, did you?” He asks it.

“Neither did you.” It calculates, and Sun can’t even argue with its logic.

“Fair enough.” Sun admits.

“Nobody else has to die here, leave this academy.” Oobleck requests, trying to reason with a Creature of Grimm. Withal his request…the Praetorian Knight spins the Sceptre through its fingers and points it straight at them, and Sun sighs.

“Damn it.” He says, and then the Praetorian rapidly thrusts forward and slashes the bladed end of its sceptre across Ruyi Jingu Bang and then the blunt end of the weapon against Oobleck’s Thermos. The impact pushes the Doctor back, but he charges back, blasting flames into the entity repeatedly but it spins the Sceptre quickly, so fast that it actually deflects the flames and then kicks him in the chest, turning and stabbing at Sun, jabbing his aura and Sun jabs his own staff right I to
the entity’s chest. The metal plates float apart as the Grimm battle around them, and then the metal closes back together by the ghostly energy created by the Geist, and then it blasts forward, punching Sun down into the ground and kicking him in the chest. “Ah! How does this asshole fight like that?” He questions, getting back up and taking his staff, seeing Oobleck battling the entity on his own, blocking every strike from the Praetorian Knight every single time it swings. Constant clapping bangs from every single movement made by the enemy.

Oobleck blasts flames into the chest of the Praetorian Knight but it shatters into a thousand pieces, and the smoke carries the metal around him, and then forms back together behind him. His eyes widen, and it swings the Sceptre round and smashes it right into Oobleck’s chest so hard it throws the Doctor across the floor, sliding to a halt. He groans as he lays there, and Sun sprints towards it, slamming his hand together and sending his Via Sun Forms jumping towards the Praetorian Knight. It snarls in anger, staggering back from how many of them jump up onto him like the little spider monkeys that they are.

It roars with anger, grabbing them and ripping them from its body and then swinging round to kick Sun in the face again, he falls back and tumbles across the floor. Only for Oobleck to swiftly blast towards the Praetorian Knight in a cyclonic spin of flames, colliding into it so hard it actually blows some pieces of armour from its body. It staggers back and swings its Sceptre round, but the skill Huntsman dodges it, then blasts flames into the leg and smashes the Thermos across its face. The Praetorian Knight grunts in pain for the first time, and snarls with rage, grabbing Oobleck by the throat and throwing him through a building, shattering it upon impact.

Oobleck groans when the Praetorian Knight darts forward and pulls him from the rubble and throws him once more. As he flips through the air, he blasts another fireball directly at the ten-foot-tall knight, blowing the arm off for a second but the plates come back together where the telekinetic smoke holds it all together. Oobleck lands on his feet and aims his Thermos at the entity. “I have never encountered a Creature like you before…oh how I cannot wait to study you.” He chuckles with a smirk.

The Praetorian Knight walks towards him, and does not even retort, it just attacks again. But as it walks towards him, Sun fires his Gun-Chucks repeatedly at the enemy, multiple shell shards impacting the metal and throwing sparks everywhere. It stares at him and deflects the shots and then swings straight at his face, but Sun uses his staff with great skill and speed, blocking every hit and backing up to defend himself. Sun fights extremely fast, ducking under swings and using one the Gun-Chucks to blow out the kneecap of the Praetorian Knight and it falls. But eventually the smoke pulls the metal pieces back to where they should be.

However, Sun is starting to notice weaknesses…it takes a few seconds for the metal to come back together. Blow bits off fast and it might not be able to stay as strong…and the head…it gets angry when you hit it in the head. Sun blocks one of the strikes but was not fast enough to block the second which hits him in the chest and blows him across the floor. It looks back at Oobleck and then at Sun.

Sun looks at his Aura Meter and so does Oobleck.

They are both in the red.
Across the battlefield from them, Ruby and Blake slash their weapons across the bodies of the Grimm that attack them, hearing the funny words of Eryka in the background with Winter. “Look out! Beringel!” Winter calls out.

“Holy hell…it can speak multiple languages!” Eryka gasps.

“Nit BILINGUAL you BOOB!” Winter yells in the distance as they battle against the huge Grimm. Ruby fires her rifle and she slices three Beowulves clean in half and Blake vanishes into one of her Shadows to dodge the Creep that just jumped at her. She lands behind it and stabs it in the back of the head, standing beside her friend. Yang suddenly crashes down, with a Boarbatusk in her grasp, holding it by the long-curved tusk and swinging it round, throwing it into a wall. Weiss then finally arrives, sliding across the ground and stabbing a Beowulf in the chest, stepping off her Glyph.

They all look at the huge Hydra that is attacking, destroying everything in its path. “How the hell are we gonna take that thing down?” Yang questions as she stares at the huge creature, toppling over buildings and burning anything in front of it.

“I hate to be that person, but Ruby…do you know how you did that thing with your eyes?” Weiss inquires.

“No…afraid not.” Ruby admits, still unsure of what that even means. She looks at them and then she sees Blake looking worried, because she has spotted Sun and Oobleck fighting against the Praetorian Knight. They have been fighting back and forth but the Knight is winning, and from here they watch in horror.

It kicks Sun in the jaw and then starts striking Oobleck repeatedly, slashing him across his aura, and with one hard strike…there is a bright green flash, of his aura crackling away. And then the Praetorian Knight spins its Sceptre through its floating fingers and stabs the curved blade straight through his ribs.

Blood splattering onto the floor…and Oobleck gasps with shock from how it felt.

Sun’s eyes widen and it all seems to go quiet.

“NOOO!” Ruby shrieks with horror as she sees the blade protruding out from Oobleck’s back, and he gasps, lifted off the floor by the Praetorian Knight. But then it sets him down and takes the blade from his ribs, and it lets him fall. He falls to the ground, and he looks over at Sun, who stares at him with horror in his eyes.

How quickly…it went from them joking…to this…

And he has only a few last words to the Monkey Faunus. “Protect…people…it was all I ever wanted to do…now…please…protect what means the most to you…” Oobleck wheezes as he lays on the ground, and the Praetorian Knight bows its head in respect.

Sun watches with heartbreak…as the light leaves Oobleck’s eyes, and he stops breathing. Blood leaving his chest and his heart stops. The Knight stands with honour. “Few have the privilege of dying with honour.” The Praetorian Knight says, honoured by the good Doctor’s brave final acts. But Sun…his eye twitches and he roars with rage, swinging his staff into the skull of the Praetorian Knight with all his might, and a bellow of pain and rage erupts from the Praetorian Knight, and he keeps striking it. He detaches the Gun-Chucks, spinning them round and firing them repeatedly in vengeance for Oobleck who was just so swiftly killed in front of him.
“No! Sun!” Blake screams, running after him as he keeps hitting the Praetorian Knight towards the edge of the battlefield, where the ground has collapsed from where countless Subterranean Grimm erupted, caving in a section of the Destroyed District of Vale. Ruby and Yang stand with Weiss, staring at the body of Oobleck laying there and she falls to her knees, shaking him desperately to wake him up.

“Doctor? Doctor please…” She whimpers desperately as she tries to wake him up.

Blake keeps running after them, cutting through the Grimm to try and save Sun from the entity. He is letting his rage get the better of him, and that will not work against an emotionless Praetorian Knight. She can see the fight, and now it has turned, Sun is now the one facing the hole in the city where the buildings fell during the first battle. But Sun is still fighting, blocking as many hits as he can with Ruyi Jingu Bang, striking the head of the Praetorian Knight over and over again.

But he didn’t block…

And the Praetorian Knight takes the Sceptre’s grip and smacks the weapon against Sun’s nose, stunning him for a second – and breaking his aura in a yellow flash and crackle – and then swinging the blade upwards with great force. The blade cuts straight into Sun’s skin and through his shirt, leaving a deep gash across his muscular chest and up his face, just missing his eye. Blood erupts from the impact of the curved blade cutting through his skin and the action throws Sun up in the air, and he plummets into the crater.

“SUUUUJUN!” Blake shrieks with horror as he falls from her vision, getting her team’s attention.

Sun plummets down the crater, crashing against the rocks and tumbling, finally slamming down into the dirty ground with a heavy thud. Blood is leaking from his deep wound, covering half his face and his white shirt forever ruined by it. He groans in agony, barely able to breathe from being winded. The Praetorian Knight lands down beside him, and stares down at him, crouching down and grabbing him by the throat, lifting him off the floor and staring into his eyes.

He is clinging to life…

The Praetorian Knight does not say a word, it just points the blood coated tip of the Sceptre to his heart and is about to thrust forward. Until Gambol Shroud suddenly wraps around the Sceptre and Blake lands behind the entity, swinging round with all her might and pulling the Sceptre from its grasp, launching it straight through its own chest. The Knight staggers back and releases Sun, and it looks at her as he hits the floor with a groan, his blood soaking the mud as he suffers.

The Praetorian Knight grabs the Sceptre with both hands and pulls it from its own chest, staring her down with the weapon aimed at her.

But then…

Ruby

Weiss

And Yang land around the Praetorian Knight, and Sun crawls back against the wall, in great pain but staying alive as long as he can. “Just hold on Sun!” She cries out to him, and the Praetorian Knight stares into her eyes, and then at the rest of Team R.W.B.Y.

“You’re gonna pay for what you did.” Yang snarls, for killing Oobleck and hurting Sun.

“We all will face the consequences for our actions.” The Praetorian Knight tells Yang, and she sees
a flash of Mercury in her eyes, but that only angers her.

And they all stare at the entity.

If they were not already motivated to kill this thing.

They are now.
The Praetorian's Promise

Ruby

Sparks fly, metal scrapes and clangs, and vicious yells from both sides of good and evil erupt from the crater from which they reside.

The Praetorian Knight battles against the four girls with its huge Sceptre, spiralling it through its digits and dodging some of their attacks. Yang swings her fists at the face of the Praetorian, both metal and skin colliding against rubble and steel pulled together from the ghostly Geist within this artificial monstrosity created. It darts across the muddy ground where sewage has been spilling in from the damaged pipes buried underneath the roads. It presses it legs up against the wall to thrust off, spinning through the air before stabbing downwards with the Sceptre at where Yang was standing. Ruby shrieks with rage, blasting towards the creature, slashing Crescent Rose across its kneecaps to try and topple the entity over, but as soon as the blade cuts through the metal and rubble – and it shatters – the black smoke just pulls it all back together.

Geists are not like normal Grimm when it comes to combat, it does not feel pain from hits on the things it has possessed, it only feels pain on the only physical portion of its being – the face. However, the face is surrounded by the surroundings it has collected from the destruction to create the helm, guarding its only real weakness. Blake casts a shadow just as the Praetorian Knight grabs Ruby by the throat, lifting her off the floor and crushing her throat slowly as she writhes around in its heavy grasp. She kicks and punches the arm to try and break free, but nothing is working. Blake yells with rage, taking both the blade and scabbard of Gambol Shroud and slashing both of them through the arm of the entity. The metal and rubble shatters, the hand crumbling away from Ruby’s throat, releasing her from its grasp. She falls down into the mud and gasps for air, rolling out of the way to avoid the staggering footsteps of the Praetorian Knight.

Blake swings round and kicks the Knight in the head with her heels and it snarls with anger as it staggers, swinging round on its own heel to slash at Blake, knocking her out of the air. All while in the background, Sun is suffering. Covered in his own blood from the deep wound that has been inflicted upon his body by this Creature of Grimm. Blake crashes against the wall of stone and mud, falling down into the puddle of brown water, coughing as it covers her face and sticks into her black hair.

Lightning crackles above their heads, and the heavens begin to open up, rainfall beginning with great force. The amount of rain starts to build and build, and Blake realises he is in serious trouble. Sun is incapacitated from his wound, it is a surprise he is still conscious from the hit, and from the fall he suffered. If he remains inside of this hole, if they all remain inside of this hole, they will all drown in muddy sewage water. The water level is already beginning to increase around them. Blake stares at the glowing red eyes of the Praetorian Knight and then at Sun, who cannot move from where he is. She knows they need to get him out, but there is no real way out of here that could be possible with him in her arms. They need to make a way out.

The Praetorian Knight walks towards Blake, dragging the sharp end of the Sceptre through the water, rainwater pattering off the body of the entity as it approaches slowly. Blake runs to Sun and she draws her pistol, firing it repeatedly at the entity but the bullets either just fracture the concrete and rubble collected in tiny areas, or it just bounces off the steel inside of it. The Praetorian Knight lifts the Sceptre above its head and goes to stab her straight through the heart, but it is stopped
suddenly as a Black Glyph forms right in front of the Sceptre, blasting the Praetorian Knight back, and straight into the cybernetic fist of the Praetorian Knight. It crashes down to the ground with a heavy boom, and Yang looks around, then she finds multiple cracks in the walls of stone.

She looks to Blake by Sun. “Blake!” Yang yells, as she loads some of her missiles into the belt chambers of Ember Celica, and she fires the single Gauntlet towards the surrounds. The missile screeches through the air and explodes, spreading more cracks and fissures throughout the structure and causing it all to collapse. Blake wraps her arms around Sun, protecting him from the falling debris that collapses down into the ground. “Go! Get Sun out of here!” Yang yells, then the Praetorian Knight rises back up behind her, and clenches its hands into fists as it runs towards her and swings.

Blake turns to Sun and she loops her arm around him and lifts the young man off the ground, pulling him up. “Just…leave me…” He winces, trying to protect her despite the fact he is losing a scary amount of blood right now.

“Shut up!” Blake replies as she pulls him up, letting him rest on her shoulder and making him move, walking as fast as they can through the battlefield that rages behind them. Yang jumps towards the Praetorian Knight and she punches it straight across the face, and she slides across the ground. The Knight still towers above them, but then the telekinetically bound surroundings constrict tightly together, shortening the once towering Praetorian Knight this time. It ducks under her punch and returns with another that throws her off her feet. Ruby fires Crescent Rose behind her, riding the Scythe blade and slashing it across the shoulder, and then she dashes out of the way of its foot that stamps down at where her head just was, nothing but petals being crushed beneath her.

The Praetorian Knight reaches its hand out, and black smoke extends from the hand like a longer appendage growing from it, wrapping around the pieces that formed the sceptre, and it swings round and blocks the neck strike from Ruby, sparks bursting from the impact, as she spins through the air in a red blur. Countless metallic bangs resound from every time her blade meets with the impact against the Sceptre, and then the Praetorian Knight takes a slash across the face from Weiss as she blasts over its head with the help of her Glyph. She then does the same again, but now stabbing right through its back. It staggers forward and swings its elbow backwards into her face to knock the Schnee Heiress from its chassis.

She falls and crashes down into the watery abyss beneath her, ruining her clothes and choking her white hair. It reaches down and grabs her by the back of her head, lifting her up and going to plunge the Sceptre down into the back of her neck, until Yang yells as she takes both her fists, clasping them together and swinging them across the face of the entity, knocking it over. The Praetorian Knight releases Weiss from the impact of two fists and it crashes down into the ground, but as Yang jumps towards it, it kicks her in the chest to keep her back from its face. It gets back up and blasts towards Blake with great speed, until Ruby yells with rage, taking Crescent Rose and stabbing it straight into its flank, the speed of her petals sends both her and the Knight crashing down into the rubble and water with a huge splash. It gets back up and pulls rubble from the ground with its telekinetic smoke and throws it at Ruby, but she shatters it with the protective spin of her scythe, giving Weiss the time to launch fire dust shells into the side of the Knight, in a blast of fiery colours that throws it across the area again.

The Knight snarls in anger down there, quickly getting back up to throw the Sceptre straight at Weiss, but she slides across the Water on her Glyph, dodging it but then it pulls it right back into its hand, ducking down from her dash forward, trying to stab it straight through its face with Myrtenaster, however it did not work. Because it ducks down and shoulder-charges Weiss across the water, pinning her up against the wall with its armoured shoulder. She gasps for air as it holds
Yang jumps towards it and punches it across the side of its head, firing her shotguns at the same time, and it staggers back from the impact, chunks of metal thrown from the punch. She swings again but it catches her human fist and stares down at her, squeezing tight, but Yang returns with a second punch that collides right into the centre of its chest, throwing her foe back and straight into the horizontal swing of Crescent Rose. The impact blows its legs off and it crashes down onto the ground, but it stares back up at them with a deep guttural growl.

They watch with disbelief as the black smoke rebuilds the legs with more rubble and metal around it, rising back up, and the pieces collected open up again, and it rises above them, dwarfing them once more.

Blake continues to help Sun, carrying him up the slope that Yang created with her missile. She keeps moving despite the violence she can hear behind them. She keeps him going, and they look ahead to see the rest of Team S.S.S.N nearby, and the three of them turn to see Sun badly wounded and in Blake’s hands. “Sun!” Neptune yells, sprinting towards Blake with Sage and Scarlet, Scarlet fires his Flintlock Pistol and manages to nail one of the Beowulves in the head before it could even get close.

“Guys! You need to get Sun to safety!” Blake tells them, giving Sun to Sage.

“What happened to him?” Neptune asks with immense worry, seeing the deep slash through his chest and across his face, just missing his eye and going through his hair on one side.

“That thing, the Geist! It…killed Oobleck and hit him.” Blake stammers, choking up at the mention of Oobleck’s name after watching him die from all the way over there by the Colonnades.

“Oobleck? No…” Scarlet stammers with disbelief, Sage begins to take Sun away, and they all look in the direction of the hole, hearing the rest of her team still battling against the Praetorian Knight inside.

“Please, get Sun somewhere safe. Find someone who can fix him up. Stop the bleeding, just keep him alive…please.” Blake begs them with tears in her eyes.

“Consider it done, Blake.” Sage promises with the nod of his head, turning, but Sun reaches out for Blake, and he can barely even speak through the pain.

“Blake…” He winces, and she stops, looking back at him, stammering as she speaks.

“You’ve gotta get out of here.” She tells him, and he scoffs, blood still covering one of his eyes and that side of his face.

“And you’ve gotta be kidding me.” He replies, biting down on his lip to fight the pain, gasping as it sharpens at some points.

“Don’t argue with me, Sun.” She demands, staring right back into his eyes.

“We’re in this till the end.” He tells her, coughing the blood from his mouth and spitting it onto the floor. Blake closes her eyes and sighs, walking towards Sun and she reaches out to his face, caressing the untouched side.

“You asked me…where we stood.” Blake says to him softly, and his heart melts as he hears her desperately trying to fight the tears. “I know where we stand now…” She promises, slowly moving forward and closing her eyes, kissing him affectionately on the lips for a few seconds. The kiss
breaks and he hold her hand.

“Please…” He begs her.

“You know I love you, Sun… and I’m done running from it. I will come back for you.” She promises with a smile, stepping back and drawing Gambol Shroud once more. Sun smirks at her, despite the pain that throbs across his body.

“Then go kick its ass.” He replies with a smile, and she smiles back. Suddenly an almighty bang breaks the moment, and they all stare at the hole, seeing Yang get thrown straight through the edge of the hole, blowing tarmac and rubble across the sky before she tumbles and rolls across the floor. Ruby and Weiss also are thrown from inside of the hole, and she looks back at Team S.S.S.N.

“Go! Now!” She orders and the four of them turn to get out of there, and Blake grits her teeth, and sprints to her team. The Praetorian Knight swiftly jumps out from the hole, soaring above their heads with the Sceptre in its grasp and channelling red energy through the Sceptre and its body, holding it with both hands as it descends towards the ground and slams it down with all its might. The impact creates a huge red electrical pulse that blows them further across the ground, tumbling to a stop and Blake uses her shadow clone to take the hit. She then dashes forward, and she swings Gambol Shroud straight at the Praetorian Knight. The Entity stares straight at her and blocks her strike with the Sceptre, staring directly into her amber eyes with its unnatural fiery red pearls of fire.

The two of them lock blades, sparks bleeding from the contact of two blades scraping against one another. “Your love for each other is nothing more than an innocent folly, that blinds you to the real disease that plagues this world.” The Praetorian Knight says to her in its sinisterly well-spoken voice, but Blake grits her teeth, then she vanishes into a shadow, suddenly appearing behind it and stabbing Gambol Shroud into the back of its head, or at least she tries to, and only misses and ends up stabbing it in the neck due to it moving its head out of the way.

“Yeah…I know what the disease is, I’m looking right at it.” She snarls, staring directly at the Creature of Grimm. The Praetorian Knight suddenly shatters into a thousand pieces, the black smoke carries all the pieces it had collected and flies around them in a swirling cyclone of darkness and debris, before returning back to its Knight Form before the four of them. Blake lands back on her feet and looks to her partner. “Yang? Are you alright?” She asks her, and Yang gets back up, cracking her neck and rolling her shoulders.

“Yep, never better.” She replies before lifting her fists and staring the entity down. Ruby stands with Weiss, and all four of them watch the Praetorian Knight.

“This thing must have a weakness, we need to work together. Overwhelm it.” Ruby suggests, and Yang nods her head.

“Break it apart piece by piece.” Yang says, remembering some of the Bestiary Lessons that Oobleck and Port would teach them about the many monsters that lurk out there in the wilderness. Normally the best move to destroy a Geist would be to use unrelenting force, attacking it with multiple people and blow off the pieces holding its body together.

No body, no defence.

“I can use my glyphs to help us.” Weiss assures, and all the while as they prepare themselves, the Praetorian Knight stands at the ready, waiting for his foes to actually be ready to fight. Just like a knight would, it treats its foe with full honour, and respect.
“Remember our team attacks? We use them as well. Use everything we know on this thing.” Ruby says, and they all nod their heads in agreement and ready their weapons, staring the Praetorian Knight down. It stands before them, spinning the Sceptre through its fingers, aiming the curved bladed end towards them as it stands in its combat stance, ready to thrust forward at the moment it needs to. Ruby decides on the first move, and she looks to Blake. “Ladybug!” She calls out, and they all thrust forward but it is Ruby and Blake that make the strategic moves. Yang blasts forward and swings her fist straight at the face of the Praetorian Knight, but it blocks her strike by crossing its forearms over, then countering with a hard push forward, casting a shockwave that blows them away from it. She tumbles back, but Weiss steadies her descent with a Glyph, helping her land on her feet.

Ruby and Blake both blast forward, and they strike repeatedly against the armoured body that the Praetorian Knight has created. Ruby fires her rifle behind her back, riding the recoil as she slashes its body repeatedly with every attack, and Blake jumps and dashes forward, propelling her real body by using her shadows to throw her further. She slams the blades across the body as well, loud bangs echo from both attacks at once. Ruby digs her blade down into the ground, and Blake slides across the ground, before dashing forward again. The Praetorian Knight recovers from the multiple sudden attacks, and it stabs downwards at where Blake was stood, in which she engages her semblance and jumps back, also using an Ice Dust magazine to freeze her shadow into a sculpture of herself.

With the Sceptre stuck inside of her chest, and keeping it stuck as well, the ice hardening around the black smoke that forges the Sceptre. “Freezer Burn!” Ruby calls out again, and Weiss nods to Yang, lifting Yang up with one of her Glyphs, and then launching her towards the Praetorian Knight. Yang yells, pulling her cybernetic fist back and throwing it forward, punching it straight across the face with all her might. Some of the rubble shatters beyond usage for the Knight and it staggers back from her, and Weiss swiftly zooms forward with Yang beside her.

Weiss twirls round and stabs Myrtenaster down and sends a long line of ice spikes protruding up from the ground towards the Praetorian Knight. One of them stabs clean through the armour platting and it growls with anger, giving Yang time to deliver multiple punches. She hits and hits over and over again, dodging the downwards punch from the Praetorian Knight as it tries to pull its leg from the ice that Weiss summoned. The Knight’s fist crashes down into the ground so hard it cracks the floor, but Yang uppercuts the Praetorian with force, knocking it back and pulling its leg from the ice. Weiss dashes towards it and jumps up, spinning through the air like a corkscrew, blasting through its chest and blowing parts of the armour off. The Knight staggers from that as well, turning to face her as she dashes again, jabbing into the armour over and over, before swiping one of its ankles with the blade.

The Praetorian Knight collapses down to the severed foot and then swings at her face, finally connecting a hit, one that hit so hard it actually throws Weiss across the floor with a heavy boom. Weiss groans, rubbing her face, the bruise healing fast thanks to her aura. She arches her arm and aims her sword at the creature, zooming forward once again. The Praetorian Knight punches down towards her again but she pushes the tip of Myrtenaster above her head, creating a bright pulse of dust that pushes it back. “Bumblebee!” Ruby calls out in the background, and as the Praetorian Knight staggers back from Weiss, it turns to see Blake throwing her grappling hook to Yang who catches it.

Blake strains, swinging Yang round and she sprints as fast as she can to build up momentum, then Blake throws Yang. Yang shoots towards the Geist like a bullet, sending one powerful cybernetic haymaker right into its face. The impact knocks it down, and she tackles it, both of them fall down a long set of stairs towards the courtyard outside of the Food Hall, tumbling and punching at one another on the way down. Yang lands onto its chest as they make it down to the bottom, and her
eyes glow red with anger, but she does not lose her way. She sends punch after punch after punch at the Praetorian Knight, pounding its skull in with every single strike. She yells with fury, punch after punch after punch, cracks spreading through the ground with every hit. “STAY! AWAY! FROM! THIS! SCHOOL!” Yang bellows with rage, but with her next punch, the Praetorian Knight catches her wrist, and stares her right in the eyes, before punching her right in the chest with all its might, sending her flying and crashing through the windows, smashing through the chairs.

The Praetorian Knight reaches out its hand, and the Sceptre comes flying right back from where it was stuck, shattering the sculpture of Blake in ice. It lands in its palm and it walks in, then sees Yang standing there…and she has shut down. Because she knows where it is standing, it is where he was standing. For a few seconds there, she did not see the Praetorian Knight…

…she saw Adam staring right back.

“Yang! Yang!” Ruby’s distant voice screams, when suddenly the hallucination of Adam is broken as the Praetorian Knight thrusts towards her, grabbing her by the throat, lifting her over its head, about fourteen feet above the ground, and then smashes her down through the tables with force, shattering the wood like glass. Yang groans as she lays there.

“Humans…Faunus…such inefficient creatures.” The Praetorian Knight states, crouching down beside her as it stares down at her blonde-haired head. “You let your weaknesses haunt you…and in the end…it will not even matter. Because you will fail…you always fail.” The Praetorian Knight states, lifting the Sceptre above its head to stab her in the skull, only for Blake to swing round and kick it in the chest, protecting Yang this time from being hurt again. She stands in front of Yang as she starts to get back up, a Xiao Long to the end.

Ruby and Weiss both arrive as well, at the ready to keep fighting this monster that stands in the centre of the Food Hall. “In the end, you will all run into the shadows…like the vermin you are.” The Praetorian Knight promises as it stands with such calmness surrounding it.

Blake shakes her head slowly. “I’m done running.” She tells it, and it stares right back.

“The only thing that’ll be running today is the rest of that army of yours. Nobody else will die today.” She states.

“And yet…you have still failed. You failed to complete your duty…to save everyone.” The Praetorian Knight states.

“We have…but we can still stop you.” Ruby replies, aiming her huge Scythe at it.

The Praetorian Knight aims the Sceptre at them. “If that is your decision.” It states, ready to grant them another battle.

Jaune

The battle continues, and the largest Grimm have arrived on the Battlefield.

The Goliaths roar as they smash through the armaments that stand in their way, and Team J.N.P.R charge towards the huge mammal Grimm. Jaune leads the charge with Pyrrha beside him, and he jumps towards it, but it smacks him out of the way with its trunk, sending him tumbling across the floor. As he rolls, his eyes widen as a Beowulf leaps towards him, claws sharp and jaws open as it
roars, about to tear him apart, if not for him pushing his sword upwards and stabbing it through the heart, killing it instantly. The Beowulf fades away into smoke and he gets back up, seeing his team fighting against the huge Goliath. He sprints back to their aid, jumping and stabbing Crocea Mors into its thick hide. The Goliath roars in pain as it stands there, turning to try and get him, but Pyrrha throws her shield and jumps off it, flipping through the air before transforming Milo into its rifle form, firing it repeatedly at the head of the creature, but the bullets are doing little to no damage to the thick black hide that covers its head.

The Goliath roars as Ren slides across its back, digging the curved green blades of Stormflower into the hide, splitting the skin and flesh open, glowing red on the inside, heat trapped inside finally escaping. Nora shoots her grenade launcher and the grenades explode against the ear, blowing it from its head. Pyrrha flips round, and kicks off her shield, pulling it with her by using her polarity semblance. She stabs it right through one of the eyes with Milo in its spear form, hanging on as the massive beast roars with anger and pain, writhing around as it tries to shake them off.

Jaune stabs into the skin, climbing his way up onto the body of the beast, and then he finally gets up top. He jumps up and he sees the top of its skull, sprinting towards it and he stabs the blade downwards into the top of its head. The beast roars in pain but it did not cut deep enough, so he turns to Nora. “Nora! Hammer down!” He calls out.

“You got it!” Nora cheers, jumping up in the air and flipping round, before slamming her pink electrified hammer downwards with all her might. The impact blasts pink lightning through its body and it roars in pain, before collapsing to the ground. Pyrrha twists Milo and throws herself from its body, landing down on the ground, looking back as Ren jumps off too. Jaune jumps as well but is caught by the claws of a Manticore that flies towards him and carries him away.

“JAUNE!” Pyrrha cries out.

“See ya guys!” Jaune calls out as he stabs its stomach over and over again, somehow sounding like he is enjoying himself. She goes to follow, but Nora runs ahead.

“Stay and fight! I’ll go get him!” Nora assures.

Jaune yells with fury, as he takes his sword and rams it right through the underside of the huge Lion Scorpion Dragon, digging the blade deeper and it roars in pain, descending and Jaune gasps. He opens his shield and pushes it downwards, protecting himself from the impact, scraping and sliding across the ground, before coming to a stop. He groans as he comes to a stop. Watching as the Manticore plummets down to the ground behind him, evaporating into nothing more than smoke.

Jaune chuckles. “Well…that was fun.” He chuckles, he pushes his hand against his knee as he gets up and turns.

But then…

Jaune is stuck.

His feet are frozen in place, his eyes unable to break free from the weapons locker that stands before him. It is sat slightly lop sided within its impact crater. The door is blown open, the weapons obviously now in the student's hands. But he just cannot break his stare, deep in the dark innards of the locker.

"There's no time...go, get to Vale and call for help!"
“Wait, what’re you gonna do…no…no Pyrrha you can’t. You saw how powerful she is.”

"Pyrrha I won’t let you do this..."

"I'm sorry."

Even though he has forgiven her, the pain of that night has not faded. And it all seems to be
happening again, monsters invading Vale and Beacon, killing everything and everyone in their
path. Someone used to trigger the attack in the first place, it is literally like time is repeating itself.

And he keeps repeating the same words to himself in his mind.

Not again...not again...

Jaune blinks, trembling, eyes watering. His vision grows blurry and wobbly, yet still he cannot look
away. His sword shakes in his hand, fingers loosening their grip as Crocea Mors threatens to fall.
He is back in that moment, so real he even thinks it is happening again. He turns sharply, breaking
eye line for the first time. Pyrrha cups his cheeks in both hands, planting her lips over his. His tears
fall, melding with the rainwater, her fingers ghosting over his cheeks. She peels away, and harshly
shoves, but her ghostly palms going through his chest, his feet staying rooted. The echoes of his
pleas, all meeting a crescendo with her apology.

The echo of a rocket launch rumbles in his ears.

"Jaune!" His hand is grabbed tightly, and his mind tears back to the present with a clap of thunder.
Nora stares at him with deep worry furrowing her brows, his hand gripped by hers. "Are you with
me?"

"Y-Yeah... I just." He pinches his brow, nodding to the pod. Nora bites her lip, before quickly
hugging him tightly, Magnhild pressed against his back.

"She's not gone though, Jaune." Nora whispers into his ear, stepping back to eye him confidently.
"We need to go help her. She and Ren are still fighting in the courtyard." Nora points to the distant
courtyard. "We need to go."

Jaune takes one last look back to the locker, walking up to it and lifting a hand. He swallows
thickly, closes his eyes, and when they reopen, a new fire rages in them. Not the snuffed flames of
defeat, of heartbreak. The fires of leadership, of companionship. Of being a goddamn hero. He
shuts the locker door with a slam, turning to Nora with a determined expression.

"Nora!" He points to her, to which she grins and readies her hammer. "Go and meet up with Ren,
I’ll find Pyrrha. We need to figure out how to take that big thing down.” Jaune orders, and Nora
smirks with a nod.

"Got it fearless leader!” Nora beams. she turns, but he catches her hand. She looked back at him
with confusion. Jaune purses his lips, then says softly.

“And be careful.”

“You too.” She agrees with a nod, and the two of them charge their way back to the courtyard,
leaving their painful past behind, and the locker with it. Jaune keeps moving as fast as he can, and
he gasps, hearing the roar of the massive War Sphinx that soars overhead, bombing the courtyard
with fireballs, multiple fighter jets from Vale and Atlas battling against the many Airborne Grimm,
keeping them busy and from diving down to attack the ground forces.
The pilots are showing incredible skill as they dodge the fireballs shot from the Manticores and the War Sphinx that circles the skies, taking hits from the powerful machine guns loaded onto them. The War Sphinx however is acting differently to the Hydra and the rest of the huge forces of Grimm. It does not even seem to be very interested in attacking the Academy or trying to get to the Relic inside of the Vault underneath the school. Because it is headed directly for Vale right now, and it has starting breathing fire into the districts that the Grimm never made it into. His eyes widen with total shock and horror, seeing the Grimm are going for the people again.

He can hear the chatter from the fighter pilots in his scroll. “Alpha Leader! You have two bogeys on your six!” One of the pilots calls out, and the pilot looks back in his cockpit, seeing two Nevermores behind him. He sighs, and growls, switching modes.

“Crap.” He says, before suddenly entering Vertical Take Off and Landing Mode, stopping suddenly and allowing the two massive Corvids to fly right past his head. He then fires missiles that explode into the bodies of the giant Creatures of Grimm, knocking them out of the sky and into clouds of smoke.

“The War Sphinx is going for the civilians, sir!” Another pilot calls out. But as they fly around and take out the Grimm, a fireball from one of the Manticores clips the wing of one of the pilots, fire erupts from the thruster and it spins out of control.

“I’ve been hit! I’m going down!” The pilot calls out, and Jaune watches helplessly as the fighter jet and the pilot inside crash down into the ground with great speed, exploding into a cloud of flames. The explosion killed him instantly, and the boom echoes a few seconds after the explosion could be seen from all the way over here.

Another life lost.

Too many people are dying.

“We need to end this!” Jaune yells with anger, and he sprints as fast as he can, vaulting across the toppled over pillars and running back into the Courtyard. He swings his sword across the neck of a Beowulf and beheads it instantly. The creature collapses with a thud before crumbling away into smoke. He looks across the battlefield and can see the White Fang offering so much support, trucks with mounted machine guns firing constantly at the horde, shredding through their numbers, and many foot soldiers shooting the Grimm down.

And then, there is Sienna Khan.

The Tigress of the White Fang charges towards an Ursa and she jumps over its head as it swings at her thin frame, but as she flips over its head she throws and wraps her chain around its neck. She swings back round and tights it, before cutting its head from its shoulders with the sharp blades that have been built into her unique weapon. She spins her chain round and swings it hard and fast, launching the small blades with dust loaded inside of them towards the Grimm. One of them is loaded with fire dust to an explosive point and it stabs straight into the side of an Ursa’s head. The explosion blows half of its ugly face off and it collapses down to the ground with a heavy thud. She then rolls out of the way, jumping up and sending three powerful kicks into the chest of a Beowulf which attacked her. She jumps off the beast and flips through the air, swinging her chain and wrapping it around the body of the beast.

As she lands, she throws it over her head, sending it head first into the ground, crushing the skull and ending the creature. She rolls across the floor and stands beside her friend – Ilia Amitola. The Chameleon Faunus sprints forward and slashes her whip across the neck of one of Beowulves before stabbing it straight through the chest, sending high voltage dust into its body to electrocute
it. As they battle, Sienna turns to see Ghira grabbing a Beowulf by the throat and throwing it across the battlefield, and he turns with Kali beside him. “Sienna?”

“Hello again, Ghira. Been a long time.” She says with the nod of her head.

“It has, must say I’m surprised to see you here.” Ghira comments.

“Well – Adam Taurus defied my orders. His punishment is yet to be complete.” She assures him as she wraps her chain around her forearm again. They then look across the battlefield at the massive Hydra that smashes through everything in its path, the many heads killing everyone that stands in its way.

“Let’s hope your reinforcements help us turn the tide.” Ghira prays.

Jaune stands there, and finally sees Pyrrha amongst the chaos and he runs to her. He jumps and smashes his shield across the face of one of the Creeps that jumps towards him. Pyrrha immediately hugs him and kisses his cheek lovingly. “Are you alright?” He asks him, since the last she saw of him he was being carried away by a Manticore.

“Oh yeah, totally fine.” He shrugs. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

“The Grimm just keep coming. This is worse than last time, they definitely built up their numbers and got some new ones. I don’t remember ever seeing Sphinxes here. They live in Mistral, so do Manticores.” She states, since she was born there and trained there at Sanctum Academy all the way in Argus, she would know these things from the teachers who work there to make the best warriors they possibly can.

“I know, I don’t remember seeing half of the creatures here. Especially not that Knight.” Jaune states, seeing the scars where Team R.W.B.Y were fighting it at the time.

“Or that thing.” Pyrrha states, pointing at the Hydra. The beast is huge, and it is smashing through their forces, six heads lunging down and biting onto the warriors that fight. Poor students or White Fang soldiers – even some Atlesian Soldiers are down there as well, firing their rifles repeatedly at the titan. “I have never seen anything like that before.” Pyrrha states as she stands beside Jaune, watching it as it moves. And people fire missiles into its body but it does not even flinch or stop.

But as Jaune watches it…he narrows his eyes as he stares at the titan.

“Wait a second…” He mutters as he stares at it.

The markings in the centre of the creature’s chest, it is showing the markings of some kind of creature. There are glowing red eyes and they all seem to be bound together. Jaune looks at it and his eyes widen, seeing the long scorpion stinger at the back, the flames exhaled from the six Taijitu heads. “That’s it…look at its chest.” Jaune says as he points to it, and Pyrrha sees it as well. “There isn’t any other part of the body like that.”

“And it has elements of other Grimm.” Pyrrha also deduces.

“I think whatever is inside of it’s chest, created that thing by taking other Grimm. Combining them.” Jaune says.

“Is that even possible?” Pyrrha asks it.

“I wouldn’t put it past the Grimm to pull something like this.” Jaune states as he walks forward, seeing it moving back to the centre of the Academy. It now stares directly at the Academy where
The Vault is, and it snarls. He turns, seeing the White Fang Forces standing with them. Ironwood pants as he reloads his pistol – everyone is at the ready. Eryka stands with her Bow drawn and Dulcis circling the skies. Nora and Ren return back to their sides, at the ready, and now they are all ready to take this massive monster on.

“This is gonna be one tough son of a bitch to take down.” Coco says, keeping the barrels rotating.

“Then we’ll give it everything we’ve got.” Cardin states, spinning his mace through his fingers. They then see team S.S.S.N, excluding their leader, emerging from the Amphitheatre, Sage with Sun’s blood on him but also with labour shown.

“Sage?” Jaune asks him as he walks over.

“Where’s Sun?” Pyrrha asks with worry.

“He’ll live…he got wounded.” Sage states.

“Where’s Oobleck too? Wasn’t he with Sun?” Port asks as he stands there, all of them still keeping their eyes on the Hydra that stands before them, the army of Grimm still by its side.

“Oobleck…Oobleck didn’t make it.” Scarlet tells them all, and their eyes widen with horror. But that horror turns to anger, and now that anger is about to be directed towards the Black Smog and that huge Hydra.

Whereas the War Sphinx is still attacking the city.

“We need to kill this thing before anybody else dies.” Ironwood orders, aiming his revolver and channelling dust through his Cybernetic Arm.

**Vale**

Terror roams the city of Vale as the War Sphinx attacks them, raining fire down from above, blowing buildings apart with the powerful charges launched towards them. Huge chunks of burning rubble fall from the sky where buildings have been hit by the explosives and the huge creature banks around with a deafening roar, the long serpentine tail screeching as well behind it as it soars up into the flashing stormy sky.

A mother whimpers with her baby in her arms, carrying the child desperately as she follows the crowd of people running as fast as they can towards the Evacuation Centre. She can hear the many cries and screams of people as they try and get to safety. “Where are the Huntsmen? They should be protecting us!” A man screams with terror.

“They’re saving their own skin!” Another man yells, when suddenly a Manticore lands down right in front of them with a deep growl and then roar. It charges up the flames at the screaming civilians, their terror of being abandoned by the Huntsmen and Huntresses of Beacon is the reason behind why the War Sphinx was drawn here. The attraction to the Relic may be strong – but an entire city of terrified people?

It has made the few Grimm from the Black Smog split from the rest and attack. A Griffin lands on top of one of the buildings and roars down at them, jumping down and biting down onto a person, shaking him around before swallowing him whole. People scream with terror, but this whole crowd
of people have just become a feeding frenzy location for the creatures. The Manticore bites down onto the torso of a screaming man and takes off, burning his corpse in his mouth before chomping him down. The terror grows, but the mother closes her eyes with fear, hugging her baby close.

Until…

There is a loud gunshot and the Griffin collapses to the ground with a groan. The Grimm turn and roar at the coming reinforcements, shredded from the gunfire.

And leading the reinforcements – is Nathaniel Killian.

He draws his Chrome Revolver and fires it through the head of another Griffin, knocking it out of the sky with the Stockholm Troopers at his side. And then a holographic projection appears on everyone’s scrolls, showing the Councilwoman of Vale speaking to her people. “I am sorry this has happened, and I will accept any punishment you demand upon me for failing you twice. The man before you is Nathaniel Killian, the leader of an Organisation called the Black Gallows. They have been keeping us safe in secret for years, and now they will do it again. Please…I beg of you… listen to Killian, he will keep you all safe.” The Valerian Councilwoman says to everyone, and they all look to Killian.

He looks to his Stockholm Troopers and he nods his head, and they all walk ahead, their rifles and weapons at the ready, whilst the Raven Talons at the back help escort the civilians back. Then the next levels of Black Gallows soldier attack the Grimm.

The largest of them are called Ebony Sabres, specialising in Heavy Weapons and Ordnance, and they definitely do not disappoint. They wear huge Exo-Suits, totally black with massive machine guns, mortars and missile launchers built into them. There are other versions of Ebony Sabres, still in heavy Armour but not in Exo-Suits like the others. They slam down deployable cover and machine guns, firing them with the Exo-Suits at the Grimm that come charging towards the civilians, shredding them before they can even get close.

Then there are the Onyx Consuls, Marksman with powerful Sniper Rifles, cloaked with a black poncho that can turn invisible on command, and their visors glow the same colour as all the other Stockholm Troopers – dark red, the only colour than black on their personage. The Onyx Consuls clamber up the buildings to get good shots on the Grimm, shooting the aerial beasts from the sky, however even their firepower is not enough to bring down the massive War Sphinx.

Fighting with the Raven Talon Standard Infantrymen are the Sable Guards, the least armoured of them but are there for the purpose of security. These are the soldiers that are taking the civilians to safety with some Raven Talons and one Ebony Sabre with them, guarding them from anymore Grimm that come crashing down. The Sable Guards keep the people moving in a calm manor, rifles in their hands if they need to use them and stun batons if prisoners are – problematic.

Finally, there are the extremely skilled Stockholm Troopers – the Shadow Daggers and the Obsidian Glaives. The Shadow Daggers use stealth to their advantage, the third least armoured class however this means they can move extremely fast and silently, using their Active Camouflage Modules in their suits to move. They also have blades that extend from their cybernetically augmented arms, ones that have different dusts loaded from their backpacks, able to deal immense damage. As two of them show, jumping up and taking down an Ursa Major with no trouble at all, shredding their bodies down to the minimum. And then there are the Obsidian Glaives – in other words, Stockholm Huntsmen and Huntresses. It is clear these are the Huntresses and Huntsmen that were deemed too dangerous to keep fighting or went insane, so they took them and changed them into something new.
All are unique in weapons, but all have the same armour, sprinting with great speed, decimating anything in their path. One of the Glaives has a Spear, jumping up in the air and stabbing it into the chest of a Griffin, riding it as it falls and impaling onto a building, leaving it to die before jumping off.

“Dark Eclipse, more enemies incoming!” One of the Glaives calls out.

Dark Eclipse – the codename of Nathaniel Killian.

He walks towards the Beowulves that charge towards him and he sidesteps and punches one across the head, firing his Revolver and hitting it in the side of its head, killing it instantly. He then draws his knife as he charges towards another Beowulf. He rolls across its back and drags the blade through its neck, killing it and then throwing it straight into the eye of the Beringel, killing it instantly after it took immense damage from the many Black Gallows Stockholm Troopers around them.

He rips the Combat Knife from the skull of the Beringel, and he turns to the scared mother with the baby in her arms. He walks over and he crouches down beside her. “Are you okay, ma’am?” He asks curiously, with legitimate concern in his voice. He is not lying here to gain their trust, he is not interested in being a leader. That is all for the politicians, he just wants there to be order – peace.

“I…I’m scared…” She stammers, and he helps her up, offering his hand to her.

“How old are you, ma’am?” He asks curiously.

“T-Twenty-three.” She stammers.

“Twenty-three…” He chuckles, sitting down with her whilst his soldiers fight off the Grimm, securing the city with every ship that descends from the Shadow of Broken Promises above. “I remember when I was your age…I was a spotty little kid with glasses, would you believe it?” He asks her with a chuckle in her voice. The woman with long brown hair looks at Killian with her large pearly blue eyes. “And I was so afraid…I lost my parents, I didn’t know what to do with myself.” He says with a sad sigh, looking around at all this destruction. Looking tired of it all.

“Too many people die for no reason, that is why I am here. To put a stop to it.” He states as he gently squeezes her shoulder. “You will be safe, this I promise.”

He stands up and draws his pistol to fight with his men again, and the young woman stands up again looking at him. “You’re a hero…you know that?” She asks him and he stops, and then looks back at her.

“No, I’m not.” He replies. “I’m just necessary.” He states, turning and walking away from her. Killian does not want fame, he does not want money or even recognition – all he wants, is for the world to no longer suffer from the very thing that has forged him into the man he is now.

Suffering…and War.

Ruby
The Praetorian Knight roars as it charges the Sceptre up with glowing red energy, slamming it down into the ground with force, sending out the powerful pulse of red electrical forks. The blast throws them all back and they tumble across the ground. Yang crashes through one of the tables, and then Blake sprints towards the Praetorian, jumping up and stabbing Gambol Shroud into its spine, making it stagger forward and she goes for the back of its head. But then it reaches back and grabs her by her long locks of black hair, swinging her round and smashing her against the wall. It then grabs her by the leg and slams her again, downwards through one of the tables with all its might, shattering it into splinters.

“Ice Flower!” Ruby calls out, and Weiss nods, forming multiple glyphs across the floor for her to shoot across towards the Praetorian Knight. She dashes through petals and slashes across its chest, but the smoke keeps it structurally sound. It staggers though, giving Weiss the chance to shoot towards it, summoning multiple icicles and blasting them into the chest of the Praetorian Knight. It staggers back and snarls, the ice cooling the smoke and making it rigid. As it staggers and frost forms across the metal and concrete, it sharply rolls its shoulder and shatters the ice, moving quickly again.

The ice definitely seems to weaken the Praetorian Knight.

It takes its Sceptre and blasts towards Weiss, smacking the blunt end across her cheek so hard it throws her up in the air. The Praetorian Knight jumps up and slashes the blade of the Sceptre across her aura repeatedly, cutting her down before grabbing her by her long tail of white hair. It spins through the air and slams her down into the ground.

Then there is a flash of white Aura.

The Praetorian Knight spins the Sceptre round and aims the blade towards her heart and pushes down, only for Yang to jump forward and catch the blade, stopping it from killing Weiss. Weiss stammers, seeing Yang push it down, and she grabs onto the hilt of Myrtenaster and pushes the blade upwards, stabbing through part of its head, and black smoke and a piercing screech erupts from the Praetorian Knight. It roars in agony, staggering back from Weiss as it roars, trying to recover, grabbing its head in immense pain.

Ruby’s eyes are wide, seeing that is definitely a weakness…and every time they have every struck the head it has gotten extremely mad. The black smoke pours from that wound and it snarls with pure rage, staring directly at Weiss before charging forward to kill her. “No!” Ruby screams, darting forward in Petal Form to smash the Knight over and she digs her Scythe into its chest to drag it across the ground. She then takes her fist and punches its head, before feeling pain rupture through her hand, and she gasps from the agony of punching metal with her little hand.

The Praetorian Knight takes the opportunity, grabbing Ruby by the face and lifting her off the floor, before turning and pummelling her head into the ground repeatedly. The third strike breaks her aura. “Ruby!” Yang shrieks, jumping towards it but it punches Yang out of the air, and she crashes back down to the ground and releases Ruby. It picks the Sceptre back up, and the bruised Ruby groans with pain, her nose broken and blood leaking from her mouth.

“Ruby Rose…you have shown immense skill…but now you will meet your mother in the Divine Afterlife.” The Praetorian Knight states, before spinning the Sceptre round, and plunging it into her heart.

They all gasp…

And Ruby gasps…
Then…

They see the blade of Harbinger stopping the Sceptre, and all eyes lie upon its owner.

“Get away from my niece you son of a bitch!” Qrow roars, before swinging round with all his might and smashing the Praetorian Knight in the chest, transforming the sword into Scythe Form as he turns. The Knight grunts, smashing through the wall and crashing through the ground before getting trapped in the ground. Qrow glares at it and looks at Ruby with a smirk. “Get your strength back, kiddo. Back in a second.” Qrow assures, glaring at the Knight as it erupts from the ground with a roar, catching the Sceptre and staring him down.

“Branwen…” The Praetorian Knight snarls.

“Tell you’re Queen we’re coming for her.” He assures.

He jumps forward and swing directly at the Praetorian Knight with a roar.

Uncle Qrow has finally returned back to Beacon per Ironwood’s orders.

Now, they have a better chance.
Their blades impact with a thunderous metallic bang, one that rattles the windows around the complex, blowing the ashes of war across the ground. Qrow grits his teeth, staring down into the unnatural glowing red orbs of flame inside of the swirling black smoke within the floating metal and rubble that has been collected. Qrow twists Harbinger round and then rolls over the shoulders and back of the Praetorian Knight, landing behind it and firing the shotgun into its chest. The impact knocks it back, and Qrow turns to Ruby and the others, nodding to them – they have the chance to get out of there and recover. Ruby needs time for her aura to strengthen again, to repair the bruises and cuts done to her face after being smashed into the floor like that.

The Praetorian Knight spins its sceptre through its fingers, before jumping high in the air, igniting red electrical sparks across the staff and spinning through the air. It then stops and blasts down into the ground, smashing the huge weapon downwards with all its might, a powerful bright flash of red lightning blasts into Qrow, pushing him across the ground, and then it darts forward with great speed, thrusting the blade forward. Qrow narrows his red eyes, and he swings Harbinger against the sceptre that crashes into the huge blade, sparks bursting from the impact and a flash of aura between him and the corrupted monster.

Qrow slides back from the impact of the Praetorian Knight, and he points the huge sword at the much larger entity that circles him with its Sceptre aimed at him over its shoulder. “Seems like Salem is making some more new toys to play with.” Qrow comments as he circles the Praetorian Knight.

“Our Queen may do what she may wish with us – for it is the Praetorian’s Promise to serve our Queen no matter the cost, no matter the order. And no matter what happens to us…it is the greatest honour any Grimm could possibly know.” The Praetorian Knight states as it circles Qrow constantly, and he notices the absolutely fantastic footwork performed by this Creature of Grimm. He would be lying if he claimed that he was not impressed by something so simple, mostly Grimm are easy to predict when it comes to them waiting to attack.

This thing though…it is very different indeed.

“Then if you care about honour so much, then I guess you won’t complain after never walking away from this Academy.” Qrow snarls, leaping towards the Praetorian, spinning through the air and slashing Harbinger across the Sceptre of the Knight. The impacts of his sword repeatedly clang against the weapon and it walks backwards, deflecting each strike with the double ended Sceptre, sparks bursting out from every single hit. The Praetorian Knight rolls backwards before shattering into a thousand pieces and swirling around Qrow, and landing behind him. Qrow pushes his sword forward, and stabs straight through the thrusting fist of the Praetorian. The Knight snarls as the metal plates shatter, but then it takes the Sceptre and swings it round, smacking right into the side of Qrow’s face.

Qrow flies across path, and then he grabs onto the cold metal pole of one of the lampposts, swinging round it and throwing himself right back at the entity, kicking it in the chest. The Praetorian Knight staggers back from the fast rebound of an attack by the warrior, and Qrow aims down the sights of the sword, firing the shotgun at him, and the shards fly towards the Praetorian. It recoils from the impact and Qrow keeps firing over and over again, walking towards it with
every shot fired. The Praetorian Knight adapts fast, and it takes the Sceptre and spins it through its fingers, deflecting the shards of shell from getting any closer. It then zooms forward and takes the Sceptre, channelling the red crackling electricity through it, swinging downwards at where Qrow was standing. The impact blasts Qrow back, but as it dashes forward to slash him again, he ducks down, and jumps up, driving the blade of Harbinger straight through its stomach.

If the Praetorian Knight had organs of a physical body like most Grimm, this attack would have killed it, but instead it grabs Qrow by the top of his head and lifts him off the floor, slamming him down into the ground. Qrow grunts as it crashes down into the floor, feeling the grit and stones that litter the ground crash against his face. He groans and it lifts him back up to do it again. But just before it can even push his face down into the ground again, he sees a pole, one that broke during their fight.

He grabs it and stabs it straight through the pieces of rubble and metal that form the leg. The shards shatter and it falls to the severed knee, smoke leaking out and grabbing the surrounding rubble and metal to re-forge its body. Qrow falls from its grasp and lands on the floor, taking the opportunity to attack, gripping onto the hilt of Harbinger and swinging round with all his might, the blade crashing straight into its face. The impact throws the beast across the path, crashing through the benches.

It rolls and tumbles, but calls the Sceptre back into its hand, stabbing it down into the ground to steady the descent. It rises back up, staring Qrow down as he blasts towards it again, and the Praetorian Knight blasts a beam of red crackling lightning from the tip of the Sceptre at him, but Qrow vanishes from its view. It looks around, unaware that Qrow has shifted into his Crow form and flies above it and transforms back into his human form. The blade extends and curves, the long handle folds out and the cogs spin round, forming the Scythe form of his beloved weapon that Ruby based Crescent Rose off.

He dives down towards the Praetorian Knight and cuts the arm clean off its body, and the arm falls to the ground, and then he drops to the ground to dodge the falling fist of the other arm, after he cuts the entity’s legs off. It crashes to the ground with a snarl, pressing its hand to the floor as Qrow stands above it, staring down at it. “Tell your Queen we’ll be coming for her.” Qrow growls, taking his sword and going to behead it, and he swings it down.

Only for the hand of the Knight to catch the sword, and the metal compacts together, shrinking the Praetorian down into a Human Sized body opposed to twelve feet. The metal and rubble that Qrow blew of rises back up and rebuilds the missing limbs and it starts to tower above him. Following with one hard and powerful uppercut, one that sends a huge pulse of energy across the area, sending Qrow skyward.

He falls and crashes straight through the windows of one of the office buildings around the Academy. Hiding Students who are not prepared for this kind of combat scream with terror as Qrow crashes through the window. He groans, paper falling from some of the tables and onto his head, turning to see the scared children hiding. Suddenly the Praetorian Knight jumps up and lands inside of the room with the Sceptre in its hand, shrunken down into the smaller size. Qrow grabs his sword and sprints towards it, slamming and grinding Harbinger’s blade against the Sceptre. Qrow twists his blade round and cuts it across the entity’s head. The Praetorian Knight roars with anger as it feels the burning sensation of a blade cutting into the weak spot.

It lets out a deafening screech that brings Qrow to his knees, and it presses its metal and rubble hands to its head, staggering from the screech that erupts from inside of its head. It is almost like there is something else inside of the skull that is alien to the rest of the body. The Praetorian Knight also seems to lose all sense of honour as soon as someone strikes the head like this, because
it acts irrationally – and predictably – using rage to its own disadvantage. It roars devilishly, terrify
the young students hiding inside of the building as the red lightning channels through the Sceptre and abruptly erupts from the tip, cutting through the ceiling and as it staggers, through the walls and floor as well. Qrow ducks down from the beam of unstable red energy as it severs one of the supports as it roars with agony and what even sounds like pain.

Eventually it quits blasting the beam savagely around the area, luckily not killing anybody in the process, and it turns to one of the wooden tables, grabbing it clean in half, both sides of the table topple to the ground, shoulder to shoulder. The Praetorian Knight charges towards Qrow and swings the Sceptre at his face, but Qrow drops to the ground, sliding on his knees underneath the blade, and he blocks the secondary attack, from the blunt end. The metallic twang from the Sceptre colliding into the blade of Qrow’s sword echoes through the building and the Huntsman slices the sword across the back of the entity’s leg, bringing it down to one knee.

Qrow jumps up, pushing himself off one of the pillars and slashing downwards, stabbing straight through the shoulder of the entity. It howls in anger, grabbing Qrow and blasting across the floor, dragging him across the floor and smashing him into it repeatedly, before swinging round and throwing him through more tables. Each table he crashes into shall eventually deal more damage to his aura, but Qrow has a lot of it.

He stands tall, and paces back and forth – the Praetorian Knight does not even look at the students that hide with fear.

Its focus is completely on Qrow.

The students scream in terror though when an extremely loud explosion sends almost seismic quakes shivering through the building, and the Praetorian Knight staggers from what happened. In the distance he can see a bright pink explosion, one bigger than he has ever seen. He turns back to see the Praetorian Knight blasting towards him and swinging the blade towards him, but Qrow deflects the impact, and kicks the Praetorian through the window.

It grunts as it falls, crashing down into the ground beneath him. He stands at the edge, turning to the more important factor.

It is a Huntsman’s Duty to protect the innocent, and these poor students have only been here for a matter of months. They are practically still civilians here, so he walks over to them and crouches down. “You guys okay?” He asks them, seeing the cuts and bruises on them.

“That thing…it killed our friends.” She whimpers with terror, one of them still covered in their friends’ blood. Qrow sighs, closing his eyes and shaking his head. Too much death for no reason whatsoever – someone has got to pay for this.

“I’m sorry…c’mon, I’m gonna make sure you get out of here.” Qrow says to them, helping them all get up onto their feet. Their legs wobbling with fear, hearts pounding and hands shaking – they must have been terrified to see that thing get thrown up here with Qrow. But luckily, he knows how to get it out of the picture.

“What if that thing comes back?” One of the students whimpers.

“It’s getting weaker – I know Grimm, and the angrier they get? The closer to losing they are.” Qrow states with a smile.
Moments prior…

The huge Hydra smashes through the Colonnades towards the warriors who charge towards it, and Jaune runs at the head of the army, Pyrrha by his side, and they all jump towards it with roars. Ironwood slides underneath the swinging tail of the beast that roars as it spins round, stamping with massive Sphinx legs, crushing the ground beneath it. Nora rolls out of the way of one of the diving skulls that was biting down towards her, the glowing pink grenades exploding against the heads, but they are not enough to kill it. She turns to Ren and she nods, reaching her hand out and swinging him round with her immense strength, throwing him up in the air, giving Winter the time to cast another Glyph that supports Ren, firing both Stormflower pistols at the Six Heads.

They hiss and roar as they stare at him at his glowing green dust bullets slice through the scales, but they all move with great speed, one of them roaring as it charges towards Ironwood, but he jumps and punches it across the side of its head with his cybernetic fist, knocking it down. He aims down the sights of his pistol to shoot it in the head, but it swings the head round, smashing right into him, knocking him off his feet and crashing down into the ground. Glynda stands beside him, and she summons another storm of powerful dust, forked lightning falling and burning into the flesh.

Jaymes swings and slashes his tomahawks bound to the purple lightning lassos, yelling with fury with every single strike that he makes, rolling aside from another head that lunges straight for him. Now his mind is his own, and he is finally focused on his objective, fighting alongside the last remaining member of his team. Peony slides across the spine of the creature as it crashes around, and the Huntsmen and Huntresses are wisely spreading apart, focusing fire and trying to land a good hit on the Squid Grimm that Jaune targeted.

Peony drags the blade of her sword down the spine of one of the Taijitus bound together and it roars in pain, blasting flames from its jaws, and it immediately spins round and lunges for her. Cardin suddenly jumps in and catches Peony, crashing down into the cobblestone on his back as he rescued her, and Peony smiles. “Thanks!” She cheers, and both of them get up as the huge Hydra rises back up with a roar.

They all stand together, never backing down.

“Tear it down!” Jaune roars as he and his team charge towards the massive beast that rises up with a growl, roaring down at them as it blocks out the Shattered Moon in the sky. The many glowing red eyes glaring down at them, eyes that once terrified Jaune – but now – they are the enemy, and he no longer fears them. One of the heads lunges downwards towards them and Nora laughs with joy as she gets to swing her beloved Magnhild into the side of its head with great force, a powerful boom exploding from the side of its head and it rises back up with a pained screech. Nora rolls aside as the other Snakes go for her, and Ren stabs Stormflower into one of the eyes, hanging on as he fires the two pistols repeatedly into its head, to try and kill it.

But all of the Grimm Biomass consumed by the Squid and repurposed into creating the Hydra has made the Taijitus even stronger. One of them turns and blasts a cloud of flames towards Velvet who gasps with fear as the storm of fire heads towards her, only for Winter to save her with a protective barrier from her glyphs, and Winter nods to her. She forms a copy of Winter’s swords and she sprints towards the beast, jumping up and slashing the black scales with her sword. The Hydra roars in pain and Winter smirks, stabbing her sword down into the ground and beginning to
summon one of her collected Beasts.

The huge white Glyph spins on the ground, and suddenly a huge glowing white Wyvern erupts from the Glyph – a Lesser Wyvern unlike the massive one that attacked Beacon – but even then, it is still massive. She grits her teeth as the Creature of Grimm collected in her memory banks round and blasts icy flames down from above, burning the flesh of the Hydra as it banks round, and diving down to slash its curved talons across its face. Ironwood stands beside her and he covers her, firing his Revolver at the many heads.

They all converge on the two of them and with a deep snarl, the six all dive down towards them with a roar, so the courageous General shields Winter from the jaws, protecting his trusted Student. When bright orange flames explode above their heads, and they both look up to see the burning Phoenix soar over their heads, burning the flesh, ice and fire attacking the Hydra all at once. It bellows in pain, recoiling back as the Ice Wyvern hovers before it, blasting icy flames down until Winter pulls her sword from the ground, unable to keep going. Winter looks back to Eryka, seeing her lowering her bow with a smile on her face, and Winter smiles back. But Dulcis on the other hand glides across the Hydra as it roars in pain, giving the other Huntsmen and Huntresses time to deal some lethal damage.

Coco nods to Yatsuhashi and they both charge forward, and the sunglasses wearing Fashionista transforms her Handbag into Chaingun mode, firing it into the legs of the titan repeatedly, shredding through the scales and flesh, whereas Yatsuhashi roars, swinging his sword across the legs of the creature. Sage doing the same, charging in with Sun recovering inside of the Amphitheatre right now. They both slice their blades through the legs, and they hear the beast beginning to collapse above their heads.

Pyrrha uses her Polarity and pulls the huge men from underneath the giant before it crushes them, latching onto the metal on their bodies and they slide across the ground. The Hydra roars in pain as it collapses, immobilised by the lack of limbs to stand on, the many heads shrieking in pain as it tries to fight. But even without the four legs, it is far from defenceless, lunging down towards Fox and Dove, but Fox punches one of the Snakes in the head, causing it to recoil back, and Dove jumps high in the air, slashing his sword across one of the large glowing red eyes of the monster, sending a screech of pain from the monster as it recoils back, black smoke pouring from the wound.

Eryka draws her bow and fires at the Snake that lunges towards her, and her blue eyes widen, and she presses her hands against the fangs and jaws of the creature. She staggers back, straining, holding the huge beast back with the muscles in her body working hard against it, gritting her teeth together, pushing her legs against the ground. But then another pair of muscular arms grapple onto it, and she turns, seeing Ghira Belladonna helping her, gritting his teeth. “Push!” He roars, and they both yell as they force the jaws of the beast open more and more, and then, Eryka rolls onto the top of its head, and then Ghira forces downwards, whilst Eryka pulls to the left. The Hydra shrieks in agony from the explosive bang that explodes from the monster as the bone snaps inside of his skull, the membrane tearing and the skull hangs by the side of its own bottom jaw. It recoils back as soon as Ghira jumps outs and Eryka rolls off, drawing a second arrow to her bow.

The ruined skull of the Hydra cries out, somehow still alive, but it is all due to the Squid that binds them all together. As long as that monster is alive, the heads will not matter. They could cut the heads of all the Hydras off and it will not matter one bit. They need to kill the Combiner in the centre of its sternum.

One of the Snakes lunges towards Pyrrha and bites down at her hand and she gasps after thrusting Milo forward. She hears the beast gulp and her eyes widen with that audible gasp, the beast rises up
with Milo in its jaws. “SERIOUSLY? I JUST GOT THAT BACK!” She calls up to the beast, until a huge spear flies into the throat of the Taijitu, causing it to roar in pain, regurgitating the sword and sending the slimy weapon flying off into the distance. She sighs, shaking her head.

She turns and sees her father with Juno, and she runs to them, holding her shield up and the three Nikos Warriors stand back to back. “PHALANX!” Anaximander roars as the heads come roaring towards them, and Anaximander stabs one of them in the head with his spear, whilst Juno slashes one across the bottom jaw, causing the heads to retreat. Scarlet swings past with Russel holding onto his hand and he throws him towards one of the Taijitu heads as Dulcis continues to burn the scales in his massive Phoenix Spirit Form. He takes his daggers and spins through the air like a saw blade, diving right into the open jaws of one of the Hydra Heads, cutting it clean in half, smoke billowing from the severed head. The long body agitates, wiggling around with a plume of black smoke rising from the severed head, not dying from the Combiner controlling them all.

Russel slides across its back and he drags his blades into the body of the beast, igniting the blades with one of the dust cartridges, burning the flesh as he yells, jumping off just in time, landing beside Port who fires his Blunderbuss at the head of another incoming Taijitu. Jaune on the other hand rolls out of the way of the incoming Deathstalker stinger attached to the rear of the titan, and as he swings round, Kali also cuts the stinger from the tail and she smiles to him with a nod. Another head comes crashing down towards Jaune, but he smashes across the face of the beast with his shield, causing it to recoil back from the impact, roaring in pain and rage.

He stares at the centre of the chest, seeing the Squid in the centre, and he looks at Nora. “Nora! The Combiner!” Jaune calls out, and Nora nods, charging towards the beast with Magnhild in her grasp. She jumps to Jaune and he thrusts her up in the air. Neptune aims with his Dead-Eye Semblance activating, shooting at the many heads that lunge towards the Valkyrie. She holds the huge hammer over her head with a mad smile, blue bolts shooting past her and hitting the beasts before they can even get close. Sienna Khan jumps and she wraps one of her chains around the neck of one of the Snakes, holding it down for as long as she can whilst Ilia slides underneath one of the heads, stopping by Kali, defending her with the whip. Electricity crackling across it.

Nora yells with fury, swinging Magnhild straight into the chest of the Hydra, and it lodges straight into the bones with great force. But it gets stuck, and the beast is not dying, it roars in agony though, the body vibrating in pain and all the heads staring at her to try and kill her. “Nora!” Ren screams with terror for his safety, and Nora stares at the hammer, tears flowing down her eyes. The bone has sent a massive crack straight through the head of the hammer and the handle… and the grenades lodged inside are getting more and more damaged with every tug that she makes. Purple flames erupting from the head of her hammer as she tugs it and she closes her eyes.

She kisses the hammer with tears leaking from her eyes.

“Goodbye…old friend.” She tearfully says goodbye, as she squeezes the trigger to engage the thrusters, and then jumping off it. The grenades ignite as she backflips away from the hammer – and then…

A massive pink and fiery explosion erupts inside of the Hydra’s heart, sending explosions through the entire body. All the six Taijitu heads and necks feel purple explosions rupturing through them, bursting through every single one. Their shrieks end as their heads all explode at once…and then… Magnhild shatters – exploding in a massive pulse of pink flames that shatters the body of the massive beast. Everyone takes cover and Winter forms a protective barrier with her glyphs, protecting them all from the explosion, and Ren catches Nora in his hands, holding her close, her
aura flickering from the huge explosion that was her beloved hammer.

Jaune stands there with shock, watching the remains of the Hydra crumble away into smoke, and the pink flames dying down and the deafening bang fading away too.

Ren looks at Nora in his arms and he kisses her lovingly as she reaches up to him. “It lost her…” She sniffs, and Ren smiles as he caresses her cheek.

“She did it…did what she loved.” He assures, and they look back to see a few parts of Magnhild falling from the sky.

The Grimm around them snarl, and they look like they are beginning to retreat, their resolve weakening after seeing the Hydra get killed. They remain though, but start to back away, and Winter deactivates the field, Eryka draws an arrow and aims at them. “Clear them out.” Ironwood orders, reloading his Magnum with a glare.

Pyrrha turns when she sees Weiss running over to them, her aura has repaired and she stops, seeing the Hydra has been killed. Jaune nods her, following the rest of the Warriors to finish off the rest of the Grimm. “Where’s the others?” Pyrrha asks with worry.

“That thing attacked us.” Weiss tells her.

“What thing?” She inquires, when suddenly the window of one of the buildings shatters, leaving only Weiss and Pyrrha alone in the courtyard whilst everyone else picks off the remaining Grimm. Weiss cracks her neck, with her aura still fortifying…she draws Myrtenaster.

“That thing.”

### Killian

Civilians continue to be escorted by the Black Gallows to safety whilst the rest of the Stockholm Troopers battle against the Griffins, Manticores, Nevermores and the War Sphinx that circles the city of Vale.

The War Sphinx bellows as it blasts fireballs at the fighter jets from Atlas and Vale that fire against them, pulling impressive evasive manoeuvres to avoid the titan that attacks, knocking one of them out of the sky though. The fireball explodes against one of their wings, causing it to spiral out of control and come crashing down into the outskirts of the city in a fiery explosion. Other jets however zoom across the city with powerful roars, firing their machine guns at the Nevermores, shredding them down and knocking them out of the air, fatal feathers falling from the sky and into the city.

Killian walks through the city with a scowl on his face, his Chrome Revolver in his grasp as a Griffin glides towards him, its wings knocking down lampposts, he draws the revolver and fires it, knocking it out of the sky and sending it crashing down into the ground. It tumbles and he rolls across the road, avoiding it as it crushes the cars left behind. The Griffin roars as it extends its wings and lunges towards him, but as he rolls out of the way again, he throws his combat knife, lodging it straight into the skull of the beast. It crashes down to the ground and crumbles away into dust behind him, he stands tall and pulls the blade from its head, wiping the black blood from its skull.
His forces continue to hold the line, seeing some of his huge Ebony Sabres stand at the end of each road, and the flocks of Nevermores and Manticores come diving towards them, screeching as they open fire. Unleashing a cyclone of bullets into the beasts that attack them, launching Fatal Feathers towards them. One of the feathers impacts a soldier so hard it shatters the armour, knocking him onto the ground with a heavy bang, but the other continues to fire, launching missiles from his backpack in the armour. They track the Manticores and explode upon contact, killing them instantaneously, whilst the Obsidian Glaives take their weapons and charge forward.

An Obsidian Glaive runs across the walls of a building and jumps up with a Spear in his hand, stabbing it right into the spine of one of the Griffins. It screeches in agony as it falls and crashes down into the road with force. He rolls from its body and pulls the spear from its body, looking around as they continue to hold the road. Kilian stands atop a car, firing his revolver at the incoming airborne Grimm, hitting a Manticore in the heart and watching as it crashes down to the ground.

The Raven Talon continue to hold them back as well, with the Onyx Consul Marksman on rooftops, firing precise shots from high impact sniper rifles, knocking them out of the sky with every hit. Until one of them turns and his eyes widen as the War Sphinx blasts flames down, explode the building he was prone on, killing him instantly. Killian staggers and looks up to see the huge War Sphinx banking round with a roar and he grits his teeth, raising the radio to the air force.

“Alpha Wing! We need that War Sphinx out of the sky now!” Kilian orders.

“We've been trying sir! The armour is too thick for our bullets to even make a dent!” The pilot of Alpha Wing responds, and Killian watches it as it banks round, realising there are two weak spots that they can aim for.

“The wings…aim for the wings with Napalm Rounds. Burn the feathers, we will handle the rest. The underside has no armour on it. With some good shots we could take it down.” Killian states, speaking with certainty as he watches the pilots change their course.

“Roger that, all pilots, converge on the War Sphinx.” The Pilot orders.

Killian turns to his snipers and Black Gallows forces in the city. “All forces, keep the rest of the Grimm off the pilots, they are our best shot at killing that Sphinx.” Kilian orders as he stands on top of the car gain, watching the massive Sphinx banking round towards the city again for another attack.

“Copy that, Dark Eclipse!” The soldiers respond, using Killian’s codename when in legitimate combat situations.

The War Sphinx roars as it soars towards the city of Vale to attack the Black Gallows again, when suddenly the Fighter Jets pull up behind it, preparing to fire the Napalm Cannons at the wings. “Fire Napalm Rounds.” The lead pilot orders, and they all fire to the wings, the flaming rounds impact the black feathers and wings, burning them up and the Sphinx cries out in agony as it burns them up. It begins to drop, and Killian’s eyes widen as it starts to drop towards the section of the city, they are standing in.

“All forces, take cover!” Killian orders, jumping off the car and taking cover just in time as the War Sphinx crashes straight through the city, shattering buildings and burying some of his soldiers in the process. Thank the gods that there were no civilians in those buildings otherwise they would all be dead right now. The Sphinx grumbles in pain, the snake looking at the burnt-up wings, unable to fly away from the Black Gallows now. Smoke and flames burn across the section of the
city where the War Sphinx crashed through, blowing up cars and setting off a few gas mains in the area.

The War Sphinx rises back up and roars, the tail screeching as well, the Black Gallows soldiers firing their weapons at the beast as it turns to face them with a deep guttural growl. Killian groans, his head beating with pain and ringing in his ears, pushing his hands against the ground as he sees the beast walking through the streets, blasting fireballs at his men and the other soldiers from Vale and Atlas helping them.

An idea hits him…

He looks at a Revolving Grenade Launcher on the ground and then at the underside, seeing it staring at his men.

“No more innocents…and no more soldiers…nobody else dies today.” Killian snarls, swiftly getting up and sprinting towards the War Sphinx after picking the Grenade Launcher up, charging towards the monster with it in his grasp. The War Sphinx roars as it blasts fireballs at the soldiers, killing some of them in the explosion, and Killian slides underneath the beast’s legs, aiming up at the belly, and he pulls the trigger repeatedly, firing grenades up into the stomach.

The explosions burst the gut open and it roars in agony, the tail shrieks as well, the titan staggers as it feels its insides explode, and then he fires one that explodes inside of the heart. The Sphinx groans and begins to collapse, its head slams to the ground right at Killian’s feet after he finally came to a stop. He pants and sighs with relief, pushing himself back up to his feet and drops the grenade launcher on the ground and draws his revolver.

With the War Sphinx dead…there is now only one more location to be secured.

“Obsidian Glaives…mount up…and head to Beacon. Everyone else, secure Vale. Make sure all the civilians made it out okay.” Killian orders and they nod their heads in agreement.

His Obsidian Glaives follow him down the road.

Towards the Academy.

**Pyrrha**

Rain continues to beat down from the heavens, dousing the smouldering flames into hissing steam and smoke. Silence echoes across the courtyard, only the deafening white noise of the heavy rain. With the Grimm falling back, losing their will to keep fighting after losing the powerful catalysts – being the War Sphinx and the Hydra, their viciousness is descending. Leaving only the Praetorian Knight behind, standing around the corpses of its own kind. The dead Grimm littering the school slowly begin to dissolve into black smoke, the rain soaking their fur into crumbling clumps.

The Praetorian Knight stands still, unmoving, the rain and wind will erode him long before he stops his deathly stare. The subjects of his eyeless gaze are Weiss and Pyrrha. Red and white hair dampened and flattened to their features. Their ponytails weigh heavily, wet locks painting stripes of water on their legs.

"We have won." Pyrrha pants, shield raised. Weiss gulps, lifting her chin and holding her Rapier tilted to the Knight's feet.
"You have won nothing. Victory is nothing but ashes in your mouth." The Knight's voice heaves. "On behalf of Salem herself, I will raze Beacon to the ground, and grind your bones to dust beneath my blade." He raises his Sceptre towards them. "When you're ready."

"We should wait for help." Weiss says, since everyone else is still out there picking off the rest of the Grimm Forces that are still inside of the Academy. Pyrrha shakes her head, Weiss' shocked eyes snapping to her. "No, we should."

"We can't. You should get help. I'll hold him off. We have to stop him. Here and now." Pyrrha snarls, her eyes never once breaking gaze with the Knight. Weiss takes her shoulder and forcefully turns Pyrrha to her.

"Have you learnt nothing?!" Weiss cracks her bullwhip voice. Pyrrha visibly stiffens at her tone, and the weight of her words. "I for one, am not letting you do this alone, and I am not letting you put, yourself, Jaune - us - through all that again!"

"I..." Pyrrha swallows thickly, shaking her head. "I-I'm so sorry, I...

"Without the other, one will die." The Knight says coldly, still waiting for them to make the first move. Weiss snarls her lip, taking her stature besides Pyrrha.

"We... together... Will hold him off." Weiss raises Myrtenaster and slides her finger slowly up its length, engulfing the pointed blade in red blaze, hissing as the rain water contacts the dancing orange flames. She swirls it through the air and then aims the blade to the dark sky, shooting a red flame up into the storm, a flare that lights up the night crimson. "That should get their attention."

Weiss smirks.

Pyrrha looks down from the sky to Weiss and cracked a smile, raising her shield. "I am your shield."

"And I your blade." Weiss blows out a breath. The Knight is on its tip toes, gingerly bouncing, awaiting their strike. Then Weiss yells and slides her fingers up Myrtenaster, a bright orange flame igniting and with a ballerina's grace, firing missiles of molten flame straight at the Knight.

The Knight's sceptre raises and blocks the attack easily, the flames impact and sizzling in the rain, clouds of smoke and steam blinding the Knight momentarily. He adjusts his stature accordingly, just as a rod of rusty metal shoots out of the grey smoke, coated in a fuzzy black aura, slamming into his shoulder plating.

He steps back on impact, Pyrrha leaping up out of the dispersing smoke, grabbing the rod as a climbing post, swinging up over with a gymnast's grace, kicking both boots firmly into the Knight's head, staggering the giant into the stone wall. She dismounts and rolls through the air, landing on her toes with a snarled lip.

The Knight lunges forward, sliding the Sceptre down through his fingers to extend its reach, shaving chunks of shelled concrete. Pyrrha back flips to avoid the sceptre, narrowly too.

Weiss summons her glyphs, gracefully hopping up them one by one, before illuminating her blade in a blue hue. She yells and flicks Myrtenaster in the Knight's direction, a thick column of spiky ice forming around his swinging arm, stopping it dead.

Pyrrha runs around the Knight's hunched stature, swinging around and launching Akoúo in a harsh discus throw. The back of his knee crunches on impact and the Knight drops to that knee.
Pyrrha catches her shield on the rebound, running around the front. Weiss skates down her glyphs, painting an icy path ahead of herself to regally ice skate around the growling Knight.

The Knight roars and breaks the ice binding it's arm in a huge explosion of frosted rubble. He turns sharply and throws the Sceptre up to catch it again in a Javelin throwing stature, before launching it downwards. Weiss leaps up into a ballerina's twirl as the Sceptre buried its blade into the ground where she was moments ago.

She lands on her dainty toes, swirling on the ice to fling a hail of fire dust at the Knight. It sticks to his arm like napalm, to which he simply runs his hand down the armour, snuffing the flames. The giant back flips and hooks his foot under his sceptre and uprooting it from the ground. He lands the rotation upon his heels with a tectonic bang, catching his sceptre from the sky.

Pyrrha sprints up Weiss' cast glyphs, feet touching on the clay tiles of the surrounding roof. She is head height with the Knight now, springing across the roof towards her target. The Knight, preoccupied with Weiss' elegant moves, turns to the footfalls behind him, just as a shield slams into his face, staggering him two or three steps. Weiss turns and rotates Myrtenaster’s chamber, firing ice across the ground, slipping the Knight's feet out from under him.

He falls to land on his elbow, Pyrrha somersaulting down his rising arm, leaping off the back of its hand to swirl through the air and discus throw Akoúo at his brow one more time, rattling his head.

Her Semblance calls Akoúo back to her, Weiss standing beside her. The Knight scoffs, standing up and swinging his Sceptre around. Wiess blows the sopping bangs out of her eyes.

"Any other ideas?"

"Have you been working on your summoning?" Pyrrha pants. Weiss stares back, equally as tired, yelping an incoherent noise as Pyrrha turns too late, turning her shield to block the upwards swing of the sceptre, sending her skyward. She swirls through the air, up into the stormy heavens, before blinking and refocusing. She throws Akoúo up behind her and pushes her feet off the shield shooting downwards out of the night sky like a bullet.

The Knight swings at the graceful Weiss Schnee, finally catching her feet from under her, spiralling the yelping teen, before hitting her in the stomach with the blunt end of the staff, Weiss hitting the concrete wall with a bang, her Aura flickering, she has only managed to summon enough aura back after the last time she was hit.

Now it is gone again.

*This thing is really pissing me off!*

A bang of thunder and Pyrrha rolls through the air, both feet firmly connecting with the Knight's head, turning it sharply and staggering him. She catches the rebar pole in his shoulder and swings round it, leaping up over his head and driving both fists down on the base of its armoured neck.

She drops to the floor, panting as the Knight turns to her, lightning forking behind him. He lifts his sceptre and spins it through his fingers, Pyrrha's eyes widening as the Sceptre went straight through her... shadow clone. The Knight raised a non-existent brow, unable to locate his prey.

That's when a shotgun fist clatters the side of his head, denting the armour and cracking plates. He falls through the roof of a nearby structure, crushing stone and concrete. Yang lands with a heavy thud, panting. She cocks her fist, shells dropping to the floor. Beside her, Blake drops into the fray.

Weiss sits up with a groan, yelping at the fallen Knight to her side. "Are you crazy? You could've
"Yep. Weiss' okay." Yang smirks, Blake giving a light chuckle. Pyrrha drops from the rooftop with a roll, panting, her armour scuffed and dented. "How're we doing?"

"Not good." Pyrrha catches her breath. Pointing to the stirring Knight. "It's clever. It can shift in size too."

"We know, it kicked our asses earlier." Yang growls, raising her shaking fists, swallowing the butterflies in her gut best she could. Blake nods to her, readying Gambol Shroud. "Wanna tap out, Pyrrha? I gotta keep going or I'll overthink and... y-you know." Yang blinks, seeing flashes of Adam every few seconds...her fear of failing or losing her friends seems to be overriding her courage and strength.

"Three's better than one." Pyrrha says, stamping on the edge of Akoúo and flipping it up onto her Gauntlet. The Knight's arm lifts through the roof and helps itself up to its feet, towering over them.

"So, your fate will be sealed, witnessed by the shards of the moon!" The Knight bellows, raising its sceptre.

"Any plans?" Blake asks anyone in particular. Suddenly a bright white light erupts behind the Knight, and a titanic white sword of bright light cut straight across the Knight's chest, stumbling it backwards.

Everyone's eyes widen on the huge glyph spinning on the floor, the white steam fogging outwards. The huge armoured arm holds aloft out of the glyph, sword in hand.

Then, to everyone's further surprise, another hand erupts out of the Glyph, something trying to clamber out. A knight's helmet emerges, and then the torso, followed by a leg, lifting itself free of the glyph.

Behind it, Weiss pants, eyes slammed shut, all her concentration being absorbed by the Arma Gigas summoning. The very same entity that gave her the scar that sends so much insecurity through her soul. Her nose begins to drip with blood, that hot sticky blood that covered one of her eyes back when she first met this entity, but she fights to keep the white knight shining bright. Its fists clench, gripping the sword.

The dark blackened Praetorian Knight raises its sceptre to the Arma Gigas. Yang blinks, shocked eyes looking to Pyrrha and Blake. The Grimm Knight leaps, shrinking down to human size, cutting its sceptre along Weiss' Knight's ankle, stumbling it. The Praetorian exits the roll and grows back to the Gigas' size, raising the Sceptre to finish it off. As he brings it down, Gigas swings round and smashes his huge white blade into the sceptre.

The two entities clash heavily above the smaller Huntsmen. Yang stands with shaking fists, her eyes shutting, listening to the sword swings and loud hits, trying to block it all out. She whines, hands trembling over her ears, before all goes silent.

She opens her eyes and there before her, cast in red light, is Adam. He stands still, staring at her, hand atop his sword. Yang cannot even move, she just shakes, eyes watering on the silent nightmare before her. Adam's mouth is moving, but no sound ever comes out. Then he lunges, and Blake's face fills her vision in an instant.

"Yang!

"H-Huh?"
"Are you with me?"

"I... umm... I..."

Arma Gigas slams a fist into the Knight, sending the huge Grimm warrior into a tower, cracking stone around it. The Knight drops into a shrunken human size, sprinting under the Gigas, growing larger as it slides across its knees, sceptre growing in size and knocking Gigas' feet out from under it. The Praetorian leaps onto the Gigas and jams its sceptre straight through its head, the summon falling limp and dissolving into white light, darkening the night.

Yang stammers, seeing Weiss passing out, blood covering her lips where her nose has been bleeding constantly. She managed to use her semblance despite being exhausted of all aura, meaning that she has one hell of a strong will to her personage. Blake holds Yang's hands in her own, feeling the cold steel skin on her warm organic hands...but it does not matter to her...she is her partner, her best friend she has ever known.

She holds the back of her head and gently presses her head to her friend's. "I know what it's like to be afraid...it's like I told you...I've spent my whole life scared, running from what I feared." Blake tells Yang, and she trembles, looking back to her amber eyes. "I'm not going to run away anymore..."

But Yang is still frozen in place, seeing flashes of the red markings on his mask. "Regain your strength...Weiss is defenceless. I'll help keep the thing busy." Blake assures, throwing her grappling hook towards it. It lodges into the hand and she swings across the battlefield, towards the monster.

Blake jumps on the Knight's back, the giant lumbering around, trying to grab her. It shrinks back down to human size, easily grabbing her by her hair and throwing her over his shoulder to the ground.

Yang, still frozen in place, eyes watering and hands quaking, snaps awake to her partner's yelp. As the Sceptre raises to stab down over Blake, a scythe rips down from the heavens in a flurry of petals, cutting the Knight's arm off and dropping the sceptre with a clatter. Ruby spins round to protect Blake, still scrambling to her feet. As Crescent Rose swings towards the Knight, his other hand catches the blade. His fist closes around the blade and pulls Ruby towards him.

The Knight then pushes down on Crescent Rose and pins Ruby to the ground, her neck pinched between Scythe and ground. She growls and groans as the Knight holds her in place. "Your determination is inspiring Ruby Rose." The Praetorian Knight compliments with a deep growl.

"Thank you!" Ruby strains, but then it slams her harder against the wall.

"Despite the fact you still cannot see the truth...that your life...that all of your lives...is completely forfeit." The Praetorian Knight snarls deeply at her.

"You could not possibly begin to understand how important life is!" Ruby yells back.

"Hey!"

The Knight turns to the voice, as a fist of fire crunches his face inwards and cracks plates, shattering armour and sending the Praetorian twisting through the air and into the surrounding courtyard wall. An avalanche of debris falls downwards onto the Grimm. Yang lands amidst a roll, panting as she turns to Ruby, helping her sister's head into her lap.

"Ruby! Are you okay?"
"Uhh... yep. Got enough aura back to keep fighting..." Ruby rubs her neck, sitting up. "Good punch."

"Heh. Thanks." Yang laughs weakly, staring down at the ground, beginning to zone out once more. Ruby holds her shoulder, snapping those lilac eyes upward.

"C'mon. Team's all here."

Yang looks up to the outstretched hand, belonging to a softly smiling Blake. Yang gulps, taking the hand and standing with a groan. Blake studies her face, a small smile curving.

"Are you with me?" Blake asks softly once more. Yang blinks at her, then looks to Weiss limping over, leaning her weight on Myrtenaster.

"Y-Yeah. I'm here." Yang lets the smallest of smiles spread, to which Blake's widened.

"Weiss!" Ruby yells, standing and heading to her side. "Are you okay?" The infamous Weiss Schnee 'Not dead yet' Thumbs up lets Ruby sigh with relief. "Good."

"You?" Weiss pants, looking up through her damp fringe. Ruby looks down to her wound, wincing slightly, her aura has repaired much of the damage...but it still hurts like hell. She flashes Weiss a smile and a shrug. She hisses and clutches her stomach, dropping onto her knee with a groan. Weiss and Yang are instantly around her, Blake standing close behind, ears training to the moving rubble.

"That was reckless Ruby." Weiss huffs. "Jumping into combat like that. Look how much you've aggravated your wound."

"It wasn't stupid, I had to help Blake." Ruby pants, silver eyes searching Weiss'. "What was I supposed to do?"

"I said reckless, not stupid." Weiss touches Ruby's cheek with a sigh. "You're... a great leader."

"Holy crap, hear that Ruby, Weiss is almost human!" Yang scoffs, stroking Ruby's back soothingly, to which Ruby lets a small chuckle escape. Weiss stares at Yang.

"Okay, let's not go that far." Weiss clears her throat. "It was still reckless of you."

"Phew that was close." Blake smirks at Weiss. "Nearly let slip that you have a heart."

Weiss rolls her eyes and shakes her head. "I so did not miss this team."

Nearby, Pyrrha is staring at the rummaging rubble, the Knight obviously not done. She blows out a breath and quickly fumbles her scroll out, her heart racing as she checks her team's vitals. Jaune is still in the green right now, Nora on the other hand is in the red...and Ren is in the orange. However, she saw the pink explosion that killed the Hydra, which was Magnhild exploding inside of its heart. And Ren helped get her to safety, to the same place in fact where Team S.S.S.N took Sun after his injury.

Meaning she is okay.

She sighs with relief, snapping her head up to the footsteps racing into the courtyard.

Jaune pants – speak of the devil, fists resting on his knees as he catches his breath. Pyrrha's eyes widen and a smile slips onto her battle-hardened features. The rain cascading did little to dim the light in her eyes. As W.B.Y help Ruby to her feet, Pyrrha walks by, towards Jaune. They all watch
with small smiles. Jaune, swiping his sleeve across his nose, panting towards the ground. He stands up and stretches his back, the water-logged hoodie beneath his chest plate clinging.

Blinking, he turns and freezes like a deer in headlights, as his eyes lock with hers. There they stand, staring at one another, rain soaking them to their cores, their usual bright and voluminous hair now thin and flat to their heads.

"Here we are again. Protecting Beacon." Jaune scoffs, flicking the dripping tips of his hair out of his eyes. Pyrrha nods, eyeing his neck, unable to lock eyes. "Except this time..." She looks up as he steps ever closer, eyes flitting to his lips then back to his eyes. "I'm seeing you. The real you. Your real emotions. And I'm seeing the real me. My real emotions."

"Jaune, I..."

"Pyrrha, let me just - what I wanna say - thing is..." He blows out a breath. "There was a locker. Back there."

Pyrrha's eyes widen and she swallows thickly, rubbing her upper arm bashfully. "I see."

"I was... frozen. Couldn't move. I just stared at it... everything playing in my head, over and over and over and..." His twirling hand lowers with a huff. He looks up at her and a small smile graces his features. "But then I shut the door..."

Pyrrha locks eyes with him again, her back straightening lightly. He cradles her jaw in his hands, his bright blue eyes filling her every being.

"... Because what's the point of living in the past, when you're right here in front of me."

"Jaune, I..."

"... And I want you to shut that door too." He says softly. "Shut it, and never look back, never doubt. Just... be."

"I will." Pyrrha smiles brightly, cupping the backs of his wet hands, leaning in.

Suddenly the rubble erupts upwards in a massive shower of debris, the Knight stands up with a roar, fists clenched upwards at his hips. Ruby looks at his missing arm, seeing the sliced armour give way to black smoky Grimm flesh.

He's grown it back.

"But not the armour..." Ruby breathes to herself. Blake and Weiss take combatant stances now that their aura has replenished to a stronger level, Yang growling as she holds her sister up. Jaune snarls and places his feet shoulder's width apart, fists paling around his weapons.

Pyrrha lifts her shield but looked to Jaune as he smiles and throws Crocea Mors up into her hand. She looks to the sword, then back to him. He shrugs.

"You're the better swordsman here." He raises his shield beside her. "I'm gonna figure out a plan to tackle this thing. You..."

"Yes, Jaune?" She smirks at him. He grins back.

"Do ya thing."

"All of you will perish by Salem's hands." The Knight exclaims.
"I beg to differ!" Blake snaps. The Knight snarls, picking up his sceptre and snapping it in two, holding the two weapons in his hands. His fingers flicked, beckoning them forward.

"Blake!" A voice cries, the Faunus girl gasps and turning in that direction. Sun limps in, his face and chest streaked with blood still, but now bandaged up over his body, while Team S.S.S.N support him, furious frowns on their faces.

“Sun? What are you doing out here? I told you to stay safe!” She yells at him.

“Have you tried stopping a monkey trying to get a banana? Even a truck won’t stop it!” Scarlet exclaims, and the weakened Sun looks to his friend.

“Alright…that is just blatantly racist.” Sun comments as he points at him, wincing from his wounds again.

“This is not a game, Sun!” Blake cries out. But instead of arguing, Sun groans and lifted his staff over his head, before throwing it with all his might.

It clatters the floor and slides to a stop at Blake's feet. She looks down at Ruyi Jingu Bang with wide eyes, then back up at the injured Faunus.

"Kick his ass..." He pants, before passing out against Neptune's shoulder. S.S.N snarled and flare their eyes at the giant Knight. Blake picks up Ruyi Jingu Bang, sheathing Gambol Shroud and blowing out a breath as she spins the staff through her fingers.

He'd only let her use it once or twice, while playfully training in the Beacon gymnasium. She'd learn by doing, she always has learned best under pressure. She unlocks them into two staffs, feeling them shift and transform amongst her fingers, chains extending, shotguns swinging in the wind.

She looks back to Team S.S.S.N. “Please…keep him safe.” She begs them this time.

“Well he’s finally passed out so that should make our job easier.” Neptune chuckles with a smile.

“Good luck.” Sage says to her and she nods.

“And to you.”

Team R.W.B.Y, Jaune and Pyrrha stand before the Praetorian Knight.

It has no more forces of any use to help it anymore.

This is the Praetorian Knight’s final stand.
Blake

A clap of thunder echoes and the Knight lunges out of the rubble, shrinking to human size and sliding under Blake's arms, turning on heel and raising a spear to her back. Ice engulfs his back and the Knight stands still, Weiss curtsying to the monster with a smirk. He slowly begins to crack the ice, staring at Blake as she turns and spins the Gun-chucks through her fingers.

The ice breaks apart and she lunges, twirling and cartwheeling, weapons slashing the defensive Knight, a loud bang echoing and a shotgun shell twirling away from one of the chucks. Blake spins up and over, heel knocking the Knight's raised weapons down and perfectly connecting the gun-chuck against his head, a muzzle flash and bang erupting.

She casts one of her Shadow Clones as he swings, leaping up from behind and Gun-Chucking him across the back, splitting some damaged plates. The Knight growls and tries to grow, groaning as it couldn't, still frozen from Weiss' dust.

Jaune studies the exchange, watching the Knight struggle to grow. His eyes widen and he hollers to Weiss.

"Rubber snaps when it's cold, right?!"

Weiss freezes, raising a brow. "Is now really the time for science questions?!" The look of total disbelief fills Weiss' eyes at the ridiculous idea of someone asking such a random question during such an intense confrontation against a Class-8 Grimm. But Jaune shakes his head, pointing at the ice that has condensed the black fog that comprises the Spirit that dominates its surroundings into the Knight form it stands in right now.

“No, look! The Praetorian Knight cannot grow with your ice keeping it frozen like that!” Jaune calls out, watching as it tries to walk towards her, limping on its frozen leg. The Praetorian Knight roars with rage as it points the Sceptre directly at the Schnee Heiress, blasting a bolt of red and black lightning right at her, but she performs a graceful backflip that avoids the entity's attack. The cobblestone ground ruptures from beneath, cracks spreading throughout and exploding up into the air. The dust billows across the floor, and the very action has also shattered the ice that bound it from being able to shift. It shatters its entire form, transforming into the swirling whirlwind of rubble, circling around them all with the crackling red lightning shown from within, certain sections of it more protected than others.

Weiss watches it and turns back to Jaune, seeing him nodding to her with his shield in his grasp, ready to fight whenever they need him. “Good catch!” Weiss replies, and turns to see the swarm of rubble and steel blasting towards her, suddenly transforming back into its Knight Form. It crashes down and punches her across the face with all its might, the impact creates one hell of a cataclysmic bang, throwing her across the floor. With her aura already at a low she groans, grabbing the side of her face with a groan.

“Weiss! Watch out!” Blake yells as she fires Ruyi Jingu Bang at the charging Knight, staring at it as it pushes its legs against the ground and jumps high in the air with the Sceptre held above its head. It goes to impale her with the blade, until Pyrrha shoots in from out of nowhere, slamming Akoúo into the side of the entity. They both crash down into the ground, and Pyrrha kicks herself
off its huge body, flipping through the air and landing on her feet. She slides across the floor, with Crocea Mors held in her grasp, gritting her teeth together. The Praetorian Knight rises back to its feet and spins its Sceptre through its fingers, blasting a constant focused beam of energy towards her.

She pushes Akoúo upwards to stop the incoming energy, reflecting it up into the air, releasing one hell of a metallic screeching drone. She curves the laser round and blasts it right back into the Praetorian Knight. It grunts from the painful impact of all that energy colliding into the armour plating like that. It gets thrown back, burns shatter some of the cobblestone and concrete that comprise its physical form. It crashes against one of the collapsed Colonnades, some parts of it falling and it snarls, grabbing some rebar and with the black smoke it launches it straight at Pyrrha. She gasps and raises her shield, the impact sends her tumbling backwards, crashing through the silt and the dust that has settled from all the combat between the monsters and the heroes.

She rolls across the floor, unaware of the Praetorian Knight that charges towards her, jumping up in the air and spinning through the thick smoke, going to slash her with the blade. Pyrrha swiftly gets back to her feet, remembering her father’s teachings as clear as day. She takes her circular shield and swings it against the diving blade, creating a loud metallic boom from the impact, sparks burst out from the impact of the two metallic weapons and a small shockwave follows. It immediately follows the prior attack with a spiral slash, the legs not moving but the top half completely spins a full three hundred and sixty degrees, leaving a trail of black and red light behind its swing.

Pyrrha deflects the impact with Crocea Mors, scraping Jaune’s trusty sword across the curved blade of the sceptre, loud and high-pitched screeches of metal fighting against each other ring out. She rolls out of the path of the crashing down boot of the entity that spreads cracks through stone. It immediately stabs downwards with the Sceptre where she lands, but she then slides underneath its legs and slashes the blade across the back of its legs. Pyrrha throws her shield and it bats it aside, sending it flying away.

Until Yang jumps towards the shield and she punches it with her cybernetic fist. “Right back at ya!” Yang exclaims, and the Praetorian grunts in pain from the bronze shield that bounces off the back of its head, making it stagger back as Yang and Pyrrha both charge towards the entity. Yang blasts towards it and punches across side of its face whilst Pyrrha jumps up in the air and fires her rifle at it as she sails over its head. Yang fires Ember Celica’s missiles at the entity, the explosions repeatedly blow off the pieces of armour it has collected, and it snarls with anger, staggering back from her impacts. It swings the Sceptre round and rests it across the back of its shoulders, aiming by extending its other arm and pointing at Yang, blasting the beam of red energy towards her. Yang’s eyes widen and she crosses her arms over, the impact pushes her across the floor, her long locks of blonde hair blow from the constant impact, then as it attacks her, she fires one of her Gauntlets to the side, pushing herself out of the path of the beam.

The Praetorian turns around and swiftly spins the Sceptre from its shoulders, shattering it in the process and causing it to return to the two halves it fought against them with beforehand. It charges towards Yang and Pyrrha with the split Sceptre, jumping up and slamming both ends down towards the blonde-haired boxer, knocking her back, but Pyrrha throws Akoúo into its face. The Praetorian Knight grunts, staggering back before throwing the sharp head of the Sceptre towards her face, which gets knocked out of the air by Yang, who then catches it after blasting in front of Pyrrha and throwing it back to the Praetorian. It stabs straight through its shoulder and makes it recoil back, it takes the two halves and connects them both back together, rising back up to its much larger form.

Pyrrha and Yang both circle the Knight and they keep firing their weapons constantly at its large body, until it clenches its fist and arches its arm back, charging the energy through its entire body
before colliding it down into the ground with all its might. The pulse of energy is so string that it actually throws the two Huntresses back, crashing across the floor. The Praetorian Knight turns when it sees Ruby launching Blake towards it, hearing her yell with anger, swinging and smashing Ruyi Jingu Bang across its face so hard that it blows parts of the head from it.

The Praetorian Knight stumbles from the impact and Blake rolls across the floor, detaching the connected shotguns and she spins them through her fingers repeatedly as Sun taught her once. She was shoddy at first, but with some more teachings from him she has improved – her skill is nothing compared to his own by comparison, but still impressive. She fires them, ejecting glowing orange smoking shells from the chambers with every single pull of the trigger. Shrapnel crumbles the soft rubble instantly, but the Praetorian Knight backs up and when holding the Sceptre in both hands it starts to deflect the shells with incredible precision.

The ran continuously falls onto their heads, drenching her long black hair and blurring her vision, all of their vision at times and making them feel bitter cold from the Autumn Night. Lightning flickers and thunder claps constantly in the sky, like some kind of raging god. Or perhaps something watching them, guiding them towards Victory against the Praetorian Knight. Blake fires the next cartridge before rolling out of the way from the fast and sudden kick delivered by the Praetorian Knight, she slides across the ground, leaving a Shadow behind for the boot to take out in one hard impact. She slides through the puddles, splashing them all and covering her legs in icy cold water.

Despite how much she loves his staff, she switches to Gambol Shroud, since she does not have any shells to reload his shotguns with. She throws her Grappling Hook and it stabs right into its head, releasing them deafening screech one more. The many collected particles begin to quiver as it howls in pain, grabbing its shrieking head as it stumbles, until Yang runs to her partner’s side. They both take the cable and strain, yanking it and causing the huge Knight to topple down to the ground with force.

Weiss gets back up, looking at Ruby and nodding as they both join the fight with Jaune who only has his shield. Jaune watches as the Knight suddenly erupts with that rage, they have only seen a few times – and he has noticed the correlating factor behind it. It seems to go berserk as soon as they hit it in the head extremely hard, that is when they hear that deafening screech from within, it is like it comes from somewhere within its own mind. “It’s head…that’s it!” Jaune realises, turning to them all as the Praetorian Knight tries to get back up, but Yang punches it across the face again. “Guys! Its head is a weak spot! Focus on it!” Jaune calls out, in which the Praetorian Knight growls in anger, rising up and swinging its leg round and kicking Jaune in the face, sending him sliding across the floor.

Ruby turns Crescent Rose and nods to Weiss, she jumps onto the curved blade and Ruby launches her towards the Praetorian Knight. She twirls through the air, launching the ice dust shards towards the helmet, causing it to roar in pain once more, staggering back from the impact. Pyrrha throws her shield towards its head and it bounces right back into her hand. She jumps in the air and performs an impressive backflip that helps her kick up the jaw of the creature, making it stagger back even more. Yang jumps and slams her metal elbow downwards, right atop its head to bring it down one knee. Ruby blasts towards it as well, slashing Crescent Rose across the legs of the entity, severing one of the legs and bringing it down to one knee.

The telekinetically held together rubble and metal is violently quivering from the screeching sound that erupts from the entity’s head as it presses its hands to its head. It grunts as it falls down there, and Blake does the same to the other leg with Gambol Shroud, sending it further to the ground. Yang runs to the Grimm again and she punches it repeatedly in the face over and over again, cracking the metal plates that surround its face.
Until suddenly a burning red flame ignites from within the Praetorian Knight and it bellows a terrifying howl, catching Yang’s fist and smashing its head into her face, shrinking down into its humanoid sized body after losing its legs. It catches Ruby by the throat as she shoots towards it in petal form, slamming her down into the ground and punching her in the face repeatedly. “Get off her!” Weiss yells, slashing Myrtenaster across its face, that agony continues to erupt from its head, and it shrieks, before turning that rage to her again. It blasts energy from its fist towards her, since the Sceptre has been removed from its field of view.

The energy blasted from its body impacts Weiss and throws her from her feet, slamming down to the ground, and Pyrrha uses her shield to stop it from crushing Weiss’ skull with its foot. The Knight pushes her down to her knees as she protects her friend, which is when Jaune roars and jumps straight at the Praetorian Knight with his shield. Pyrrha knows he will need his sword back, so she throws it to him, and this time he catches it. He swings it round and slashes straight through the armour, whilst Weiss comes up with a plan.

Pyrrha moves aside, giving Weiss the shot she needs as she pulls Myrtenaster back to her grasp, and she blasts a cloud of ice from the blade. The blizzard swiftly condensates the destruction that birthed this demon, causing it to move slower and slower with every swing. It roars in anger as it feels its movements weakening and weakening. The ice also begins to freeze into the smoke, like frost in muscles, it struggles to move more and more.

But that hardly means it is defenceless. Blake deflects the punches with her sword, but it grabs her by the throat and lifts her off the floor, slowly crushing her windpipe with the massive hand attached to the wrist. She gasps for air, desperately writhing around to break free from its grasp, but Yang saves her with Ruby’s help. Her little sister fires a shell that blows the hand of the Praetorian Knight apart and it staggers back with a roar of agony, turning as Yang sends a powerful haymaker into its face.

Yang swings and then releases a shriek of rage, repeatedly punching it in the face about twelve times in a single second, expending shells in every single punch that she delivers. The Knight staggers back from her, and she jumps up in the air, twirling through the air before extending her leg to kick it right in the side of the head. It crashes down to the ground and roars in agony from the feeling of immense pain they have inflicted upon it. It turns and stares at them, pounding its fist down into the ground, causing the rocks to fly up from the ground where it ruptured.

Black smoke wraps around them and it aims the many rocks at them and blasts them towards the Warriors. Yang takes one straight to the chest, the rock shatters and she tumbles across the floor, whilst Jaune and Pyrrha use their shields to defend Blake still recovering. Ruby spirals Crescent Rose through her fingers to shred the rocks before they could even hit her and Weiss casts a Glyph that stops them from touching her, in fact they stop inside the Glyph and she turns their trajectory – aimed back at the Praetorian Knight. The Creature of Grimm roars in pain as they explode against its body, blowing parts of its own body off in the process.

Weiss and Ruby both attack at once, using their Ice Flower Team Attack, Weiss casts Glyphs for Ruby to utilize, and she zooms through red petals of red towards them. She sprints across the many Glyphs that her white-haired partner cast, and then fires her rifle repeatedly at the Praetorian Knight.
Knight. It grunts as it takes some of the hits, and then Weiss thrusts forwards and conjures a powerful blast of energy that knocks it down to the ground. As it crashes down to the ground, it sets its ghostly yet demonic eyes upon its fallen Sceptre. It grabs onto it and swings round, stopping Myrtenaster from striking down upon its head.

The Praetorian Knight goes to punch her, but Weiss bounces off one of her Glyphs and lands on her heels. Ruby shoots down towards the Praetorian Knight, spinning her Scythe with great speed, tearing up the ground with every single swing, but the Praetorian Knight dodges and deflects a couple of her swings, but the constant punishment it has endured is really beginning to show on the Creature of Grimm.

Ruby slams Crescent Rose downwards into the ground and fires her rifle at it, blasting multiple ice rounds, modified thanks to Weiss’ Glyph that she conjures in front of the barrel. Each ice coated round detonates into huge icicles that protrude through the armour plating, covering it with frost. It snarls in anger and in pain as it struggles to move, giving Blake the chance, she needs, swinging round and kicking both her legs right into the arm itself, shattering it from the rigid metal and rubble, causing it to fall to one knee. Yang suddenly appears and uppercuts it, causing it to stagger back into Pyrrha’s shield that flies right into it. Pyrrha spins across the floor before launching her shield again, not even needing Milo right now – wherever it has ended up.

The Praetorian Knight growls with anger, but as Jaune stands there, he turns to his scroll in his hand, and he sees that Nora’s aura has been boosted a little bit more…enough for her to fight despite losing Magnhild. Which is when they all turn to see Stormflower spinning in from around the corner, stabbing into the leg and the Knight turns with a growl. Nora stands tall, holding one of the Atlesian Gauss Cannons that was left operational after their defence of the Tower. “Guess who’s back, UGLY?” Nora yells, charging up the Gauss Cannon before firing a kinetically charged shell into its chest. The Praetorian Knight grunts from the impact, crashing down to the ground with flames burning across its body.

Ruby stands before it, aiming her rifle at its head. “It’s…over.” Ruby states as she glares down at it with her furious silver eyes. The Praetorian Knight slowly looks up at her and snarls softly.

“Is it?” It inquires, and that is when a gasp leaves her lungs, seeing the red energy building from within its own body. The rubble and steel begin to vibrate more and more and more, with a deep thrum building up with it as well. Suddenly the Praetorian Knight literally explodes, releasing the most powerful one of those pulses of energy they have seen it do, blasting the metal and rubble into all of them, shattering their auras instantly, knocking them all to the ground.

All...

…but one.

Jaune.

The blonde-haired Knight stands alone, Pyrrha groaning in pain as she grabs her stomach, a piece of metal lodged through a part of her armour. The wound is not fatal but still enough to down her, and she will still need it bandaged up if they survive this fight. Jaune holds Crocea Mors in his hand and he stares the Praetorian Knight down as it stands there. “Enough of this playful banter – I have come here for him. Our Queen demands it.” The Praetorian Knight states, and Jaune is left speechless.

“Q-Queen? The hell are you talking about?” Jaune stammers with concern.

“The true ruler of Remnant, and you are required.” The Praetorian Knight states as it pushes its
weak body back up, barely able to continue fighting after the beating it has endured by their hand. The flames continue to dance until the falling rain extinguishes the flames. Jaune feels his whole-body quiver, his lip trembling and the cold water dripping from his soaked blonde hair. Lightning flashing and thunder clapping in the skies above his head.

“I won’t let you take me.” Jaune states, and the Praetorian Knight stares him down.

“You do not have a choice; the Dark Queen does not broker failure.” The Praetorian Knight states, and Jaune scoffs.

“Well I guess that’s your problem not mine.” Jaune chuckles, since it sounds like the Knight cannot return to its ruler without Jaune in its custody.

“More will die unnecessary deaths is you do not come with me, child.” The Praetorian Knight states and warning him as well. The words truthfully do sit with Jaune, but he still does not fall to his knees before it.

“I won’t.” Jaune assures.

“He is…stronger…than you could ever be.” Pyrrha winces as she grabs onto the piece of metal that broke through a part of her armour.

"Your strength is irrelevant."

"Oh yeah? Well you'd fool me!" Jaune yells with anger alongside a crack of thunder, nearly drowning out his voice. "My whole life, I have been called a weakling, sheltered by my overprotective parents, and even now I get pushed to the back burner, because Jaune's a clumsy klutz who'll just hurt himself or others. I have been getting kicked down my entire life!"

“I always wanted to be more, to be like Thaddeus Rex! I always wanted to prove to the world that I was better than what everyone saw…but no matter what I did, I kept failing. Kept getting hurt… and there you stand…acting like you are the first cruel monster to ever harm me.” Jaune snarls, and the Praetorian Knight stares the teary-eyed Arc down, sensing his anguish and able to see it through the bloodshot in his eyes. “You’re not though…you’re just the newest piece of trash down a long line to look down on me.” Jaune snarls as he glares at it, taking a stance.

The Knight does the same, aiming the Sceptre straight at the Huntsman, Jaune quaking with nerves as his sword rattles in his grip. He sniffs, looking at Pyrrha. "I have to prove my worth. To myself."

"I'm just a scared boy, in way over his head."

"I forged documents to get here! I lied so I'd have a shot!" His words cut deep to them all, their eyes widen with total disbelief bar Pyrrha who already knew about this. Ruby gasps when she sees Jaune standing there, admitting to all his mistakes with no fear whatsoever. He is no longer that boy who kept messing up – he has become so much more.

"I am here now, because of them. And I would do anything to protect them!"

The Knight lunges forward, swinging his sceptre blade with a hum, Jaune rolling under it to stand on shaky feet behind the turning Grimm. Rainwater trails from their fast-moving bodies and weapons, cutting down raindrops as they fall. He lifts his sword and blocks an incoming strike, pushing the sceptre away and quickly swirling Crocea Mors above his head, swinging it to crack against the incoming sceptre. down to cut through the black tar of its leg. The Praetorian Knight roars in pain as it staggers back from the boy, the quivering pieces of metal and rubble starting to fall the weaker the Geist gets.
It glares at him, seeing the certainty in what he is doing. “I’m no longer the useless cat in a tree.” He states, and the Praetorian Knight swiftly swings yet again, the blade colliding against the steel of Crocea Mors and sparks bursting out from every single swing. Jaune rolls out of the downward strike from the Knight that shatters the cobblestone, and as he moves, he gets up and swings horizontally across its spine, making it stagger forwards again. It growls, blasting more red lightning towards Jaune, but he lifts his shield, blocking it, red electricity crackling across it as it holds him there, but then Jaune remembers how Pyrrha reflected the beam.

He changes the angle slowly, seeing the energy starting to be reflected off it like sun off a mirror, and he bends it round, burning it across the face of the Praetorian. It roars in anger and in pain as it stagers back from its own attack. Jaune rushes forward and he swings the sword towards the Praetorian Knight.

The Knight catches Crocea Mors in his hand and tugs, straightening Jaune's arm out and bringing his sceptre down across it. Thinking quick, Jaune releases his sword and wrenches his hand back as the blade hums through the air his arm had previously occupied. With his sword held in the Knight's hand, he stands completely defenceless.

Jaune blinks, heart hammering as he looks up at the Knight, at his mercy. Then Crocea Mors shoots out of its grasp, shattering fingers on the way. The blue wrapped handle meets Jaune's palm and he stares down at it, at the black aura glowering around it.

Pyrrha lays there, hand outstretching, red aura flickering brokenly around her, panic etched across her pale face, blood still leaking from her injury and through her shattered armour. Her black semblance dances along her finger tips, her eyes welling. Jaune's heart falls into the pit of his stomach, feeling the sword lift into a defensive pose despite his slack muscles.

"Keep your guard up." She winces, before dropping her hand to the floor, panting from exhaustion. Jaune feels the invisible grip of the sword loosen, all under his control now. He gulps, looking back at the awaiting Knight. The Praetorian Knight stares directly at Jaune, then to Pyrrha.

Then back.

Then the faceless face shows some form of recognition in its eyeless gaze.

And in times of intense stress...

Jaune's entire body seizes up as the Knight raises the Sceptre into a spear throwing posture, time seeming to slow down as he studies the angle aimed at Pyrrha. His heart beats harder than ever, feeling that rising pressure within, like he wants to scream. She is down for the count, her Aura shattered, her semblance out of fuel! He turns his panicked gaze to Pyrrha as she looks up through her matted fringe, at the Knight launching the Sceptre at her. Her eyes widen, her natural response to raise her hands.

Jaune, screaming her name, eyes flooding with tears as history begins to repeat itself once more, as he helplessly watches by, raises his outstretched hand for her.

...They can manifest, for the first time...

Pyrrha's eyes clamp shut as the tip of the sceptre hits her palm...

And goes no further.

The entire courtyard falls silent bar the falling rain.
Has she died?

Was that sharp pressure in the centre of her palm actually where the sceptre had gone straight through, her and all?

She dares to open one eye.

And there, before her, white murky light dances with a black glow along her hands, up to her elbows and brightly coating her quaking body too. With a moment to reflect, she feels no pain.

Was she really dead?

No, couldn't be.

The tarmac still presses uncomfortably into her knees, the cold rain still races down her skin, she has to be alive to feel all that.

Both eyes open and she looks around her raised palms, at the floating sceptre suspended in mid-air, bladed tip nestling against the slow trickle of blood in the centre of her palm.

The knight is stood motionless, an almost shocked expression on that faceless head. Then she looks to her beloved Jaune, at his quaking body, his shivering fingers and knocking knees. His eyes still streaming, his hand outstretched and glowing bright white.

Pyrrha snaps her palms back to her chest, to feel for any kind of puncture wound, still not quite believing the lack of blow. The sceptre drops to the ground with a loud clatter. Her aura slowly rejuvenating, that red light snaking through the fingers of white light on her skin. She blinks, teary eyes looking up at Jaune as he stares at his shaking hands. R.W.B.Y, Nora and Ren stare at her and Jaune with wide shocked eyes, and at their own bodies encased in very slight, murkier white light. It is uneven, unsteady, like ripples emanating away from the centre of the splash - Pyrrha.

His power…it seems to eb and flow, like a stream of clear water.

His tears hiss to steam as they splat into her white glowing palms. He sniffs, looking up at Pyrrha.

"Did I?"

The Knight swings and his black smoky fist connects with his face, sending Jaune sprawling across the concrete with a loud thud, his Aura exploding like white glass. His head bounces off the ground and he groans, the white light encasing Pyrrha vanishing into thin air.

"Jaune!" Pyrrha cries out, clambering up to a weak knee. The Knight paces over with earth shaking thumps, picking up his sceptre.

"Impressive. But it means nothing."

Pyrrha and Ren both disagree, both blasting towards the Praetorian Knight with the boost that they needed thanks to Jaune unlocking his semblance when he did. Pyrrha spins through the air and she smashes Akoōo across the side of its head. The loud metallic boom brings it down to one knee and Pyrrha lands behind it, reaching out with her Polarity, wrapping it around the metal that comprises the Sceptre that nearly murdered her. She rips it from its body and throws it away from it’s reach. Ren jumps up and fires both of his Stormflower Pistols repeatedly at the entity, riding one of Weiss’ glyphs casted by her as she presses her sword down to the floor, using it as support.

Ruby looks at Nora and she smiles, giving her a nod. “Weiss! Freeze it as best you can! Blake!
Yang! Restrain it! Pyrrha! Use your polarity! Ren help us keep it secure!” Ruby calls out, swiftly using her tactical mind to her advantage. With Nora here, they know how her semblance works, and she still has some high voltage rounds she can use to charge her strength up. Blake picks up Gambol Shroud and she sprints towards it with Yang, and she slides under the fist of the Knight as it swings straight at her face.

“Yang!” Blake calls out, throwing her Grappling Hook and letting it wrap around the torso of the Praetorian. Yang stands on the other side and she punches it, accelerating the speed of which it wraps around its body. As they continue to do this, the others begin their side of the mission. The Praetorian Knight glares at Weiss as she unleashes the blizzard of Ice Dust into the Praetorian, freezing the smoke and causing the body to turn rigid. Ren jumps round and he stabs Stormflower down into the hand, now that the ice has prevented it from just pulling itself free by using the smoke. It strains as it tries to free itself, and Pyrrha uses her Polarity to hold the rest of the arms still bound by metal, the Praetorian Knight roars and snarls in anger as it feels its whole body become impossible to move.

Rubble and steel splitting, cracking and snapping from the frozen pressure. Yang punches Blake’s Grappling Hook down into the ground, lodging it into the stone, keeping it secure so then it cannot move. The Praetorian Knight yells with rage and anger. "I…I will not be defeated! Not by the likes of you!" The Praetorian Knight bellows with rage as it remains in their grasp, and Nora smirks.

"That's where ya wrong." Nora says, standing up with a groan. Her hands balled into fists. She lifted her head, cyan eyes blaring. "You're hurt our friends! Now you're gonna pay the price!” Nora yells, turning to Ruby and nodding her head with a grin.

“NOW!” Nora calls out, and Ruby aims her rifle at her good friend, and she cocks the rifle, the electricity charging up within it. She fires the crackling round and it impacts her aura, the electricity charging through her body, and giving her immense strength. Through the smoke the blue electricity turns pink, and her cyan eyes glow brighter with a furious grin. "Now..." Nora sparkles, her eyes glowing bright cyan, volts of electricity shooting around her limbs, in and out of her eyes. She tilts "I DON'T NEED A HAMMER, TO KNOCK. YOU. DOWN!"

She jumps up with a yell, bright pink streaks of lightning shooting down into the ground beneath her, and up into the storm clouds above, sending pink lightning crackling through the darkness above. The Praetorian Knight stares up at her, and all that channels through their minds is one thing.

THIS IS FOR OOBLECK!

AND EVERYONE ELSE YOU KILLED YOU SON OF A BITCH!!

Nora descends like a nuclear bomb, roaring with fury as she pulls back her arm to collide it directly into the Praetorian Knight.

Her fists slammed down atop its head, cracking steel and forcing the black smoky flesh downwards into its neck cavity with a loud crack. Bright pink energy erupts outwards with a huge explosion, deafening the students. As the pink light and smoke dissipates, Nora rolls to their feet, unconscious, her brittle aura broken completely.

"Nora!" Ren cries, sliding to her and pulling her head into his lap, wiping the soot and grime off of her cheeks, brushing her hair out of her eyes. "Nora, speak to me!"

Pyrrha and Weiss both feel their own aura's pop and they yelled in overexertion, slumping to their hands and knees again. Yang and Blake have also recharged - not fully - but enough to stand in
front of the vulnerable ones, releasing Gambol Shroud from the wreckage within. Then the smoke clears.

The Knight is on its knees, its torso cracked in two. Pink crackles of electricity buzzed from one broken limb to the other. Its neck twisted downwards - almost inside its own chest cavity. The right shoulder completely snapped open and the arm hanging by loose tendons of smoke…but it is not able to rebuild itself. The ice caused it to shatter like glass…Black smoke oozes over the ground and the loud clatter of falling armour echoes around the courtyard.

It gargles and groans, fingers twitching on the concrete beside its knees.

"You... delay...inevitable."

Its voice is weaker, yet still just as intimidating as always, a faint red glow from within its fractured skull. Ruby uses Crescent Rose like a walking stick as she approaches their fallen foe, staring down at it. “Who...is...Salem?” She snarls, remembering that name when they fought it before, because they need to know what this thing is commanded by.

“You…will know soon enough.” The Praetorian Knight assures, and Yang smirks as she stands beside Blake.

“Yeah…and we’ll defeat her together.” She assures with a smile, looking at Blake. But the Praetorian Knight splutters and snarls at them with that dark demonic voice still sending some fear into their hearts.

“You have brought this…upon yourselves...Huntsmen...Huntresses...” The Praetorian Knight snarls as it stares at them, metal and rubble falling from its dying body. “You let your own belief in family blind you to the world that surrounds you...the world will turn on you...and they will not save you, when it all falls.” The Praetorian Knight promises with a growl.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Yang questions beside Ruby, Pyrrha beside the unconscious Jaune Arc, holding his head on her lap as she listens to the final words of the Praetorian Knight.

“Nothing…not even your Silver Eyed Girl...can save you...from what is coming.” The Praetorian Knight states, its faint shimmering red eyes looking up to the Shattered Moon that can faintly be seen as a Ghostly Omen through the storm. “The Moon...will be made whole...and when the time comes...there will be more of us...many more...” The Praetorian Knight promises them with what sounds like a chilling laugh behind its voice.

And then…

It gives them a haunting final collection of words.

“This...is just...the beginning.” The Praetorian Knight promises, before it suddenly rips its arms from the ground and grapples onto the fissure in its own body, and instead of trying to fight, it completely tears its body in half, severing the connection and killing it instantly. There is a faint flash of red energy and the black smoke flows out from the metal and rubble as it crumbles to the ground. As the metal shatters before them...they see the mask-like-skull of the Geist fall from within, shattering against the ground like glass. The black smoke leaves the skull, before it crumbles away and disintegrates away.

The helmet crashes down to the ground, pieces of metal and rubble falling everywhere and Ruby gasps, seeing another Creature of Grimm splattering against the ground. Some kind of Squid or
Octopus like Grimm, squelching and hissing as it gets up, floating away. Ruby swiftly takes the chance, and she fires her rifle, launching a bullet from her weapon, and nailing the creature in the back of its glassy dome like body. It shatters instantly, with a creepy ghostly whispering echo from within as the smoke leaves the dome before the Grimm disintegrates from existence.

Ruby lowers Crescent Rose and looks to her sister.

The Praetorian Knight was right.

This was not the end.

Not even close.

**The Sanctum...**

Her glowing red eyes glare down at the creature sat down on the surface of her glowing purple crystal table, her hand gently resting against her pale cheek as she stares at the Seer. Watching as the connection to the Praetorian Knight fades away before her glowing red eyes. She exhales softly as she stares at it.

“One must lose a battle...to win the war...” Salem softly says.

**Pyrrha**

Some time after the fall of the Praetorian Knight...

They have won, the Grimm are falling back from Beacon, and after the destruction of the Praetorian Knight, their resolve is completely broken. Their coordinated nature has disappeared completely, and they are retreating from the Academy, the taste of the Relic within the Vault of Beacon is not even drawing the stragglers back in to be exterminated. Jaymes sits down on a box beside Peony as they look at the many body bags with recovered corpses, countless heroic students.

And Rouge among them with Oobleck as well. Sun lays on a gurney beside Blake who has not left his side once, looking at the immense bandaging around his body to help him recover from the wound he suffered from the Praetorian Knight. She holds his hand lovingly as she looks at him, he will make a full recovery, and Pyrrha looks at it all. It is like the Battle of Beacon all over again... so many dead...it may have been a victory but at what cost.

She looks at Oobleck’s bag and she sighs, seeing his closed eyes and pale face in the section unzipped where Glynda is knelt down, wiping tears from her eyes. Port with his head bowed with heartbreak of losing his close friend and Ironwood sighing as he stands beside Anaximander Nikos. “We will make sure they get the proper burials they require.” Ironwood assures as he looks at Glynda and she softly smiles up at him, standing up and looking down at the body bag before one of the men zips him up so then they can prepare his body to be buried.

“We will provide any assistance necessary, General.” Anaximander assures with a nod, and
Ironwood nods to him.

“Thank you.” Ironwood replies, and Pyrrha’s father turns to her with a smile and approaches her, sitting down on one of the crates next to her.

“We did it…” Anaximander says softly as he looks at her and Pyrrha nods her head gently.

“Yeah…but I don’t think it is over, dad.” She says to him as she looks up at her father, and he smiles.

“By the way…” He says, and he reaches down into his belt and he reveals a very slimy but still intact Milo, and he looks at her and she sighs with relief, holding her beloved weapon in her hands.

“Oh, thank the gods…” She sighs with relief as she looks upon her weapon in her hands, despite the gooey saliva of the Hydra still coating the steel which forged it.

“You’ll need it…if this really isn’t over.” Anaximander says to her, and Pyrrha chuckles softly as she flicks her hair over her shoulder, before winching, touching the bandaging wrapped around her stomach where that piece of metal was lodged. She turns to see Jaune, emerging with a bandage around his head, he needed it after the punch he suffered from the Praetorian Knight and she smiles happily. If it were not for him, she would have needed extensive surgery to survive that wound, his ability healed most of the damage, even pushed the shrapnel from her belly.

“Thank you, dad…” She says to Anaximander, looking over at him and seeing Juno speaking with Kali and Ghira by the building. Sienna Khan with them as well, most likely talking about how to help rebuild the Academy after all this.

Again.

“For what? Miss a good scrap?” He asks with a chuckle, slamming his fist into his open palm as he grins. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” He assures. “And besides…got to see what you can do, Amica Mea.” He says to her, gently caressing her red hair – he does love her, with all his heart. And now that she is a great warrior that can survive without him having to look over her…she can actually see that now. If anything, it is her mother the boyfriend should be scared of, because she is more like the protective father than the actual father is.

She wraps her arms around her father lovingly. “I love you, dad.” She says with happiness in her voice and he smiles.

“I love you too, Amica Mea.” He says to her, something they never really got to say to each other before she left.

As Blake holds Sun’s hand, she turns to see Ilia approaching her with her Whip holstered on her belt and she crouches down beside her, looking at her with a smile. “Hey, Blake…I would’ve called if…you know…” She chuckles softly as she looks at the state of the school, but luckily the Academy’s

“Ilia…I…really don’t know what to say. I didn’t think that you and Sienna would…I mean after…” Blake keeps stammering and stuttering, but Ilia giggles, stopping her right there.

“Oh, please. The Attack on Beacon was never okayed by Sienna…it was just Adam. We think he is helping someone else to get what they want, so long as he gets…you.” Ilia explains as she looks at Blake, with rightful concern in her eyes. Blake looks down at Sun and she caresses his cheek lovingly whilst he rests to recover from his wound.
“Where is he?” She questions.

“Buried deep in the cells at H.Q. You know Sienna, she does not broker betrayal,” Ilia chuckles, and Blake rubs the back of her neck awkwardly.

“Well…I kinda…” She stammers.

“I think she forgave you for that, especially since Adam was starting to look a bit crazy.” Ilia chuckles with a smile, making Blake giggle as well. She smiles as she looks at her old friend.

“It’s good to see you again, Ilia.” Blake says to her with a smile.

“Been a long time…hopefully we can catch up some time.” Ilia suggests with a smile and Blake nods her head.

“I’d like that.” She agrees, wrapping her arms around her friend once more. As she hugs her, her head resting on her shoulder, her eyes widen, and she gasps when she sees him approaching with many other soldiers.

The Black Gallows.

“Oh no…” She whimpers, getting Ilia’s attention and she also turns to see Killian approaching, looking around as he sees Ironwood standing there, his hand close to his revolver. Both Winter and Eryka turn after talking and swiftly draw their weapons, Eryka nearly loses an arrow if not for Neptune stopping her, grabbing her arm and lowering the boy.

“You…” Eryka snarls with anger as she glares at him with gritted teeth, Dulcis descending and landing on her shoulder.

“Hello again, Eryka Vasillias.” Killian greets as he looks at her, then at Winter who glares at him with the same level of fury. Weiss stands beside her older sister and now all eyes are on the Black Gallows. “Vale has been secured, the civilians…for the most part…are safe.” Killian assures as he looks to all the Huntsmen.

“No thanks to you, you homicidal madman!” Eryka snarls at him, and Ironwood walks forward.

“What exactly is this?” Ironwood inquires with Glynda beside him.

“Killian captured us before the attack, he planted Jaymes in here as a seed, used him like a bomb to trigger the attack. To use Vale as an example for his case against the Academies and Huntsmen in general.” Winter remembers, glaring at him and Killian scoffs, shaking his head as he crosses his arms.

“And who exactly is going to believe you?” He asks them curiously.

“You captured us! We saw your files…” Eryka growls.

“In my office that you broke into. Already incriminating things there, Eryka…and for you, Winter Schnee.” Killian tells her, and Ironwood glances at his subordinate, seeing her glaring at Killian beside her partner with her sword drawn and pointed at the leader of the Black Gallows.

“That’s nothing compared to what you just pulled.” Winter snarls, and Killian chuckles as he walks around the decimated grounds of the courtyard.
“Tell me – what do you possibly think you stand to gain with these accusations? Who do you think the people are going to listen to? The Commander of a now respected Military Organisation funded by the Government who saved Vale while all of you were sitting here in your Academy…or a thief and a renegade Atlesian Specialist?” Killian asks as he looks at them, and even Ironwood knows that he is right, no matter how he feels. Ironwood knows Winter would never lie and he believes her…but he is right…the only person who would be punished if this went to a court-hearing are Winter and Eryka.

“Your cameras would have shown the conversation.” Eryka suggests, and everyone stands quiet between them.

“Cameras which lost all their feed when Jaymes Ickford’s pulse wiped out the power.” Killian adds. “Do you have physical proof of these accusations?”

“No…because you took it after you kidnapped us.” Winter argues.

“Arrested.” Killian corrects. “However, I am a forgiving man, and your sentence does not need to be carried out for what you did – it can be replaced.” He says, as his cold eyes turn to Jaymes Ickford and his eyes widen, and they all look at the young man and then at him. Even Ironwood stands between him and the young boy.

“Enough of this power play, Killian. We will take care of this ourselves.” Ironwood states as he stands there, much larger and defining than Killian is, and yet somehow Killian still holds more cards than Ironwood does. He has been playing this kind of game far longer than he has.

“Jaymes Ickford, even when ignoring these claims made against me – is a terrorist. His actions must be punished accordingly to what he did. I think time in the Black Cells would be appropriate for the approximate deaths of two hundred and thirty-seven people.” Killian suggests as he crosses his arms, looking at the young man with purple hair who starts to shake and tear up with terror. The Black Gallows soldiers push past Ironwood and they grab Jaymes.

Ironwood suddenly draws his revolver and points it straight at Killian’s head. “Enough.” Ironwood demands with a snarl in his voice, but Killian does not even flinch.

“We are both soldiers, Ironwood. You know full well that I do not fear death – so pull the trigger.” Killian challenges as he holds out his hands, but then all the soldiers and the Wasps that shine their lights upon the Tower’s Base aim their cannons at them. “But if you do…my men will decimate all of you.” He warns.

Ironwood looks around and he sighs, lowering his pistol, despite how much he hates what Killian is up to. The Soldiers force Jaymes down to his knees and Killian walks towards the tearful young boy, and he leans forward, staring at him. “Jaymes Ickford…Your crimes are on a capital level of offense, with the deaths of both Academy Students, Staff and Civilians on your hands.”

“P-Please…I-I didn’t mean to…” Jaymes whimpers with terror, but Killian rises up mercifully. Jaymes breaks down into tears, sobbing uncontrollably, his worst fear being realised with the Black Gallows about to lock him away forever. “You have the right to remain silent, I have a feeling you might like that for your time in that cell. Raven Talons, take him.” Killian orders as he turns to walk away, and the two Raven Talon soldiers walk towards the crying student.

Until suddenly, their metal armoured suits stop them from moving and they gasp in pain, feeling the metal bending down into their bodies, before pushing them away from Jaymes. Killian stops and he turns, seeing Pyrrha standing between him and Jaymes, staring him down with stern

“Leave him alone.” Pyrrha demands with anger in her eyes, and Killian grits his teeth as he stares at the defiance against him – the very thing that he is fighting against.

“You’re just going to protect him? After everything he did to you? After he bullied you?” Killian questions in disbelief as he stares at her.

“Oh, there’s only one bully here, Killian – and I’m looking right at him.” Pyrrha assures with hatred directly staring into his onyx coloured eyes. Killian glares right back and he clenches his hand into a fist.

“Fine…then maybe you can join him.” He attempts, until Jaune walks forward as well, protecting him. Even Sun grabs onto Ruyi Jingu Bang and aims one of the shotguns at him.

“I…hope you got enough cells, dickwad…because you’re not gonna single us out that easily.” Sun assures, as everyone stands between the Black Gallows and Jaymes. Eryka and Winter both keep their weapons trained on the Commander at all times, but this is somehow more satisfying. Seeing him back up with fear of them.

“This…this is what I am talking about! You are meant to be soldiers! No children playing at a game you don’t understand! Stand down!” Killian yells, but none of them move, Ghira and Kali glare at him with disappointment and Ironwood glares right back.

“If you want him, Killian. Then we may have another fight on our hands.” Ghira states as he unholsters his Revolver and everyone draws their weapons to protect the young man.

They may not be able to prove Killian was behind this for the reasons he showed – but they can at least humiliate him.

Killian turns to his men and he just gestures to them to stand down and they all do so. Killian looks back to Ironwood and he narrows his eyes. “What do you hope to gain from all this folly, Ironwood? A happy ending where everyone goes to the prom?” He asks him with a scoff.

“I served in the military like you…and none of our soldiers can fight like these kids can. Think on that next time you try and take their freedom away.” Ironwood states as he glares at him, and Killian nods his head, keeping his head held high.

“You’re a good man, James. At least you have the honour of dying with the people you love.” Killian says as his men all enter the ships that land and begin to leave.

“And how will you die, Killian? Alone, or surrounded by your enemies?” Ironwood asks him, and Killian smirks.

“Oh no, James…I’ll get out of it…I always do.” Killian assures, turning and walking away from him as the ships fly away. He walks towards the darkness and Eryka grits her teeth and she shockingly launches an arrow towards his back. But the arrow only hits the wall, wobbling after contact.

He used his semblance again…able to walk among the shadows.

Ironwood stands there, and despite their relief…he is the only one that understood what Killian just said to him – was a threat.

The Praetorian Knight was right.
It is not over.

Not by a long shot.
What Comes After...

Jaune

Morning has risen after the Fall of the Black Smog…

A Victory, that has come at great cost. Jaune walks across the battle-scarred terrain of the Academy, smoke still rising from the places where flames once burned, extinguished by the storm that hit during the end of the battle. The pile of metal and rubble that formed the Praetorian Knight lays on the ground still. With water pooling out across the floor in multiple areas, claw marks and craters torn across the upturned cobblestone. The howls of Ambulance Sirens and Police Cars can be heard across the entire city of Vale, having to collect the hundreds of corpses left behind, mostly from the city itself. Due to the unanticipated attack from the War Sphinx that was drawn to the civilians’ terror opposed to the scent of the Relic. So many innocents were eaten alive inside of that city, beyond the Destroyed Districts.

And even within the Academy itself, so many students and staff members lost their lives, even some innocent construction workers who were caught up in the battle which started. Some of them are burying their friends, whilst others are staying as positive as they can, starting to begin the second round of cleaning up in the Academy. Sweeping up the rubble into enormous piles, whilst others zip up the bags that hold the bodies of the fallen. As Jaune walks along, recovered from the punch he suffered from the Praetorian Knight after finally activating his Semblance, with a bandage wrapped around his head and a mighty bruise faintly visible on his cheek where he was hit.

His concussion has subsided, thanks to his aura repairing the damage coupled with the medics that helped him recover from the circumstances. He walks towards the base of the Cross Continental Transmit Tower, where the Battle was held to try and keep the Black Smog busy. But due to the amount of people that were killed from the attack, it was not a total success. However, it is nowhere near as bad as the first attack was – if that is any consolation whatsoever. But there are still people heading out to collect the bodies in order to stop Secondary Disaster once again.

There is a feeling in the air directly after a battle, it is a combination of relief but also terror – because there is that part of you that does not believe that the battle is truly over. You are still expecting to hear the shriek of another Nevermore or the howl of another Beowulf. It will never come, now that the Praetorian Knight is defeated, but even still…that feeling is as thick as the Smog that they just defeated.

Jaune approaches the family of warriors recovering at the base where many bodies have been zipped up, seeing Glynda sat beside the body of Oobleck, sighing sadly as she zips the bag up with Port beside her. He gently caresses her shoulder with a smile as he stands beside her, and Jaune looks around, seeing everyone sat there. None of them showing many smiles on their faces, just that feeling of recovery. The same one that they felt from the first battle – however they had that thought in the back of their mind that this would happen. The Black Smog were getting closer with every day that was passing by.

It was only a matter of time before something would trigger the attack, and unfortunately it was all due to the schemes of Nathaniel Killian, manipulating a sick child.

No matter how noble your goal may be, if your methods are as cruel and merciless as that – does
that truly make you a good leader?

It might create a better world…but at what cost?

Who will be left to remember the world that came before?

Jaune has been thinking of those questions ever since Killian left the Academy, and he approaches them all, seeing them all sat there. Blake sat beside the recovering Sun Wukong, blood still hardened around his wound, but the bandage has stabilised his condition. He is less lucid now, but he does seem different. Blake lovingly caresses his hand with a smile, supporting him, but he has a blanket wrapped around his chest. “How are you feeling, Sun?” Blake asks him softly as she gently holds his hand, her other hand caressing his cheek and moving some of his messy blonde hair from his blue eyes.

“I…I don’t…” He stammers as he winces in pain, trying to sit up but his wound is still trying to heal. And his aura is doing its best to accelerate the process, but he needs to rest. Blake takes her hand and gently presses him back down to the gurney he is resting on.

“Just rest…” She assures, since it took everything to keep him in the medical wing of the school.

“I…I’m gonna look like a freak with this.” He stammers as he looks at the wound across his chest, the deep slash that could have killed him if it was just an inch higher. If the Praetorian Knight’s swing was any different and slashed his neck it could have severed his jugular, and could have caused him to choke to death on his own blood.

“Sun…” Blake gently says to him as she caresses his cheek where the bandage covers his face, and he flinches, but not from the pain, more because he does not want her to see him like this.

“You…you shouldn’t see me like this…I…I.” Blake has never seen him like this before, he has never been so…self-conscious…before. Neptune would poke fun if it was not so terrifying to see him like this to begin with, and now Sun is starting to feel bad for all the times he joked around with Neptune about his insecurities. Now he knows how serious it can be, especially when his whole thing was showing off his abs…and now there is this mark that will never go away.

But Blake…she could never be disgusted by Sun or his scar, not only because she has accepted her feelings for him – but also because she knows what it means to feel so insecure. And she has a scar of her own. She takes his hand and she gently uses it to lift up the lower part of her shirt over her hip where the scar from Wilt and Blush has healed. He looks at her and then at the scar, before finding her beautiful amber eyes once more.

“I know…I know what you’re feeling Sun.” She says to him and he looks up at her with fear for her and his own safety. Because this is the first time, he has ever been injured like this, for so long he felt like he was invincible when using his weapon, but the Praetorian Knight has taught him a very valuable lesson.

No matter how skilful you are, sometimes you might come across someone that is just a bit better than you.

“Blake…I…”

“I know it’s a small scar…but Weiss knows too. She has been self-conscious about her scar for years…it will take time. But I will spend every second of it with you…it will help you.” Blake lovingly promises with a smile, and Sun smiles back with tears welling up in his eyes. She leans down and kisses him gently on his lips, and he holds her close, and then she lies up beside him,
closing her eyes as she holds the tearful man’s hand.

This will open up a new chapter in his life, one that will not be easy to experience – but at least he is not alone anymore.

Neptune sits on a crate and he smiles to Jaune, nodding his head as he looks to his sister who also walks over to him. They both give each other a playful fist bump as they wait to figure out what to do next. That is the other feeling they all have on their minds right now, nobody knows what to do now. They have been impending the attack of the Black Smog for weeks now, and…and they have been preparing to lose and have to go into hiding. But they won, and they don’t need to hide from the monsters anymore.

So why are they so lost?

Another example of recovery after a battle, one of the first steps is acceptance.

Jaune turns his head to see Team C.R.D.L sat down and Jaymes sat there as well with Peony, the only people left from his team. Cardin looks at Jaymes and he sighs, feeling for the poor kid especially from how they treated him, all of them having absolutely no idea about his Paranoid Schizophrenia in the first place. Jaune keeps walking, seeing and hearing Sienna Khan speaking with Glynda about something relating to the White Fang.

“Thank you, Sienna…I…Anything we can do to help your cause will be provided. We will never forget what the White Fang did for us.” Glynda says, but Sienna Khan holds up her hands and she shakes her head with a kind and supportive smile.

“Oh no, I don’t think so. I’m not gonna accept any help, you have enough to deal with lately. Besides, I wanna help you all recover from this. That’s why I’m gonna go speak with the Valerian Councillor about how the White Fang can assist…you know, repairs…politics.” Sienna sighs, rolling her eyes with a smirk, making Glynda chuckle as well.

“I think the Black Smog are an easier challenge than that.” She chuckles, making Sienna chortle as well.

“I bet.” Sienna replies with a smile, nodding her head as she plants her hand on her shoulder. “Some of my forces will stay here in Beacon, to help you all rebuild and recover. Locate bodies, help the wounded. Ilia Amitola has volunteered to lead them.” Sienna Khan explains, looking to the young Chameleon Faunus who smiles proudly to them, looking at her old friend Blake Belladonna with a smile. Blake smiles back as she lays with Sun, comforting him still.

Glynda shakes Sienna’s hand and she smiles. “I never expected the White Fang to save us…” She says with pride.

“Well – Adam was not the leader of the Fang, and he is paying for his crimes. Especially since he committed them against my orders.” Sienna states, and Glynda smiles and nods her head.

“That is very reassuring to hear. I think this will prove to be a strong help for the movement you are leading, Sienna.” Glynda says to her, hopeful sounding as well.

“As do I, Miss Goodwitch – as do I.”

Jaune walks away from their conversation, approaching Ruby and Yang who are also recovering from the battle. He smiles when he sees Yang back at the Academy, now that everything has calmed down, they can all really appreciate seeing the blonde-haired hero back at the school now. She smiles back fondly to him. “Hey vomit boy.” She softly says and he chuckles.
“Still using nicknames, huh?” Jaune asks her curiously as he crosses his arms.

“Why not?” She chuckles as well, they are all feeling so tired after all the fighting they have had to endure. Near the end it was proving difficult to even be able to stand after everything, using what little aura they had left against the Praetorian Knight.

“How about you, crater-face? Feeling better?” Jaune asks her as he crouches down, touching his throbbing head from where he was hit by the Knight. Ruby rubs her stomach where she was stabbed twice by Neo, and also rubs the small cut on her neck where her blade nearly slashed her open and spilled her blood onto the carpeted floor.

“Yeah…if it weren’t for Cardin…” She says, looking over at him and he just smiles and nods his head to her. He has never asked her for a thank you or anything, he knows she is grateful, and even after everything he has done, he never asks people to try and be friends with him. But whether Cardin likes it or not, everyone likes him now – because he did something about his choices…and now has become a new man.

A better man.

“I…I was so scared…I really thought…that that was gonna be it. That was how I was going to die…” Ruby stammers, and what scared her most of all was simply that idea of it all – there would be no heroic sacrifice like in the books, nobody would have known…she would have just died a painful death. “…and you wouldn’t have known…” She tearfully says to her sister with fear, and Yang gently wraps one arm around her little sister’s shoulders and pulls her in, hugging her lovingly.

“But you didn’t.” Yang says to her. “Because you’ll never be alone, sis.”

Ruby smiles and wipes the tear from her eye. “Never…”

“Fought well, even after suffering what you went through.” Jaune says with an impressed tone. Ruby gives him a small smile, lacking that beaming grin at the moment, but in this feeling of fatigue they are all experiencing right now it is not overly surprising.

“You too…and…I have to ask…” Yang softly says as she looks at Jaune, remembering what he did when they fought the Praetorian Knight. “Was…that your semblance?” She asks him with curiosity, and Jaune chuckles, lowering his head as he remembers it all so vividly. The feeling of his heart palpitating and the sight of the Knight launching its Sceptre towards Pyrrha. And then it stopped as her polarity wrapped around its structure, holding it in place and keeping it from killing her instantly.

And that bright glow which emanated from his body around every single one of them, giving Nora the power, she needed to summon that lightning with her own semblance. She is still recovering from that attack, just getting her strength back. “Yeah…I think it might’ve been…” Jaune chuckles shyly as he looks at them with a smile.

“I knew you could do it…” Ruby says to him with a smile, but as they sit there, Ruby looks down at the floor and she shuts her eyes with a sigh. Yang looks at her and she rubs her back gently with her cybernetic hand.

“Hey, what’s up?” She asks her little sister.

“I…I need to see her.” Ruby states.

“Who?” But Ruby just gets up and she walks away from the two of them, so they both follow her.
With that look in her silver eyes, she looks angry but clearly wants closure on something. And the further they walk across the Academy into the City of Vale, and towards the Police Station, they both start to realise pretty fast why she is taking them there. They know who they are going to see...

Ruby approaches and one of the Police Officers stands in front of the door to stop her from entering, holding his hand up to keep her there. “Sorry ma’am, we need proper identification.” The Officer says, looking quite afraid right now, but Ruby shows him her Beacon I.D that she has inside of her wallet, and he looks at it and then at the other Hunters standing with her. They all just look at him and he sighs, stepping aside since all Huntsmen and Huntresses have access to Police Records and Prisoners for their missions. The Officer stands aside so then they can enter and the three of them walk in, speak with the Receptionist and after getting the permission...they meet with her.

Inside of a cell with a bullet-proof window showing her face inside, long messy pink and brown hair and the same coloured eyes, wearing the same clothes of which she was captured in. Ruby stands before her cell door, staring at Neo inside and she looks up at her with a sinister smile on her face. She touches her stomach gently, feeling the faint throbbing pain where she was stabbed and was nearly killed. “It’s over, Neo…”

Neo suddenly leaps up from her bed and she lunges towards the door and she reaches towards the window, punching it with force, hitting it over and over again until she bloodies her knuckles. She grits her teeth viciously at Ruby, and the young woman staggers back from the madwoman who just went for her despite having a steel door barricading her from the monster inside.

Yang catches her little sister, whilst Jaune stands with them with a glare focused on the assassin that tried to kill one of his closest friends. But Ruby finds her strength and her bravery, and she stares right back through that window. “You’re not getting out of here, Neo…you’re going to pay for your crimes. You murdered a girl...to kill me...nobody else will die because of you.” Ruby explains as she stares at her, seeing both rage, madness but also pain in them.

She sighs, remembering Roman, and how he got himself killed because he kept screaming about the man he is, and who he could be. “I never killed Roman...he killed himself.” She tells her, and Neo punches the window again with a silent yell, gritting her teeth together again, but this time Ruby does not flinch. “I gave him a chance to walk away…but he didn’t. He made his choice, and now you’ve made yours. Time you learn to live with it, because even if you did get out, this place is locked down. Soldiers everywhere...you wouldn’t stand a chance.” Ruby explains, and Neo desperately glares at her, scraping her nails down the window pane.

Ruby turns and she goes to walk away from Neo but she stops and looks over her shoulder. “I’m sorry…but it’s over.” Ruby tells her, and she walks away, but Yang walks into the view of Neo’s window, staring her down with red eyes.

“If you ever come after my baby sister again…and I will kill you myself.” Yang snarls, and Neo stares right back. “Do you hear me?”

Neo smirks with insanity in her colourful eyes, and she winks at Yang, signing the words – See You Around – with her hands, before she sits back down on her bed with a smile, waiting to escape her cell. They all turn and leave Neo behind, leaving the past behind so then it can be punished for her crimes.

Ironwood
He has seen it all before, the aftershock of a battle, some people crawled up into the corner as they wait for the next bomb to come crashing down.

He has become quite used to it, but he will never recover from seeing innocents experiencing this, or first years having to experience the horrors of war. The students know that they will have to learn to put up with the horrors of war one day, but to experience it so young is a curse that nobody should have to endure in their lifetime.

Ironwood and Winter both walk around the battlefield, approaching the destroyed Paladin that Yang was using for a time before one of the Forsaken Striders destroyed it. Ripped apart by the Grimm that clambered over it or crushed from the Hydra and the huge beasts that toppled it over. Crushed cobblestone from the huge weighted footfalls of Goliaths that marched through. And what makes it worse are some of the ash smothered corpses of Atlesian Soldiers, barely even noticed in the destruction. Ironwood crouches down as Winter picks up some of the weapons left behind from the battle to be returned back to Atlas. He reaches down to the body and pulls his dog tags from his neck, reading his name.

_Elias Amethyst._

He sighs as he adds this dog tag to the collection, he has put into one of his pockets to make sure that they return back to their families. He stands tall and some of the soldiers come over and they lift his torn apart corpse from the rubble and ash, adding him to the cart for burial. Winter is not the only one helping with this, as Dulcis glides over their heads and he lands on Eryka’s arm as she walks with them, helping carry some of their equipment to the other trucks that are here to return it back to where it belongs.

Ironwood looks at the two Warriors, and he sets another Gauss Cannon down on the flatbed of the truck. “Winter, Eryka…I would like you to be honest with me.” Ironwood requests as he stands before them, the two Huntresses stop and turn to the General, seeing him with that rather serious look in his eyes.

“Yes, General?” Winter responds.

“What happened with Killian?” He asks them both, and they look at each other, and they sigh since they know they need to tell him the truth.

“We knew he was dirty, he was up to something. His hatred for the Academies and those trained in them was no secret. And since he was keeping my men from investigating the crime scene of courier, we looked into his files one night when we knew he wasn’t there.” Winter explains, remembering every step perfectly, and remembering everything that Killian said to them, and the things they found.

If only they had physical evidence to use against him.

Maybe they could turn the world on him.

“You went after him without an order? Or a warrant?” Ironwood asks them both, and Eryka scoffs.

“Did he have a warrant to manipulate a kid with Schizophrenia?” Eryka questions.

“No…but that is not the point I’m getting at. You do realise the trouble this could cause us, right? I understand you had the best of intentions, but Killian is a Black Ops Operative, do you understand? Black Ops don’t follow normal rules, I know this because I worked with them. They do whatever
needs to be done to complete the mission." Ironwood explains, and Eryka crosses her arms.

“Okay, and you’re point is?” Eryka inquires.

“My point is that even if this information about him doing this, it wouldn’t matter. Because he has the resources to bend the truth to make it acceptable. Make it out to be Ozpin’s fault or something like that. It wouldn’t be the first time, I have seen him do it before. Multiple small villages have been crippled by the Black Gallows to the point of which they were wiped from the history books forever. All to hide their dark secrets, the things they did to protect the world.” Ironwood explains to the two of them and they both sigh.

“So, you’re saying we were wrong?” Winter inquires, and Ironwood looks down at the floor, at all the destruction.

“No…I know you Winter, and I know you had the best of reasons behind what you did, and I would support you. I’m just saying it was foolish to not come to me about it, because I would have listened. I don’t trust Killian any more than you do.” He points out and they sigh.

“We didn’t wanna get you involved…”

“…well…that and we didn’t know if you were under his gaze as well.” Eryka adds, bravely—something Winter would never dare say. “Well I didn’t.” Eryka corrects, since Winter always trusts her General, but Eryka is not one of his soldiers.

Ironwood chuckles, setting another piece of tech down onto the flatbed, giving the driver the thumbs up. “You’ve got good instincts, Eryka. I respect that—but Killian does as well, and he would have prepared for every eventuality.” Ironwood explains.

“So, what do we do now?” Winter asks him, and he sighs.

“We wait…and we hope. I’m not stupid, I know that what Killian said to us was a threat. And he is not about to give up on his goal to create a truly better world. We need to be careful, because he will either eliminate loose ends with the snap of his fingers who imprison them in those damned Black Cells of his.” Ironwood explains as they walk with him.

“Yeah and make Stockholm Troopers…pretty twisted.” Eryka says.

“Yes, it is. The man is dangerous, don’t underestimate him. He has some terrifying monsters inside of those cells. And he will unleash them whenever it suits his plan.” Ironwood warns.

“Does he seriously believe the shit that comes out of his mouth?” Winter questions, before gasping and covering her lips with her mouth at her use of a curse word. Eryka smirks as she looks at her.

“I’m rubbing off on you.” She jokes as she pinches her shoulder.

“Quit it.” Winter responds.

Ironwood chuckles, and he does not even give Winter a glare for her inappropriate language, he just answers her question. “I ask myself that a lot, hell I’ve actually asked him that a few times. But I do think he does what he does with Remnant’s best interests at heart – he is no politician…he hates politicians.” Ironwood chuckles.

“I guess we can all agree with him on that.” Eryka chuckles.

“I don’t—” Winter attempts to lie, but both James and Eryka look at her with raised brows and she
stammers before giving in with a sigh, admitting that she is not as prim and perfect as she tries to make herself out to be.

“Go on now, you’re dismissed. I think it is time I have check in on our prisoner.” Ironwood says to them, walking away from the two of them and he hears Eryka whisper something Winter that makes him chuckle.

“Drink?”

“Sure.” Winter replies.

Ironwood approaches the Police Station, and as he approaches the doors open up and he sees the doors open up to reveal Ruby, Yang and Jaune emerging after their conversation – if you would call it that – with Neopolitan. He slows down as he sees the three Hunters emerging and he holds his hands behind his back. “If I had known how brave all of you would have been…I would have given you a medal for breaking that boy’s leg.” Ironwood chuckles as he looks to Yang and she blushes a smile in response.

“Thank you?” She replies, confused of how she should reply to that.

“It is good to see you back on your feet Miss Xiao Long.” Ironwood says as he looks to her, and she smiles.

“It’s good to be back…it’ll take some time to get used to…but thank you.” Yang says to him with a smile as she lifts her cybernetic hand up and flexes her fingers around, listening to the mechanical sounds that emerge from every single little movement. He holds out his metal hand to her to shake it, and she extends her steel one, shaking his once.

“Hoo, nice grip there.” He says as he feels her tighter grip on his own, something she is definitely going to have to learn to improve on. They both shake hands, grateful to one another Ironwood turns his attention to Ruby and he looks at her with understandable concern, he knew of what happened to her – it is the whole reason for Neo being incarcerated in the first place. “Miss Rose, how are you feeling? I can understand if you are still rather shaken up after what you went through.” Ironwood says to her as he looks to the young woman, and she touches the place on her stomach again where she remembers that agonising feeling of when that blade punctured her twice, and when that same blood coated blade went to her throat to slit the jugular.

“I…I’m okay…gonna take some time to recover…but I have my friends and my sister.” Ruby says as she looks to Yang and her big sister smiles, putting her arm around her shoulders again. Ironwood then turns his eyes to Jaune, and he opens his hand to shake it. Jaune extends his hand and shakes the Atlesian General’s hand.

“When I first read your file, I honestly didn’t think much of you. And here you are…you have surpassed my expectations, young man. Well done, few have accomplished that.” Ironwood compliments with a smile, shaking his hand.

“Thank you, sir…that really means a lot.” Jaune says to him as he finds his courage to not let his nervous heart get the better of him.

“You’ve all earned it…I just hope we don’t have to experience something like this again.” He says to them, before he looks to the entrance and then nods to them. “Go on now, you’ve earned a rest.” He assures with a smile as he walks past them, but Ruby turns and she stops him.

“Sir…”
James turns to Ruby, seeing her wringing her hands. “Yes, Miss Rose?” He says to her, and she looks up at him.

“How...do you cope with it? After a battle...after nearly dying?” She asks him, and James looks at her and he walks back to her and he crouches down since he is much taller than her. She looks at him and he looks right back.

“You’ve already figured it out.” He says to her, as he looks at Yang and Jaune. “You have your family hear at this academy, and you help each other. And you heal together.” James assures as he gently squeezes her shoulder before rising back up to his feet.

“You’re all stronger than you know, remember that.” Ironwood says to them all. Ironwood continues on, opening the door and the Officers do not even stop him because they know exactly who he is as he walks inside. He walks towards the cells and he approaches the one of which that Neo is inside of, noticing that one of the Officers is already trying to speak with her, since that have had to chain her to the bed due to her aggressive nature.

He cannot hear what he is saying to her, but due to her mute nature it is all a bit of a defeated argument to have with her, since she will never respond. She just stares back at him with a totally straight expression, sighing as she rolls her eyes. The Detective eventually gives in and he stands back up, walking out of her cell and stopping when he sees the General standing there. “Take it she really is Mute?” He asks.

“Seems like it, General. I’ve been pressing her repeatedly and not a peep. I guess I’m gonna need to bring in a Sign Language expert. We’ll get something out of her.” He assures, as he closes the metal slider that blocks her window in the door. Ironwood nods his head and he walks with him, leaving her cell to talk with all the officers.

What none of them realise...

Is that inside of that cell...

She has just shattered into shards.

And a female officer walks out of the Station with blue eyes, but as soon as she blinks, they turn pink and brown and she smirks sinisterly. None of them have even realised that one of their officers never made it home, and she made a copy in her mind of her outfit and look.

And Neo just walked straight out of the Police Station, with no resistance whatsoever.

Neo

An hour of walking has passed now, and for some reason she has not gone after Ruby. She just left the entire city in search of something, walking alone in her real outfit, after somehow managing to trick the guards and getting out with perfect ease. Her pink and brown hair blows in the wind as she walks across the dirt roads in the countryside.

But the fact is, Ruby was right – she may have been able to escape easily but if she went after Ruby, she would never have a chance now. Everyone is going to stay near her, she would never get close enough before another fight would break out. But Neo is a creature of patience, and she will wait years to get the revenge of which she seeks. So now she will keep walking and walking across
Until suddenly bright lights shine down above her head and she stops with her eyes widening, and she turns around slowly to see the Black Wasp from the Black Gallows military. Obsidian Glaives jump from the ship and they land right in front of her, their armoured suits softening their fall and the thrusters helping slow the descent down a little bit. The glowing red light of their visors and armour is the only light from the black plates and that creepy black smoke that surrounds them like some kind of poncho.

Which is when she turns around again to see more soldiers emerging from black portals with their rifles aimed at her head, and even laser beams from nearby Onyx Consuls in the trees that were waiting for her. Raven Talon soldiers aiming down their sights as they stand before her, and she slowly draws her Umbrella she managed to take from the evidence locker in the Police Station. She really has made it seem like it was just so easy to escape their custody, but the Black Gallows might be a little harder to trick.

Especially when they have surrounded her.

“Don’t even try it, Neo.” Killian’s voice warns as he walks towards her, moving past some of his soldiers with his Revolver in his hand, ready to shoot her if he must. She glares at him with that Umbrella tightly in her grasp and she counts them all.

She is surrounded by at the very least twenty-six soldiers and Kilian.

She scoffs and speaks through sign language. “Don’t think I can’t cut you all down right now?” She asks him curiously with her hands, and Killian clearly is well educated enough to be able to read sign language.

“I’m sure you could do your best, but we all know that you cannot escape a Wasp.” Killian states as he looks at the Gunship that hovers above his head. “Do you really prefer death to safety in the Black Gallows? Ironwood might not know yet, but by tomorrow your face will be on every single Bounty List with an incredibly high price to it. You may be good, but you won’t be able to outrun them forever.” Killian explains as he looks around at the lonely road.

Neo scoffs again. “And I’d be safer with you? In your Black Cell?”

“It’s your choice, try and take us out and either die or be on the run for the rest of your life – or you could be protected where nobody will ever find you, until I clear your name.” Killian suggests as he shrugs his shoulders as he speaks.

“What happened to Vale being a necessary sacrifice?” Neo signs curiously, and clearly, she was more involved in Killian’s business than they realise. Killian stares the Assassin down and he exhales through his nose as he looks at his soldiers and he nods to them to lower their weapons and they obediently do so.

“Things changed.” Killian answers, and Neo just replies with the raising of her brow. “Turned out the plan would go better if we have the people on our side…rather than joining the graves.”

“Then why do you want to save me, when I am just a loose end?” She questions.

“Because you may still have a good use.” Killian admits, since it is not an act of kindness. Neo scowls at him, for it is clear that she does not share much respect for him as the heroes do not. “So…how do you want this to end?”

Neo looks at the soldiers and they could kill her right now, so she plays the part as she always has
done – she cannot outsmart them with their skill and technology, they most likely have some sort of thermal vision for where she has vanished off to so then they can take her out. So, she holds out her wrists and lets them cuff her, and take her away. Killian stands aside as his soldiers take her to the landing Wasp, and he looks up at the sky and exhales through his nose before he walks away.

Looking up at the Shattered Moon.

Winter

She sits beside her sister, looking across the Academy as she sees Ironwood walking with some of his men that help some injured students to the hospital to recover from their wounds. Some of them have broken bones and others have some pretty extreme burn and nerve damage in their bodies due to the Manticore’s and the War Sphinx that attacked them. Even the Headless Horseman’s attacks were responsible for these injuries, and they are only a few. Yang and Blake both have seen some students who fought that have lost appendages, some have lost their legs, some lost their hands or entire arms.

War is a bloody conflict, and it will never change.

Only the tools to fight them will.

Winter looks over to see Glynda emerging from the Academy with something held in her hands as she looks at it, and everyone stands up. They see that Kali and Ghira are with her, Ilia as well, and Blake gasps as she rises up. They are all holding these beautiful lanterns, ones that were brought with them by the White Fang. Glynda looks at everyone sat down, and she smiles. “Sienna Khan did not originally come here to assist us in the battle, she wanted us to help recover from the initial battle. She brought with her these lanterns, and Miss Amitola and the Belladonnas have informed me of their nature.” Glynda explains with a smile.

Kali walks forward as Blake looks at her mother with a fond smile, and Cardin uncrosses his arms as he sees her approach. “In the times of old in Menagerie, the priests of the Fang would light these lanterns…and let the wind carry them away. We would write on them a name, and cast a wish upon them, so then the souls of those we loved who died…can find peace in the afterlife. And will have a star in their name.” Kali sweetly explains to them all as she holds this one in her hand, and she gently passes it to Professor Peter Port. He holds it in his hands, and he reads in the name.

Doctor Bartholomew Oobleck

He looks at it, and the once closed eyed man finally opens them to reveal his blue eyes that are filled with mournful tears for his friend. “He was your friend, Professor – I believe you should have the honour of sending him beyond.” She kindly says to him, and he shoves the tears from his eyes, recovering his courage as he holds the little lamp of light material in his hands.

“T-Thank you…” Port stammers to speak, and Jaymes stands up as Ghira gives the young man his lantern and one of the soldiers does the same for his partner Peony, and they both look upon the names on the lanterns.

Forrest Ickford

His cousin who was killed in the first Battle of Beacon, and Peony nearly cries when she sees her
name on her own lantern.

Rouge Daniels

Two souls taken who never deserved to die the way that they did, Rouge died afraid as she begged for her life, and Forrest died a painful death at the claws of the Grimm. The White Fang all give out the lanterns to everyone so they can write the names of those that they cared for who lost their lives this day. Anaximander and Juno stand beside Pyrrha and they gently comfort her with a smile as she looks at them. Glynda walks with the lantern in her hands, and she gently holds it out to Ruby with a truly supportive smile on her face.

Ruby accepts it, and she nearly breaks down into tears as well, covering her gasping lips as she sniffles – seeing her name.

Penny Polendina.

Ruby feels the hand of her sister on her shoulder, seeing her own tearful smile on her face, and Weiss stands close to her sister with Blake by Yang’s shoulder. Ruby wipes the tears from her eyes as she looks at Glynda, and she smiles. “T-Thank you…” She nearly cries as she speaks, feeling that lump in her throat as she speaks, trying to get the words out. Glynda smiles and hugs her, holding her close as she softly speaks.

“You’ve all come so far…and it has been a pleasure to teach you.” She assures with a smile, and as they have a moment, Qrow looks upon them all as they take their lanterns, and one of the men approaches him with one. He accepts it, and he takes the pen and he writes the name upon it, pausing as he writes the surname.

He exhales as he looks down at it.

Summer Rose.

He wipes a tear from his eye and then looks at her daughter with a smile. “You’d be proud of her, Summer.” Qrow assures with a smile, and he holds the lighter in his other hand, and they all prepare to do so. All of them looking at the name, before igniting the are underneath the bag where the name has been written upon. They all think of their message to their lost loved ones, and then they release them as the flame sends the hot air up into the bag. The lanterns all ascend up into the sky with a beautiful twinkling glow, rising into the fading stars as dawn begins to break.

Ruby looks up at the sky as the lanterns meet the stars and seem to disappear, allowing their souls to be free. “Goodbye Penny…” Ruby softly says as she stands with her team as they say goodbye to their friend, wishing her to be happy and at peace in the sky. Winter smiles as she looks at her sister beside her team, and Winter looks over at Eryka, seeing her sat on one of the benches with Dulcis beside her, gently caressing his feathered body as he chirps.

Maybe it isn’t too late, to find something.

Qrow stands tall as he looks up at the sky as the lanterns fade away and he looks down at the floor, before looking to one of the trees. Seeing the Raven with red eyes stood on the branch and he softly nods his head to the bird. She caws, before taking flight and flying away from them all, letting them have that moment.

Pyrrha looks to her parents and they both perform the honourable farewell of the Spartans, as they both stand upright and tall, slamming their spears downwards once, and they call out something in Ancient Mistraalian.
“Sit perierat inveniret pacem concilia Elysiumque.” They both say in unison as they pay farewell to the people who lost their lives both in this battle and the one that came before them. Pyrrha looks at them and she asks them both what hits her.

“What does that mean?” She inquires.

“May the lost find peace in Elysium.” Juno answers with a kind smile, since it is Spartan Culture – or at least the ancient culture – to believe that when you die, the good in your soul finds Elysium, and the cruel finds Hell. Making sure that no matter the deed, the side of the soul that was good, may find peace at last, and the cruel suffers for eternity for its actions. Cleansing the soul of all their misdeeds.

As Glynda lets everyone recover, she looks at Ironwood and Winter and she walks back towards the base of the tower as everyone has their conversations. Ilia walks past them, and she speaks with Ghira and Kali, since they have been like parents to her in the same way they have been to Blake. The two Atlesian Commanders enter the elevator with Glynda, and they dart back up to the top of Ozpin’s office, luckily this time the C.C.T Tower was not destroyed in the attack.

Glynda walks out of the elevator when the doors open and she approaches the desk, sighing as she runs her fingers across it. “I knew that working with Ozpin was dangerous – but I had hoped we would have more time before this much blood was spilt.” Glynda states as she looks out at the beautiful sky, unable to see the lanterns anymore, it is literally like they have become the fading stars as the sun rises above the horizon to mark the morning of the next day. It is even harder to believe that the entire battle only lasted a night, it felt like it lasted months.

“The battle is over…I know it will take time to get used to, but the Black Smog are gone. Their forces scattered and we wiped the majority of them out. My ships have already informed me that Grimm Signatures in both the Emerald Forest and Forever Fall are smaller than ever before. Vale is more secure than ever before.” Ironwood assures as he crosses his arms with a smile, and they all look at the distant Emerald Forest, and that thick black smoke that once infested the trees is truly gone.

“At what cost?” She asks them, turning to face them. “The Lanterns helped us find peace in it…but it is still a fact.” Glynda says to the two Atlesians and then their eyes turn to Ozpin, still in his comatose state. His body has healed magnificently, however even when he does awaken, he might need to use a wheelchair for some time before his legs restore the strength that they have lost.

“I know, and we won’t forget the sacrifices made. And Neopolitan will pay for her crimes, this I promise you. She is not getting out of that cell.” Ironwood assures, little do any of them know that she is already gone. But as soon as they realise it, her face will be stapled across the whole world with a bounty so hefty that everyone will be searching for her. But in the hands of the Black Gallows nobody will be able to find her until they release her.

“I still think we should have killed her for good measure, sir.” Winter admits, sounding more and more like her partner with every second that passes by.

“With that kind of talk, you’re starting to sound like Killian.” Glynda states, and Winter responds with a disgusted shudder at the mere thought of being like a man like him.

“So, what do we do now?” Winter inquires, crossing her arms.

“Well…assuming we will still be able to run the Academy – we will continue the repairs and pile on the costs after this attack. We’ll have to push back the dance…but hopefully we can still give these kids some joy after all this. They need it, to show that our demons don’t control us.” Glynda
explains as she crosses her arms as well.

“I will happily help support this, and I know Jacques Schnee will help fund the repairs.” Ironwood states.

“Permission to speak freely sir?” Winter inquires.

“Always.” Ironwood replies.

“Are you really so sure my father would be so willing?” She inquires, and Ironwood chuckles.

“He may think he’s smart, but if he can find a way to improve his reputation he can be used as easily as a gun.” Ironwood chuckles as he shakes his head, since Jacques really is an easy man to control. Just feed his ego like a master feeds his dog and you will have his full support.

“And…as cold as it may sound, after who we have lost…we will need more staff here. With Oobleck gone, and Peach…we need people to take their places until someone can…well nobody could replace them. Just carry on their work, I guess.” Glynda explains, and to both of their surprise, Winter rises to the occasion.

“I will happily take up the role for Oobleck, I did not know him very well, but I would like to help in any way I can.” Winter volunteers.

“You want to be a teacher? You?” Ironwood chuckles with disbelief.

“I can do it, no different than training soldiers.” That comment makes the two teachers burst out with laughter, and she looks at them both with confusion. “Isn’t it?”

“Much harder.” Glynda chuckles as she shakes her head.

“Well…I would like to take the responsibility until we can find a new teacher.” Winter says to the two of them, and Glynda nods her head.

“Okay…but believe me, being a teacher is nothing like being a soldier. If anything, being a soldier is way easier.” Glynda assures with a smile as she nods to her.

“And…what of the Black Gallows? We know that this is not the last we’re gonna see of them, aren’t we?” She asks, especially after her conversation with Ironwood earlier.

“Not by a long shot, and we’ll handle it tactically. End of the day, Killian may be as ruthless as he wants but he still operates under the law as best as he can. He may bend the rules on occasion, but he clearly does not like spilling blood needlessly. Why else would he have saved the people of Vale?” Glynda explains as she gestures the city which is also under repairs right now.

“To gain their support.” Winter comments.

“True, but I know men like Killian. He is no Ruler who would sacrifice anyone, he came back because he respects the lives of innocents. Or whoever he deems innocent, and clearly what happened here was not part of his plan. I think he had hoped the Grimm would stay focused on the Academy before heading into the city.” Glynda explains to them, sitting on the edge of Ozpin’s table, crossing one leg over the other with her hand pressed against the glass pane.

“Not from what he told Eryka and I. He said he was willing to sacrifice anyone to get what he wants, he even said that Vale has been a target for the actions they have made.” Winter points out, and at the end of the day this would not have been the first-time people have tried to do this against
the Kingdom of Arrogance.

“Well he must have changed his mind, because he would never have come back otherwise.” Glynda states.

“We’ll keep an eye open for him. Be ready for whatever he throws at us.” Ironwood agrees with the nod of his head, and he looks over and Ozpin and his eyes widen when he sees movement in his hand. Then they hear an audible groan from his bed, and Glynda gets off the table with a gasp of her own. They all walk over to the bed, to see his closed eyes slowly opening, to reveal his brown irises inside.

“Oz…” She softly says and he groans.

“W-What…what happened…the Academy…is it…”

“It’s standing…we…we were attacked again, but we’re standing.” Glynda says as she sits down on the edge of his table.

“How…How many people did we…did we lose?” Ozpin stammers weakly, barely able to keep his eyes open due to the fact he was in a coma for so long. Ironwood looks at Winter and she looks at him.

Glynda looks back at the two of them and she exhales. “Go on now, I’ll fill him in on everything that’s happened.” Glynda says, and Ironwood nods, standing up as he looks at the Professor who has finally awakened.

Unfortunately, Ozpin cannot control when he awakens from his coma, and he could not have a heroic return into action like most would expect.

He awoke after the battle, and now needs to learn of everyone they lost.

Winter and Ironwood both stand in the elevator together, and she wrings her hands together as she stands there, and Ironwood looks at her, noticing that she clearly wants to say something. “Something is clearly on your mind, Winter…and it’s not Ozpin being awake, is it?” He asks her, since that clearly is on his mind. The amount of questions that man needs answers to, it is best to leave it to someone like Glynda.

“I…I know we are leaving to Atlas soon…but…” She stammers, and Ironwood raises one brow.

“Come on Winter, I may be your commanding officer, but you are also my student.” He reminds, and how there is such a difference between the two. “Speak your mind.”

“I want to stay here sir…with my sister.” She confesses, righting herself like a soldier would, yet Ironwood does not even seem upset.

“You know, I was actually going to give you the opportunity to remain here with your sister.” Ironwood admits, and she looks at him with confusion.

“Wait…really?” She asks.

“Yes, I heard of what she accomplished when fighting the Praetorian Knight. She managed to summon, not for very long mind you, but considering she had never done it before, that was quite impressive. You two can definitely help each other, and if you do want to start teaching here when lessons start back up, then it would make sense for you to stay here.” He explains, and clearly, he has been hoping she would ask him that question.
“Oh…I was…kind of expecting I would have to beg.” Winter softly chuckles, making him laugh.

“Part of me would love to imagine that, but I think it would ruin you for me as well.” He chuckles, making her blush, but then he squeezes her shoulder. “Winter – you are one of my most trusted students. But now…you aren’t a student anymore, you are a warrior, a Specialist – and a teacher. Your choice has always been your own, and I could never be disappointed in whatever path you would choose.” Ironwood assures.

Winter smiles as she looks to her General and the elevator finally reaches the bottom. “Thank you, sir.” She says, and she holds out her hand to shake his. He extends it, and shakes her hand with a smile.

“And worry not, I’ll be back for the dance. Never could miss a good party.” Ironwood chuckles as he walks away from her, towards his men and the ship. She walks out from the tower and looks around, seeing everyone and the Construction Workers playing with some of the students and making jokes. The Site Managers speaking with the staff, and then she turns to see her sister.

Weiss opens her palm and forms a Glyph.

Winter smiles. “Shall we begin?”

Jaune

After all the chaos, the silence has never felt so peaceful.

The birds that tweet in the trees as they walk, hand in hand, her red hair flowing in the wind beside his messy blonde hair. Sapphire Oceans and Emerald Fields gazing out to the peace that has filled the land after the chaos. Jaune and Pyrrha both come to a stop at a bench and they sit down, having a moment together, hands held tight as they sit there, and Pyrrha rests her head on her boyfriend’s shoulder. No beating around the bush anymore, this is what they are now.

They are together-together.

Jaune looks up at the rising sun, seeing the flock of birds flying towards it as he gently rubs his thumb upon the top of her hand. “Been a long road.”

“It has…”

“Not an easy one, but we’re here.” Jaune says, feeling such pride in himself and for his girlfriend. She wears her brown jacket over her red shirt after the damage she sustained to her armour from the pulse that the Praetorian Knight set off. She still has a bandage around her stomach, despite Jaune healing her wounds thanks to his semblance unlocking at the perfect moment. The bandage however keeps her stable, since it only partially healed her body, he will need to harness his ability more and more before he can use it to amplify aura in a better way than how he did against the Praetorian.

“So…where do we go from here, Jaune?” She asks him curiously, and he chuckles.

“What do you mean?” He replies.

“Well, I think the dance is gonna be pushed back. But…you and me…are we gonna…really do
this?” She asks him, and he looks at her and he holds both her hands as she turns to face him. He looks down at her knees and then back up to her beautiful face.

“It’s not gonna be easy, after losing Oobleck…nearly losing Sun…Ruby getting stabbed… everything that has happened. And with the Black Gallows – I doubt this is over. But I can’t think of anyone else I could possibly face that with.” He says to her lovingly, caressing her cheek with his hand, and she moves her cheek into his hand, feeling so at home in his embrace.

“Neither can I…” She agrees with a smile, but then a smile spreads across her cheeks as she looks at him. “…although…can I just say how proud I am of you?” She asks him, and he raises his brow.

“Hmm?” He asks her like a puppy.

“Your semblance, dummy! You unlocked it!” She squeaks with joy as she holds his face by his cheeks with a giggle in her face. She smushes his cheeks together as he tries to speak.

“I did…” He slurs through squished cheeks. She releases his face and she holds his hand again, not letting go. “Not sure what it was though.” He admits.

“I think…you amplified our auras…gave us all the strength we needed to finish off the Praetorian Knight, remember?” She says to him with a smile.

“That’s true…I guess I’m…like a Support Main!” Jaune gasps, leaving Pyrrha a bit speechless.

“Um…” She softly coos.

“Oh, it’s a gaming think. Ruby and I can explain it later.” He assures.

“Oh.” Pyrrha agrees with the nod of her head.

They both turn to the sun that shines upon them and he continues to hold her hand, and she smiles. “Beautiful morning.” He then looks at her and he cannot even fight the urge anymore.

“Not as beautiful as you.” He coos, and she smiles, looking at his lips and then at his eyes.

“Sweet talker.” She says to him.

He takes her gently by the back of her neck and she smiles, pulling herself into his embrace, holding on tight as their lips meet, kissing long and lovingly together. As the sun shines upon their beautiful relationship as it finally flourishes into something more.

They finally did it.

Their demons are finally conquered.
Epilogue

Jaune

A couple weeks later…

Construction is still underway in the repairs for the Academy and the city, however with the looming threat of the Black Smog no longer on everyone’s minds, they can finally enjoy their two victories. Victories that came at great cost, and that cost has not been forgotten. Inside of the Food Hall, they have finally set the long-awaited dance off, and the photographs of the fallen have been stapled to a wall to always remember them. Professor Oobleck, Forrest Ickford, Rouge Daniels, the many students and members of staff who were killed in both attacks.

Penny Polendina.

Glynda and Ironwood both stand beside the board, with Professor Ozpin sat down in a wheelchair, still recovering from wakening from the coma. Glynda filled him in on everything that has transpired, and the reaction can still be seen in his eyes. That look of I should have been here to help them is clear as day in his brown eyes. However, nobody is dwelling on the past, for that is not what everyone died for, they died so then the rest of the world could keep on living and never forgetting the sacrifices that they made to get to this point.

Peony dances with Jaymes on the dance floor, more enthusiastically than him, whilst Neptune, Scarlet and Sage are all dancing with immense vigour. More vigour than the Schnees who are both sat down, admiring the spectacle of their utterly terrible dancing skills. Sun is sat with Blake, talking indistinctly at their table, and he now has metallic medical filament implanted into his wound, one that has helped repair the damage but has left this long dark metallic grey mark across his chest and side of his face. He actually now has his – now black – shirt buttoned up, unlike what he would normally do.

Accept for this dance he is wearing his smart suit again, and Blake is wearing her beautiful dark purple dress. Everyone is dressed up nice. Pyrrha in her crimson red dress and Ruby still struggling in hers. Yang welcomes the rest of the students into the dance, seeing Team C.R.D.L entering in their suits, and Cardin smiles and playfully bows to Yang. She chuckles, and she lets the four of them enter, new people, no longer the bullies their once were. Hearing cheers from the students who see them, and Cardin smiles as he nudges Russel’s shoulder with his elbow.

Team C.F.V.Y are already inside, and this time their planning for the dance was actually completed unlike last time, and it is clear. Their ideas alongside Yang and Weiss’ work really shows, especially with Coco’s sense of style. Nora and Ren both dance slowly and adorably on the dance floor, whilst one couple…the main couple…is not there.

Not like before.

Pyrrha sits at the table, the music drowning out her thoughts as she swirls her finger around the rim of her glass. The multicoloured lights from the dance floor swipe left and right across the table, when a shadow dwarfs over her. She turns and her solemn expression slowly explodes into an ear to ear grin.

"Still fits me." Jaune chuckles, patting the white dress currently hugging his torso. "I dunno
whether to be disappointed or relieved." He laughs sheepishly. "So... wanna dance?"

"Can't go one party without being in a dress, huh?" Pyrrha chuckles, standing and taking his hands, staring longingly into his eyes. His smile softens to sheer compassion. "Thank you."


"W-What are we, Jaune?"

"Hmm?" He asks, eyebrows scrunching. She huffs and squeezes his hands.

"Us? Everything. Where are you?" She asks softly, blushing as she studies his hands in hers. "I'm where I'm always going to be, so... it's up to you. I'll understand if it's just too mu-

His forehead unexpectedly became warm against hers, his hands sliding free of hers to fan open on her supple shoulders. She closes her eyes and shakily breathes out.

"I'm not going anywhere, Pyr." He sighs, Pyrrha just able to hear it over the music. "Too much history with you to walk away. Too much of... this... " He holds his hand over his drumming heart with a scoff. "... going nuts whenever I see you. Nah... I'm with you."

"Lovely." Pyrrha blinks her stinging eyes, hand sliding up his shoulder to the nape of his neck, pulling his lips to hers with a crashing wave of relief. It feels like coming home. He smiles and pulls her tight to his frame, totally unaware of the cheers all around them, all wrapped up in their own little world.

Winter stands in the corner of the hall in her dark grey cocktail dress, swirling her shot glass of potent gold liquid, necking it in one gulp. She clears her throat with a cough and sets the glass down, letting a small smile grace her face as she watches all those wounded friends come together to celebrate, to heal.

It's...nice.

Eryka walks in, damn near stumbles in, dressed uncomfortably in a figure hugging dark maroon dress. She swears constantly at her spindly heels, saddling up besides Winter.

"Oh, so you can clean yourself up." Winter smirks, eyeing the party while Eryka scoffs.

"Yeah, I guess, gods these heels suck! Dunno how these toothpicks are holding me up."

"You look nice." Winter says, picking up two shot glasses, passing one to Eryka. "That's as far as my compliments go."

"I was gonna say, felt weird. You feelin' alright?" Eryka grins, tapping her glass to Winter's. Winter eyes her sister giggling as she dances joyfully with Neptune and Ruby now on the dance floor. She smiles brightly, something that really weirds her partner out...she’s never seen her like this before.

"Yes. I feel great actually."

"Good." Eryka swallows her shot with a splutter. "Whoa that's some strong shit for a kids party."

"Oh... " Winter nods over to Qrow stood looking out the window. "His personal stash."

"Well..." Eryka places her hands on her hips. "By the way, you scrub up well yourself. Got a killer figure hidden in that uniform."
"I suppose I should... appreciate those words?" Winter raises a brow along with a scoff. Eryka shrugs.

"Might as well." She grins that infectious toothy smile. Winter rolls her eyes, her cheeks reddening slightly as she looks over to the dance. "So... might as well show these youngens what true talent looks like." Eryka cracks her neck.

"You? You dance?" Winter scoffs, gulping her drink. Eryka shrugs with a smirk as she walks backwards towards the dance floor.

"Oh, like a dog trying to piss while walkin’. But guess you'll have to show me." Eryka takes Winter's hand, dragging her onto the dance floor. Winter gasps with shock.

"No! Not on your life! No! NO!"

Qrow chuckles, shaking his head before looking back out at the moon, sighing heavily. He rolls over against the wall to face the party, finding Ruby laughing breathlessly as Yang spins her around and passes her from Blake and Weiss, giggles all around. He smiles and looks upwards, nodding his flask.

"Here's to you Summer. Oh, if only you could see your girl. She's something special."

Weiss twirls around under Neptune's arm, placing a hand on his chest as the two-step side to side, grinning ear to ear. He spins her again and she steps back into Scarlet's hand, the red head chuckling as he leans over to the nearby plant pot, ripping a rose out and putting it in his mouth with a wink. Weiss chuckles and rolls his eyes.

Scarlet's eyes widen and he takes the thorny rose out of his mouth, tapping his finger to his tongue to see blood.

"There's blood, Sun!" Scarlet runs off pass him, Wukong chuckling and shaking his head. He startles when Blake steps up to him, their eyes locking, her beauty making him freeze like a dear in headlights every time he sees her.

"Are you okay?"

He shrugs and looks down, pulling his shirt collar over his black t-shirt, trying to hide himself in it. The bandage across his facial scar was no longer thick dressings but just a thin line of stitching, the grey metallic medical filament visible through the thin white bandages. Still, Blake can tell he is not himself.

She takes his hand off his shirt.

"You have nothing to be self-conscious of, Sun." She swallows thickly and leans up, gently pecking a kiss to his cheek. "Nothing at all, okay?"

"Wanna dance?" Sun croaks, gulping heavily. She smiles and nods, taking his hand. Yang watches Blake go, and her smile splits her face it is that wide. She spins Ruby back around and takes her sister’s hands, side-stepping to and fro, swaying their arms left and right.

"Go get him, Blakey." She smiles joyfully. Sun gives a gentle laugh as he places a hand on Blake's hip, stepping side to side with her, slowly starting to soften in her hands, forgetting all about the world around him, only focusing on the beautiful person before him. He smiles brightly for the first time in days.
Pyrrha giggles heartily as Jaune steps around her, his trainers squeaking against the floor with his fast moves. Pyrrha's giggles grew to uncontrollable fits of laughter as Jaune got faster, gathering the attention of other dancers.

"Go Jaune!" Ruby cheers, Jaune watching his feet moving flawlessly against the floor.

"Oh! Oh, watch me go! Don't stop me! I can't be stopped!" Jaune pants, Pyrrha hunching forward with her laughter. Suddenly Nora slides out of the crowd to his side, winking to Pyrrha and clapping her hands.

"I smell a JNPR dance number!"

"Count me out of this one." Ren says from the punch table. The record screeches and the room gasps, silence suddenly screaming at him. He lowers his punch glass from his lips, looking at all the shocked eyes. Then his vision tears through the parting crowd to Nora. Her eyes are glassy, pupils as big as saucepans.

"Nora. No puppy dog eyes." He says, trying to sip his drink. She whimpers. He groans loudly, puts his cup down heavily and walks over to her.

"Yay!" Nora cheers, kissing his cheek. Ren clears his throat and nods as the music starts up again. "Hit it!"

Soon JNPR are on the dance floor again, even brighter smiles than before as they tear across the room in that same super synchronised fashion. Eryka spins the grumpy Winter Schnee, stopping to watch the kids.

"Holy fish knuckles... those kids can move."

Jaune spins Pyrrha as Ren mirrors with Nora, picking their partners up and spinning them over their heads. They finish the dance as the song winds to a halt, the room erupting in cheers as JNPR pant.

"Yeah... We still got it." Jaune laughs to the still dipped Pyrrha in his arms. She giggles and he pulls her up to both feet.

"Pfft, have we gotta teach you this lesson again, Jaune?" Ruby challenges with a swipe of her thumb across her lip. Weiss, Yang and Blake flank her with smirks. "DJ! Crank that base!"

"Whuh?" The kid at the front of the hall shouts over the music. Ruby cups her mouth.

"I SAID! CRANK! THAT! BASE!"

"I-I can't hear you over the base!" He hollers back. Ruby huffs.

"What's the plan, Ruby?" Weiss asks, stepping up beside her. Ruby scoffs as Jaune stares back, smirking wider. Ruby nods.

"Checkmate!"

"W-What? Wait, what dance are we doing?" Blake asks as she takes Weiss' hands.

"Yang! Pick a dance!"

"Err... Can-Can!"

"Really?" Ruby deadpans with a huff.
"Oh Rubes, you're really showing us up over here, right guys?" Jaune grins, NPR nodding with equal smirks. Gauntlet thrown down. Ruby takes Yang's hand and Weiss', and they rip forward into a Can-Can dance. Jaune blinks in surprise.

"I'm umm... glad my skirt isn't short tonight." Weiss winces to Blake, who nods back, bringing their legs up in the dance.

Qrow snorts, shaking his head and turning to the balcony, walking out to get some fresh air. The music isn’t as loud, more muffled and peaceful. He sighs contently and rests his forearms on the stone, looking out at the scaffolded tower.

"Wow. Yang's... looking so much better."

Qrow turns his head to his sister, leaning against the stone wall, looking inside at her daughter having fun. A small smile curves Raven's lips, before sobering.

"Raven? What're you doing here?"

"I took some kids into the tribe a week or so ago. They've proven to be reliable." She takes Qrow's offered flask and swigs it back with a nod. "But the youngest one. Kid called Oscar. We found him at his house. His family had been massacred."

"Well... that sucks. Other tribes maybe? Trying to muscle in the Branwen's?"

"Nah. I don't think so." Raven sighs, handing him the flask back. "I think it's worse." She reaches behind her and pulls out a long blade of blackened metal, handing it to Qrow. He studies it with furrowed eyebrows, looking up at her. She shrugs. "It was embedded in the wall... and several more pinning bits of body to the walls... Like a-"

"Fatal Feather." Qrow pinches his nose. "You don't think...?"

"I don't know what to think Qrow." She takes the feather back, storing it. "But I know what it damn well looks like. If it wasn't the Ripper, then it's a damn good copy-cat. That place was a blood red bomb sight. If arteries can be cut, then they were cut in that house."

"That's way too far West for it to be him, surely? You think he's come back?"

"I dunno." She sighs, going silent to ponder. "Oh. Valravn's back by the way."

Qrow looks up at her with a raised brow. "Really? Uncle Val's popped in?"

"Popped? Nah. He's staying. Trying to fortify the tribe and it's infighting." Raven huffs. "Long story short, couple of rebellions. Shay helped me put them down. He's good like that, doesn't hesitate."

"Shay's been there almost since the start." Qrow huffs, swigging his flask. "With Val back, things might be on the up for you, sis."

"Mmm." She turns to him, placing her hand over his, stilling his movements. "Come back, Qrow. Come back to the Tribe."

"Raven, you know I can't. You know why. You really want to fix all this, then have bad luck waltz in? Nah, I left for a reason. Besides, you're taking good care of it." He smiles. Raven scoffs.

"Trying. Val's already got his thoughts on how I run the place." Raven shrugs, crossing her arms.
Qrow nods.

"Well... Val's brave for trying to sway you off of ideas you're set on." Qrow smirks, Raven rolling her eyes. She turns and slashes her sword at the air, opening a portal. She stops and smiles slightly to him.

"She... she looks happy." Raven looks through the window, at Yang dancing with Jaune. "Keep it that way. I'll umm... I'll keep you updated on the Ripper situation. If I think it's really him, come back. We'll have to seriously discuss... well, everything."

"Yeah. Okay. Take care sis." Qrow nods. Raven gives a curt nod and disappears, leaving Qrow to sigh and stare out at the stars, ponder everything she'd told him, as the icy gooey fear settles in his gut.

Inside, the party is as lively as ever, Velvet dancing with Coco and Yatsuhashi, giggling as they whisper jokes into the Faunus' ear to see whose is funnier. Nora and Ren happily sat at a table, talking softly, his thumb rubbing circles on her hands. Yang and Weiss dances joyfully among Scarlet and Sage, Neptune talking with Cardin by the punch bowl.

Sun is happily holding Blake, content to slowly rock back and forth as they talk in hushed tones. Ruby is content to stand to the side for a moment, smiling at her beloved family all coming together once again. All in all, everyone is mending, taking the world on together.

Jaune however is holding Pyrrha softly in a slow dance, off the side from everyone else, humming contently as he rests his head on hers.

"So, what d'ya think? A week before the Grimm come back?" Jaune huffs. Pyrrha opens an eye from her content place against his chest. She puffs her cheeks and shrugs.

"Don't be so negative, Jaune." She smiles. "Look around." So, he did, at all the laughter, the comradery. They both smiles brightly and hugs deeper. "I think we'll be fine."

Winter sits nearby with one leg crossed over the other, whilst Eryka is drinking and speaking with Ironwood and Glynda beside Ozpin since this is the first time she could actually speak with the professor. Winter on the other hand has her scroll out and she scrolls through BeaconBook, seeing the many people on there posting their comments and some of the praises made for the efforts the Huntsmen made in the Fall of the Smog.

But not all of it...is praising them on their efforts.

As she scrolls through them, she pauses her eyes focus on the words that have appeared on the net...and if it was just the few then it would not worry her...but it is not.

Those praising them are the few, and it is a very small minority.

*How many of our people died inside of our cities whilst those meant to protect us hid like cowards inside of their academy?*

*If the Government can protect us, then what’s the point in having these Academies that we pay our taxes to?*

*My wife was killed in the attack! And where were these heroes? Nowhere! They left us to die, whilst the Gallows saved us all! The Huntsmen have lost my vote, they need to be controlled or be removed forever!*
What happens when you create superheroes? You get Super Villains! It is the natural order of things! So, get rid the them before it gets worse!

Sign this petition! Get rid of the Huntsmen!

It goes on for pages upon pages, people from across the world, since the attacks on the cities happened at all the Kingdoms as well as here at Vale in the first Attack. Thousands of innocents died because of that day.

It sends a cold chill down her spine as she reads it…

…because of what he said to her after she said the people will know of the things he has done.

And it is starting to make more sense of what he said.

“The world will approve, because when Jaymes shows what his level of power can cause when uncontrolled…when untamed…the very people you have sacrificed yourselves to protect, will turn against you.

They will want you all to be controlled, or imprisoned…Times are changing, Winter Schnee.

You can either let the changing tide pull you away or you can adapt…and survive the change with the rest of us…”

Killian was right…

…the people have made their choice.

Killian

His onyx eyes stare towards her as he sits on the chair with purple crystals glowing around him, shining upon his skin. His breathing is faintly metallic still due to the device attached to his throat to help him breathe. He sits there, his hands pressed to the table, as the three other members of her coven stare at him.

One of these men is a tall middle-aged man with a slim build and slightly tanned skin. He has short black and grey hair as well as a thick moustache and eyebrows, and green eyes. He wears a grey overcoat with yellow linings, a yellow dress shirt and a black necktie. His pants are the same colour as his overcoat. His yellow-buttoned undercoat and fingerless gloves match his cordovan shoes, under which he wears yellow socks.

Another is a pale man with gold eyes and a brown ponytail braided to resemble a scorpion's tail. He wears a white sleeveless jacket with leather belts strapped to it, along with white pants. His jacket is left open, exposing his bare chest, which is crisscrossed with prominent scars. His arms are covered with purple bandages and leather vambraces. He also wears leather boots covering his entire shin with knee guards. On each earlobe is a silver, ring-shaped earring, and near the top of his left ear is another matching earring.

And the third of the Disciples is a tall and muscular middle-aged man, towering over the others who sit in the room. He has short brown hair, a beard, and hazel eyes. He wears a two-tone olive-green coat over a black 3/4 sleeve shirt, and a large belt. His pants are black, with a pouch strapped
to each pants leg, and his boots are brown with white fronts. His hairy arms have some scars near the edges of his sleeves. However, unlike the others there is something unnatural about him due to the sewed pieces of his body connected together and a faint glow in his chest. As if he is not meant to be alive.

And finally, at the very end of the huge table…there she sits.

Her skin is a deathly pallor, covered with deep red and purple veins that run up her arms and face. The sclerae of her eyes are jet black and her irises glow red, shining brighter when she is agitated. She has a black diamond-shaped marking in the centre of her forehead. She wears a very long black robe with red designs resembling eyes. She also wears a ring resembling an insect on her right index finger. She has white hair formed into a bun with six offshoots from which ornaments are suspended.

Her glowing red eyes stare directly into Nathaniel Killian’s onyx ones as he sits there, and he does not look overly afraid of her. If anything, he seems a little angry himself as he stares at her, his body tense. The man with the long tail of her grits his teeth as he glares at him. “Do you have anything to say for yourself, Nathaniel?” The man questions.

“Be quiet Tyrian, I’m here because Salem demanded it.” Killian snarls.

“And we are all in this together, aren’t we Watts? Hazel?” He coos as he looks to the Doctor and the massive behemoth of a man.

Arthur Watts and Hazel Rainart, and the madmen known as Tyrian Callows.

“Silence, Tyrian. This is for our Saviour to decide.” Watts states as he clasps his hands together on the table, whereas Hazel remains silent. Tyrian snarls as he glares at Killian, ready to attack him at will. But then, her voice finally emerges from her lips as she stares the Commander down.

“Explain…yourself, Nathaniel. Because from where I am sitting, it looks like you betrayed the operation by protecting the people of Vale the way you did. And after Cinder abandoned her post, I must admit I am starting to question where your allegiances lie.” Salem growls as she glares at him with flaring red eyes. Killian looks at them all and then back to the Dark Queen once more, revealing that he indeed has been working for Salem all along.

“Permission to speak freely, your grace?” He inquires, and she raises a brow and glances to Arthur. The Doctor, who is clearly one of her Advisers nods his head, and it is also made even clearer that Killian is an Adviser as well. Hazel does not seem to say much at all, just follows his orders and Tyrian is far too unhinged to deliver any kind of useful advice, meaning she has two.

An Adviser on Scientific Matters and Whispers.
And a Military Adviser who understands the way people work.

Salem looks at him and she slightly gives him a nod. “Permission Granted.” Salem replies, and Killian stands up and he looks at her.

“Then you may forgive any offense I send, but your plan would never have worked, your grace.” Killian tells her bluntly, in which the defensive Tyrian Callows springs up from his seat and suddenly extends his pincer blades from his bracers as he glares at Killian with glowing yellow eyes of rage which turn purple, with poisonous intent.

“Watch your mouth, Killian!” Tyrian roars with fury at him, but Killian swiftly draws his Revolver and points it at Tyrian’s head.
“Sit your ass down before I turn your head into a dog’s dinner!” Killian yells back as he aims the gun right between Tyrian’s eyes, and he freezes in place. “And interrupt me again, and I swear I’ll cut that stupid tail of hair of yours off faster than you could blink.” He threatens once more, and Tyrian narrows his eyes with hatred directed towards his enemy. Salem holds up her hand and she just gently moves it downwards.

“Please, sit down Tyrian.” Salem politely requests, in which Tyrian turns to her with disbelief.

“But…your grace…” He stammers, but then her gentle demeanour changes to quite a menacing one as she glares at him. The glare alone was enough to convince Tyrian to sit down and he does as his Queen demands. Killian holsters his Revolver and looks at Salem, continuing to explain himself.

“As I was saying, your tactic was not going to work. And I realised this when I saw all those civilians being slaughtered in droves by those monsters of yours.” Killian explains as he walks around the table, passing by Watts and Hazel as he speaks. “Do you know what the most important and valuable weapon in war is, your grace?”

Salem glances up at the man as he stands beside her with his hands behind his back with respect, and she gives him her honest answer. “An unstoppable army.” She answers, and he nods his head.

“In an ideal world, yes. But sadly, there is no such thing as an unstoppable army, even your Grimm have weaknesses, and so does every army. No, the strongest weapon is the people themselves.” Killian tells her and Watts chuckles.

“And how does helping the innocents who do nothing for our cause help us?” Watts questions.

“Because then they would do anything for you. Rule with fear and your people will rise against you with a rage that cannot be quelled. And then you choose to rule with a burning fist – and before you know it – you will be nothing more than the Queen of the Ashes.” Killian explains as he walks past Salem and past Tyrian as he speaks, stopping back at the foot of the table where he was stood before.

They all look at Killian as he stands there. “I have lived a long time Killian, I know how war works.” She states.

“Aye…but tell me, how much do you know about our generation?” He asks her, and she exhales.

“Precious little…I was forced into hiding a very long time ago.” She admits, and Killian nods his head.

“I was not – and I know that people are – as you said – easily swayed. What we have accomplished may seem like a defeat, but in the grand scheme of things it is more like a victory. The people are already questioning the Huntsmen and are now siding with the Black Gallows.” Killian explains as he presses his hands atop the spine of his table.

“This is not about your obsession over controlling the Huntsmen Academies, Killian.” Hazel states, and he chuckles in response.

“Oh, I know, Hazel. It’s about something greater than we can possibly understand – but the Huntsmen stand in our way. And they will get innocents killed, innocents you once told me you wish to protect. How can you expect to protect them when there is nothing but bones and ashes at your feet?” Killian asks Salem as he holds his hands behind his back again, and Salem is looking at him and thinks on his words, then she stands up and walks to the window in the room, looking out
“We still do not have the Sword, Nathan.” Arthur says to him.

“And Cinder ran, like the coward she is.” Tyrian snarls in disgust, but Salem raises her voice but not into a yell, just enough to get it into their heads.

“Forget about Cinder, the power will leave her when she falls and when it does, we will locate the new suiter. She is not a problem for now, with Ozpin awake from his coma we need to be cautious. The man is smart, we have been fighting him longer than we can remember.” Salem explains as she stares across the domain of darkness. “One must lose a battle to win a war, this I understand. But we must continue…and as you said, Killian…this victory of theirs opens up a new opportunity.”

“What kind of opportunity?” Killian inquires.

“One that will spill plenty of Huntsmen Blood, and will also help the world fall into your hands. His work has always been messy, but he already has a target on him, giving us complete deniability of affiliating ourselves with him.” Salem explains, and she can see Killian’s pupils shrink with fear, because he knows who she is talking about.

“You’re talking about him, aren’t you? Jack the Ripper?” He asks her.

“I am.” She responds and he swiftly shakes his head.

“No, I don’t condone this. The man is a monster, he will spread the completely wrong message, he cannot be controlled, he should be six feet under!” Killian argues, but Salem’s words cause him to fall silent.

“He has already been laying the groundwork for his chaos for the past month now.” Salem reveals, and all this clearly has been completely unbeknownst to Killian, as his eyes widen, and he looks at Watts and then at Salem.

“W-What? You…you released him, without any confirmation from me?” He questions.

“It would have taken too long. And besides, it has all worked out as you said it would, Killian. The Ripper will wait for the right moment, and when he attacks…blood will be spilled.” Salem explains.

“Will the Inhumane Necessity be unleashed?” Tyrian inquires with excitement.

“NO!” Killian suddenly erupts, all eyes falling upon him and Salem stares at the Commander as he clenches his fists. “The Inhumane Necessity is a Final Resort…only if the Huntsmen and Huntresses are deemed to be irredeemable. I do not want needless bloodshed, it is not necessary.” Killian states with desperation shown very clear in his eyes. Salem stares at him and she softly smiles as she approaches Killian and sets her hand upon his shoulder.

“Worry not Killian…and if you can guarantee the Academies to follow your rule then there will be no need for bloodshed. But as you said – Last Resort.” Salem says to him, and then she snaps her fingers and suddenly the doors open up and Killian spins round. Hazel rises up as a creep Creature of Grimm emerges from the darkness. Some kind of entity, covered in dark armour and long black tentacles moving beneath the white and red armour. The head is completely eyeless, blinded but with immense hearing and emotion sensing abilities. It has two long and powerful arms with five-digit hands, along with pincer limbs that fold out from its chest, creating a chilling whispering snarl as it drags in two people, dropping them at Salem’s feet.
The Creature of Grimm that captured them…

An Abductor.

The Abductor circles Emerald and Mercury – battered and bruised, Mercury spits blood from his mouth as he tries to get up, but black magic wraps around their bodies and spins them round onto their backs, holding them down. Salem stares down at them with a small smile as she looks at the two disciples that tried to run.

Killian looks at them and then at Salem as she speaks. “This however…this is necessary bloodshed. For we must cut off all loose ends, mustn’t we?” Salem asks Killian, and he stammers as he looks at the children who whimper in terror.

“Please! I…I didn’t…I don’t wanna…AARGH!” Emerald shrieks in agony as the dark magic starts to pierce her flesh, making her beg for mercy from the Dark Queen, but she shows none, just approaches Killian, and she unholsters his Revolver and places it in his hand.

“You wish to have control…to show the world you can get the job done? Then do it…cut off these loose ends.” Salem orders as she stands beside him, looking down at the two screaming teens who are tormented from Salem’s magic. Hazel does not listen, he just looks away whilst Watts stays emotionless and Tyrian smiles maniacally at the sound of their suffering. Killian points the gun at Emerald’s face…but…he hesitates…he shakes erratically as he points the gun at her face.

Because despite everything…despite being a soldier at his heart…this…this is wrong, and in his heart, he knows this kind of suffering is wrong.

“M-Maybe we can imprison them in the Black Gallows. Their cries won’t be heard there.” Killian requests.

“No Killian – I may agree with your strategy…but I have my doubts.” Salem states as she stares at him, and he looks back at the pistol and then at the screaming pair at his feet. His finger finds the trigger and he ignores the uncomfortable sweat that beads from his skin, and he is about to pull the trigger.

Until…

Their wails silence and their gasp with relief. “Enough.” Salem tells him, grasping the revolver and pushing it down as she walks past Nathaniel and approaches Emerald and Mercury. She crouches down and lifts Emerald’s head up with her finger, staring into her eyes. “Cinder wasted her second her chance…I recommend you do not do the same.” Salem states, and Emerald whimpers with tears streaming from her eyes and down her cheeks as she looks at her Queen.

Salem rises up and she walks away from Killian who turns and looks at her as she approaches her throne, sliding her fingers across the back of the seat. “This is the Beginning of the End, Killian…” Salem states as she sits down and smiles sinisterly at him. “…I hope I see you standing beside me when the End arrives.” She says as she looks up to the Shattered Moon in the Dark Purple skies.

“Do not fear the Shattered Moon my children…” She says to them all.

She looks Killian in the eyes with a smirk.

“…Fear the Moon becoming whole.”
“Have you ever heard of the man named Jack the Ripper?” Raven asks her, and Cinder looks at Raven with confusion as she sits at the fire, all those weeks ago when she last asked the question.

“Yeah…man massacred Patch thirty something years ago, right?” Cinder asks curiously, and Raven nods her head softly. “Why?”

“Well…it’s a funny story…”

Four Years Later…

The snow billows around him as he reaches across the frozen lands, straining as he tries to get to Harbinger in the ice and snow, barely able to see anything in front of him. It is Qrow, lost and alone in the snow somewhere completely unknown. And despite the difference of time between these events, Raven’s words can still be heard.

“…Jack the Ripper…it’s not his real name.” She says to Cinder as Qrow crawls towards his sword, and he rolls onto his back with a groan, staring up at the blizzard plagued sky.

Hearing the caw of a Jackdaw, and seeing the little Black Corvid fluttering through the snow.

“Jack the Ripper…he’s my brother.”

A silhouette approaches Qrow from the snow.

And Raven reveals his name.

“His name…is Jackdaw Branwen.”

His hair is charcoal black, slicked back over his undercut, two long strands falling over those piercing blood red eyes. His grin stretches his midlife wrinkles and curves his thick black handlebar moustache upwards. His thick trunk of a neck is tight over tendons, pale skin tattooed with three little black birds on the left side. The thick built body of his is wrapped in a fleece lined tan leather trench coat. The collar is high around the back of his head, and flaps open over his broad chest.

Two huge mechanised hands rest atop his knees, his grin widening down at his brother. Sleeves tattered and rolled up, each arm massive and convulsing with mechanical plates and whirring innards. He scoffs, bearing those pearly teeth as that deep raspy voice speaks…

“Hey Little Brother…been a long time.”

To Be Continued

In Act 2 – Of Blood And Truth

End Notes
Author Note - Before everyone goes absolutely mental! Yes, David has giving me permission to continue on his story, and no I have not stopped writing Knights of Grimm. Both of these will be going on, now that I have been able to develop a schedule to handle three stories at once.

So yeah, he gave me permission to continue it, since he has been kicking himself about not being able to continue due to a busy schedule and finding no time to write - I thought I would take up the mantle. So everyone knows I will be starting from the beginning here, so we will keep going and I will change/improve/add things along the way to smooth it out since we both agree that is direly needed in comparison. Lots has changed from the original draft and I know the full story now, so I can iron out the issues in areas and stuff.

I thought the start with Pyrrha being the first chapter on its own would be a good idea too, get it out there quickly so then I can work on it properly later on for the bigger chapters.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this story, let me fill you in:

This story is essentially an AU (Alternate Universe) to the show, where the events of Volume 3 actually end in victory for the good guys, Cinder is defeated and so is the Grimm Dragon by Ruby.

- Pyrrha survives
- Cinder defeated (but still alive too)
- Grimm Dragon is killed
- Beacon is under repairs
- Ozpin is in a coma
- Blake does not run away to Menagerie

This Act (as most of you will remember) shall surround the recovery after the events of the previous volume, rekindling the relationship of Arkos. I intend on showing more characters recovering this time as well, so look forward to that!

This is in no way related to Knights of Grimm, but if you are new here then please feel free to check it out! I have been working on it for a long time and I have loved every second of it. And as I said it is still in production, I have just added this as well to please people. :)

Also please no hate towards my brother for not finishing it himself, I know how the internet works. He simply cannot find the time anymore whereas I am an antisocial pleb that loves to write all the time. So I am happy to take the sword!

Original Story Link: s/12460606/1/

I hope you enjoy! If you have any questions do not fear to P.M

Please review, follow and favourite!

Stay tuned for the next chapter - Aftermath! Let's continue this great story!

- Matt
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!