Some People's Kids: A RWBY Punk Rock AU
by kenoi131

Summary

It was Jaune Arc’s third year at Beacon Academy. He’d planned on coasting by, until an advertisement for the new Light Music Club derailed all of his best laid plans. The bumbling boy scoped out the club, but found himself in over his head when a gorgeous blonde greeted him. He could never have guessed how much a quartet of rebellious teenage girls would change his life.
The First Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beacon Academy, one of the foremost private educational facilities in Vale. Though it called itself an academy it was really just a pretentious high school with an overinflated ego. Some of the students harbored a similar mentality, though most were just glad to be there. It couldn't compete with the sprawling campuses popular in Atlas, it was the best anyone this side of the world could do at this grade level.

A boy stood just outside the wrought iron gates, staring up at the red brick exterior. Many kids his own age traversed the wide white stone staircase leading up to three sets of crimson double doors. Most entered the building, but a few departed its premises to instead laze about on the immaculate green lawn. His eyes wandered up to gaze upon the roof. Only two stories high, the heavily slanted tiles steeped up into a narrow point above the entrance, not unlike a church. He always thought the religious iconography there was intentional, but never went about asking anyone. Maybe he could inquire of whoever his new history professor would be.

The boy brushed a hand through his scraggly blond hair. He knew the reason for his hesitation. Though he had been here many times the past two years, the first day always made him a bit nervous. This would be the beginning of his third year in attendance at Beacon.

A sudden shoulder colliding into his own from behind snapped him out of daydream land. The spacey chap would have liked nothing more than to stand idle there all day, but the world had other plans. He took a short step forward to gain his balance, caressing the affected area. The impact didn't hurt. It just made him feel rather dumb for standing there like a bump on a log. He turned his gaze up to see a tall boy with impossibly broad everything and auburn hair walk by.

"Watch where your going, John." The assailant called back, putting extra emphasis on the name.

"It's Jaune," the blond clarified. "Jaune Arc. And I wasn't going anywhere. You were the one...who was...walking." His fire slowly petered out. It did him no good to talk back, especially when the bigger guy only laughed in response.

Jaune let out a solemn sigh. New year, same old situation. For as much as he hated to admit it, the brutish redhead had a point. There was no good reason for him to remain standing outside. He did this every year, and it was stupid each time. He stood up straight, squared his shoulders. Time to enter, for better or worse. With a determined set in his dark blue eyes, Jaune made his way toward the imposing steps.

The entrance opened up into a vast—and mostly barren—lobby. To the immediate right was a staircase which led up to the second floor. The auditorium could be found through a set of doors in this direction as well. On the opposite side was the main office. A few long glass windows allowed vision within the space. Assistant Principal Goodwitch conversed with an aging secretary. There was also a memorial to Beacon graduates who had become soldiers, and a huge, overflowing trophy case. The only other things of note were the wood and glass doors on the other end. It was through these which Jaune traversed.

He found himself in a hallway. The passage was long and wide. Tall and slender grey lockers lined the east and west walls, broken up at regular intervals by hanging doorways, and benches bolted to the fancy achromatic plaster walls. Angular corners to both the left and right at the far end led to
other portions of the building. Just beyond them, another set of stairs zig-zagged up to the second level.

The space was surprisingly devoid of students. Most liked to hang out upstairs. The ones who remained on this level wore the distinctive uniform of Beacon Academy, as did he. The girls wore a black jacket and tan vest over a white blouse and red plaid skirt. A red ribbon tie around the collar and pair of brown loafers completed the ensemble. The boys, on the other hand, had a much simpler black suit, blue vest, white shirt, and red tie. Jaune never liked the uniform, personally. It clashed with his hair.

Jaune would've been content to walk on and find a place to wait for the first bell, but just after entering the corridor he passed the student bulletin board. Well, one of a few, anyway. Here, the children could place faculty-approved messages for others to read. Most days it was rather empty, but for the first week of school, posters covered it's every inch. They were advertisements for the various clubs available for students to join. There were sports teams—some of which played competitively—the math league, several creative ventures, a new cosplay club, the newspaper, and pretty much anything else one would expect to find in a normal school. But, one specific offering caught his attention.

It was a hastily drawn up little flier, obviously done by hand, though the hands which made it were quite talented. Letters alternating between crimson, alabaster, ebony, and gold read in a big, flowy cursive "The Light Music Club." Jaune had only heard tell of such an organization on television. He honestly didn't think they even existed in the real world. But, a notice for it wouldn't be posted if it weren't a real club.

The boy took a few steps closer, reading through the ad. It was somewhat sparse in terms of information. A small body of text said something about "calling all musicians, young and old, professional or otherwise." It offered a place to play and practice, and socialize with other performers. It promised a chance to learn and grow, and even made a point to welcome beginners.

It would be a lie to say he wasn't enticed by the offer. To meet other musicians and perhaps share knowledge with them was not an opportunity he'd had during his short time involved with music. Judging by this neat little piece of paper, the Light Music Club seemed like a pretty calm place without the pressures and performance anxiety of the orchestral and jazz bands. It also didn't have the pompous air of most genre-dedicated clubs.

He thought about it for a moment longer there. It certainly looked like a good offer, but maybe too good to be true. Then again, club sign-ups lasted for three weeks. He had plenty of time to make a decision. No harm in scoping it out in the meanwhile. He took note of the location, Music Room C, the smallest and furthest of the three music rooms. The blond hadn't planned on joining a club, but all plans were subject to change. If only he'd brought his guitar...

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Soon enough the first bell rang, and Jaune was whisked away to his homeroom. He only spent a short amount of time in there, though, as it was mainly a place for announcements and lunch orders. However, this being the first day, there were no announcements other than a reminder to sign up for clubs and sports teams.

After homeroom it was Algebra 2, his worst subject by a longshot. He'd actually had to retake it, and as such was stuck in a class full of mostly tenth-graders. They seemed cool, despite their younger age. Honestly, Jaune was just happy to get it out of the way early in the day.

The classes that followed were history, physics, and study hall. He took the second of three lunch
periods after that, sitting alone as he munched on a decadent hamburger. The only thing Beacon did better than education, was food. Seriously, the school could make a fortune if it opened up a restaurant.

Jaune suffered with his fellow students through his next three classes, which were psychology, Language Arts, and a computer programming course his mother insisted he take. The boy had no interest in technology, at least not to that extent, but she was adamant on it, likely because of her professional life. Whatever. it was the last period of the day, and the teacher was cool. It could've been far worse.

When the final bell rang, a freshly exhausted Jaune began to pack up his things. As always, he was among the last group to leave the room. Though exhausted, the mental miasma accrued during the day faded the moment he crossed into the hall. The pressures of academia lifted from his shoulders in one great heave. During the summer, he'd forgotten how freeing the end of the day could be. It was a rush, but not one worth the monotony required to obtain it.

As he walked through the hall, deftly dodging traffic and slow walkers, Jaune realized his feet automatically led him to his next destination that day. Most students were on their way to a locker, but not him. He tended to never use the things. Ever since middle school, he'd instead just taken all of his books with him in an oversized backpack. Not the healthiest way of going about things, but certainly the most efficient. No, Jaune had a much more creative end in mind.

Slowly tiring feet encased in uncomfortable shoes led him at a steady pace. Music Room C was on the same level—the second floor—as he currently was, just on the complete opposite end. This gave him a little time to think. As his mind wandered, he realized it was a moot endeavor. Thoughts of the club had pervaded his mind all day, making it sometimes hard to focus on the teachers. Not that they had anything important to say, anyway. It was all just introductions and handouts on the inaugural day.

Honestly, Jaune surprised himself by just how calm he was. The club on his mind all day quelled any nervousness he may have felt. Now, the dominant emotion in his head was curiosity. He wanted to see what this gathering was all about. However, a little flutter still clutched his chest. No matter how inviting the flier made it sound, thrusting himself into a new, uncertain social situation came with an amount of disquiet.

Clever use of underutilized staircases allowed Jaune to cut a shorter—if convoluted—route to the music room than simply following the corridors would allow. He pushed off a top stair and turned a corner left into the distant end a much longer hall, his destination only a short skip away. The final door on the right stood wide open. A smile stretched across his lips, accentuating the butterflies in his stomach. He was so close. Too late to go back now.

As Jaune approached, the sound of music seeped into the passage. A single guitar leaked from the opened sesame. Light, crunchy distortion partially masked the amplified strings. It was a jaunty tune, simple but quick with musings in the major scale. At a guess it sounded like an interlude of some sort, though he professed not the know how to make such a determination.

The loudening song dissolved into rapid power chords as Jaune approached the threshold. This evolution gave it away as some sort of modern alternative rock song. The boy steeled himself, ready for whatever awkward introductions would follow.

Without missing a beat, he stepped into the room. However, he didn't make it far, stopping dead in his tracks immediately after the jam. Upon his entrance, so too did the music cease. Jaune just stood there, stunned. No amount of mental provision could have prepared him for the unusual lilac irises which looked up at him.
AUTHOR’S NOTES: This is a project I've had kicking around for a long time, a combination of my two great loves: RWBY and Punk Rock. I was looking for a way to cure some mental burnout on my main project (an original), and thus we have Some People's Kids. The title is stolen from an old band of mine.

Most chapters will be longer than this. I just had to split what I already had, or else it would've been easily close to, if not longer than, 10,000 words for a single entry. Chapter 2 will go up immediately after this one, so anybody interested can get a better feel for the story itself.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance:

1.) "Skate or Die" - Teenage Bottle Rocket. It's what our "mystery" person was playing before Jaune interrupted.

And, yes, I committed the sin of making Beacon into a modern high school. Get over it.
Jaune didn't know how to respond to the sight before him. He stood stiff as a board just inside the music room door, stunned beyond any semblance of action.

Sitting in a metal chair pulled out from a cluster behind was not the slimy, gothic guy Jaune expected, but instead a beautiful girl. Purposefully messy blonde hair fell behind her shoulders and down her back. Though she wore the school uniform, it was not quite up to code. The red ribbon was missing, and a few buttons in her blouse were undone to reveal a slender sliver of buxom cleavage. The standard dressy jacket clung brilliantly to the tantalizing curves at her waist. Black stockings concealed fit legs.

The two blonds stared at each other for a moment. Silence stretched between them. Jaune remained perfectly still, mouth agape. The girl, however, seemed more curious than anything else. She leaned forward just slightly, fingernails clicking once on the scratched white pickguard of her faded yellow Squier Strat.

"Hiya," she broke the silence with a cheerful greeting, puzzlement a slight whine above her chipper voice.

"Hi," Jaune returned out of reflex, but did not offer conversation. Further quiet threatened to set upon them, but the girl snipped it off.

"Can I... help you?" She asked, blinking twice as perplexity mounted.

"Is this the Light Music Club?" Inquired Jaune slowly. At mention of the club, the girl's eyes widened and her shoulders relaxed. The air around her loosened considerably.

"Oh! Yes, sorry. Yes, it is." Without standing, she extended an open hand. "I'm Yang, Club President, I think."

"You think?" The boy quipped as he crossed the space between them. "Jaune Arc." He gave her hand a hearty shake, sure to keep eye contact.

"Well," began Yang, dropping her hand to the guitar's rim, "the other members haven't really thought that far ahead, but I founded the thing, so I guess that makes me President?" Yang presented the rhetorical with a surreptitious squint.

"There are other members already?" Jaune wondered aloud. The pack on his shoulders was beginning to get rather heavy. He lowered it with a thud into a spot against the wall, right of the still open door.

"Yeah, through that early signup thing no one uses," explained the golden girl. "They should be showing up any minute."

"Yaaaang!" In that moment, a disembodied high-pitched shout emanated from the hallway, and imposed upon the room. Yang shook her head at the sound.

"Speak of the devil."
The owner of the voice entered a second after her voice did. She was a petite girl, small in both size and stature. A black messenger bag hung from her right shoulder. Though her uniform was up to regulation, the deep red dye at the tips of her short brown locks certainly was not. It highlighted one of Beacon's more ridiculous rules: no unnatural hair colors. Her large, innocent eyes were also a strange color, a vibrant silver. She blew right past Jaune and up to the other girl in the room.

"Yang, I got Professor Port for biology! I know you said he was boring but he's, like, so much worse. He just told stories the whole time!" The smaller girl whined. Jaune could sympathize with her complaints. He also had Professor Port, but in his freshman year. Great man, horrible teacher. Still, the confession betrayed her grade level.

Yang did not respond, but only put a hand on the brunette's shoulder and forcefully spun her around. She visibly started as argent saucers beheld Jaune for the first time.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't see you there," she swiftly admitted. Good Lord, but she was adorable.

"Don't worry about it," dismissed Jaune, scratching the back of his head.

"Ruby, this is Jaune," Yang introduced the two. "Jaune Arc."

"Hey, Jaune," the indicated girl waved from her spot, Yang's hand still on her shoulder. "I'm Ruby, Yang's younger sister."

Jaune waved back. "Nice to meet you, Ruby."

"You, too!" returned the small one. Sisters, huh? Other than a gleeful disposition, the two shared zero similarities. Maybe each took after a specific parent?

"I was just telling Jaune about you and Blake," Yang said, dropping a third name.

"You were?" Ruby said with a wondered gasp. "Are you thinking of joining the club, Jaune?"

"Oh, well, I don't know." Jaune shifted his stance, staring at his feet. "I was thinking I would just come and scope things out for today." He finished with a forced little laugh. "Is that okay?" He returned his gaze to the women.

"Yeah, it's more than okay!" Ruby answered, turning to her sister. "Right, Yang?"

"Of course it is," Yang agreed. "We're not a private club or anything. You're welcome to just hang out, or whatever."

Jaune brightened at their dual admissions. He didn't think he'd ever encountered a more warm and welcoming pair. It was almost as if they wanted him around, but that was crazy. They just met.

Ruby finally broke away from her sister, who let her go without resistance. The short girl maneuvered her way behind a drum set in the back of the room Jaune hadn't even noticed until just then. It was a standard black Yamaha brand assortment, with a snare, bass, and all the toms and cymbals one would expect from an entry-level kit.

Ruby grabbed a set of sticks from atop the snare and hammered out a swift rhythm, ending with the crash cymbal. Jaune's eyes widened just slightly and an impressed frown turned his lips. Clearly, she knew how to play the instrument.

He was about to compliment her when the sound of footsteps interrupted him. He turned just in time to see a third woman enter, closing the door behind her. Immediately, he noticed the striking amber
hue of her eyes, which completed the trifecta of weird oculars.

"Try not to play with the door open, Ruby." Her tone—not meant to scold—was just a gentle reminder. It was at this point she noticed Jaune, far quicker on the uptake than the previous newcomer had been. "Hello. I don't believe we've met."

"We haven't," confirmed the boy. "Jaune Arc." He held out his hand. Yang snickered behind him.

"Blake." The girl closed in on him and took his hand. It was only when she was so close did Jaune notice the black bow atop her head. It blended in almost perfectly with her long, straight, midnight tresses. One thing she did not wear, however, was her jacket, opting instead for just the white blouse; another dress code violation.

"I take it you three know each other," Jaune said as Blake released him and walked over to the right side of the group. Jaune grabbed a chair and sat across from the other blonde.

"Oh, yeah, we go way back," Yang said poking a thumb over her shoulder for emphasis.

"We're in a band, too! It's, like, super cool," Ruby added of her own volition. Both older women shot her icy glares. She buttoned up under the weight of them.

"You're in a band?" Jaune asked the red girl. She nodded. "That's cool. Is it just the three of you?"

"No, we have a fourth member, Weiss, but she goes to a different school," Ruby explained. At the mention of her friend, a smile returned to her lips. Her posture straightened back out.

"Oh, so I guess she'll be showing up later?" Jaune scrunched his eyes in confusion. He wasn't aware people from other schools were able to join clubs at Beacon, unless she wasn't actually a member.

"Not for a while," denied Blake. "Her school starts an hour later for the first week. Something about easing kids into the schedule, so she'll be skipping the first week."

"But, wouldn't that put her out of practice if she can't play with the rest of you?"

Yang chuckled. "You've clearly never met Weiss. She'll be fine."

Jaune took a second to ponder all of the information he'd just received. It was perfectly fine these three knew each other prior to joining. Unless he was mistaken, most people joined clubs in groups to alleviate the social pressures of fitting in and making friends. It was even okay that they were in a band. After all, it was only natural for musicians to cooperate.

But, even considering all of that, something about it didn't sit right with him. The setting didn't make sense. There was a lapse of logic, at least in his mind, one which seemed pretty severe. It bothered him, because no one else seemed to get it. Either that, or they ignored it entirely. He honestly wasn't sure which was worse.

"But, isn't the Light Music Club supposed to be a band itself?" He began, broaching his concerns. "Why bother joining if you're already in a band? It seems like a lot to juggle."

"I mean, have you seen this place?" Looking around the room, Yang made a wide gesture. "It's mostly soundproof, and we get it for an hour every day. It's the perfect practice space."

That admission made Jaune pause for a moment. Yang had a point. It was the perfect place for a band to practice, especially an electric one like theirs. That was the whole point of giving the Light Music Club an actual music room to use, so they could play without disturbing the other students.
Suddenly, it all clicked into place; a plan as devious as it was brilliant.

"You tricked the school into giving you a practice space," he said flatly. Not a question, but a declaration of fact.

"That's not the word I would use," Blake clarified. "But yes, we knew they would give us a room to use if we made a club."

"But isn't that a little bit, you know, dishonest?" Jaune asked with a cringe at potentially calling them out. Amber eyes narrowed on him, but he pressed on. "I mean, isn't the point of the Light Music Club to collaborate and learn more about music? If you're already good enough to be in a band, why bother forming the club in the first place?"

"Just because we're in a band doesn't mean we have to stop learning," Yang countered immediately. She paused for a second to collect her thoughts. "And we do still collaborate. The way I see it, we get a free place to jam, and get to meet some awesome new people. It's a win-win, you know?"

"So you're not opposed to letting other people in?" Jaune asked.

"Of course not," Blake said. "We're not as dumb as you think we are, Jaune. We wouldn't have formed the club if we didn't want other people to join. Anyone who wants to is more than welcome."

Blake's confrontational tone may have been a little harsh, but it certainly shut Jaune up. He looked away from all of them, opting instead to stare at his shoes.

"I don't think you're stupid," he muttered under his breath, barely audible to everyone else in the room.

"You can join if you want, Jaune," Ruby finally contributed to the conversation.

"We won't force you, but we won't turn you away, either," Yang added. "This isn't just our band's little private studio, it's the Light Music Club. We knew that going in."

An oddly somber silence fell over the group as Jaune considered the situation. So far, his suspicions about whether or not this would be a good idea was firmly in-line with the latter. He just wanted to join a club, make some new acquaintances, and maybe even meet a cute girl or two. While he'd certainly succeeded with that third aspiration, this particular social group seemed to have a lot of baggage, as any established group of friends did. That's what these three—or four, including the mysterious Weiss—were, a group of friends. Jaune felt much like a fifth wheel, like he didn't really belong. Could he really just inject himself into their lives?

He took a gaze at his present company. There was, of course, Yang. The bombshell beauty was certainly nice enough. Even in this uncomfortable silence she exuded a bright warmth. Jaune didn't know her very well, but he felt quite comfortable in her presence.

Her sister, Ruby, was similar. She, too, had a welcoming air about her, perhaps even moreso than Yang, which was saying something. Idly tapping away at one of the toms, she was a boundless well of energy. Though, the hunch in her shoulders betrayed a bit of inner awkwardness.

Then there was Blake. Cool and collected, she didn't wear her soul on her sleeve like the other two. She seemed like a rather smart girl, unapproachable but not hard to talk to. At the very least, she seemed not to be judging him, which was a huge plus.

There was something about them Jaune couldn't quite put his finger on. The trio of women just worked together. They fit like puzzle pieces, three parts of a collective whole. They'd clearly
been together for a long time. He was sure this Weiss character would be no different. All of this brought up his original question; could he really just inject himself in their lives?

"So," he said after what felt like a short eternity, but was really just a few minutes. All eyes turned to him, and he shrank just a little under their gaze. "If this is a fake club, does that mean I shouldn't join?"

"It's not a fake club," Yang instantly clarified. "There's just something extra going on, too. Think of it as an extra extracurricular." Yang paused just long enough to let her joke fall flat. "Like I said, anyone who wants to join, can. You'll be a full-fledged member."

"You sure I won't get in the way?" Jaune asked, voice noticeably smaller than before.

"What? No!" Yang seemed genuinely taken aback by the question. "You'd be a friend, not a burden."

Jaune's heart skipped a beat at that word. They'd just met. How could any of them be friends yet? In his experience, it wasn't that easy.

"I just..." he began, "I wouldn't want to stop you from practicing." Even if he didn't necessarily agree with the obvious con these girls were running, it seemed wrong to stand in the way of their progress.

"We honestly don't need an hour every day," Blake answered. "We can use other time for more normal club activities."

"You don't even have to play an instrument!" Ruby added. "Just music appreciation is good enough."

"Isn't there already a club for that?" Blake offered an offhanded comment.

"Oh, well, that won't be a problem," Jaune said, shuffling his feet. "I kinda already play guitar, sorta."

"Oh really?" Yang turned up the volume on her guitar. An outstretched hand held it vertically by the neck. "Why don't you show us what you got?"

Jaune paled at the offer. "No, no, I couldn't, really." He waved his hands defensively. His heart threatened to beat itself to death.

"What, you leave your lucky pick at home or something?" Yang teased.

"Actually, yeah." He did forget his lucky pick at home, but that wasn't the root of the problem.

"Come on, now I'm curious. Play us something. I'm sure you'll be fine." Yang insisted. The sunlight never left her eyes and she almost seemed encouraging in a weird way.

"I'm really not, though." Jaune found a rather interesting mark on the floor to inspect. "I just started playing a few months ago. I'm not very good."

"Neither am I, but I don't let that stop me," Yang said. She lowered the instrument slightly, though still offered it to him. "You don't have to if you don't want to. It's cool."

Jaune looked from the guitar to, the one holding it, and back again. It was a gorgeous instrument, despite being well-worn from years of use. The chips in the dull yellow paint and dust around the tuning knobs gave it undeniable character. And then there was Yang herself. When Jaune looked at
the smile on her face, he believed she really did want to hear him play.

He glanced around at the other girls. The youngest, predictably, wore a similar expression to her sister. Those giant silver eyes held an innocent kindness Jaune only ever saw in children. From where Blake leaned against the far widow with her arms crossed, she seemed completely disinterested. However, when Jaune's eyes fell upon her, she gave a little smirk. Whether meant to sympathize or inspire, the boy didn't really know, but it felt like a positive gesture at the very least.

But, this venerable outpouring of support was not what ultimately forced his hand. Here he was, sitting alone in a room with three pretty girls who wanted him to play guitar for them. In this case, the rewards outweighed the risks. He stood from his chair.

"Alright, give me that." He closed the distance between himself and Yang. She handed him her instrument and purple pick, beam ever present on her lips. The cord wouldn't reach all the way back to his chair across from the blonde girl, so he pulled up one next to her instead. Seeing this, Ruby repositioned herself to a seat off to their right, between the two of them and Blake, who stayed where she was. The youngest leaned forward, resting elbows on her knees.

Jaune took a moment to feel out the instrument in his hands. It was much lighter and slimmer than his own. It had three single coil pickups, as opposed to his double humbucker. He struck a G chord. It had a treble-y sound he wasn't used to. There was still distortion on the amp, but not enough to make a difference. All in all, it was a decent setup, just different.

As the seconds ticked by, the boy knew he could delay no longer. With a deep breath in, and then out, he began to play.

It was a gorgeous acoustic piece, modest of tempo and temperament. The chords were robust and jangly, with the right balance of bass and treble. The song had a major tonality, which made it naturally victorious sounding. Indeed, the song which it belonged to was a triumphant, soaring anthem. Just not this part. This was the tender intro.

The song he played was a rather recent acquisition, something he picked up just a couple weeks ago. Thus, it had a few kinks, perhaps unnoticeable to an untrained ear but they sang loud to him. The chords were just fine. He'd drilled that part to monotony. Each one rang out full. There were just some missing melodic arpeggios in between.

The riff repeated once. Halfway through the second coming, Jaune wondered why he'd chosen that particular song to play. Surely, there were others he knew better. Deep down, he knew the reason. This was the hardest thing he knew how to play. Was he really so desperate to impress these people he'd just met? Unfortunately, yes.

The riff came to an end on a seventh. It could've stopped there, but had a little more to go. Jaune glanced up at his audience, trying to gauge the situation. Ruby gave him an excited little nod, and that was all the confirmation he needed.

Fingers set back into the song. The next part was just the same riff played twice, but had a cool little interlude leading into it. The second time, Jaune played with markedly more confidence. The piece still purposely missed a few notes, but as he got into the groove it didn't sound quite as bad.

At the end of the repetition it was supposed to transition into a proper Power Metal tune, but since he didn't have a string accompaniment, Jaune finished it with a major chord, one he hoped fit in the progression. A pleasant sound to his ears proved it did, and he couldn't help but smile. His intuitions were improving.
He placed a flat palm on the neck, both to stop the sound and indicate he was done. A single pair of hands clapped for him. Ruby, of course. Yang smiled at him, also predictable. At some point—Jaune failed to notice when—Blake had wandered closer. She stood next to Ruby. Though her arms were crossed, she wore a thin smirk, which Jaune took as a good sign.

"What was that about not being good?" Yang said as soon as he finished.

"You liked that?" Jaune couldn't hide the slight disbelief from his voice.

"I'm not gonna sit here and tell you it was perfect, but it was pretty good."

"Thank you." Jaune tried to remain humble, yet his heart soared. People outside of family almost never complimented his playing, and relatives couldn't be trusted to give an honest opinion. Jaune appreciated both Yang's optimism, and her bluntness. It was refreshing.

"You're better than you think you are, Jaune." Ruby, bless her heart, added to the positivity train.

"Aren't we all?" Blake offered her own insightful musing. Ruby looked up at her with eyes suddenly wide.

"Oh hey, Blake, what was that song you were working on yesterday?" The girl asked of her taller friend.

"Chump?" Blake asked.

"Yeah, that one! It has a cool drum part, doesn't it?"

"It does," answered Blake after an affirmative hum. "I was actually thinking of a way we could combine it with another song."

"Oh?" Yang chimed in. "Do tell."

She shot Jaune a sidelong glance and jerked her head in Blake's direction, silently egging him to join the conversation. He handed her back the guitar and pulled his chair forward so the four of them were in a vague oval shape. Though he didn't have much to add, the sole boy still listened in. Blake and Ruby both paid him no mind, which he guessed was better than the outright rejection he'd become accustomed to in the past.

Though there wasn't a whole lot of music in the time which followed, there was plenty of conversation. After the little talk about whatever Blake had been working on, Jaune became a more active part of the gathering. They did speak of music, but the topics covered were more broad in scope. Yang asked how everyone's first day had been. Blake mused about a new book she'd just started, a subject Ruby was quite interested in. Speaking of the younger girl, she was a veritable fountain of words. Jaune envied her boundless energy.

Speech flowed free and easy between the four of them. Jaune was completely confused when the bell indicating the end of club activities screeched through the room. He could've sworn only ten minutes had passed. But, a glance at his Scroll revealed it had, indeed, been a full hour.

Certain clubs, like the basketball team, had permission to go over the allotted time, but most had to vacate or else risk detention. The Light Music Club said their goodbye's. Ruby hugged Blake before departing and—after checking if it was okay—even spared a short embrace for Jaune. When his time came to go, the bumbling blond boy was reluctant to leave his newfound acquaintances.
AUTHOR'S NOTES: This was a whole lot of talking. The next chapter will likely be, as well. Because of the interpersonal nature of both the story and its relationships, it is naturally tended toward speech. I don't know if conversation-heavy chapters bother anyone else, but they bother me. I would say that's because I've only had the wrong examples, but I love Twain and Steinbeck, so maybe I just don't know what I'm talking about.

Again, I can't promise anything with this story, but updates will definitely slow down after this chapter.

If you enjoyed this chapter, or even if you didn't, please remember to give kudos or leave a comment and let me know what you think. It's greatly appreciated.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance

1.) "The Last in Line" – Dio. The song Jaune plays, and also one of my favorite acoustic licks. Chosen because it's way easier than it sounds, and it sounds good enough to impress most people.

2.) "Chump" – Green Day. Just a mention by Ruby and Blake, but I might as well put it here so people know what they were referring to.
Sitting behind the wheel of a glistening white sedan, Jaune made his way home. An older model, it had been kept in immaculate condition. Its in-tact paintjob shone beneath the sun just beginning to descend across a mostly cloudless sky. The music on the radio was some jaunty pop tune. He'd never been too particular about what he listened to. Perhaps that was about to change.

The song certainly had a positive, danceable swing, but it wasn't the fire behind the smile on his face. The boy still rode the high from his last hour of school. It almost didn't feel real. Movies had been made about such experiences, yet here he was, a living example of the real world. The desire to pinch himself only was tempered by a need to keep both hands on the wheel.

The vehicle slowed—but not entirely—for a stop sign. No traffic to compete with, Jaune hung a right-hand turn. The moment he landed on the new road, his home came into view. The radio switched over to stupid commercials at the same time. Seeing as he was almost home, Jaune switched off the pointless noise.

Solemn on the left side of the road, the Arc household stood sentinel over the avenue. Or, perhaps, it stuck out like a sore thumb. A real two-story home among a sea of split-levels, it towered over everything else on the street. Five equidistant, symmetrical windows—one of which was also the front door—across, and three back, meant it also took up the most area. Pleasant copper-colored siding decorated the home, while darker tiles slanted on the roof.

The one thing it unfortunately lacked was a garage, quite the hindrance come winter. Jaune pulled his vehicle into the wide driveway. Most probably would've thought the broad blacktop a bit overzealous, but not the Arc family. Jaune still remembered the days when it would be filled to the brim with various vehicles. If anything it could've stood to be wider, back then. Now, the only other car present before the addition of his own was a big black SUV. The blond pulled up next to it, switched off his vehicle, and stepped out. The heavy backpack remained in the back seat, however. No need to deal with it if there wasn't any homework to do.

Free from both the literal and metaphorical baggage acquired during the day, Jaune walked up to the house and pushed through the unlocked door. The home opened into a rather narrow hallway. Immediately to his right, an opening led to his father's study. It had a door, but was never closed off. Just down the wall from it was a staircase to the second floor. At the end of the hall was the spacious kitchen.

Jaune began to take off his shoes. The domicile was mostly quiet except for the sounds of a nearby television. An overly excited man, followed by the laughter of a crowd, gave the program away as some sort of stand-up comedy show.

"I'm home!" He called into the house, voice echoing around the walls. He slipped off his shoes and put them on a black mat against the east wall.

"Hey, Jaune," answered a disembodied female voice, one which brought an instant smile to his face.

"Hey, Mari." Jaune completed the shouted pleasantries.

The boy made his way toward a wide opening in the left wall. The sound of television became
louder as he approached. When he was just a few steps away, a woman entered the hall, intercepting him.

Marigold Arc had always been a beanpole, tall and thin. Only recently had Jaune passed her in height, but by just a few inches. By appearances alone, the two were clearly related. The same deep blue eyes peered from their sockets, and the same shaggy yellow hair adorned their scalps, though the sister's ran just past her shoulders.

The woman regarded her younger brother with a smile, idly adjusting the right shoulder on her too-big blue sweater. Her expression turned down after inspecting him for a moment.

"Did you even try to brush your hair this morning?" She playfully ruffled his locks for emphasis. Jaune just smiled again.

"Do I ever?" He joked before taking a small step back to escape the assault.

"How was school?" Marigold changed the subject. She turned and re-entered the living room she'd just left. Jaune followed.

"It was… interesting." That was the only word Jaune could think of to accurately describe his day. "How was work?"

"It was work," Marigold scoffed, collapsing into a brown leather couch against the right-hand wall. She grabbed a sliver remote and turned down the television. Jaune glanced at the flat screen hanging above a wooden fireplace on the opposite wall. A large, dark-skinned man told satirical jokes upon a stage to a likely drunk audience.

"Bad day?" He asked, still on his feet.

"Slow day," corrected his sister. "You're home a bit later than usual. Any reason for that?" Marigold flicked him mischievous eyes. Jaune, knowing he was trapped, just sighed.

"Yeah, actually. There was… this club I wanted to check out." He preemptively winced.

"I knew it!" Marigold cried, shooting up from her seat. "You've never been interested in clubs before, Jaune! Which one was it?"

"It was something called the Light Music Club."

Mari raised an eyebrow. "Never heard of it. Is it new?"

"Yeah, it must be, because I'd never heard of it either. It's pretty cool."

"Yeah? What kind of club is it?" Marigold leaned forward just slightly, the mirth behind her eyes struggling to stay down.

"You know, I don't really know," Jaune responded honestly. "We didn't really do a whole lot other than introductions. The bulletin board said it was a place for musicians to hang out and play with other musicians, but it wasn't too specific."

"That sounds like fun, though," enthused Mari. "Do you think you're gonna join?"

"I don't know yet," Jaune averted his gaze at the more loaded question. "The other members are cool enough, but I just need to think about it, you know?"

"Of course," Mari waved her hands and backed off a step. "I wasn't trying to pressure you or
“I know you weren't,” Jaune said gently. He glanced back over his shoulder. "Mind if I cut out for a bit?"

"Not at all." His sister nodded. Jaune started on his way back to the stairs. "Jade is home, too." She called after him.

"Alright," The boy yelled back without pausing on his trek.

The journey led him first to the staircase, but instead of up, he went down. A second set cut into the floor in the opposite direction, toward the front door instead of away. It brought him into the basement, though someone who didn't know better wouldn't know that's what it was. The stairs deposited climbers into another hallway, white walls identical to those above, two rooms on each side and a small bathroom on the end.

Jaune hadn't been alive for it, but apparently the basement wasn't always like this. Necessity drove the Arcs to renovate. More than two decades later, most of these rooms lay empty.

The expedition underground stopped short as Jaune halted next to the first door on his left, the only closed entryway. He leaned in close and gave it a few harsh taps.

"Yeah?" A young female voice—muffled by the structure—called from the other side.

"Just wanted to let you know I'm home, Jade," Jaune shouted through the barrier.

"Oh. Hey, Jaune!" The voice answered.

The boy moved on from the spot, knowing that's all he would get out of her for now. Jade would greet him more personally on her own time, when she finished with... whatever it was she could be doing. Best not force it until then. Instead he pushed on to the next door down. This was his room.

It was a rather simple space, adorned in mostly tones of blue and white. Azure carpet warmed the concrete flooring beneath. A twin bed with a fluffy spread sat nestled in the northeast corner. Above it hung an Epiphone 1984 Explorer, white with a black pickguard. Continuing counter-clockwise was his closed closet door, and the 15-watt Fender amp directly to his left. To his right was a rather large natural wood computer desk compete with a rolling black chair and plenty of drawers, though only a dark laptop occupied it. Finally, across from his bed, was a small white dresser. A television hung above it, while a gaming console sat atop, its controller haphazardly on the floor.

Jaune made a b-line for his bed and pratfell atop it. A long sigh warmed the blanket beneath him. His mind raced at a mile a minute. A thousand possibilities swam up to the surface, only to die upon contact with the air. But as soon as one perished, two more popped up to take its place. He had a lot to think about.

Yang. Blake. Ruby. The three names ran on repeat through his head. Their words, their faces, he remembered it all is if they were right in front of him. He could see the boundless warmth in Yang's smile, hear the velvety-smooth tone ever present in Blake's utterances. Ruby's energy seeped into his veins. Even Weiss crossed his mind, though he had only a title to go on for her. He didn't even know any of these girls existed until ninety minutes ago, yet it was impossible to get them off his brain.

In a fit of tempered frustration, Jaune rolled over to stare up at the ivory ceiling. Marigold, though she tried to help, only made it worse. She was right. He had no intention of joining a club. Part of him still didn't. It was a potential hindrance, a responsibility he perhaps was not ready for. Then again, when else would such a golden opportunity fall into his lap? To be essentially part of a band, to play,
discuss, learn, and grow alongside fellow musicians; could he really pass something like that up? It also helped that the individuals in question were all quite good-looking.

Jaune covered his eyes with one hand and took a slow breath. A lot to think about, indeed.

…

Jaune awoke the next day to the piercing screech of an alarm. He silenced his scroll and hopped out of bed, groggy but ready to face the new day.

His mornings were a feat of time management. He purposely lined everything up so he could get out of bed, have a shower, eat a bowl of cereal, and then bolt out the door to arrive at school with roughly twenty minutes to spare. This day would be no different as he accomplished all of this and jumped into his car with even a bit of extra time.

A short trip found Jaune parked in the large lot across from Beacon. He switched off his vehicle, gathered the heavy bag in the back seat, and exited the cage, making his way across the street. Jaune didn't pause at the gate this time, and instead continued right on into the facility.

The scene outside was functionally identical to the previous day’s. Some students lazed around on the front lawn, while most entered in droves. Jaune joined the latter group and quickly pushed inside the building. He passed through the foyer and into the adjoining hallway, intent on his homeroom class, but once again stopped at the bulletin board.

A few fliers were missing, their clubs already having met their individual membership limits. These were mostly competitive organizations, and were always the first to go. Most people didn't wake up one morning in eleventh grade and decide to play football. Those spots were spoken for long before the year started.

One advertisement in particular remained, and it caught his eye. The Light Music Club. Memories of experiences from the previous day all came flooding back. Or, rather, it would be more accurate to say they surged, since they never really left. Ruby. Blake. Yang. And Weiss, too. Suddenly the alternating color scheme of the poster's lettering made perfect sense.

Yang, a person he didn't know, had called him 'friend.' Ruby seemed to genuinely want him around. Blake... Blake was harder to read, but she at least wasn't openly opposed to his presence. Seeing the poster again brought up an important conundrum; was he going to go back? Would he intrude on their space again today? It hadn't even been a question before just then, but he guessed that was also the answer. If it wasn't a problem, then why feel apprehensive about going back?

Soon enough, the first bell rang and the day began. Homeroom was homeroom, full of conversation and announcements, and not a whole lot else.

As soon as the introductory period ended, Jaune was whisked away into a maelstrom of work and review. Literally every single class assigned him something to do, though some were easier than others. His task in History, for instance, was just to read about half of chapter one, which he absolutely had no plan of doing. Algebra, on the other hand, saw him forced to wade through half a page of pointless equations. His mother would have to help him with that.

It felt like he'd been thrown to the wolves. Maybe it was his own fault for being unprepared for so much work, but that knowledge only worsened the blow. Jaune now understood why everyone said eleventh grade was the worst. When the final bell sounded, Jaune begged for relief. His feet could not carry him fast enough to Music Room C.
The door was open once again, but no tune spilled out into the hallway. Jaune sort of wondered if he might have been the first to arrive this time around. That would be kind of awkward, to sit alone in a club's room without the club. However, that anxiety left when he entered the room and found Yang bent over and messing with her amp, guitar slung over her shoulder.

Jaune was about to announce his presence when he noticed the headphones over her ears. Following the cord led from it to the amp. Yang turned a dial to the right and struck a hasty G barre chord. Seemingly unsatisfied, she spun the same dial back the other way and repeated the strum. The blonde girl then moved on to another knob, adjusted it, and hit the chord. She was about to continue on, when a glance revealed she was not alone.

"Oh!" Yang stood, placing the headgear around her neck. "Hey, Jaune. When did you get here?"

"Just a few seconds ago." Jaune dropped his backpack in the same spot as yesterday. "I didn't want to interrupt... whatever it is you're doing."

"You should have," argued the girl. "I feel like I'm being rude, otherwise."

"Alright, I will next time," Jaune joked, earning him a smirk from her. "So, what are you doing, exactly?"

"Just trying to get my levels right." Yang said before turning another knob. She hit the G, and Jaune could just barely hear it through the auditory muffs. "Me and the girls are gonna test out the room today, and I want to make sure my guitar sounds good. Come here." She suddenly beckoned him over to her. Jaune was confused, but did as instructed. The moment he was close enough, Yang placed the headphones on him. "Do you think this needs more treble?"

Before Jaune could protest, or react in any way, a loud chord assaulted his ears. It had the same light distortion from yesterday, but with slightly more twang. He winced at the intensity of the vibrations. It sounded good, though.

"NO!" Jaune blurted, before realizing it came out as a yell. He removed the apparatus. "No, you're fine. If anything, you could use a bit less."

"That's what I thought, just needed a second opinion. Thanks, Jaune!" Yang removed her headphones from him and turned a knob on the amp. She was about to say something else, when a duo of new arrivals interrupted her.

"Hey, Yang! Hey, Jaune!" Ruby greeted them both with an enthusiastic wave the moment she crossed the threshold. Blake followed after her, but gave only an affirmative nod in their direction.

"Yang, I have so much homework," Ruby whined to her sister. "Even my gym teacher gave me some, and I didn't even know you could have homework in gym."

"Was it that fitness goals essay?" Yang asked.

"Oh God, I remember that." Blake added her own two cents from across the room, where she was extracting an instrument from a black guitar bag.

"Yeah, that's it! I mean, I'm already in pretty good shape. I don't think I need fitness goals."

"Everybody lies their way through that one," Yang said. "We can work on it after practice, but we have a lot to get through, first."

"Oh, right, our first real practice is today!" The mention of music reinvigorated the younger girl. She
walked her way around behind the drum set and grabbed her sticks.

Without prompting, Jaune went to close the door. Any noise from outside suddenly ceased along with the motion. It really was amazing just how soundproof a soundproof room could be.

The boy spun around to take a look at the scene evolving behind him. Blake had just plugged in a beautiful ebony Jackson bass from her bag and taken her spot to Yang’s left behind a microphone. The four fat strings shone in the late afternoon sun. They must’ve been brand new to be that clean. Yang also stood behind a mic, but was slightly separated from her bandmates, nearer the center of the room; a classic position for a frontman. Or woman, in this case. Finally, Ruby sat behind them at her drums. She also had a microphone, but this one on a stand kinked in the middle to reach her lowered position. All in all there were five speakers, one for each guitar and mic.

"Test, test," Yang spoke into her microphone. Her voice was much louder, but did not bounce around the walls. "Alright, girls. I’m pretty sure we have this down, but I want to run through the setlist just once to make sure it’s all good. Does that work for you?"

"Works for me," Blake said, both a confirmation and a test of her own vocal acuity. Ruby, on the other hand, responded by banging out a quick rhythm.

"Okay," Yang nodded. "Jaune, you can play the part of the audience. Just act like you’re listening, and pass the spliff when it comes to you."

"Uh, okay." Jaune responded, a nervous laugh afterword. What kind of crowds was this band playing for, if that joke were relevant?

"Everybody ready?" Yang asked.

"Ready." Blake nodded.

"Ready!

"Count us in, Rubes!"

"One, two, three four!" Ruby shouted numbers in rapid succession, clicking her sticks in unison. When the next beat dropped, the girls launched into a song Jaune had never heard before.

It started with a pick slide from Yang. Ruby kept her in time with measured strikes on the hi-hat. Blake had yet to play, but probably came in later. To Jaune, it sounded amazing. The two sisters were in perfect sync. He’d never seen anything like it. His honeymoon, however, was to be short lived. It died the moment Yang opened her mouth.

The vocals were... underwhelming, to say the least. Yang barely projected her voice. Even with just the sound of her instrument, Jaune could barely hear. The diction was clear, it just had no volume whatsoever. It didn’t make sense. Yang was a loud person, Jaune could deduce that much about her already. Why would she sing so low? It couldn’t have been a confidence thing. The last vibe Jaune got form her was shyness.

The rest of the band kicked in after a verse, but the vocals remained the same. With a proper rhythm from Ruby, and now Blake playing her own part, Jaune had to really strain to hear Yang. She did pick it up a little bit after the music became naturally louder, but she still was hard to pick out from the other noise. About halfway through, the singing stopped for an instrumental break. Yang spoke over it instead.

"Yeah, Weiss isn’t here to play the solo," she said. "Just imagine the sick shredding that’s supposed
Yang’s little explanation there was at a regular speaking volume, so Jaune was even more perplexed when she resumed singing in the same muted fashion. It was, honestly, a bit ridiculous. The music was on the aggressive side both in tone and message. The vocals didn’t fit at all.

The first tune came to a close. Jaune wanted to ask what Yang had been doing, but didn’t have a chance before the next one started up. Ruby didn’t even count. She just hit a cymbal a few times, and they were off.

The second piece had a somewhat bluesy groove to it, which Jaune quite liked. It was still firmly within the same genre as the last, but different enough to be interesting in comparison. His enjoyment was short live, however, when once again voices came to shatter it. Harmonies in this song were sparse, but even they carried no weight. None of the girls put any magnitude into their voices. Only a curious mind kept him from laughing aloud.

The third and final bit they played was a more anthemic theme. It had a soaring message of strength, unity, and rebellion, which all meant nothing when paired with the lacklustre presentation. At least it was pretty short. Indeed, none of the trio breached three minutes apiece.

Yang ended by shouting a vulgar declaration over a held note. After a few beats, both guitars cut out, roughly at the same time. The band was all smiles. Yang pumped her fist and Ruby hit a celebratory crash, cutting it short with a quick pinch. Even Blake shared a jubilant high five with her blonde mate. Jaune, however, couldn’t share in their glee. He simply clapped, unable to hide the scrunch from his face.

"That's what I'm talking about!" Yang yelled. "I'll have to touch base with Weiss, but we were perfect!"

"The second song went really well," Blake said. "I know I said this before, but the harmonies we added were a really good idea."

There was a pause in the conversation, one which Ruby filled after only a few seconds.

"What did you think, Jaune?" She asked, leaning forward on her bass drum. The other two girls looked at him expectantly. All three were eager to hear his interpretation of how the practice went. He hated to burst their bubble.

"It was... good?" Jaune began tentatively. "The band sounded great, but—" he sighed. "But I didn't like the singing. I could barely hear any of you. It's like you weren't even trying. Is it supposed to be that way?"

"We should've thought of that," Blake answered. "You've probably never heard a band practice before."

"That must've sounded really dumb," Yang said with a chuckle. "No, it's not supposed to be like that. We're just trying to preserve our voices for our gig on Saturday."

Of course. That made perfect sense. Now that Jaune thought about it, he'd heard of singers doing just that during rehearsal. It would be disastrous for a performer to hurt their voice. The practice didn't seem such a sham anymore. If anything, he respected how responsible the three were about it.

"Remember that time you lost your voice the day of a show, and Weiss had to fill in?" Ruby chimed in.
"Don't remind me," Yang groaned. "I think she's still mad about that."

"You have a gig on Saturday?" Jaune asked suddenly. The atmosphere in the room shifted.

"Yeah, we do." Yang confirmed. She looked back at her sister. "I thought you were gonna tell him."

"What?" Ruby sat upright. "I thought you were gonna tell him!"

"But last night, you said—"

The siblings began to bicker back and forth, but Jaune tuned out from there. He hadn't known about their show, or even really thought about the possibility of them playing, but of course they did. Every band performed at one time or another. It sounded like fun, and Jaune would've liked to hear the setlist in its full glory.

While the sisters argued, Blake shook her head and approached him.

"Yes, we have a show this weekend," she said calmly. Jaune opened his mouth to speak, but she cut him off. "And yes, you're welcome to come. It's at a live house downtown. I can text you the address."

"Oh, uh, thanks," Jaune said, digesting all the information he'd just received. "I don't think you have my number, though."

"Well, let's change that, then." Blake held out her hand to him, palm faced skyward. Jaune just stared at it for a moment.

"Oh!" It clicked for him what she wanted after an agonizing few seconds ticked by.

Jaune dug out his Scroll, and placed it in her hand. Blake quickly got to work tapping on the cellular device. She handed it back once finished. When Jaune inspected what she'd done, there was a new entry in her contacts, simply titled Blake. A text came through a breath later. The trial message from her contained only a kitty cat emoji.

"Cute," Jaune sent back. Blake sent him a second message, which was an address.

"Thanks," said Jaune aloud.

"Don't mention it," accepted Blake. She struck a few more commands into her touch screen before stowing the device. Apparently the school skirts had pockets, which was news to him.

As the bow-wielder walked toward the petering argument—probably to attempt some form of damage control—a dumbfounding realization dawned on the bumbling blonde boy. A girl had just given him her phone number. What's more, he didn't even have to ask! It was her idea, given freely of her own volition. Whenever he'd requested such a thing from women in the past, they always turned him down. Blake, however, offered hers with zero prompting or hesitation. All of this begged the question, what had Jaune been doing wrong before?

He looked down at the address again. A smile crossed his lips. He'd never been to that location, nor did he know what a live house was, but those were questions for his GPS and the internet to answer. RWBY had a gig on Saturday. He wouldn't miss it for the world.
AUTHOR'S NOTES: For those curious, a "live house" is a type of Japanese nightclub dedicated to live music. Many are jazz and electronica themed, but you can find a live house for pretty much every genre.

The live music scene in my native USA is abysmal. Seriously, most other developed countries do it much better. As such, I've had to structure the scene in Vale around other places. What I came up with is a mix of what you'd normally find in Japan and Germany. If you want to know more, Google is your friend.

All that out of the way, what do you think of the Arc family? I hope you don't mind a few OCs. I had to cut quite a lot from this chapter to make it a reasonable length, which included a second interaction between the three of them. It still ended up longer than I wanted.

If you liked what you read, or even if you didn't, please remember to leave a kudos and tell me what you think. I love reading what you all have to say, and every comment is greatly appreciated.
The Girls at the Punk Show

Chapter Notes

**IMPORTANT** Since this is a musically-focused story, there will be songs included within the text. To minimize on text breaking up the songs, I'll be using a notation style from old liner notes. Things in (single parenthesis) are sung in a single harmony between the lead singer and one other band member. Things in ((double parenthesis)) are sung in full harmony. **IMPORTANT**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The week came and went in a flash. Jaune barely had any concept of the passage of time as each day went by. It was all a blur of academia to him, full of homework, and classes, and people, and homework. Thankfully all his teachers were cool, though he couldn't say the same about all his peers, which was a shame. But, we can't all be saints, after all.

To his great surprise, RWBY only went through their setlist during that one practice on Tuesday. The rest of the week was spent jamming on new songs, doing homework, or just hanging out. According to Yang, this was to avoid over practicing. She said if they drilled the same songs too much, there would be diminishing returns and perhaps even regression. The songs get under your skin if you play them too much. This notion perplexed Jaune. Surely, practice made perfect. Had he missed something?

When Saturday rolled around, Jaune didn't even realize what day it was at first. He even woke up early to get ready for school. He was halfway to the shower when a glance at his Scroll revealed the date. With a sigh, the boy resigned himself to an earlier than necessary morning. As he hopped in the shower, dread was replaced by boundless excitement. This was the day of the show, his first ever concert.

The show was pretty late at night, even for a Saturday. The live house didn't open until 9:00 PM, and it was an hour before any bands took the stage. While the time was agreeable, it also presented a problem. Jaune had to find some way to pass the time until then. He tried playing video games, surfing the internet, lazing around with his family but everything just felt monotonous in comparison. The hype was oh-so-real, and Jaune couldn't contain himself. Nothing would sate him until he walked through the live house doors… if those kinds of places even had doors.

Grit and perseverance were the only things which got him through the daylight hours. When the time came, he was more than ready to leave on a new adventure. His parents were surprisingly cool with it, too. They were probably just glad he was finally getting out of the house to spend time with actual friends, rather than Master Chief.

Jaune made sure to leave with enough time to arrive at some point after the doors opened, but before the first band played. He figured most people would do the same. He checked to make sure his keys, wallet, and Scroll were on his person before stepping out of the house.

He only made it a few feet from the door when his pocket buzzed. The boy pulled out his scroll and gave it a look. He'd received a text message, but didn't recognize the number. With curiosity a furrow on his brow, he opened the message. It was a strange sensation, to smile while his heart sunk.
"Hey, this is Yang!" The message began. "Blake gave me your number, so blame her. Are you on your way yet?"

Jaune didn't know what to do, at first. Now two pretty girls had his number, and he needn't have convinced either of them. Was this the real life, or some kind of sick fantasy? Jaune closed his eyes and physically shook the cobwebs from his brain. Yang expected a response.

"I just walked out my front door. I'll be there shortly." Jaune typed, and hastily sent, his response, wishing the moment it flew away he'd bothered to spell check it. Thankfully, there were no errors.

Jaune took the time between responses to get into his car. A deep breath inhaled the familiar scent of recently sunbaked leather upholstery. He slid his key into the ignition, but waited to turn it until a second buzz came through his phone; another text from Yang.

"Cool. Tell me when you get there. I'll meet you in the lobby."

"Okay," was Jaune's quick response. Were his mind not so clouded with excitement, he would've asked why, but no other words left his fingers before he pulled the car onto the road.

The journey slowly brought him into a seedier part of town, which he predicted. The heavy nighttime traffic of Vale’s center faded away, making traversal much easier, since he'd seldom been to this area.

The venue sounded like a lower income sort of establishment, a place for people who couldn't afford a ritzier night club. Though the generalization was admittedly terrible, his assumption proved true as Jaune ventured deeper into what was Vale's industrial district, somewhere between the commercial center and the slums.

Eventually, Jaune closed in on his destination. It was on a narrow street well off the beaten path. He parked in a nearby lot and walked the rest of the short distance. He was a little scared to navigate these dark streets on foot, but there thankfully wasn't long to go. He hardly encountered anyone along the way, which was a plus. When he almost reached the end, he pulled out his phone.

"Almost there, about to walk in the door," was the short message he sent Yang.

The door in question was exactly as Blake described, a narrow gray entrance down a small set of concrete steps with only address letters nailed on the front to denote it in any way. Standing there in front of the thing, it seemed odd to him. How would anyone know what this place even was without being told? These venues mustn't have pulled large crowds. While he pondered this, the Scroll in his hand vibrated.

"Okay, wait for me in the lobby. Seriously. If you're not there when I get there, I'll kick your ass."

Yang’s response was the perfect balance of informative and threatening. It was all the motivation Jaune needed to walk through the door. If there was one thing he'd learned about the fiery blonde in the past week, it was that she most certainly would kick his ass.

The entrance opened rather unceremoniously to a bland gray room. Literally the only piece of furniture was a long wooden bench on the left end. The rest was just a blank square. There weren't many people, either. Other than Jaune, the only other presence was a couple making out quite loudly in the northwest corner. Jaune moved himself to the opposite corner and tried his best not to see or hear them.

By the grace of the gods, he didn't have to wait long. After only a few minutes, Yang walked in through a door directly across from the entrance. Jaune looked up at her, relieved to see a friendly
face, but stopped in his tracks.

He should've known Yang wouldn't be in her school uniform, but it never occurred to him until he saw her. The girl wore a short, brown leather jacket atop a short yellow tank top her bosom threatened to bounce out of with every step. A smidgen of navel was exposed by the duo. Black short-shorts covered her booty and leather tassets provided extra concealment, but not much. She wore boots up to her knees with even longer orange socks, the right one pulled up higher. A lavender bandana tied over the right boot completed the ensemble. She looked, in a word, gorgeous.

"Hey, Jaune," she greeted, knocking the boy out of his stupor.

"Uh, hey," he said with a few quick blinks.

"Come on, let's get out of here while those two still have their clothes on." Yang joked, shooting the couple a dirty look. She turned to lead Jaune out, and it was a good thing, too, since she couldn't see the crimson which heated his cheeks.

Jaune followed her through the same door she'd come from. He made a concerted effort to look at her long, shaggy hair and not how tight her shorts were. This herculean task became much easier the moment he passed into the club proper.

It was a big open room, devoid of tables or seating arrangements. An elevated stage took up most of the far side. It currently lay empty, save for a drum set and array of speakers. A door in the far right corner probably led behind it. There was a bar immediately to the left. Jaune's assumption of attendance was rather unsubstantiated. It wasn't a full house by any means, but there were plenty of people, probably around a hundred, if not a few more. Most were dressed in goth, thug, or otherwise alternative styles, but there were a few standouts here and there. One dude even wore a black suit. A look down at his black hoodie and blue jeans made Jaune realize he was the unusual one. It was a strange sensation, to stand out wearing normal clothes. In this setting, Yang fit better.

"Pretty good crowd today," she commented idly. "More than enough for a good pit."

"Is this more than you usually get?"

"For a small venue like this, yeah, but not by much. Probably because summer is almost over."

Yang led him into the crowd. With no music to occupy them, most stood either in social circles or awkwardly by themselves. Thus, cutting through them was a simple affair. The blondes walked together to somewhere a good distance away from the stage, far enough that Jaune could see most of it without turning his head, but not so far he couldn't make out the small details.

"Ok," Yang said, spinning to face him. "I have to go backstage to get ready with the others. The first band should be on shortly. We're the second-to-last opening act, so we'll be third. I just wanted to make sure you got in okay."

Jaune appreciated the gesture, but he had something else on his mind.

"Aren't I supposed to pay someone?" He asked, cocking his head to the side.

"Nope!" Yang chimed. "Places like this make most of their money on booze. Charging admission just means people have less money to buy drinks. Don't drink anything, though, and definitely don't accept a drink from anyone."

"Got it," Jaune nodded, the message loud and clear. "Is that kind of thing a problem here?"
"Not really, no," Yang shook her head. "Most of the folks here are perfectly decent, but you never know, ya know? Just be careful, okay?" She gave her final caution, and Jaune nodded. "Okay. I really need to be going, or Weiss is gonna kill me. Remember to have fun, okay? Don't be afraid to dance."

"Okay. Thanks, Yang." At Jaune's admission, the girl began to leave. "Good luck!" He called after her. "Wait, that's actually bad luck, isn't it?" The boy added to himself. "Break a leg! Or something." His cheeks flushed for the second time in only a few minutes. Yang just shot him a big smile before disappearing behind the door beside the stage.

Standing alone, and having just shouted across the room, Jaune felt discomfort like lead weights tie itself to his limbs. He shuffled around to face the stage, looking at the hard floor just in front of it.

No one noticed, though. The patrons seemed all in their own little worlds, consumed by mobile devices and social groups. It made Jaune feel kind of endless, like it was a waste of his time to stand there doing nothing.

Jaune took out his Scroll, desperate for distraction. Moments passed unnoticed by the blond boy. The only indication anything had shifted at all, was sudden shuffling on the stage. Jaune's eyes snapped up to see what the commotion was about.

The first band had emerged. They were definitely an Emo outfit of some sort, all black clothes, dark-dyed hair, and chains. The bassist was a total scene queen, too. She wore a black tank top, tight dark jeans, and combat boots. Her hair was a poofy jigsaw puzzle of patterns and shapes, almost as if three different people took paintbrushes to it.

The four individuals up on stage made quick work of setting themselves up. The guitarists brought out effects pedals which were hooked up to the amplifiers. Stray notes adjusted the sound. The singer tapped on his microphone, just to make sure it worked. It was honestly impressive how fast the four of them managed to get ready.

When they were all squared away, the singer gave a thumbs up. At his behest, lights went down over the audience. The din of conversation died in an instant. A proper crowd formed. Jaune found people close by him in all directions. It was warm and giddy as everyone stared up at the band, still as statues, waiting in tandem for that first beat to drop. The drummer counted off, and the band launched into action.

They played heavier music that Jaune expected. He'd prepared himself for something a bit whiny and maybe a little safe, but their opening number was firmly modern metal. It started slowly with subdued instrumentals, but picked up when the chorus finally hit.

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ came to fight for the love of the game, unstoppable} \\
\text{That's why I, I'm undefeated} \\
\text{Off the leash, out of the cage, an animal} \\
\text{That's why I, I'm undefeated} \\
\text{I, I, I know I can beat it} \\
\text{Won't give up 'cause I believe it} \\
\text{Fight for the love of the game, unstoppable} \\
\text{That's why I, I'm undefeated}
\end{align*}
\]

The vocals were rough and loud, the message inspiring and triumphant. It was the kind of song Jaune could see a wrestler entering the ring to. The bassist occasionally offered her own little vocal inserts, as well. She wasn't a very good singer, but made up for it with raw energy.
This band played three songs. It wasn't really Jaune's kind of music, but the crowd seemed into it, gyrating with pumped fists and short hops. A few people even sang along when a tune they knew played. They were polite enough to remain quiet during the music, but at the end of each song they cheered bloody murder. It was all a bit overwhelming to someone who'd never attended a concert. Jaune listened and felt the energy of the crowd, but kept his feet firmly on the ground.

When their last song finished, the singer thanked the crowd and announced the name of the band, a foreign word Jaune didn't want to try and pronounce. The singer, now that Jaune heard him speak, was definitely from Vacuo judging by his accent. When the music stopped, the band went about gathering their things. They evacuated the stage posthaste, gone as quickly as they arrived.

There was little in the way of intermission, just long enough for one band to leave, and for the next to be ushered up. It took a few minutes for the next group to walk upon the dais. Conversation descended among the crowd in the short meantime, but Jaune was more interested in the transition.

None of the speakers or microphones were changed out. The only pieces of equipment to switch were effects pedals for the guitars and lead mic. The new band didn't even touch the amps. All of the modulation came from pedals, which they hooked up and adjusted with lightning speed. The drummer had the easiest job. He just sat down and waited. Jaune would have to ask about this process later, because he couldn't figure it out for the life of him.

The band finished setting up after a moment, and Jaune decided it would be best to give them his attention. They were very different from the first. Each of the four men wore sharp black suits, exchanging ties for open buttons. The leader was a wide man with a big semi-hollow white guitar. Where the previous act was a grungy mess, this quartet was the personification of class. Jaune already liked them better.

The music kicked on, and even further widened the valley between the two bands. It was a funky beat, one Jaune heard many times before. The singer had a throaty, soulful voice, which suited the song perfectly.

\[
\text{Hey, once I was a boogie singer} \\
\text{Playing in a rock and roll band} \\
\text{I never had no problems, yeah} \\
\text{Burning down one night stands} \\
\]

\[
\text{And everything around me, yeah} \\
\text{Got to stop to feeling so low} \\
\text{And I decided quickly, yes I did} \\
\text{To disco down and check out the show} \\
\]

Strangely, the crowd reception to this song wasn't quite as grand as the last three had been. They still swayed and belted out the hook, but the energy wasn't there. Jaune, for his part, found this ridiculous. This was clearly a more talented band, with more skill in one hand than the entire previous group had put together. That translated its way into the music, but fell deaf on the crowd. Did skill not matter to them? Was there something more important?

Regardless, the second band came and went with a notable lukewarm welcome. They finished their three song set and began to exit the building. As they did, Jaune's heart leapt into his throat. With them gone, the entire reason he was here came upon him. The third act was about to take the stage. It was RWBY's time to live in the limelight.

The boy could barely contain himself. He wanted to jump, to scream and shout for his friends, even before they got into position. Excitement bubbled over him like white waves over jagged rocks, only
to grind to a halt with the rest of his mental facilities when his friends finally took their places.

Blake led the charge, ebony bass slung over a shoulder. She wore a black cop top with a heart-shaped pattern of tessellating diamonds cut out of the neckline. The garment revealed a glorious expanse of pale, toned midriff and a black thorny vine tattoo which snaked all the way up her right side. Tight black jeans clung to her hips, while zip-up boots with their tops folded down protected her feet.

Ruby and Yang followed after her. The younger kept her arms bare, but covered her torso with a red laced black corset. A similarly colored frilly skirt drooped just past mid-thigh, black with a thick red lining. Tight ripped leggings fed into black combat boots. Once the sisters took the stage, Jaune's eyes tripled in circumference, for trailing behind them was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

Her long, silky alabaster locks were pulled into a ponytail skewed off-center to the right. Pale skin complimented ice blue eyes. She wore a sky colored t-shirt, collar pulled over her left shoulder to reveal a red bra strap beneath. Cut-off jean shorts dissolved into black fishnets, which ended in a pair of pure white sneakers. Built much like Ruby, she managed to be small and still demand attention. This must have been the ever-elusive Weiss.

Jaune couldn't take his eyes off of her. At least, not until the music started. He hadn't even noticed the rest of the band setting up. A pick slide filled his ears. It was the same intro he'd heard days ago, but the sound system gave it a completely different feel. It was fuller, louder, echoing off the hard walls and gyrating bodies. Ruby tapped out a rhythmic hi-hat. Yang chugged on a chord. When she opened her mouth to sing, the world faded away.

Showed up on the scene
Backed up like it was a dream
Something that I don't understand
Two-thousand dead, but not cursed by name

This was the first time Jaune heard Yang sing full force. Her voice was incredibly loud and clear, almost completely devoid of grit and vibrato, save for a slight rumbling growl in the very back of her throat. She fit the genre perfectly. While Jaune was still admiring her vocals, the rest of the band kicked in, and the song carried on.

Dreams and homes carved by blood
Poor people die 'cuz of innocent blood
Your body next to a rotting man
This is something I don't understand

The song transitioned to a pre-chorus. The chords became smoother, and the drum beat punchier.

There's a fire in the sky tonight
Nobody coming, no ending in sight
Poor made to suffer, pushing them around
Working class men, now they're all gone

And now they're all gone
They're fucking

((Gone))

Harmonies on the last word were more of a shout than anything else.
From there Weiss launched into a quick but relatively simple solo. She bent up on one string, then hit the next two higher strings together. This riff ended in a short, descending run. She repeated the first half again, then brought it to the close with a climb in the opposite direction. When finished, Yang took the lead back.

So much time, no food, no clothes
Don't fight back as the suffering grows
People forced to rob stores just to survive
Government complains, but where are the supplies?

Living in the city is just a big mess
Another man dead from a bullet in his chest, yeah
Another dead man ((bullet in his chest))

The second time the rest of the band chimed in, Jaune realized these harmonies were new. They hadn't been there in practice. When had then been able to add them, or even rehearse their addition? No time to wonder, as the song continued.

There's a fire in the sky tonight
Nobody coming, no ending in sight
Poor made to suffer, pushing them around
Working class men, now they're all gone

And now they're all gone
They're fucking

((Gone))

Weiss played a second solo. It started identical to the first one, except the riffs were played twice each instead of just once. After that, however, it transformed. She slid higher on the neck, and took off. Rapid bends spilled over hammered out chords. The strings were punished for standing under her pick. A quick run followed, making its way up and down a bastardization of the major scale. She transitioned into pulled-off triplets, gradually increasing in speed until their velocity was impossible. A harsh bend cut them off, leading into rapid rake picking up and down the strings until Jaune couldn't even keep track of it anymore. She ended with more quick pull-offs and a big bend.

While Jaune stood perfectly still, mouth agape at what he'd just witnessed, the music partially fell away. Yang again stole back the spotlight, just her voice and her guitar.

Celebrities sing songs about love
Some even like a big white dove
They are just symbols rich people grasp
Take your fucking money, ((shove it up your ass))

There's so much more, the working class can do
And we can sure stand the hell up to you
Your body next to a rotting man
Silent cooperation is something I don't understand

There's a fire in the sky tonight
Nobody coming, no ending in sight
Poor made to suffer, pushing them around
Working class men, now they're all gone
And now they're all gone
They're fucking

((Gone))

Weiss stepped forward one more time to play the same repetitive solo riffs from before. Then, the song cut off suddenly. All at once, the band stopped playing. The room fell silent for only a split second before the crowd replaced the melody with an eruption of shouts and cheers. They didn't even clap, just jumped and yelled their lungs out, and Jaune joined in the merriment.

What had been dumbfounded amazement to the boy transformed into pure energy and he screamed jubilation at the stage. He thought RWBY would be good, but he never imagined just how great they could be. It didn't even break three minutes, but that was the most incredible live performance he'd ever seen. Granted, he only had the last two band's worth of prior experiences to go on, but that didn't matter. It defied explanation. The only expression of adoration Jaune could give was to yell.

When a new song started, the blond almost leapt out of his skin. That's right, there were still two more left! This night just got better. He recognized this as the fast bluesy number. RWBY seemed to be keeping the same order as practice. It also had a short intro, just a few chords before Yang opened up.

You wanna be a (catastrophe)
You wanna see things that nobody wants to see
Your daddies little (public enemy)
We know the score

In practice, the harmonies on this one had been Yang and Blake. Now, they were Yang and Weiss. The blonde took the low part, while the latter sang an octave up. Their voices meshed together without a flaw, still distinct yet perfectly in tune. That wasn't to say Blake contributed nothing, however. Throughout the entire song her bass line kept things grounded with an immaculate groove, and she occasionally injected fills at the end of a phrase.

You wanna scare us with the (things you wear)
Show everybody that you just don't care
You're real wild with those colors in your hair
I bet ya

Weiss played yet another guitar solo, but this one was completely different. It lined more up with the soulful leanings of the current song. It was a bit less complex, but still impressive. It lasted for the duration of eight bars.

When the vocals kicked back in, the song changed dynamic. Ruby kept a solid beat in the back for Yang to sing over. Guitars and bass punctuated the end of each line, but did not play during them. Jaune always heard this technique referred to as a blues stop.

Go in your room and turn all the lights out
Feel ashamed and cry your eyes out
Read every page of your Bukowski
Popping pills like they're fucking candy

Now you're with that new guy
Expensive slacks and fancy ties
Turn the corner and don't look back
You pull your bullshit life from the discount rack
On the last line, the music came back in. Everyone hit a rapid rhythm, permeated by Ruby's frantic drum fill. The band hit a rest to let everything set in, but only for a beat before they came again.

Now tell us how you're (all fucked up)  
The enemy must be down on her luck  
But now who really (gives a fuck)  
She's gonna, she's gonna

Tell everybody how she's (so much better)  
Let us know how she pulled it all together  
Never let those hands back in her sweater  
Again and again

Weiss played her last solo for the song, and this one she really let fly. It started with a big bend, and then evolved into a series of rapid notes, her fingers a blur on the fretboard. The rest was nonstop riffage, slower but in-line with the song. Yang came back in to close out the jam.

You wanna be a catastrophe  
You wanna see things that nobody wants to see  
Daddies little public enemy  
You fucking cunt

The music stopped all at once, just like with the previous number. Again, it was replaced instantly with the crowd.

Jaune couldn't believe his hears, and not just for the profanity out of Yang's mouth (which he was used to, at this point). That song was even better than the first, at least in his mind. It was mostly impossible to gauge fan reaction from within the audience, but from the way they whooped and hollered, they also enjoyed it just as much.

Since the song ended so abruptly, RWBY wasted no time transitioning into their final piece. This one had no intro. It started right in with Yang singing to sustained chords knocked out by Weiss. With every strike of the strings, the alabaster girl put her fist up in the air.

When the blood was red and the lies were black and white  
They put their hands together they thought they have the right

A pick slide from Yang, and the band came in. The chords became a strumming pattern, a distorted anthem behind loaded lyrics.

We know they made mistakes but we still imitate  
Keep the spirit alive when there's nothing left at stake

Now our heroes seem further away  
((Fists in the air)) but nothing has changed  
Would they shakes their heads would they feel ashamed  
Fists in the air for a fucking name

The chorus brought slightly different chords, but the same level of aggression. The harmonies here were more of an impassioned shout than actual singing.

All we know is what came before  
((There's no revolution anymore))  
We look to the past and ask for nothing more
No break separated the chorus from the second verse, nor did one break up the flow following it.

On the edge of tomorrow, what are we fighting for?
We fight each other whenever we get bored
Jaded kids, hatred wins and we all lose
Schemes kill our dreams its self-abuse

All we know is what came before
((There's no revolution anymore))
We look to the past and ask for nothing more
((There's no revolution anymore))

The bridge came around. Sustained notes and a bass drum beat eased the audience into it. After that it was again just Yang and her guitar belting out to anyone with half a mind to listen.

Let's light a match to these dynamite dreams
Let's let it all go and set it all free

Weiss and Blake came back in, hitting sustained chords in the same fashion as the first verse. Each of them struck a sound, and put their fists up in the air before coming down for the next.

I vote for the outcasts the losers and creeps
Who can bring it back again make me believe

The closest thing this song had to a solo was an instrumental break. The band played in tandem loud and proud, smashing out chords like it was their last day on Remnant. Blake strode over to Weiss. The two played face to face, not in competition, but instead to share the moment with each other, though their eyes remained glued on their respective instruments. When the vocals kicked back in, they shared a microphone. All four girls sang their hearts out in declaration of the revolution, or lack thereof.

((There's no revolution anymore))
((No revolution anymore))
((There's no revolution anymore))
((No revolution anymore))

Four quick chords ended the song. Yang, Weiss, and Blake put their pick hands up in the air, fingers clenched to fists. Ruby stood upon her stool, both sticks presented to the sky.

As the sustained sound faded away, the crowd replaced it with riotous cheers. Jaune joined them with body and soul. Life ran through is veins, and his every inch screamed for release. In some small part, he felt as though this was not just RWBY’s triumph, but one for the entire Light Music Club.

For a split second, Yang locked eyes with him. It was brief, but conveyed all the motivation he needed to continue his victorious calls.
that at the beginning. In all seriousness, I wanted the first curse words to have an impact, but now the floodgates are open. I blatantly refuse to censor the music in this fic. If pretty girls dropping C-bombs triggers you, don’t read on.

That aside, I hope you enjoyed the performance, as well as my song choice. I didn’t want to blow my load on the big anthems just yet, but I still needed to make solid picks. I hope I accomplished that goal. I'm including the lyrics because Punk, beyond attitude and presentation, is all about the message. Omitting it defeats the point. I know this is the chapter where I lose people, so if I’ve lost you, no hard feelings.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance:

“Undefeated” - by Skillet. It’s the lamest modern “rock” song I could think of, meant to emphasize that this band isn’t very good.
“Play That Funky Music” - by Wild Cherry. I needed an older song that was still danceable, but a modern audience wouldn't relate to.

RWBY’s Setlist, in order of appearance:

“Dead and Gone” - By Static Thought. The lyrics for this one don't exist on the internet (which was unforeseen), and I don't have access to the liner notes. If I got anything wrong, please tell me.
“Wanna be a Catastrophe” - By Far From Finished. They're one of my favorite bands.
“No Revolution” - by The Explosion. I wanted to end on something powerful.

If you liked this chapter, please remember to leave kudos and a comment. It means a lot.
There were a million words to choose from. The dictionary bristled with adjectives, and nouns, and verbs, all of which could've been picked out and applied. The possibilities were limitless, bound only by knowledge and imagination. However, as the music died down and RWBY packed up their things, the only word Jaune could think of to describe his current state of mind was, simply, *stunned*.

He was *stunned* by the performance. The songs left him stupefied. His mind simply couldn't comprehend the spectacle which played out before it moments ago. The cheering had all gone silent, and the crowd stood in slumber waiting for the final opening act to take the stage. Meanwhile, all Jaune could do was stand there and gaze, mouth agape.

The stage lights swam like stars in his vision, each more brilliant than the last. They were mesmerizing, like a thousand tiny sunsets over lush forests and desert plains. Jaune was blinded, and all the same suspended in pure disbelief. Distantly, he wondered if this were what it was like to drop acid. Not that he actually wanted to find out, of course. Like his mom always said, drugs are bad.

The music still echoed in the caverns of his cranium. Guitar, bass, drums, and immaculate vocals meshed together like the sweetest of springtime memories. It was harsh, brutal, fast, intricate, and even beautiful in its own twisted way. Impassioned shouts and blaring guitars. Groovy bass atop plodding drum beats. The sounds were all of them a symphony to the destitute and desperate.

He felt it. He'd heard both Yang and Blake mention it—the latter offhandedly—for the past five days, but this was the first time Jaune had really felt it. An audience joined together in a single moment of passion. A band playing its heart out, screaming to be heard. Lights and music were like a solar chant though space and time, screaming at the walls for just one *moment*, a time to shine bright amongst a sea of dismal grey. This was Unity, achieved through music.

And it was all thanks to four girls, to a garish color palette bathed in revelry and song. They were all four of them wholly unique. Quiet personalities met with happy and loud ones. Dark tones met light. They should've clashed in brilliant display of fire, shadow, and ice, yet they did not. Jaune had come to this same conclusion earlier in the week, but seeing Weiss join her spiritual sisters on stage cemented it even further in his head. There was something about RWBY, an intangible property which defied quantification. They just *worked*.

They were like nothing he'd ever seen or imagined. They defied possibility, and were their own breed of existence. Emotion flowed in them and out through fingers and strained voices to the undulating mass impatient to receive a bold recompense.

And in the middle was Jaune. When he and Yang locked eyes, the boy realized he'd helped, if only in a small way. He listened to them play, and offered his own brand of feedback, though he realized now just how insignificant his petty thoughts were. The victory of this night did not belong just to RWBY. No, it belonged to the Light Music Club.

Jaune took heart in the knowledge that he had aided such a beautiful flower to blossom. And this would not be the last bud, either. RWBY would pay another show, and again they would bring down the house. There were future victories to be had. Jaune set himself on a path to assist in their acquisition.
So enraptured was he by the spectacle still playing out behind his eyes, the blond failed to recognize the crowd shifting to his right, the miniscule parting to accommodate a newcomer. A light touch on the wrist sent him jumping to the moon. His heart skipped a beat, and every sense flared at the potential of danger. All quieted to a calm the instant he looked over his shoulder and directly into a glowing set of silver circles. The rest only lasted an instant, however, as it was replaced immediately by pure excitement.

"Ruby!" He shouted, loud enough to illicit stares from a few nearby persons. "That was incredible! You were incredible!"

"Jaune..." the small girl attempted, but her words were gobbled up by the raving boy.

"I've never seen anything like that! I don't even know where to begin."

"Jaune." The poor girl put more authority into her little voice, but to no avail.

"The band, the music, and of course your drumming, were all... I mean, I can't even describe it, and —"

His linguistic vomit came finally to an end, when a petite finger pressed itself against his lips. He cut off at once, and eyes widened just a little at being physically shushed. Needless to say, the girl now possessed his undivided attention.

"Jaune," Ruby gave one more caution, just to make sure she had him. "Save it for the rest of the band."

"The rest of the band?" Jaune parroted through lips still forced together. Ruby giggled and removed the intrusive digit.

"Yeah! The manager agreed to let you come back stage with us. Yang sent me to come get you, come on!"

The boy needed no further convincing. He simply nodded and allowed himself to be quite literally whisked away. Ruby pulled him along by the wrist for a few steps, but let go after she was confident he could follow behind her. For his part, Jaune wouldn't dream of taking a detour.

His heart fluttered, and his steps felt oddly leaden. He knew a time would come to meet the band, but never did he expect it to be so soon; after the headliner, or maybe even the next Monday at school, sure, but not literal minutes after their performance. It was too soon. What would he say? Who would he compliment first? Could he just offer blanket praise to all of them? No, that was too bland.

His time to think about all of these things wore thin as Ruby opened the door on the far right of the room and ushered him through. The gentleman in him thought it briefly a bit strange that a woman was holding the door for him, but he hadn't the state of mind to do anything about it. He strode through the portal, preoccupied with the coming moments. It wasn't until he fell in next to Ruby that his nerves tramped down.

He found himself in an undecorated hallway. It stretched a good distance straight ahead, and turned sharply to the left at the end. There was a door directly in front of him all the way on the other side, and another along the left wall a few feet away. The entirety of it was solid concrete. Electrical boxes, shielded wires, and thin pipes snaked along the corridor. Ruby and Jaune walked its depths together, presumably destined for either the door ahead, or whatever lay around the corner.

"The stage is just through there." Ruby pointed at the left hand door as they passed it. "On the other side is a ramp for loading equipment up on the stage, but you can't see it from the floor."
"That must be how you guys got up on stage," Jaune passively observed.

Ruby nodded. "The ramp is really steep, though. It's hard to walk on."

"Well, that seems like a design flaw," Jaune joked, but received no response from his companion. Instead, she pointed ahead of them down the hall.

"There are three little private rooms down there for the bands," she explained. "The first two bands didn't stick around, and the headliners always get the biggest one, so we have one all to ourselves."

"I guess it makes sense for places like this to have lounges," Jaune shrugged, "but it never occurred to me before."

"It depends on the venue, really. Some do, some don't," Ruby explained.

The conversation between the two of them fell away after that, but not for long. They soon enough reached the end of the hall. Ruby led them around the corner. Just as she said, there were two more entrances on the other side of it. From directly behind the stage, Jaune could just barely hear the band currently performing. It was mostly bass and drums, with the vocals a distant buzz. They seemed to be another modern metal band, similar to the first act. Given how he disliked that kind of music, Jaune was glad to be back here with Ruby, as opposed to suffering out there. She was better company than the crowd, anyway.

The little red brunette took the both of them all the way to the final passage. She wasted no time opening the door to allow entrance.

It was bigger inside than Jaune expected, about the size of his living room, but just a little bigger. The walls were painted a strange pale yellow. It felt warm and calming, which was probably the point. Pictures and news articles hung on the walls. Each one used either text or visuals to capture a band in the act. Jaune guessed they were all bands which went on from this venue to become successful. He even recognized one of them, a blue-collar grunge act called Bumblefoot. They were big when he was still in grade school.

Sitting on a grey wrap-around sectional couch against the far wall was the rest of the band. Blake was to Jaune's left. She perched up on the back of the furniture instead of its cushions, plucking away at her unamplified bass. Yang was in the middle, listening intently with her feet up on a metal and glass coffee table.

Opposite Blake was Weiss. She also listened, though not with as much attention, with legs crossed and hands folded neatly in her lap. She was beautiful and poised, like an indifferent angel. Jaune felt his heart miss a beat at the sight of her, which was strange. He'd never had problems with simply looking at anyone before.

Blake continued to play as the door cracked open, though all six eyes turned to the new arrivals. Jaune paused under their collective gaze. His breath hitched, surprised at the sudden attention. He relaxed, though, when he saw the thin smile which graced Blake's lips, and the gigantic beam that split Yang's entire face. Weiss, however, just scowled. She shifted in her seat, turning ever-so-slightly away from the door.

"Back already?" Yang greeted them. "Jeez, that was quick."

"Well, it is me, after all." Ruby lavished herself a little pride, and then plopped down between Weiss and Yang.

"Oh, that's right, silly me," Yang rolled her eyes. "Ruby Rose, the Red Streak of Signal." She
trapped her sister under one arm and pulled her close. The younger girl gave a grunt at the unexpected contact, but did not struggle.

Jaune couldn't help but grin as he watched the two of them. They had such a sweet relationship. It reminded him of his own sisters. He began his way over to the couch, but was stopped by a sudden utterance from an unfamiliar voice.

"You must be that boy wonder I've heard so much about," said the voice. It took Jaune a second to realize the high-pitched, unimpressed tone came from the girl to his right. He turned to her and almost startled at the piercing blue which beheld him.

"Weiss…" Yang warned softly.

"What?" Weiss shifted her gaze to the lead singer. "They're your words."

"Weiss!" Yang said more harshly this time. The snowy girl just huffed under her breath and observed her knees.

Jaune was a little bit insulted that the two of them, or perhaps all four, had clearly talked about him behind his back, but was willing to believe it had been mostly good things. He swallowed the miniscule contempt and walked over to Weiss.

"Yeah, I'm the new member of the Light Music Club," the boy said with a smile. He held out his hand. "Jaune Arc, nice to meet you."

"Weiss Schnee, same." She did not shake his hand, but simply met his eyes instead.

After an awkward moment, Jaune dropped his formality and shuffled away. He sat between Blake and Yang. The couch was surprisingly firm, and a bit uncomfortable to sit on. He wiggled around a few times to dig out a soft spot, but gave up after it didn't work.

"So, Jaune," began Yang, "What did you think of the show?"

"What did I think?" The boy repeated, his heart soaring. "I thought it was amazing! It's like I was telling Ruby, I don't even know where to begin. You're such a good singer, Yang! You too, Weiss. And your guitar is incredible. And Blake, you're great at bass! I don't think I've ever seen anyone play with a pick before."

"I take it you like it, then." As Blake came to his rescue, Jaune realized he'd been rambling again. His cheeks colored a slight shade of crimson, and he took interest in the coffee table.

"Yeah, you guys were really good." He said much quieter than before, his excitement effectively contained.

"Don't be embarrassed, Jaune," Yang said. "After all, flattery will get you everywhere." She gave him a playful wink. The boy's face colored an even deeper shade, but the sullen expression left from it.

At that point, Blake ceased playing her instrument. She set it down flat on the cushion below her. Its headstock hung just over the edge. It was almost uncomfortable without her constant, rhythmic bellows. The grumbly intonations had an oddly calming effect.

"Did you like any of the other bands?" Ruby asked out of the blue.

"Sorta," Jaune said honestly. "Neither one was really my kind of thing, but I liked the second band a
bit better."

"You don't look like the type for old funk music," Weiss observed, joining the conversation.

"I'm not, really," Jaune shook his head. "I just thought they were the more talented band. I mostly
listen to grunge and alt. rock, like Nirvana and the Smashing Pumpkins."

"You don't like Nickelback, do you?" Blake asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Not particularly, no."

"Good." The dark-haired girl said with a sigh.

"There was something I actually wanted to ask you about this place," Jaune suddenly changed the
subject. He paused to make sure the girls were listening. "The way they had a bunch of bands open
up for a headliner, is that normal?"

"Kind of," Yang answered. "It depends on the night, honestly. There's always openers and
headliners, but the amount of each and the length of their sets depends on whatever the manager has
booked."

"That's why most places book weeks, or even months, in advance," added Ruby.

"So, does that mean I'll get to watch you guys play a longer set sometime soon?"

"Of course," said Weiss. "We have a forty-five minute opener in two weeks. And before you ask,
yes, that's much more normal than what we did tonight."

"It's also at some shitty bar, Weiss," Blake corrected, "so the rules are a bit different. Like Yang said,
it just depends on the night."

Jaune barely heard her, though. His eyes still hadn't returned to normal after Weiss's statement. Forty-
five minutes seemed like an awful long time, especially in comparison to the very few they'd just
played. Jaune didn't know enough songs to fill twenty minutes, let alone double that. With the
relatively short lengths RWBY's genre seemed to prefer, that would be well over a dozen tunes,
maybe even nearer two. How could any one band play so long?

"Speaking of headliners and stuff, though, do any of you really wanna stick around to see this one," Yang asked.

"No," Weiss said with a cold scoff.

"I'd rather not," intoned Blake at the same time. Ruby just shook her head vigorously.

"What's wrong with them?" Jaune asked. "Are they not any good?"

"They're a Country-Rock band." Ruby said.

"So, no," agreed Weiss. Jaune was willing to take her word for it. Country was more or less the only
genre he flatly disliked.

Yang stood and gave a big stretch, fingers interlaced above her head. "Why don't we call it a night,
then?"

At her behest both Ruby and Blake got up as well, seemingly in agreeance. Jaune joined them. He
would've liked to hang out a bit longer, but if they all were leaving, then he might as well go along
with them. The idea of staying alone in such an unfamiliar setting, especially one in a bad part of town, churned his stomach. The last to stand was Weiss, which she did with a sigh.

With little in the way of conversation, and toting their respective gigging equipment, the five of them exited the room. They walked in a clump down the hall. It was a good thing no one approached from the opposite direction, because they wouldn't have been able to get through. For Jaune's part, he stuck to the right wall. He refused to be a traffic hazard along with the rest of them. That was just rude.

Once back onto the concert floor, a distorted twangy sound filled Jaune's ears. He shared a cringe with the rest of his friends. He'd been skeptical before, but that reveal settled it. He most certainly did not wish to stay. The audience, probably piss drunk at this point, didn't seem to mind it all that much. Oh, well. More fun for them.

The group exited the establishment, and there on the sidewalk went their separate ways. Jaune was the only one to park in the direction he did. There was apparently a closer lot he hadn't known about, which both Yang and Ruby apologized for. He didn't really care, though. The girls bade him goodbye—Ruby with a quick hug—and the two cliques parted.

It wasn't until he returned to his car did the euphoria of the night return to him. The music was amazing. All of the bands had been good, even the ones he didn't particularly like, but RWBY was by far the greatest. They received the best reception from the audience, even though their set was the shortest in terms of cumulative song length.

In just the span of a few hours, Jaune had attended his first concert, heard some incredible music, saw his new friends sing their hearts out, and even got to meet the little snow princess known as Weiss. All in all, it had been quite the successful night. As Jaune pulled out of the parking lot, he promised himself to do this again soon. Now that his heart knew the glory of live music, he couldn't go without ever experiencing it again. The people involved with making the music just served to make it that much better.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I hope this chapter wasn't too boring for a follow up.

I know I'm allowed to take liberties here and there, but I also want to keep at least a semblance of realism when it comes to the experience of being in a band. Don't worry about the length of the sets, though. I most certainly do not plan on transcribing an entire hour's worth of music. I'll just pick out the highlights, likely the first and last songs, and whatever other moments I deem important.

There isn't necessarily a soundtrack for this one, but feel free to insert any Luke Bryan song into the headliner's act, and then proceed to projectile vomit at the thought of Luke Bryan.

If you enjoyed this chapter, or any of the previous ones, make sure to give kudos and leave a comment. I love hearing feedback from my readers, both good and bad. It means a lot to me.
Sunday came and went in a flash. Jaune spent most of it doing his favorite activity, absolutely nothing at all. As much as he loved his family and friends, these were his favorite kinds of days, the ones where he could just sit back, play video games, and watch stupid internet videos without a care in the world. No homework, no responsibilities, it was liberating. He may not have felt alive, but he did feel at home. Safety, security, and relaxation were sometimes the most important of things.

Along with violent video games and cute cat videos, there was also music. Whether it were learning something new, refining the old, or just jamming, Jaune took some time out every single day to play guitar, and an uneventful Sunday wouldn't change that. He practiced a few chords, and worked on the paltry number of songs he already knew, but his fingers ached for excitement. This felt like the right time to pick up something fresh.

There was one particular song he couldn't get out of his head. The last one RWBY had played the night prior was pretty simple. It sounded like just a few chords. A quick search for tabs confirmed this, and utterly baffled the boy. By far, this tune hit the hardest of their short set, yet it was laughably modest. He could memorize the whole thing in five minutes. How could such an easy song enrapture so many people? He had a lot to learn.

And learn he would, but not from the sidelines. When Monday rolled around, Jaune went into it with a very specific goal in mind. He entered the school at roughly the same time as any other morning, but instead of heading to homeroom or a hallway bench, Jaune went straight for the main office. Inside, the secretary was typing away on her computer. The loose hairs in her messy, brunette bun swayed in the ever-so-slight air conditioning. On her fairly cluttered desk was a dwindling stack of papers.

The older woman behind the counter offered him a sweet smile, but said nothing as he took a page from the stack. There were a few places Jaune could've went to observe a similar collection, but this was the closest. He sat down in a chair in the opposite corner, removed the giant physics textbook from his bag, and placed the sheet upon it. Popping the ballpoint on a pen, the boy began to write.

The club sign-up sheet was a relatively simple form. It asked for the date, the student's name, their homeroom teacher, which club they were joining, and why they wanted to be a part of it. The school already had all the contact information for everyone enrolled, so those bits were not needed. This made the page a swift study When it was done, he ended by taking a picture with his Scroll, and sending it off to his most recently acquired contact.

When all that was squared away, Jaune rose from his seat and passed the form to the secretary, who took it with another smile. She thanked him, and he returned the pleasantries. The blond went back to stuff his book where it belonged and shoulder the bag once again. He exited the office and turned left, bound for a place to relax, but barely made it a few steps before his pocket buzzed. A check of the device revealed no words, only an expression of pure excitement.

"!!!!!!" was the simple reply from Yang, followed immediately by, "Holy fuck, dude! Welcome!"

A huge grin stretched from either side of Jaune's face. He stepped off to one side of the hall to tap out a quick reply.
"Only if you'll have me, of course." It was meant as a joke, but Jaune let a little bit of insecurity flow through the message.

He kept Scroll in hand as he walked through the second set of doors and into the corridor proper. The moment he did, another vibration disturbed his palm. Figuring he'd probably be at this for a while, the boy sank onto one of the nearby benches.

"Jaune fucking Arc," the feisty message began, "you'd better show up, of I swear to God."

"I'll take that as a 'yes'?" Jaune smiled as he typed his response. That one was purely comical.

"Swear. To. God." Yang reiterated her previous statement.

"If you keep threatening me, I really won't want to show up."

"But I already texted Ruby. Just think about the look on her face if you're not there."

"Well, I can't argue with that," Jaune said. Yang made an excellent point, after all. With how absolutely adorable the other girl was, he didn't think he could live with putting a sad look on her face.

The conversation between the two of them dried up after that, but Jaune didn't mind. It felt like a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Whether or not he was actually going to sign up for the Light Music Club no longer was held in the balance. He was now definitively a member. Even though he didn't think it would matter one way or the other, it did him a world of good to make it official.

In light of this most recent development, the rest of the day flew by. Jaune had never officially taken on an after-school activity. He'd never realized the benefits of having something to look forward to. A goal in mind made the entire morning feel like just a few minutes, and the afternoon was no different.

Sure, he went to the music room every day last week, but that was only as a guest, or maybe even just a passive observer. This was different. Jaune was now an official part of the club, his first ever. It was exciting. As was becoming a trend, when the last bell rang, the sound utterly baffled him.

No amount of excitement could, however, change the nature of school itself. If the first week was meant as an introductory period, then the second made up for lost time. All but one of his classes assigned homework, including two tasks in History. The teacher had been smart enough to give a worksheet on a section they hadn't covered in class forcing students to read the book. Jaune would probably just internet search the questions, but that didn't lessen the audacity of such a thing. Two assignments. What a joke.

Regardless, when classes for the day concluded, Jaune made his way right over to Music Room C. The door, as always, was wide open. No music emanated from inside, but he could hear someone shuffling around. By the volume, he felt confident betting money on who it was.

Crossing the threshold, his suspicions were confirmed. Yang strode around inside, carting around a bunch of folded metal chairs, two under each arm. She placed them in a stack against the west wall before going back for another load. There weren't many left, or even a whole lot to begin with.

"What's up with all the chairs?" Jaune asked, dropping his bag against the wall behind him. Yang looked up just long enough to determine who he was.

"Hey, Jaune," the girl greeted briefly before returning to her work. "The jazz band uses this room
when they have planning meetings on the weekends. No sense in using the auditorium if there isn't a full practice, right?” Even from behind, Jaune could see the blonde roll her eyes.

After that little bit of reasoning, Jaune realized he was just standing there like a bump on a log. How un-gentlemanly. He quickly fell in to assist Yang. Not that a strong, independent woman like herself needed a man to help her. …Nor was that even the problem. Jaune physically shook his head, glad none of that thought train made its way out of his mouth.

The blond boy gathered up his own quartet of chairs to follow in Yang's footsteps. He folded each into a relatively flat shape, and tucked them under an arm. Each new load added to the weight, which was considerably more than he expected. Add in that there was no good way to handle the things, and the task became much more gargantuan.

Jaune straightened his spine, straining just slightly at the chairs which threatened to slip from his grasp. Yang, however, carried her own seats as if they were of no consequence. Jaune's expressions sagged at the sight of. It stung his pride to know a girl was stronger than him. It wasn't a particularly uncommon occurrence, but it still hurt. He did his best to swallow the disappointment and went to deposit his armful. Yang was on her way back.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question, Jaune?" She said as the two passed.

"Sure, go ahead." Jaune reached the point where the other discarded chairs were.

"Why haven't you brought your guitar to school yet?"

Jaune stopped in the middle of setting a chair down, a moment of hesitation as the inquiry worked through his psyche. He'd expected something along the lines of why he'd joined the club, or his honest opinions of their show last weekend, but nothing so much more direct. When he didn't respond right away, Yang took up the conversation again.

"I mean, you've been hanging around with a band all week, and now you're actually a part of the Light Music Club, and you were pretty good that one time you played for us. Are you embarrassed or something?"

"It's not that, Yang, it's..." He searched for the right words, "I don't know."

Answer given, Jaune resumed his task. Yang, however, did not. She straightened up to gaze at the back of his head.

"Hey, it's cool if you don't want to talk about it. Just thought I'd ask."

"No, that's my honest answer." He turned to face her. "I don't know why I haven't brought my guitar. If I'm being completely honest, I never even thought about it."

Yang grinned at his admission. "Oh, ok. I'm glad it's nothing serious. Come on let's get these chairs stacked up."

She began to gather up a few more seats, while Jaune finished dumping his. The two set a steady pace, having come to an unspoken goal of finishing before the other three showed up. All the while, Jaune wondered why Yang had asked him such an out of leftfield question. Had she really been worried about something so small? The girl struck him as a naturally caring person, but whether or not he toted his instrument around seemed a petty problem. Though he guessed that was just her nature to nurture. Honestly, he found it rather endearing.

The two made short work of the task at hand. Though it was a rather brief obstacle, Jaune felt an
inconsequential animosity build up with each chair he folded. Seriously, if the jazz band were going to use the room, the least they could do was clean up after themselves.

Jaune dropped his last load and stepped out of the way so Yang could do the same. As she set down her final two burdens, Jaune realized it may have been a bad idea to stack them vertically, instead of allowing them to lean against the wall. The three groups were stable enough, but rather uneven. Yang didn't seem to notice, though, knuckling her back as she stood.

"Well, that's done," she said with an air of finality. "Thanks for the help."

"Don't mention it," Jaune deflected, "It's no big de—"

"Yaaang!" A familiar whine from out in the hall interrupted him.

"Does she do that a lot?" Jaune asked.

"You have no idea," answered Yang, just before her sister entered the room, clutching a book to her chest.

"Yang," she said again, sparing not a glance for Jaune. "I thought last week was bad, but this is even worse. I don't think I've ever had this much homework."

"Welcome to high school, Rubes," Yang jabbed. "You get used to it after a while."

"But that sounds horrible!" Ruby protested to no one in particular.

"At least the two of us are in the same boat," Jaune offered, an attempt to soften the blow. "I got two history assignments today." At his admission, Ruby gasped, seemingly appalled by it.

"Oh my God, don't remind me," Yang complained. "That's such horseshit."

Jaune decided to file that bit of information away in a brain-box labeled important. That little quip from Yang confirmed the two of them had the same teacher for History, if not the same period. He may be able to go to her for help later on.

In that moment, Blake entered the room. She always seemed to followed right after Ruby. This time was different, though. She had a black guitar amplifier in her left hand, roughly the same size as Jaune's own.

"Look who I found wandering the halls," she said while striding into the room. In her wake trailed a resonant beauty so intense it made Jaune's heart skip a beat.

"I wasn't wandering," Weiss countered. "I was just… getting a feel for the layout."

"You were lost, admit it," Blake teased, leading her charger further into the space.

"Alright, fine, I was lost," the icy girl said quickly, "but only because the layout of this school is so stupid."

"Sure, Weiss. Sure." Blake ended the conversation with a final prod at the shorter girl.

As the newcomer placed her things down next to Blake's, Jaune found himself stunned by her good looks. He couldn't help but gawk. The uniform Weiss wore was a lot different from the Beacon attire. It was a gray coat atop a white shirt with a black tie. The skirt matched the coat, Black boots came to a stop just before her knees, and dull tights fed into them.
Weiss bent over to plug in her amp, and Jaune's stare focused in on her backside. She righted herself, quickly, though, and spun to face the room. The boy diverted his gaze in a flash, but the way she narrowed her eyes said he'd been caught. His face flushed with a burning fire. Thankfully—though she would've been well within her rights to—the princess didn't say anything. Instead, she set about freeing the guitar from its black bag hanging on her back.

"So, Weiss, what do you think of the room?" Ruby asked from across the space.

"It's..." Weiss looked around, "*quaint*, I guess," she concluded with a wince.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Yang put on an overbearing dramatic tone. "Next time we'll be sure to rent out the entire second floor. Only the best for our dear Queen."

Weiss just gave her a flat look. "You done?" When Yang responded with only a lopsided grin, Weiss went back to extracting her instrument. "I meant *quaint* as in *cozy*. It's a lot better than Blake's basement."

Ruby, Yang, and Jaune all looked at the named girl as if expecting some sort of admonishment, but all she did was hold up her hands defensively.

"You'll get no argument from me," said Blake. The bass around her shoulders slipped, and she quickly caught it by the neck. "This room is a bit smaller, but at least it doesn't echo."

"Yeah, we can actually hear ourselves play," Yang agreed. "Speaking of which, do you want to christen the room, Weiss?"

"Do we really need to?" Weiss asked, messing with her amp. "We'll have plenty of time to do that, and we haven't started on a setlist for our next show."

"Aw, but that's, like, two weeks away!" Ruby complained with a longing glance toward her drum set.

"No, I actually agree," nodded Yang. "The sooner we get the setlist out of the way, the sooner we can start hammering out the details." She turned to the only boy in the room. "What do you think, Jaune?"

For himself, Jaune was taken off-guard at being addressed. He'd been pleasantly listening to a conversation he wasn't necessarily a part of, and hadn't expected to be thrust into it. His eyes widened, and his mouth worked soundlessly once, a poor attempt at forming words.

"Me? I'm not sure this is my area of expertise..."

"Well, it's never too early to learn." Yang deflected his deflection. "You're part of the club now, which means you should at least have some say."

She looked around at the other occupants. Ruby smiled at him, Blake did nothing, and while Weiss rolled her eyes, she didn't outwardly object. Again, Jaune hadn't expected to be included so quickly. This was a band matter, and didn't have really anything to do with the club. In that respect, he failed to see how his opinion bore any importance whatsoever. But, if they all were willing to hear him, he might as well speak up, for better or worse.

"I agree with Weiss," he answered honestly. "Make the setlist, then practice it. That makes sense to me, anyway."

"Alright, that's three votes for, that settles it," said Yang. "Everybody powwow."
The girls all seemed to know what that meant, as they each gathered a chair from the piles and began setting them up in a circle near the center of the room. Jaune promptly did the same, settling between Blake and Ruby, with Weiss directly across from him. Their eyes met for a split-second, and then he disengaged. Jaune again felt a furnace burn in his face as she bored a hole into his temple.

Yang took out her Scroll. "Okay... new setlist is a-go." her words were drawn out and deliberate, as she pressed buttons at the same time.

Jaune leaned over to see what she was doing. Ruby politely pressed herself against her chair to allow him access. The blonde girl had a simple memo open on her device, and titled it roughly the same as she'd vocalized: RWBY Setlist, 45 minute show.

"Any ideas?" Weiss decided to kick things off.

"I really like what Blake was talking about last week," Ruby said. "Combining those two songs is a good idea."

"I agree," said Weiss. "I think that's a great way to open the show." At this conclusion, Yang wrote down two songs in the memo.

"The song you were texting me about earlier would work, too, Weiss," Blake added. "We could turn it into a three-piece. What was it again?"

"Oh, it's just a really simple Operation Ivy song, I guarantee you've all heard it before." Weiss grabbed a chord. "It wouldn't take us long to learn, it's literally three chords. Even Jaune could play it." That last quip was paired with a frigid side-long look at the boy. Jaune deferred his gaze and took the insult. He probably deserved it for staring at her.

Without prompting, Weiss began to play. It could be assumed this was the song she and Blake spoke of. Though the tune wasn't exactly distinct, Jaune was sure he most certainly had not heard it before. The others seemed to recognize it, though, as both Ruby and Yang nodded at almost the same time. Jaune couldn't help but feel just a little left out, like everyone else had been told a secret except him.

He'd have to look this song up later, and maybe even learn it himself. That would show the Ice Queen. Or, at least it would, had she not already admitted he could probably play it. Wait, did that mean she had faith in him? It was probably just a stupid joke, but Jaune clung to that fool's hope.

True to her word, the song Weiss played was incredibly simple. Only a trio of chords made it up. There was some palm muting and modulation, along with a riff in the middle Jaune decided not to worry about, but the verses and chorus all kept to the same skeleton. It didn't even have a bridge. None of the songs he'd heard RWBY play so far did, he distantly realized.

The sounds coming from Weiss's amp were perhaps a little too loud for the room, but Jaune doubted they leaked into the hall. If this space were meant for full bands and choirs, then a single guitar posed little threat of overriding its protections. The same could not be said, however, for things inside the room.

Without warning, a cascading crash resonated from behind Jaune. It drowned out the music almost entirely, and deafened all ten ears subjected to it. Ruby muffed her own while the others looked around to see the stacks of chairs collapse inward, spilling toward the powwow circle. One almost reached the back of Jaune's seat.

They all just sat there and watched them tumble. The piles had been rickety to start with, but the soundwaves from Weiss must have pushed them over the edge.
The catastrophe only lasted a few seconds, but that was enough time to thoroughly annoy everyone. When it stopped there was silence in the room. Ruby seemed mildly shocked, Yang, Jaune, and Blake did nothing, and Weiss just looked miffed. None of them were really sure what just happened—despite the evidence literally laid you before them—or how to proceed. Predictably, it was Yang who broke the ice.

"Well, d*cks."

"Who stacks chairs vertically!?!" Weiss shouted what they all had been thinking. "What is wrong with you people?" Yang and Jaune looked away from both her and each other under the weight of such scolding. "Oh, of course it was your idea." The admonishment was targeted at them both, though Weiss lingered a fraction longer on Jaune. Or, he thought she did, at least.

In the midst of this, Blake sighed, leaned her bass against her chair, and rose to clean up the mess. Ruby followed shortly behind, and that was the catalyst for the rest to help as well. The chairs were set up properly along the wall in short order with all five of them on the case.

When they were put away, the brainstorming renewed. Though Jaune didn't have much input—since he recognized few of the songs—Yang did make a point to ask his thoughts every now and then, always with a smile on her face. They even listened to him once, agreeing when he said two songs wouldn't sound good together and should be swapped with others. All in all, it was a productive club meeting for Weiss's introduction.

Jaune couldn't wait to hear them play again.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I know that was a bit of an odd ending, but I figured you all didn't need to hear an entire hour-long brainstorm. Unfortunately, that didn't leave many opportunities for a more natural close. I thought the chairs were just comical and poorly-planned enough to make sense as a thing both Yang and Jaune would do.

I won't list out the songs mentioned in this chapter for the sake of spoilers, but I'm willing to bet someone out there can guess what Operation Ivy song Weiss was playing. It's not that hard, since there aren't many to choose from.

If you enjoyed this chapter, or even if not, please remember to leave a kudos and a comment and tell me what you think. It's greatly appreciated, and only helps me make the story that much better.
Later that same night, when he probably should've been asleep in bed, Jaune sat upon it instead. A controller lay next to him, idle. The television was on, but displayed a black screen. The only indication of its life was a green light in the bottom left corner. A single light in the ceiling illuminated the room, the blub concealed by a domed fixture. Most of the house had already turned in for the night, but Jaune still stirred, unable to find the inspiration for sleep just yet.

Music flowed from his hands. Fingers and a black pick upon six metal wires coaxed sound from a speaker a few feet away. A white Explorer rested on his lap. The volume was low in consideration for his housemates, just barely loud enough to be heard over the natural twang of the strings. Distantly, Jaune thought it may be smart to invest in a pair of headphones.

A simple set of chords beat along the walls, but the boy paid little mind to them. Weiss had been correct when she said he could learn the song she presented to the group during club hours. There was some modulation, and that riff he still didn't want to learn, but the easy progression came to him with little effort. He didn't even need the tablature anymore. It had been discarded, along with the Scroll which displayed it, to his nightstand a while ago.

With the song well under his fingers, playing became automatic as Jaune lost himself in thought. He considered all the things Yang said to him earlier, and how dumb it was to leave his guitar at home. He'd given her an honest answer, and could at least feel good about that, but it was still a stupid thing to do. Of course it made sense to play his guitar to the Light Music Club. What else was he supposed to do there?

The boy knew not how much time passed in this ethereal state, but a knock at the door snapped him back to reality. He was once again in his room, sat on his bed playing three chords. The music cut off immediately. If there was one thing Jaune had learned, it was how to stop playing.

"Come in," he chimed politely as possible. The door opened to admit a person who brought an immediate smile to his lips. "Hey, Jade."

Every single member of the Arc family had brilliant golden locks... except for the youngest. A burning fire sprouted from the top of her head. Its jagged edges stopped just shy of her chin. It would've been combed much straighter than the unkempt mess it was then, if not for the late hour. Dressed in the white t-shirt and blue shorts of her pajamas, she was built much like Weiss, though three years younger.

The girl paused just inside the door, as if waiting for permission to enter fully. Jaune gave her a short nod and she began on the short distance to his bed. As he watched his adorable baby sister approach, his expression slacked.

"I'm sorry, was I too loud?" He asked, suddenly apologetic.

"No, I could barely hear you," she responded, her voice a natural middle tone with a slight rasp. She dropped down on the bed to Jaune's right, barely heavy enough to cause a chain reaction in the springs. "But you were playing the same thing for, like, a half hour."

"Sorry, that must've been annoying." Jaune scratched his head awkwardly, almost dropping his pick
in the process. "I guess I wasn't paying attention.

Jade shook her head. "It's fine." She cocked her head to one side. "Lien for your thoughts?"

"No thoughts," denied Jaune. "I was just zoning out, no big deal." He did his best to tell the truth, without going into detail. He had been zoning out, and it wasn't a big deal, but there were quite a few thoughts to consider.

"Okay." Jade regarded him with a thin smile. She gazed down at his guitar. "What were you playing, anyway?"

"That? It was just some song by Operation Ivy," he said. Jade gave him a quizzical look. "I know, I'd never heard of them either. But one of my fr- someone in my club was playing it earlier, so I thought I'd learn it, too."

"It sounded pretty easy," commented Jade.

"It is." Jaune nodded. "I thought it might be kinda fun to play it for them tomorrow, like, 'hey I can play this thing, too.'" He probably could've phrased that better, but Jade seemed to understand.

"Oh, you're finally gonna bring your guitar with you, instead of just leaving it at home?"

Jaune heard the words, but he failed to respond for several seconds. He was stunned, quite simply. Of all the things he'd expected her to say… that wasn't even on the list.

"I'm surprised you noticed," he said finally, just as the air between them started to grow uncomfortable. Jade giggled at him, which he also didn't anticipate.

"I mean, you're part of a music club. It's obvious you'd want to bring your guitar," Jade explained. "It was kind of weird when you didn't."

For a moment, Jaune just looked at her with wide eyes, because he could've sworn he heard an echo. That was, quite literally, everything he'd just been thinking about, summed up in three sentences.

"No, you're right," Jaune said. "Yang even asked me about it today. I guess I just never really thought about it.

"That's silly." She smiled at him. "It seems pretty obvious that people bring instruments to a music club." She giggled again. "I'm sure you'll blow them away."

"Thanks," Jaune said. "I don't know what I was thinking." Though, that wasn't true. He hadn't been thinking. Like, at all.

"Hey Jaune?" Jade said suddenly, the soft tone in her voice a jarring shift of atmosphere. The boy blinked a few times to acclimate himself. Jade, however, pushed on. "I know it's late, but do you think you could play my favorite song for me?"

Jaune gave her a wide grin. "Of course, Sis."

He placed fingers upon the fretboard, and struck the opening notes. When he did, Jade scooted a little closer and laid her head on his shoulder. The contact made it more difficult for him to play, but Jaune would never speak a word of it and risk upsetting her.

The song was of a moderate tempo. It started out with a simple riff. After that, it was mostly bass and drums, but Jade liked him to play it differently. He grabbed the chords and made each an arpeggio,
focusing more on the higher strings. At the end of each stanza, he let the full chords sing out before moving on. In the chorus he played the riff again. He was lucky Jade's favorite song was so simple, otherwise playing it for her would be a much more gargantuan task. But he'd always do it, whenever she wanted him to.

As he settled into a comfortable way, both with the song and the girl leaning on him, Jaune set himself with a fresh conviction. There would be no more uncertainty. No more not thinking. No more fear of judgment, from the people he knew would never judge him. Funny, that despite all of the encouragement and positive energy given freely by his new friends, the deciding factor was the way his little sister believed in him.

The next day came and went. Jaune moved through his classes with a surprising amount of calm. Sure, there were still butterflies in his stomach, but they didn't dominate his being. He had little trouble concentrating in his classes. Or, at least, no more than usual. History was still boring beyond belief. No butterflies, or lack thereof, could change that.

The entire time, he was conscious of the weighty load in his locker, and of his insatiable desire to play it, to prove himself not just to Weiss, but to everyone else in the club. Yang wanted to hear him play, and she would get her wish in just a few short hours. She would get far more than she bargained for, if Jaune had anything to do with it. He hoped so, anyway. At the very least he'd brought his guitar, which was what she really wanted, anyway. No one could say he hadn't fulfilled her request.

For all that confidence, all that resolve, Jaune found himself paused in front of his locker after the last bell. He'd actually had to pull out his first-day papers to open the thing, the ones with all his student info on them. Never using it meant he didn't know the combination. Standing inside was a black bag, an expensive instrument inside. Well, relatively expensive, anyway. There were much pricier guitars to be found.

No, no. Focus! His shoulders heaved in a sigh. No use denying it. He was nervous. He always felt nervous before playing for people. That was a normal human reaction. But, those crowds had always been just his family. The club was a bit different. He didn't know any of them very well. While he had a single prior experience to draw from, there was no way to know how they would react to him.

But none of that mattered. He'd made a promise to not only himself, but to his little sister, even though the latter wasn't really aware of it. An Arc never went back on his word. He opened his locker, slung the long bag over his shoulder, and headed off for Music Room C.

Once he stepped inside the room, Jaune beheld the ever-present radiance of Yang Xiao-Long. She always arrived first by quite a hefty margin, which made him wonder what her last class was. The only close rooms belonged to the economics program, but that seemed unlikely. While Yang was certainly a sharp cookie, she did not strike him as a businesswoman.

She noticed the new presence immediately. The bombshell raised her eyes to him and looked about to offer a greeting, but any words she could've levied dissolved into that signature gigantic smile.

"You brought your guitar!" She practically squealed, fists balled giddily beneath her chin.

"Yeah," Jaune confirmed, resisting the urge to pick at his ear. "I talked to my sister about it, and what you said yesterday made a lot of sense, so I figured, why not?"

"Glad I could get through that thick head of yours," Yang joked. She pulled a chair from the row
behind her and presented it to the boy. He thanked her and sat upon it.

Jaune was acutely aware of the purple eyes resting on him as he set about freeing his instrument. The uncomfortable gaze made him work a bit faster than normal, and be perhaps clumsier as well. He struggled with the zipper, tugging on it multiple times as it caught on the sturdy material. On the fourth try, it slipped easily along the teeth. He discarded the now useless bag and set the instrument upon his lap, tilting it so the girl to his side could see.

"It's… so clean," commented Yang after a moment.

"That's not the reaction I expected," Jaune said with a slight, crooked frown.

"Look at it, though," insisted the girl. "There's not a speck of dust anywhere."

"Well, I guess I'm kinda obsessed with it," Jaune admitted, scratching the back of his head. Was his guitar being clean really all that remarkable? It just meant he played it a lot, right? Or, maybe Yang was just commenting on the newness. It was only a few months old, after all.

"That seems unhealthy, Jaune," Yang teased. "But, I guess I can't say much. I remember what I was like when I first got Sheila back there." She poked a thumb over her shoulder to indicate the yellow Squier propped up in the back corner.

"That's your first guitar?" Jaune was astonished, to say the least. He figured it was an old thing, but never would've guessed it was her first instrument ever.

"Yep, my first and only." Yang let a hint of pride seep into her tone. "My uncle Qrow got her for my seventh birthday. I didn't even ask for a guitar. He just showed up with it." The blonde giggled. "She was bigger than me, back then, but I loved her just as much as I do now."

The misty way she spoke of what was likely her most prized possession was absolutely adorable. The passion and dedication she had for it was obvious even through the openness in her stance. It was admirable for her to stick to the aging implement, even when more expensive, fancier ones no doubt tempted her on occasion. It was a loyalty Jaune would’ve thought impossible, were it not right before him.

There was probably more to the story, but it would have to wait for another time as a squeak rang through the room.

"You brought your guitar!" Exclaimed Ruby Rose. Jaune and Yang looked up at her in near perfect unison, just in time to see her clench giddy fists below her chin. She rushed over and leaned forward to get a closer look at the thing in Jaune's lap. The younger girl ran gentle fingertips along its white face.

"It's so clean," she breathed in wonder. Jaune rolled his eyes. It was almost like the two girls were related, or something. Was this how Weiss felt, dealing with them all the time?

"That's what I said," Yang said. "Not even Weiss keeps her guitars that clean."

Jaune wasn't sure whether to be offended by that or not. But, he'd accept beating the Ice Queen at something for what may be the first and last time ever.

"I've never seen one of these in real life before," Ruby continued. "It's an Exploder, right?"

"Explorer," Jaune corrected. "It's not a real one though." He tilted the headstock toward her. "It's just an Epiphone."
"Well, what's it sound like? Come on, play something!" Implored the only present brunette.

"Why don't we wait until everyone else is here, Rubes?" Yang suggested before Jaune had the chance to strike a chord. Her sister visibly deflated, but agreed. Ruby had a good point, though. He would need sound.

"Do you mind if I use your amp, Yang? I kinda forgot to bring mine." He felt dumb for making such an omission, and decided to look at the object of his desires rather than the person to whom it belonged.

"Go right ahead," allowed the girl. "Just don't break anything."

It was obviously a joke, but as Jaune walked over to the little speaker against the wall, he was very conscious of his efforts.

A Fender branded product, the amp was about the same size as his own. It had most of the same bells and whistles as his, too. As such, he was able to make swift work of the settings. Yang preferred a sound light on distortion and with a little reverb. Jaune, however, wanted none of either. He turned off all of the drive settings and set their knobs to zero. A quick G chord confirmed his sound was perfectly clean and unmarred. He noted this amp had a much better clean setting than his.

Jaune turned to walk back to his seat, but only made it a few steps before both Weiss and Blake strode into the space. They arrived together again, though he suspected this time was by choice instead of happenstance. They pair noticed the instrument hanging from his shoulder almost immediately after entering. Weiss just glanced at him before continuing on her way. Blake gave him a quick top to bottom before shrugging.

"Not bad," she said, a compliment in her own way.

"Thanks," returned the blond boy.

"Guys, Jaune's gonna play something for us!" Yang enthused at the passing duo. Though her declaration was correct, Jaune realized he'd never actually said as much. Best not call her out on it, though.

"Is he?" Weiss intoned, setting her stuff down on the opposite side of the room. "How marvelous." Sarcasm dripped from her voice.

"Weiss…" Yang warned. The princess took no notice. "Ignore her, Jaune," she encouraged as Jaune returned to his seat. "It's just her time of the month."

"Hey!" Weiss protested. Sparks flew between them for a moment, but the tension died as soon as it sprung up. Jaune had a feeling that kind of exchange happened a lot between the two of them.

"You weren't here the first time he played, Weiss," Blake said as she pulled up a chair across from him. "I think we were all a little surprised."

That was probably meant to encourage him, but had the opposite effect. They—or, at least, Blake—didn't think he would've been any good. While he was glad to have proved them wrong, the realization of premature judgment was far from a vote of confidence.

While this thought ran through his mind, the boy failed to notice the crowd which formed in front of him. He blinked twice in surprise as Yang and Ruby had joined Blake on either side. They sat with expectant and excited looks on their faces. Weiss was the last to sit. She positioned her chair a bit apart from Ruby and crossed her knees, pointing them toward the window. Though she gave off a
slightly more annoyed vibe, the alabaster girl still waited patiently.

"You, uh… want me to play right now?" Jaune asked with uncertainty shaking his voice.

"Yeah!" Ruby confirmed. "If you want to, of course," she added quickly.

"No, it's fine. I just expected to play after your practice, but before is cool, too." Both statements were true.

Jaune removed the black pick from where it rested laced between the strings on the first fret. He grabbed the first chord of a predetermined song. A deep breath in, and then out, and his right hand made to strike out the opening notes… except it didn't. He froze up as soon as the plastic made contact with his thickest string. His muscles seized while the pick rested there against the string.

Ice gripped his heart and pulled it down. At the same time, a fuzzy flutter of wings surged up to greet it. The boy knew what he wanted his body to do, but it refused cooperation. A sudden rush of uncertainty overtook his senses. This was it, the hour of reckoning. He'd spent so much time psyching himself up for this moment, but now that it was upon him, he was suspended in time.

A quick glance, not more than a twitch of his eyes, regarded his crowd. Ruby leaned forward, her eyes wide with anticipation. Yang and Blake both reclined in their chairs. The latter had her eyes closed and arms crossed; the former wore a neutral expression, but did give him thumbs up when he looked. Weiss, predictably, did nothing except stare out the window.

Well, there were at least three people who actually wanted him to continue. That was enough to inspire action in the anxious blond. He took another deep breath and let it out slowly through his nose. Ready as he would ever be, Jaune began to play.

The intro to his chosen song was a rather simple progression of three chords, one of the first he'd learned to play. While it was supposed to be open chords, Jaune played it with barres. That saved him the trouble of switching techniques when the verse rolled around. It was soft and tender, a perfect soliloquy for a beginner.

After that, the dynamic shifted dramatically. It went from a pretty standard strumming pattern, to a more interesting Ska feel. Though the notes were the same, he hit each one on the offbeat, punchy upstrokes that gave it a lively feel.

That wasn't the only change, however. It's good he was looking at his hands, because Jaune would've been distracted by the utterly shocked expressions of the audience, when he opened his mouth to sing.

When you grab a hold of me
Tell me that I'll never be set free
'Cause I'm a parasite
Creep and crawl, I step into the light
Two pints of booze
Tell me are you a badfish too?

Ain't got no money to spend
I hope this night will never end
Lord knows I'm weak
Won't somebody get me off of this reef?

There came a brief rest, which Jaune used to catch his breath. His voice was honestly a bit similar to
Yang's. It was only somewhat high pitched for a guy—just like his speaking voice—and possessed the same loud clarity which defined the buxom blonde's. Jaune's, however, had a different texture. A slight trebly grit ran straight through the middle of his tone, enough to be noticed without dominating the sound. He even had a fast vibrato on longer notes. It was an easy voice to listen to, one which would've been right at home on the radio.

It truly was a short rest. Jaune launched straight into the next verse without missing a beat. A smile graced his lips. It took him a while to nail that transition back while still learning the song.

```
Baby you're a big blue whale
Grab the reef when all duck diving fails
I'll swim, but I wish I never learned
The water's too polluted with germs
I dive deep when it's ten feet overhead
Grab the reef underneath my bed

Ain't got no quarrels with God
Ain't got no time to get old
Lord knows I'm weak
Won't somebody get me off of this reef?
```

After the second verse, the more nominal chord progression from the beginning took over once again. Since he didn't have to focus on two things at once anymore, Jaune finally took a chance to inspect his audience. What he found was... unexpected, to say the least.

Blake still had her eyes closed and arms crossed, but a thin smile curved her lips. Yang leaned forward, propping her chin up on a balled fist, while her elbow rested against a knee. She beamed that huge grin of hers. Purple eyes met directly with his blue, and he wondered how long she'd been gazing at him like that. Ruby was completely enraptured. Her big silver saucers somehow became even wider as she stared at him, mouth just slightly agape. Even Weiss seemed to be listening. She'd at some point turned her body to face him. Her posture—with legs crossed and back straight—was still a little rigid, but this was the first time Jaune could meet her eyes without any feelings of derision or hostility.

Jaune felt his cheeks color just slightly at the attention these four pretty girls gave him. In an attempt to minimize the damage, he went back to regarding his fret hand.

The song transitioned back into the verses. Normally, there would've been a guitar solo here. Maybe Weiss could've nailed the piece, but it was far beyond Jaune's own capabilities. So, he just played the chord progression twice.

It came to an end with one final repetition of the second chorus. As Jaune started to sing, to his great amazement, Blake joined in as well. He almost stopped entirely at the sound of her voice. She had a quieter tone than either himself or Yang, with a definite jazzy edge, and a bluesy slow vibrato. Jaune thought they sounded rather great together as she took the high harmony.

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(Ain't got no quarrels with God)
(Ain't got no time to get old)
(Lord knows I'm weak)
(Won't somebody get me off of this reef?)
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A single strum brought everything to a close. The moment the sound fell away, Ruby replaced it with giddy clapping. She rose from her seat but did not stand fully. The grin she wore was so wide, it forced her to squint. The younger girl's mirth didn't last long, however. Realizing she was the only
one who applauded, she quickly sat back down.

"I love that song," Blake said, finally opening her eyes to look upon the performer.

"Why didn't you tell us you could sing?" Yang's voice was a strange halfway mix of jubilant and accusatory.

"Uh... because I'm not very good?" Jaune raised an eyebrow as if that were the most obvious thing in the world. "What, don't tell me you actually liked that?"

Ruby looked aghast at his words, and even Weiss seemed on the edge of confusion. Yang took a more direct action, though. She stood from her chair and leaned forward. To say she full-on punched him in the shoulder would be inaccurate, but it most certainly was not a love tap.

"Ow!" Jaune gripped the assaulted spot. "What was that for?"

"Shut up," commanded Yang simply. "You're great, dude."

Ruby and Blake nodded parity with this statement, one of them much more enthusiastic about it than the other. For his part, Jaune could only look between them with astonishment clear on his face.

"I-but... what?" He stuttered in a pathetic attempt to form words. "How? I mean, I've never even had a lesson."

"Neither have I," said Yang immediately. "But I like to think I'm pretty good."

"You're amazing," Jaune agreed, perhaps a bit more admiration underneath his tone than he intended. No one seemed to notice, though.

"And so are you," Yang easily returned.

"Yeah!" Concurred Ruby.

"I never thought I would say this," Weiss intoned suddenly, "but I have to agree with Yang." She gave her yellow friend a side-long glance.

"See?" Implored the buxom blonde. For a second, the gears visibly turned in her head. "Hey!" She shot Weiss a dirty look, and got a smirk in return.

"Thanks." Jaune muttered, squirming just a little in his chair.

He hadn't the fainest clue what to do, what to say, or what to think. Even Weiss liked his singing. Weiss, the girl who hated literally everything he did, complimented him! It wasn't exactly addressed to him, and also was a tool to get back at Yang, but she still said it. Jaune's heart wavered at the thought, and he had to forcibly stop a shiver from shaking his spine.

She wasn't the only one, either. Ruby and Yang both gave him their undivided attention during his performance, and they were distraught when he doubted himself. The latter went so far as to take direct intervention. Blake even sang with him. That, was perhaps the big shock of the day. Sure, by her own admission she loved the song, but no one—regardless of the tune—sang along to a performance they didn't like.

"I think you just gave me an idea, Jaune," Ruby said, snapping him back to reality. "Remember how we were trying to think of something slower to break up the middle of our set next week? Why not use something by Sublime? I mean, it's not really our thing, but it's close enough."
"I don't think most people at Ebony's will be able to tell the difference," Weiss scoffed.

"Maybe," Yang nodded. "I had a few songs of my own floating around, too."

"Well, it's not like we're doing anything else," Blake said, indicating this would be the perfect time to decide.

As conversation erupted among the girls, Jaune decided to sit on the sidelines. He wasn't afraid of joining them anymore—or, at least, he thought not—but just needed a second to mull things over. RWBY actually liked his singing. He hadn't even actually decided to sing until he started the song. Never in a million years did Jaune expect praise for his voice. He didn't know what to do with it, but certainly had a lot to think about.

As a smile spread across his face, the boy distantly realized he'd never actually sung Jade's favorite song for her. Now seemed like a good time to change that. He needed to learn the lyrics, though. Maybe next week would be better.

Regardless, Jaune spent most of the rest of that day riding a splendid high brought on by the approval of his new friends.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I tried to base Jaune's singing voice off of his voice actor Miles Luna's own voice. Anyone who's seen Camp Camp knows Miles is a pretty good singer. I didn't even need to add the grit or fast vibrato, because Miles already has those things. I took some liberties to make it a bit smoother and more dynamic, but that's about it.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance:

1. "Otherside" - by Red Hot Chili Peppers. Jade's favorite song. You young whippersnappers still listen to RHCP, right?

2. "Badfish" - by Sublime. I don't like Sublime, yet this is one of my all time favorite songs. Funny how that works, huh?

If you enjoyed this chapter, or even if you didn't, please remember to leave kudos and a comment. It means a lot to me. I love hearing from all of you.
They very next day—Wednesday, to be exact—started off like any normal day. Jaune completed his morning routine and headed off to school. The first few periods passed by in a progressively more awake haze, until around halfway through the third he was finally able to pay attention to things. How he avoided falling asleep on any given day was beyond him.

Fourth period study hall rolled around. As always, Jaune was one of the first to arrive. There was no real seating plan, but most students by then had found their usual spots. Jaune was no different. He sat in the third column, three rows back, smack dab in the center of the room. He had people on all sides. It made him feel invisible, like he could do his work without being disturbed. And, with the assignments he’d been given that morning, such an arrangement was just fine by him.

He removed a math book from his overloaded backpack and placed it upon his desk, accidentally knocking an elbow against the metal connecting surface and chair. He hid the pain, and the embarrassment, and cracked open the book.

Someone plopped down into the seat to his right. Jaune paid the person little mind. Probably just the guy who always sat there, a person who’s name he did not know, nor care to discover. Out of sheer human curiosity, Jaune looked in the newcomer's direction. Little more than a flick of the eyes, it was enough to reveal something quite wrong. The person who normally occupied that spot was rather wide in stature, and wore glasses. The one there currently, however, was neither. Jaune sat up in his seat, and gave her his full attention.

"Blake?" He breathed, his entire expression scrunched up in pure astonishment.

"Hey, Jaune," she said simply back, as if it were of no consequence. Silky black hair, matching bow, aloof attitude, it was definitely her, which begged the question of what she was doing there.

"I didn't know you had this class," stated Jaune, voice thin as he was still somewhat stupefied. His eyes widened a second later as mild panic set in. "You should've said something! I would've come sit with you, or—"

"I didn't always," Blake came to his rescue. She sighed. "A spot in a class I wanted to take opened up, but I had to rearrange my schedule to take it, so I ended up with this study hall."

"Oh," Jaune replied, feeling a bit dumb. "Well, it's good you got the class you wanted."

"Hmm," Blake hummed in response as she idly searched through the pack on her desk. Jaune mentally kicked himself for giving such a lame statement.

"Does this mean you have the second lunch period, too?" He swiftly changed the subject in an attempt to save face.

"Yeah, I do," confirmed the girl with a nod. She produced a book with a simple red the cover and set it upon the desk, but offered no further conversation.

At first, Jaune was a little put-off by her anti-social attitude. She’d gone out of her way to sit with him. Surely that meant she wanted to talk, but that didn't seem to be the case. She opened up her book and scanned yellow eyes over the pages. Should Jaune lead the conversation? It seemed rude to
interrupt her, especially when she seemed so engrossed in the tale.

And that was when Jaune kicked himself again. The room was dead quiet as students set about their tasks. Of course Blake didn't want to talk right then. No one did. This was study hall, not a free period. She had things to do, as did everyone else. As did he, for that matter. It was a complete non-issue.

With renewed focus, Jaune once again went about his math work. Even though she didn't say anything, it was nice to have Blake nearby. It made him feel like he wasn't alone in the room, like he had someone to talk to if the need arose. She was a little quiet, but Jaune had come to expect that from her. Indeed, the fact Blake refrained from forcing him into conversation was a good thing. The boy could talk to her if he harbored such inclination, but felt no pressure to do so. It was a comfortable silence, a safe one. The boy quite enjoyed it; the feeling of companionship without the need to socialize.

In that moment Blake was just another normal student, but it was more to it than that. There were plenty of free seats to pick from, yet she chose specifically to sit next to him. There was a camaraderie in that which Jaune hadn't foreseen, but readily accepted.

With a slight smile upon his lips, Jaune began the arduous task of mathematics. The expression loosened somewhat, however, as the reality of the work set in. Math, his most dreaded of subjects. The material was still kind of simple so early on in the year, but that didn't mean he enjoyed it any more. With a sigh, he began solving problems.

The equations flowed from his mind through his pencil at a regular pace. Each one took several seconds to complete with what he assumed was reasonable accuracy. There were about thirty-five to go through. At this pace, he'd be done in about as many minutes give or take, more than enough time to finish it before heading home.

He was maybe about halfway through when he caught something out of the corner of his eye. Blake was not reading her book, but instead looking over at him. It was just a flash of her golden irises, fast enough to make Jaune believe he'd imagined it. But, not even a minute later, it happened again. The girl looked over at him for a split second, then returned to her book, only this time Jaune realized she peered not at his person, but the paper he wrote upon.

Not that he minded. She was probably just curious, wanting to know what he was up to, yet unwilling to interrupt him to find out. A couple peeks was nothing to worry about, especially since this wasn't a test or anything like that. Besides, they were probably more than enough for her to figure it out. So, when she glanced a third time, Jaune felt puzzlement rise in the back of his brain.

"What's up?" He asked, craning his neck to look at her. Blake diverted her gaze back to the book, obviously trying to hide what she'd been doing. She knew the jig was up, though, and gave him another sidelong look.

"It's nothing," she dismissed and returned to her reading yet again.

"Alright, if you're sure." Jaune didn't think the matter important enough to push. So, he returned to his work. It would be short lived, however, as Blake yet again looked at his paper.

"That's wrong," she spoke up suddenly.

"What?" Jaune looked from his paper, to her, and back again. "What is?"

"That one, number thirteen?" She pointed to the equation in question. "You divided wrong. It's X
equals ten, not twelve."

Jaune bent over the paper so his nose hovered about half a foot above, as if getting closer would make his mistake more obvious. He quickly ran through the equation—distantly praising the value of showing his work—and found he had indeed somehow managed to misplace two whole numbers. Negligence was the only explanation.

"It is, you're right," Jaune said. His pencil eraser made quick work of the mistake, and only left smudges behind. "Thanks, Blake!"

"You're welcome," the girl returned after a quick pause. She went back to her book.

"Yeah, math has never really been my strong suit." Jaune mentioned with a scratch on the back of his head.

"No wonder you and Ruby get along so well," Blake said with a slanted smirk.

"Is she bad at math, too?" Jaune was genuinely curious. Their conversations were usually more lighthearted than the dreary subject of stupid numbers.

"She's pretty good when it has to do with music," clarified Blake. "But, otherwise, she's awful."

"Well, I guess you don't need algebra to play an instrument."

"And now you sound like Yang."

Jaune snickered at that, while Blake simply allowed her smirk to widen just a tad. She had a point, too. It was like something Yang would say.

Conversation dried up entirely between them after that. Again, Jaune found he didn't mind. Though the person sitting next to him he considered a friend, the scenario felt rather normal. They were students in a class, first and foremost, and had their own jobs to do. Though, he had to admit a friendly face made the dead silent period much more enjoyable than the slow slog it normally was. He hoped Blake felt the same.

Jaune was content to let the girl read her book while he finished his homework. Blake never offered further input, which meant he either made zero mistakes from that point on, or she just didn't catch them. Whatever the reason, he finished in a few minute's time. The calculator on his Scroll helped move things along at a good clip.

He exchanged the math text for a novel of his own. The cover seemed rather childish in comparison to Blake's, though. It depicted a bare chested Viking astride a golden dragon. It gave an accurate representation of the book's material, so he couldn't complain. With the quiet in the room, Jaune lost himself in a world of Vikings on dragons doing pitch battle against orcs… who also rode dragons. The title of this tome? Ragnar the Dragon Rider. The author wasn't a fan of subtlety.

Though the tale was engaging enough, it did little to streamline the passage of time. When it bell rang, it felt just like a full period had passed. Jaune went about packing up his things, caring not for prudence since it was only one object. He bent over and unzipped his bag just enough to slip the book in before bringing the whole thing up on his desk with a soft thud.

The boy stood and slung the bag over both shoulders. He looked to his right to peer at the door—his destination—and followed through past it to a sight which baffled him. Looking at him with a slightly expectant—or perhaps irritated—expression, Blake held her own pack off one shoulder. He'd expected her to leave and maybe meet up with him at the cafeteria, but no. She was still there.
"You ready to go?" She asked with a raised eyebrow, and brought Jaune back to Remnant in the process. His cheeks colored a shade he hoped the girl didn't notice.

"Yeah, I'm ready."

Together, they departed the classroom, headed in tandem to the cafeteria. They joined a smattering of students also destined for the same place. Blake clutched her book to her chest with arms crossed. She led the way by not even an inch, just a smidgen ahead of Jaune, who was more than happy to follow. Whether she said it or not, going together had been her idea. Blake should be the one to lead.

For himself, Jaune was happy for the short distance to the cafeteria. The entire way, Blake said nothing, just walked with him beside. Without work to distract him, it was a bit awkward. Not that she struck him as the most talkative type, but he wasn't sure what to say in this situation. Thanks for tolerating him would seem desperate, and he hated to waste her time with small talk. So, in the end, the boy kept his trap shut. Probably better that way. Blake didn't seem to mind.

The two of them crossed into the eatery, and Blake came to a sudden stop. Jaune took a step past her, then realized she wasn't with him and quarter-turned to look back. His companion quite clearly searched the crowd, standing momentarily on her tiptoes to get a better view. Seeming to find what she sought, Blake resumed her trek. Just slightly confused, Jaune fell in behind her.

Passing by the myriad round tables which played host to a variable numbers of students, it became quite obvious what Blake was going for. At the second to last table in the far right corner of the room sat a familiar head of crimson-tipped hair, along with a swirly orange style he didn't recognize.

"Look what I dragged in," quipped Blake, setting her bag in a chair to Jaune's right.

"Ruby?" The boy wondered aloud.

"Jaune?" Ruby looked up at him with a confused tilt of her head. "What are you doing here?"

"Um... eating lunch?" Jaune said. An air of uncertainty tinged his voice. "What are you doing?"

"The same." Ruby hefted home-brought her ham sandwich for emphasis. "Have you always had this lunch period?" To answer her question, Jaune just nodded. "Well, why didn't you tell me!" The younger girl rushed to say, dropping her food to wave her arms. "I would've come sit with you, or something!"

"I feel like I just had this conversation," joked Blake, more to herself than anyone else.

"How did I never notice you before?" Jaune asked.


"Is this a friend of yours, Ruby?" The orange-haired girl interjected. She had a sweet, almost whimsical way of speaking which nearly made Jaune laugh.

"Oh, how rude of me." Ruby sat up straight and folded her hands in what was probably a Weiss impression. "Penny, this is Jaune. Jaune, this is Penny." She gestured to each of them in turn.

"Hey," Jaune waved. "Nice to meet you."

"Oh!" began Penny simply. "So this is that funny boy you've been telling me about." That was addressed at Ruby, who waved her hands and made a few quick, distressed sounds.
"A-anyway." Ruby tried—and adorably failed—to ignore that comment. Jaune, for his part, just smiled awkwardly and scratched the back of his head. The smile thinned just slightly when the new girl transfixed him in an intense stare.

"Your eyes are very blue," she concluded after a few seconds.

"Um, thanks?" Jaune accepted with a nervous laugh. That was a compliment, right? He decided to take it as one.

"Well," Blake cut in, "While you two get acquainted, I'm gonna get something to eat." And with that, she strode off toward the lunch lines.

"That's a good idea," agreed Jaune, noting the empty void in his stomach. "Be right back, guys."

"Okay!" Chimed Ruby, giving him a quick wave as he departed further into the room.

There were a few different lines for food. The one Blake joined led to a sub sandwich station. Another led to the a la carte section, an optional and usually better menu item students could pay extra for. Jaune, however, just took the standard line, which today offered a choice between popcorn chicken and a chef salad. He had no particular love for either, it was just the shortest line. He didn't feel like waiting for the other, lengthier options.

Thanks to his expedient decision, Jaune returned to the table long before Blake would. He found Ruby and Penny chatting amongst themselves. The former hadn't touched her sandwich save for a few bites, whereas the latter didn't eat anything at all. Maybe she just wasn't hungry? A concern for another time, at the very least. Jaune sat next to Ruby, placing his plastic tub in front of him and backpack on the floor to his right.

"Have you really had this period the whole time Jaune?" Ruby asked the moment he sat down. The boy didn't even have time to open his meal.

"I really have," he answered, folding back the top of his plastic container. "I usually sit on the other side of the room, though, so I guess I just didn't see you. Sorry."

"It's alright, Jaune," Penny answered for her friend. "Ruby is easy to miss in a crowd. She's rather short."

It wasn't the comment, but the way Ruby puffed her cheeks in indignation, which made Jaune laugh. He put down the french fry he was about to eat and let mirth wash over him, shoulders bouncing in time with constricted breaths.

"It's not funny, Jaune!" Protested the younger girl.

"It's kinda funny," Jaune argued, but stopped laughing a second later, if only to avoid making her feel any worse.

The speaking lapsed, and Jaune took advantage of the opportunity to dig into his lunch. Something told him Blake's return would spark anew the conversation, so he wanted to eat as much as possible before that happened. Ruby must've had the same thought, for she too began to munch.

Penny just looked around the room, occasionally smiling at either of them but mostly people watching. Jaune almost felt bad for ignoring her, but if the glint in her eye were any indication, she was rather content to observe. A difficult girl to read, but certainly cute in her own way.

Blake returned after a few minutes, toting a sandwich in a curled up paper plate along with a bag of...
plain potato chips and little carton of milk. She sat down in the seat next to Jaune, instead of the one hosting her bag, and the blond noticed a pair of things. One, he'd forgotten milk. Two, Blake's sub was tuna fish, loaded up with lettuce, cheese, and pickles. The second was worth of note because he hadn't been aware the school even served tuna. Although, he'd only ever used the regular menu line in his three years of attendance.

The last person to arrive took a bite of her food and then slid the bag of chips across the table to Ruby, who caught it almost without looking, herself finishing off a mouthful. Penny continued to watch people, but did flash a quick smile to Blake.

"They never have tortilla chips, do they?" Ruby commented after swallowing. The youngest among them opened the food parcel she'd received. Blake shook her head in response to avoid talking with her mouth full. She swallowed quickly.

"It's a travesty, isn't it," Was her sarcastic quip, exactly what anyone would expect from her.

"If you're unhappy with the menu selection," Penny offered, "you could talk to the Headmaster. I'm sure he'd take it into consideration."

"It's not that big a deal, Penny," Blake said. "I'm pretty sure I'll live."

"I hope so," intoned the redhead. Jaune couldn't tell if that was supposed to be a joke or not. It sounded so sincere. Of course, he didn't want Blake to die, but a lack of tortilla chips hardly seemed a mortal offense. Besides, regular crisps were a much better pair for tuna.

The three of them continued to eat after that little exchange. Three, because Penny still didn't have anything of her own. She probably just wasn't hungry, which Jaune certainly understood. He didn't always feel like eating, either.

Chatter occasionally flitted between them, though it was mostly Penny and Ruby. Jaune and Blake gave their own input every once in a while, the former with markedly more enthusiasm. Neither minded a more silent role. The talkative group was hilarious together, with Penny making all kinds of weird comments while Ruby attempted translation or damage control.

All in all, it was one of the best meals Jaune had ever had, and not just for present company. The food itself seemed to taste better. The boy had been eating alone for so long, he'd forgotten how it felt to share a meal with people outside of family. Even Penny, whom he didn't even know, seemed like prime friend material; quirky, fun, and at least outwardly accepting. When the bell rang, he didn't want to leave.

The last half of his day passed by as normally as the first, but Jaune weathered it in much higher spirits. He actually paid attention in class. Well, sort of, anyway. The pleasant surprise of hanging out with both Blake and Ruby, as well as Penny, was enough to put him over the moon. It was nice, to talk to people outside of the club. Jaune felt alive, as if he nothing could ruin this day. What made it even better was the events of it were based on a schedule. It all was likely to happen again the next day. That knowledge made his classes go by in a flash.

Even club activities flew by. Having finally hammered out the details of their setlist, RWBY decided this would be a good day to test it. Just like during their last practice, Jaune acted as the audience. He watched dutifully, jotting down mental notes on the off chance they asked for his input. Not that he expected them to, of course. Jaune was still an outsider, and on nowhere near the same level. His opinions probably didn't count for much.

The band didn't play their entire set in one go. They completed the first trio—the project Blake had
been working on—then took some time to talk about what went right, and what didn't. Though, concordance on that particular portion was that they fucking nailed it, a conclusion Jaune agreed heartily with. He couldn't wait to hear them perform it on stage in just a little over a week's time.

The rest of practice followed the same basic formula. The band would play a few songs, then talk about them. Some were good, some were not. The bad parts stood out, even to a lesser trained ear like Jaune's. A few songs even were repeated, just to make sure they had them down.

For RWBY, a lot of this was simple review. There weren't many brand new songs. Most of them they already knew. It was just a matter of putting the pieces back together. A majority reformed smoothly, even though some hadn't been played ensemble for months. To Jaune, this demonstration just widened the gap between himself and the band. But it did not discourage him. If anything, he was inspired. It was a goal to work toward, to one day be as good as Yang or Weiss. To that end, his mental notes would come in even handier than previously assumed.

With all the talk breaks they took, the band couldn't quite make it all the way through before it was time to pack up. The process began a few minutes early, lest they be caught in school after hours. While not exactly against the rules, no one wanted to be there if they didn't have to. This part Jaune was able to help with. He turned things off, put away Blake's guitar for her, and helped Yang move the microphone stands back into the closet. He felt a bit like a roadie, but enjoyed contributing to the band's success, even if in only a small way.

Everything put away, it was time to call it quits until the next meeting. As always, Weiss was the first to leave. She walked at a brisk pace out the door, likely eager to get home as they all were. Jaune watched her go with a mix of longing and regret on his mind. Things were still awkward between them, and there hadn't really been a chance to rectify that. Weiss hung a left out the door and disappeared. A grimace crossed Jaune's lips. If club meetings wouldn't allow him time, then he'd just make his own. He stood up and jogged after her.

"Weiss, wait up!" He called after the alabaster girl. To her credit, she didn't offer any sort of snide comment or refuse to humor him. The girl simply turned and peered up at him with an expectant look in her ice blue orbs. Jaune came to a stop a few feet away.

"Yes, Jaune?" The girl prompted him to continue with as much politeness as he deserved.

"I, uh..." Jaune took a mental breath. No backing out now. "I wanted to apologize for what happened Monday?"

Weiss considered him for a moment. "Monday?" She puzzled aloud.

"Yeah," confirmed Jaune. "I... I know you caught me staring at you, and I'm really sorry. I know I shouldn't have."

As expected, Weiss transfixed him with a narrowed gaze. It took all of his willpower to remain standing there. He felt much smaller than her, which was quite something, considering her short stature. Everything within him wanted to turn and run under the cold fire she shot his way. It only lasted a moment, though. Weiss quickly resumed a more neutral expression.

"Do you know how many lecherous stares I get from stupid men on a daily basis?" She said after a moment, a hand on her hip. "Adding one more to the pile won't make it any worse."

"That doesn't make it any better, either," Jaune immediately countered. "I know you've been uncomfortable around me, but the club room shouldn't be a place where you have to feel on edge. I shouldn't have betrayed your trust like that, and I'm sorry. It won't happen again, I promise."
Weiss was silent while he spoke, waiting patiently for him to finish. When he finally stopped talking, she let out a sigh and rubbed a finger along her brow.

"Whatever, Jaune." She met his eyes once again. "Okay, yes, I was annoyed at the time, but it's over and done with, now. Just forget about it."

"Does that mean you forgive me?" Jaune's heart soared at the implication. Should he dare to dream?

Weiss blinked twice at him. "No."

And with that single flat statement, she turned and walked away.

Jaune allowed himself to slump against the wall. His shoulder knocked with force against the plaster, but he ignored the pain. A silent groan escaped his mouth. He apologized. He was honest and sincere, and even made a promise. What went wrong? What did he miss?

With a dejected sigh, Jaune popped off his perch and went back to the room to gather his things. If the others overheard, they said nothing as he reentered the space. It may have been better to let it blow over first, but he would have to somehow make it up to Weiss.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I thought for a very long time about who to introduce in this chapter. It's important to have an outsider perspective on everything other than just Jaune's, else he would feel alone in the world. However, I also thought it would be important to give him another guy friend, so Jaune had a decidedly un-female look at things. Most of the male characters of RWBY—Sun, Ren, and even Neptune—bring with them a lot of baggage. Where the story isn't about them, I was afraid they would distract from the story as a whole.

So, after much deliberation, I decided on Penny. She's not in the band or the club, and so ticks the outsider box, and is also just oblivious enough (and I mean that in a loving way) to give Jaune a viewpoint which doesn't come from within RWBY itself. I think I made the right choice. Also, Penny is an absolute blast to write. I love her so, so much.

If you enjoyed this chapter, and even if you didn't, please remember to give kudos and leave a comment. It means a lot to me.
The next couple days passed with little in the way of incident. Jaune went to classes, spent mostly quiet study halls with Blake, and ate lunch with her, Ruby, and Penny. Afterward, he reported to the club room. Thursday was another practice, but the band decided to take Friday off and just hang out for an hour, which Jaune greatly favored to just being a passive observer. They were simple days, but ones he'd never trade away for all the world.

When the weekend rolled around, Jaune felt strangely hollow. Without either the casual fun and companionship of the school days, or the promise of it, he felt empty. That was the only real way to explain it, as if something were missing. Sitting at home on a Saturday afternoon with nothing but a guitar and a few video games, Jaune was simply bored.

Instead of waste away at home, Jaune decided it would be better to get out of the house for a bit. That was how he found himself within the aptly named Vale City Shopping Mall. Not the most creative of titles, but it described the establishment to a T. It was a sprawling, multi-level complex, full of stores and kiosks hawking goods to passersby. While most of the action took place under lofty ceilings, there was an open-air courtyard in the direct center.

It was through this atmospheric cutaway which Jaune strode. In the winter it may as well have been abandoned, but on late summer days like this many other people had the same idea as he. Most traveled to and fro, on about whatever tasks they assigned themselves. Some sat on benches or the occasional planter box to converse with friends or family. Stores catering to every niche surrounded the space. Spiral staircases in the corners allowed access to upper levels. Shops on every floor bustled with activity. The mall was truly the commercial heart of Vale.

Jaune had somewhat underestimated just how busy the place would be on a weekend. It made sense now that he saw it. There were people everywhere. It almost looked like a city sidewalk, though not quite as crowded. He had no difficulty walking, but it still surprised him just how many people there were.

And for all of them, they offered nothing at all in stimulation. There were some pretty girls, but other than that none drew his attention. They gave him about the same consideration. Though certainly not alone anymore, he was no less bored. There were even fewer things to do here than at home, which he hadn't anticipated. Maybe it would've been better to just leave.

He walked on about a minute more, ever-present endlessness in the back of his head. Just as he was about to head back to the parking lot, something finally caught his attention.

"Jaaaaune!" From somewhere behind him, a very familiar—and very loud—voice called his name. The boy turned to it with a smile on his lips, betraying not the confusion on his mind.

"Ruby?" He felt an odd sense of déjà vu as the girl's name lingered in the air.

Jogging the short distance to him was none other than Ruby Rose. She wore a red hoodie, black jeans with rips in the thighs and shins, and white skate shoes on her feet. Round-cupped crimson headphones hung at her neck like an oversized piece of jewelry. She stopped a few feet away, just outside of arm's reach.
"I didn't expect to see you here!" She stated without even the briefest of seconds to catch her breath.

"Yeah, same here," returned Jaune. "What's up?"

"Just looking around," Ruby chimed. "You?"

"Same," said the blond with a nod. "Are you here alone?"

"No. Well, sorta," corrected the girl quickly. "Yang and Weiss were here, but they wanted to go to some boring shoe store, so I decided to go to the Nook until they were done."

"The Nook?" Jaune questioned with a raised eyebrow, until it hit him. "Oh, you mean the Bard's Nook."

Ruby hummed affirmation. "It's my favorite store!"

"Well," Jaune began, "I'm not doing much of anything. Mind if I tag along?"

"Of course not," Ruby shook her head. "Come on, let's go!" She began to walk past him, and Jaune fell in on her right side.

"So, how's your weekend going?" Jaune asked after they'd been underway for a bit.

"Good so far, I guess. I mean, it just started," answered Ruby. There was no malice in her words, though they did reveal to Jaune just how dumb his question had been.

"That's good, I guess." He gave a nervous laugh. "What brings you to the mall?"

"I don't know. Yang was bored, and I was bored, and Weiss said she wouldn't mind hanging out today, so we met up here."

"And now there's four of us, so it's even better!" Ruby exclaimed. "Or, there will be, I guess, once Weiss and Yang are done shopping for boring shoes."

"You don't like shoes?" Jaune pondered out of sheer curiosity.

"They're fine, but the store is boring," contested the younger girl. "It's just shoes. There's nothing to do and it smells like rubber and feet."

Jaune gave a genuine chuckle at that. When put that way, he understood the girls' disdain. He probably wouldn't have gone in, either.

They chatted idly about this and that while in transit to their destination. Ruby mostly directed the conversation, a role Jaune was more than willing to let her fill. With such a talkative person, it was easier to respond rather than instigate. Not that he minded, of course. He could listen to Ruby talk all day. She was pleasant to be around and he rather enjoyed her company. By the way she enthused her own words and intently listened to his, Jaune was sure Ruby felt the same. Though he was unfamiliar with the notion, it was nice to be wanted, for someone to enjoy having him around.

Their conversation was short lived. The destination lay only at the other end of the courtyard. Ruby strode through the doors of Bard's Nook with an ear-to-ear grin which put her sister to shame. It was a local store, but looked much like a more high-value chain. The inside walls were decorated with fake redwood paneling, polished to an immaculate sheen. The floor followed the same pattern.
There were instruments everywhere. The left side was dedicated to modern band implements. Guitars lined the walls and perched on multi-pronged holders atop tables. There were drums and keyboards scattered around as well. The latter pieces seemed a bit disorganized, but Jaune was sure they had a reason for being that way. The right wing contained all of the accessories. Picks, straps, bags, pedals, strings, drumsticks, everything someone would need to maintain a band. More traditional instruments like trumpets were in a completely separate room, the closed door to which was just to the left of the checkout counter.

There were a few other people in the store, but not many. Specialty establishments like this generally brought in a lesser crowd. Most perused the myriad guitars located wherever the eye could see. One even sampled the product. The emo looking kid strummed on a black and white guitar. It was a heavy song Jaune hadn't heard, and never cared to again. Thankfully, the guy had the presence of mind to keep his volume at a respectable level. Past experience taught Jaune some people preserved no such consideration.

The blond was about to say something when Ruby skittered off to the left. Jaune closed his mouth with an audible click and chased after her. He should've known she'd come to a stop in front of a drum set. It was a standard kit. The shells started off an electric blue which faded to glossy black at the edges. The skins were clear.

"Isn't it pretty, Jaune?" Ruby said without looking away. Part of him wanted to ask how the girl knew he was there, but he thought better of it.

"It's nice," he agreed. "Are you in the market for a new set?"

"Not really." Ruby shook her head. "I just like looking, ya know?"

Jaune nodded. He most certainly did know. He'd never understood the appeal of window shopping until he started playing guitar. There was a distinct thrill in looking at all the pretty paint jobs and wondering what it would be like to play on stage one day.

"Do you see anything you like?" Ruby asked after a moment. Jaune looked around, and located the object of his desire almost immediately. He gestured for Ruby to follow, and the both went to a particular spot on the wall.

Hanging before him was the shiniest, fanciest guitar Jaune had ever seen. Artificial light glinted off its golden pickguard, and simultaneously became lost in the cavernous depths of its white, semi-hollow body. The tuners, bridge, pickups, and whammy bar were all gold. It was majestic, beautiful, and impossible.

"I've always wanted one of these," Jaune gestured toward it. "It's a Gretsch White Falcon."

"It's so shiny!" Ruby said. "You should play it, Jaune!"

"No, Ruby, I don't think I want to," Denied the boy instantly as his stomach performed gymnastics. "Just try it out," the girl insisted. "Just to see if you like it."

"No, really, I'm fine."

"Come on!"

"You come on. I don't wanna be that guy," Jaune said. "Besides, I don't wanna end up paying for it if something happens."
"Why? Is it expensive?"

"Uh, yeah." Jaune grabbed the price tag and turned it to her. Ruby stood on her tip-toes to get a better look. Her expression fell the moment she beheld the steep demand. Almost four-thousand Lien.

"Oh," she muttered. "Well, I'm sure you'll have one someday." Ever the optimist, Ruby put a positive spin on the situation.

Jane appreciated the gesture, but knew such gratuitous fantasizing on his part would only make him sad. In an attempt to distract himself, and also bring the moment to a lighter place, he led Ruby over to something he knew she would like, a wall display of shiny new cymbals. The way her silver eyes lit up told him it was the right choice.

"I don't mean to sound rude or anything," Jaune said after a moment of inspection, "but they all kinda look the same."

"They do, don't they?" Agreed Ruby, which he didn't expect. "It's pretty easy once you know what you're looking for, though." She took a step closer to the wall and pointed at one of them. "This one's a crash. It's the loud one I use at the end of my fills." She pointed then at one just slightly behind her. "This slightly bigger one is a ride. You'll hear it on a lot of choruses. It accents the drums with a constant sizzle-y rhythm. Oh! And over here," she jogged toward the wall, to a set of clearly smaller cymbals, "these are called splash cymbals. You hear find them a lot in jazz and metal. They have a really short, shimmering sound. I don't really use them, though."

Jaune just stood there with what must've been a dumb look on his face, but thankfully Ruby didn't call him out. Those little bits of information had been more knowledge about cymbals, and drums in general, than he'd ever received. He had nothing against drumming, but just preferred to focus studies on his own instrument. As such, his brain had a hard time processing the sudden influx. He gave his head a brief shake to knock out some of the cotton. It didn't help.

"Wow," he breathed stupidly. "You really know your stuff."

"Yeah, well," Ruby gazed at her sneaker as she ground something into the floorboards, "I know a little, I guess. I'm kinda a nerd when it comes to this stuff."

"That's cool," Jaune continued. "I mean, it makes sense to know what you're talking about. I'm kinda a nerd about guitars, too."

Ruby brightened instantly at his words. She lifted her head and looked up at him with the honesty and sunlight he'd become so used to seeing in those big silver saucers.

"I know. You're right. Yang says the same thing," observed the younger girl.

"Well, I guess even your sister has her moments." Jaune's little joke earned a snicker from Ruby. It was all in jest, of course. He would never even dream of saying anything genuinely bad about someone kind and warm as Yang. It would be an unfair, blatant lie.

"Ooh, look at this guitar!" Ruby's short attention span took over, and she strode over to one of the tables. "You don't see many green ones."

"No, I guess not," Jaune agreed, joining her. "It matches Penny's eyes, don't you think?"

"It does!" Squeaked Ruby in delight. "Hold on, I have to send her a picture." She dug out her Scroll to do just that. Jaune waited patiently with a smile.
The two of them—Ruby and Jaune—perused for a little while longer. Jaune wasn't necessarily interested in all of the things Ruby decided to look at, but since she was the one who wanted to come here in the first place, he followed her lead. The boy never left her side as she flitted between displays, gawking at any piece which caught her eye.

It wasn't just drums, either. The selection was admittedly small, and wouldn't have held most people's attention long. Hyperactive Ruby fared even worse. She switched from percussion, to keys, to guitars, and back again at random intervals. She seemed to know less about the string instruments than anything else, but admired the colors and shapes. Jaune recognized a lot of them, though his own knowledge mostly stopped at names only. Ruby occasionally commented that one of her bandmates would appreciate some particular specimens.

Jaune chased his own interests as well, whenever Ruby's enthusiasm seemed to wane. That's how they ended up on the opposite side of Bard's Nook, looking through the guitar picks. The blond played with a thick triangle constructed of gray felt. It seemed strange to him. Surely something so stiff and abrasive would make a terrible plectrum. But, he'd heard some people swore by them. To each their own.

The boy heaved a dismissive huff. He gave a few flicks of the pick's point and tossed it back in the plastic box with the others. He glanced over at Ruby to his right just in time to see her mimic his own actions, but with a yawn.

"Bored?" He teased, silently afraid he was no longer interesting.

"No, just tired," corrected the younger girl. "Zwei wanted to go out at, like, six in the morning, and I couldn't fall asleep after that." She explained. Jaune knew not who this Zwei character was, but it sounded like a dog. He breathed a mental sigh of relief at not being the problem, but it was replaced instantly with concern.

"If you're tired, I can take you home." The blond made what he thought was a reasonable offer, but by the way Ruby stepped back and waved her hands, he miscalculated.

"Oh, no! You don't have to do that. I wouldn't want to impose."

"You're not imposing," he reassured gently. "It's not a problem. If you're tired you should get some rest, especially on a Saturday."

"Well, I do kinda wanna go home. You really don't mind?"

"I really don't." Jaune smiled and shook his head.

"Okay! Thanks, Jaune!" Ruby returned his expression.

"Don't mention it," the blond dismissed with a wave. "Come on." He began out the door with Ruby to his left. "I actually managed to get a space pretty close to the front entrance, so we won't have to walk too far."

"How'd you manage that?" Ruby asked with slight wonder. "Yang and Weiss had to park in a parking garage down the block."

"I don't know, but I'm not about to question it, either," said Jaune with a shrug. Ruby had a chuckle at that as they exited the store.

Well, that certainly wasn't how Jaune expected his weekend to go. He'd expected to wallow away in a sea of boring, endless and unbound on the ho-hum waves. There would perhaps be text messages,
and in his wildest dreams a call from out of the blue, but nothing more. And to think he'd actually
been looking forward to a Monday. The teenager in him screamed blasphemy at the notion.

He hadn't even expected his little trip to the mall to lead anywhere. Sure, it would've been nice, but
the realistic part of his brain knew he'd probably just end up bored somewhere else instead of bored
at home. But, trust Ruby Rose to break him out of that.

Vale truly was a small kingdom, a place where literally anything could happen. His incredible week
turned into a great weekend as he walked side-by-side with a good friend. The smile Ruby gave him
said she felt at least similarly. Jaune couldn't help but praise his good fortune. He didn't have to be
alone on the weekend after all.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I really wanted this and the next part to be all one chapter, but
they would've been much too long as a single piece. So, I instead expanded upon this
scene as a whole, and gave a little more interaction between Jaune and Ruby.
Unfortunately, this means I'll have to delay the band's next performance by another
chapter, but hopefully the story as a whole will have better pacing in the end. Chapter
10 may end up a little on the short side. I don't know yet, but I'll try not to.

Expect the strangely absent female lead also known as Yang to make an appearance in
the next chapter. Again, she was supposed to be in this one. It feels weird to leave my
most likely deuteragonist out of two chapters right back-to-back.

If you liked this little chapter, or even if you didn't, remember leave kudos and a
comment. It means a lot to hear from all of my readers.
Jaune Arc and Ruby Rose strode side-by-side through the open air courtyard of the Vale City Shopping Mall. They'd just departed from a local music store known as Bard's Nook, where the latter hosted a master class on cymbals. But now it was time for her to go home, a task Jaune happily volunteered himself for.

Though they walked in tandem, they did not interact. Not for the moment, anyway. Ruby was absorbed in her Scroll, typing out a message with swift fingers. Shortly after leaving the Nook, she decided it was a good idea to text her sister to inform the older girl of the situation. Jaune couldn't argue, and thus allowed her the privacy with which to do so.

Almost out of the courtyard, though, they'd swapped several messages already. In Jaune's mind, it should've been a short exchange; one text to say what had happened, and a response to either approve or deny the event. But, as he now was privy to, nothing was ever so simple between the sisters. Chatterboxes the both of them, there was no such thing as just a few text messages.

Several feet more, and the entrance into the rest of the mall was close. The two teenagers rounded the corner to their right and headed for the trio of Plexiglas double doors. Just before they went through, Ruby finally stowed her Scroll with a smile on her lips. They pushed through adjacent doors and continued on their way.

Jaune was met immediately with a blast of air conditioning, a rather jarring sensation compared to the heat outside. The mall interior was brightly lit by myriad artificial lights in the high ceiling. The floors were mostly broad white tiles, with red squares to break up the monotony every so often.

There were stores everywhere. Everything from clothing departments, to sporting goods, to hobby shops, and even a curious little stop selling reproductions of antique weapons. Jaune quite liked that one, even if he couldn't afford anything inside. There was something for everyone inside the sprawling economic heart of Vale. Tiny crowds of people flitted around the stores, traversed the causeways, or sat on benches in between. It catered to all kinds, and took all kinds to run.

The only kind Jaune cared about right then, however, was the one who traveled with him. Her smile from just a minute ago faded into something more neutral. Eyes forward and shoulders relaxed, she looked utterly content as they pressed on in silence. That wasn't good enough for him, though. Curiosity got the better of him.

"So, what did you tell Yang?" He asked. Ruby glanced at him for a moment before returning her gaze forward.

"Just that I'd found you and we'd gone to the Nook, but now I'm tired and you're taking me home."

"And she's okay with that?" This was the crux of Jaune's concern. The last thing he wanted was to incur the wrath of Yang.

Ruby gave an affirmative hum. "She said it was really nice of you. Oh! And she says 'hi.'"

"Ok," Jaune said, relaxing. "Tell her I said 'hi' back."

Now, he hadn't meant that literally, but it went completely over Ruby's head as she pulled out her Scroll to do exactly as he'd instructed. Jaune heaved a mental sigh and smiled down at her. She wasn't even trying to be adorable and yet…
After relaying the platitude to her sister, Ruby again stowed her device. The friends walked on for a few moments more in silence. Jaune allowed himself to unwind fully, armed with the knowledge he wouldn't have to hide from an angry older sister anytime soon. Or, perhaps he should say, a Yangry sister. …He'd been hanging around her too much.

They were close to the exit when Ruby's device once again went off. At this point, Jaune was glad she'd set it to vibrate. The younger girl checked on the disturbance. He assumed it was another text from her sister, probably checking up on the two of them. Certainty twisted to doubt as Ruby stopped in her tracks and burst out laughing.

Jaune whipped around to find his companion hunched over with shoulder shaking uncontrollably in time with uneven chuckles. One arm clutched her midsection. The other hung by the wayside, fingers in a tight grip upon the Scroll. She made no attempt to cover her mouth politely, and instead allowed merriment to flood the walls. Jaune regarded her with a raised eyebrow.

"What's so funny?" He couldn't help but smile and share in her contagious happiness. "Did Yang make a good pun for once?"

"No. It's… It's-" No matter how hard she tried, Ruby just couldn't string together a sentence atop her mirth.

In lieu of speaking, she raised her scroll to Jaune. He read the message. To his surprise, it came from Weiss, rather than Yang.

"Does Jaune need anything from the shoe store?"

The question was simple. The boy guessed he could see the humor in it, but enough to elicit such a reaction from Ruby? She could exaggerate at the best of times, but this was extreme even for her.

"I… I think I'm missing something."

His confusion seemed to spur a desire for self-control in the younger brunette. She took deep breaths between loud spasms. With each repetition her laughter subsided. It was a gradual process over several seconds, but she finally took the reins back. Her voice was still a little strained when she spoke, though.

"Don't… don't worry about it," Ruby said, a snicker sneaking out. She began walking again, and Jaune fell in beside her. "It's an inside joke, and a bit of a long story."

The two passed into the breezeway—a place for people to wipe their feet—separating the interior doors from the actual exit.

"Well, it's not like I don't have time," Jaune said, voice echoing off the enclosed space. Ruby gave him a broad smile as they left the building fully.

They both were buffeted by the warmer outside air. The parking lot was full of cars. All makes, models, and colors either sat idle in spaces or milled about to look for one. Not that there were any to be found, though. This would likely be one of the last nice days of the year, and people were determined to enjoy it. Really, it had been a work of God that Jaune managed to find a space so close. Ruby walked beside him as he took them to where his car lay.

"Okay!" began the girl with a sparkle in her eyes, already talking fast. "So, this one time—back when we were still practicing in Blake's basement—she said her gym sneakers were falling apart and she needed to buy a new pair after practice. She jokingly asked if anyone needed anything while she was there. Yang smiled and said she could use a new pair, and we all just laughed.
"Well, when we went to practice tomorrow—it was a Saturday—Blake presented Yang with a 
shoebox. Yang was all like 'OMG, Blake, I was kidding, you didn't have to' and Blake was all 'I 
know, but I wanted to get you something' and we all thought that was, like, sooo sweet!" Ruby 
made no attempt to hide her mirth, cooing at the memory of a nice gesture. Jaune couldn't help but 
laugh at her Blake impression, though she did a pretty good Yang.

"So, anyway," continued Ruby, "Yang thanked her, like, a million times, but Weiss was getting 
impatient and told her to 'just open it!'" She also did a pretty good Weiss. "Yang opened the box with 
the biggest smile on her face. It went away for just a second and then she just started laughing. Weiss 
and I asked what was wrong, and Blake had that smug look of hers on. Yang was still laughing 
when she took them out to show us. It was a pair of baby shoes!"

Ruby couldn't hold back any longer. A fit of giggles overtook her body as she traveled with Jaune, 
eyes squinted so narrow he wondered if she could even see. He joined in her joy, though with 
markedly reduced gusto. It was a decent prank, and something Blake would definitely do. He wished 
he'd been there to see it.

"They lit up on the side and everything!" Ruby added after a moment between snickers. "Blake put 
them in the box from the shoes she'd bought for herself so Yang wouldn't know until she opened it."

"No way," Jaune laughed. "What did everyone else do?"

"You should've seen it, Jaune! We all pretty much fell over laughing, and I actually did! Even Weiss 
thought it was funny. I don't think I've ever seen her laugh so hard!" Ruby continued to recount the 
events though strained breaths. Jaune grinned at the thought. He'd never seen Weiss laugh at all, so it 
was an adorably hilarious sight to consider.

"So, what happened to the shoes?" Jaune prompted his friend to continue the story.

"Oh! Yang said Blake could return them and get her money back, but Blake didn't want to. She said 
something about keeping them as a memento. Yang still has them in her closet somewhere."

"That's great," Jaune said. "It sounds like you guys have a lot of fun together."

"We do," agreed Ruby. "And now that you're our friend you can have fun with us, too!"

Jaune just smiled. "That sounds nice."

As he had every day since the start of school, Jaune thanked his lucky stars to end up so warmly 
welcomed and integrated with such a close-knit group as RWBY. It had only been a few weeks, but 
he already considered them all friends, and he knew at least three of them thought the same of him. 
Jaune had no idea what he'd done to deserve such amazing companions, but he knew enough to 
refrain from asking questions.

The ride home was comparatively quiet, especially considering how loud Ruby had been while 
telling her story. She gave him her address to input into his Scroll GPS, but other than that few words 
passed between them. Ruby sat back in the passenger seat of Jaune's white four-door and gazed out 
the window, a contented look on her face.

It was not an awkward silence. Far from it. Jaune turned on the radio and allowed the gruff crooning 
of old grunge to permeate the vehicle. It probably wasn't Ruby's favorite, but she didn't complain. 
Both simply enjoyed the ride, the time spent with one another. Jaune didn't have to force 
conversation to fill the air, nor did he expect Ruby to. It was an easy comradery, one which felt 
entirely natural. It was similar to the relationship he shared with Blake, though Ruby exuded
naturally more energy even when she wasn't doing anything.

It came as a surprise to find out Ruby didn't live within Vale itself, but rather about ten minutes outside the city limits. The territory around here was much more rural, given over to country roads and the occasional farm. There were trailer parks and a few little hamlets, but it was mostly scattered housing. Ruby's home was one of this latter group.

As he pulled into the pale dirt driveway, Jaune's eyes widened. The boy didn't know what he'd been expecting, but it most certainly wasn't a log cabin. The home was a large two story latticework of thick brown cylinders, broken up only by doors and windows. A sloping roof ensured snow in winter months slid right off.

Jaune shifted the car into park and stared at the structure before him. He'd never seen one with his own two eyes before. There was little time to gawk, however. A click from his right alerted him once again to the other person in the car. Ruby let her seatbelt retract. She glanced over at Jaune but her eyes darted away to instead stare at the floor mat. She played idly with the hem of her hoodie.

"Thanks for driving me home, Jaune," she said without looking at him. Jaune could only grin at her. Even after they were already there, Ruby was still worried about being a burden.

"Don't mention it," Jaune shook his head, "I'm glad to."

"Do you wanna come in?" She gave him a sheepish look.

"WHAT!?" Jaune shouted, a bit louder than he'd intended. He must've misheard her. Such boldness could be expected from Yang, or maybe even Weiss, but for such a thing to come from Ruby… No, she was too young to know about that kind of thing.

"Yeah, we could, like, hang out, and talk, and play video games, and stuff." Ruby's confidence seemed to rise by the word, if the growing glint in her eye were any indication. Jaune, meanwhile, relaxed considerably. His shoulders slumped back to a normal posture, and his lips gained a slight curve.

"Oh," he breathed. "That's what you meant."

"Yeah. What did you think I meant?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all." Jaune was not about to entertain that with an answer. "Yes, I'd love to hang out, Ruby."

The younger girl let out a delighted squeal. "This is gonna be great! Come on!"

Jaune turned off his car and they both exited the vehicle at roundabout the same time. Ruby led the way to the dark red front door. The sedan was parked rather close, so they didn't have far to go. Once there, Ruby fished a key from her left pocket and inserted it into the brass knob. A single turn which took both the lock and latch with it, and they were inside.

The house opened immediately up to a wide open living room. Directly before them was a long green couch. To its right lay an end table with an orange-shaded lamp atop. It sat at an angle which curved into a matching chair perpendicular to the couch. At the other side of a broad green rug was a slender entertainment center which supported a big screen television. An open door behind the T.V. led to the kitchen, and a staircase to the east kinked left, providing access to the second floor.

While Jaune was still marveling at the home which was far nicer than he expected, Ruby placed her shoes right of the door and strode into the space.
"Do you want a drink or something?" She turned around to look at him, leaning back on the couch. "We have plenty of milk."

"No, thank you. I'm good." denied Jaune with a shake of his head.

"Okay. Come on, I'll show you my room. It's right up the stairs."

Ruby began on her way toward the steps, bothering not to check if Jaune followed. She needn't have, though. Jaune didn't enjoy the idea of staying all alone in a strange living room. The awkwardness alone would be enough to strangle him. So, he accompanied Ruby on her trip to the second floor.

The stairs led to a rather bland hallway. There were five doors, one down at the very end and the rest split evenly on either side. It was shrouded in pale blue shadow. A single curved fixture in the middle of the ceiling would've helped alleviate the problem, had Ruby bothered to flip it on. There were no pieces of furniture nor paintings on the walls, just the doors for scenery.

"This is Yang's room," Ruby said as the two teenagers passed the first door on their right. "And over here is the bathroom." She pointed to the door across from Yang's. "Mine is right next door to hers, and at the end is our dad's room."

"What about the last one?" Jaune asked, noticing one had been left out.

"That's the guest room. My Uncle Qrow usually stays in there whenever he comes to visit, but no one else really uses it."

"Oh, okay."

"You can use it if you ever sleep over." Once again, Ruby surprised him with a potentially indecent statement, though she meant it in the most innocent of ways.

"Alright, thanks. I'll keep that in mind, I guess." Jaune resisted the urge to scratch the back of his head. Ruby didn't need to know how awkward this topic was, not when she were so obviously happy.

Ruby opened the door to her room and headed inside, Jaune just a step behind. It was a rather normal domicile. Directly ahead was the red sheeted twin bed, mahogany headboard resting against the wall's center. Right of it was a dresser which matched the headboard. Left was a computer desk with a proper desktop and flat screen monitor, along with a fancy-looking stereo. Immediately to the left after entering was an entertainment center similar to the one in the living room with a much smaller television atop it. A gaming console with four controllers sat in one of the cubby holes.

For how decidedly average the room was, one thing stood out. Shaped like an upside-down letter U, a white shelving unit framed Ruby's headboard. There were several shelves for compact disk cases to rest upon and almost all of them were crammed full. Only the last few were barren. There must've been hundreds. The only other place Jaune had seen so many CD's was in a record store. While Jaune still marveled at the display, Ruby pushed further into the room.

"Do you mind if I put on some music?" She asked, already moving toward the stereo.

"Not at all," replied Jaune with a shake of his head.

"Thanks." Ruby pressed a button and a light hum of distorted guitars filled the room. "I usually have something on in the background, so it's kinda weird not to." The music was loud enough to be heard, without overriding normal speaking tones.
"Who are we listening to?"

"No one in particular," Ruby said. "It's a playlist on shuffle. I have most of my CD's on a couple flash drives." She poked a thumb over her shoulder at the stereo. Jaune followed her indication to see there were, indeed, two USB sticks in the front of the receiver, with room for another pair.

"You have all of those one just two drives?"

"Yeah," confirmed Ruby with a nod. "You'd be surprised how many songs you can get on thirty-two gigs."

The girl sat down on her bed and patted the mattress to her left. Jaune hesitated before moving in. He plopped down a good foot away from her, careful to avoid a proximity which may have been inappropriate. The springs sagged underneath his weight. Ruby utilized the brief bounce to sidle just a bit closer to Jaune.

The blond looked everywhere but at her for a moment. He could already feel the air between them growing awkward. That simply would not fly. Even if it were just platonic, he wasn't about to screw up his first time ever in a girl's room. Something to talk about. Anything. Just to nip the stillness before it grew.

"I've never heard this song before," he observed, perhaps a bit too fast. Ruby giggled.

"I didn't think you had," she said. "They're a local band called Bilgeworks, sort of a Vacuo Hardcore band."

"Never heard of it." Jaune didn't know what Vacuo Hardcore was, but given the slippery vocals and incoherent guitar distortion, he didn't want to.

"Yeah, it's not really my favorite sub-genre either, but these guys are okay."

"What do you normally listen to, then?" Jaune asked, pleased with how naturally this topic had sprung up, but also amazed they'd never had this conversation before.

"Um…" Ruby stared at the ceiling as she trailed off. "A little bit of everything, really. Agnostic Front, The Unseen, The Bouncing Souls, Alkaline Trio, I don't really limit myself."

"Oh, I've actually heard of Alkaline Trio before," Jaune said the mention of a familiar name. "You have?" Ruby perked up at the sudden acquisition of common ground.

"Yeah. They have a song in a game I used to play."

"Was it Armageddon?" Ruby said. "The song, I mean." She clarified as an afterthought.

"I'm not sure," admitted Jaune after a second's consideration. "I just recognize that name."

"Oh, okay. I only asked because Armageddon has been in a few games."

"Well, that's probably what it was, then." Jaune was about to say something else when the song came to an abrupt end. "That was quick."

"None of these guys's songs are much longer than two minutes," informed the younger girl. "That's one of the things I like about them."

Jaune hummed in acknowledgement and took a few seconds to listen to the new song which just
began. It stark contrast to the previous track, it featured almost no distortion and a rather straightforward rhythm. The female vocals were loud and had an interesting sound, like they were both in key and wildly out of tune at the same time. Ruby gave a delighted squeal soon as they began.

"I love these guys," exclaimed the girl.

Before Jaune could ask who they were, Ruby bounded off the bed and stepped over to the shelves. She poured over the articles for a second before extracting a single plastic case. She stood in front of Jaune and held it up to him. He leaned forward to get a better look. It depicted four people lit from the front before a black background. There was an even split among genders. One of the girls had a pair of cute rabbit ears, indicating she was a Faunus. Each person held a black letter painted on a large white card.

"C-F-V-Y?" Jaune read each letter individually.

"Coffee!" Ruby corrected. "It's their initials."

"Oh!" Jaune sat back as the realization hit him. "Just like you guys. Is that where you got the idea from?"

"No-no," Ruby refuted him yet again, but did so sweetly. She pranced around to the other side of the bed and quickly crouched down to acquire another album. "That would be these guys."

She handed him the album before going back to her original spot. Jaune largely ignored the art and instead focused on the flowy writing across the top. It was again four letters, but this time read WTCH.

"Witch?" He raised an eyebrow as Ruby stood before him.

"Yeah! They were huge back in the day, brought Punk back into the public eye about thirty years ago. Because of them, it's kind of a tradition for Vale bands to make names out of their initials."

"Wow," Jaune breathed stupidly, turning the case over in his hands. "They must've been really good."

"They're amazing," agreed Ruby. "They're actually Yang's favorite band."

"Really?" Jaune handed her back the object. "I never would've guessed." He said, watching Ruby as she put it back. She fluttered yet again around the now well-trodden path and reclaimed her position next to the blond.

They spoke for a little while more after that, the faint musings of harsh harmonies their soundtrack. Subject matter spanned a wide range of topics, flitting around between whatever happened to come up. They spoke of school, friends, family… and school again. It was the most common thread between them, after all.

Whenever a particularly good or interesting song came on, Ruby would say something about it, sometimes showing him the albums responsible for them. Jaune had to admit, even though he didn't like all of them, especially the more hardcore selections, listening to Ruby enthuse about them made listening much easier.

The girl even, somehow, convinced Jaune to help with her biology homework, should she ever need it. The course itself wasn't what concerned the blond. He'd already taken the class. No, what distressed him was volunteering for more homework, atop what he already had. He'd have to
remember exactly what Ruby said, and use it in the future on someone else.

After a while, Jaune could feel the conversation winding down as they slowly ran out of things to say. It would soon be time to make his exit. The thought saddened him. Spending time with Ruby was fun, as always. Part of him didn't want to leave, though it would be nice to make it back home at a decent hour.

Currently, Ruby was once again talking about drums.

"—But if you put some duct tape around the edges, you get a lot less ringing, especially on cheap sets."

"Is that because it sticks to stuff, or just because of the weight?"

"Both! It depends on what kind of sound you want."

Jaune was about to asks something else, but a terrible noise cut him off. It sounded like a screeching animal, but also had a strange sort of crescendo. It approached the house rapidly before stopping rather abruptly. A low rumble replaced it, before that, too, cut off.

"What the hell was that?" Jaune asked, trying to get a look through Ruby's window. He couldn't see anything but the trees to the east.

"Yang's home!" Ruby said, completely ignoring her friend. "Oh, that was just Bumblebee, her motorcycle."

"She has a motorcycle?" Jaune wondered aloud, before a more important question came to mind. "She named it Bumblebee?"

"I know! Isn't it super cool?" Ruby mistook his confusion for enthusiasm. There was silence between them, but just for a few seconds before the front door flew open.

"Guess who's back, bitches!" The boisterous voice of Yang shouted from downstairs.

"Hey, Yang," Ruby called in response. "Jaune's here, too."

"Hey," yelled Jaune at the mention of his name to confirm he was, in fact, there.

"Hey, Jaune," greeted Yang. "I was about to ask who's car that was out front."

"Yeah, that's mine."

"Not bad." Yang's voice was distinctly closer that time.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs gave her position away. Strangely, there almost seemed to be four feet, instead of just two. The sound of talking betrayed there was indeed more than one person, though Jaune couldn't make out the voices nor what they said.

A few seconds and steps later, Yang strode into the room, but she was not alone. Weiss Schnee followed close behind. Her entrance carried with it no fanfare and little in the way of greeting, only a quick wave to the pair already inside. Weiss went straight over to Ruby's desk, swiped the rolling chair, and sat down across from Ruby and Jaune. It looked much like a rehearsed motion, something she'd done a thousand times.

"Ooh, you brought him to your room, Ruby? How scandalous." Yang gave a seductive roll of her eyebrows.
"Yaaang!" Ruby whined in protest. For his part, Jaune's skin mimicked a tomato and he looked at the ground next to his left shoe, anywhere but at Ruby.

"You two are so easy to tease," Yang giggled, obviously proud of herself. "So, what have you guys been up to?"

"Oh, we were just talking about music, and school, and stuff. Real chill, ya know?" Answered Ruby.

"Cool, cool," her sister agreed.

"I was about to ask Jaune if he wanted to play Street Fighter, or something, but we can't really do that with four of us here." Ruby went on.

Her voice carried no hints of sadness or accusation. Rather, she seemed almost curious. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out she was probing for ideas. Thankfully, the ever-perceptive Yang picked up on this just as much as the other two older folks. It must've been the big sibling instincts they all shared.

"Well, we could always go with the old standby, Halo, and play some campaign or something," Yang suggested with a glance at the television. "How about it, Jaune? Sound fun?"

"Sure, I could go for some alien killing." Jaune agreed with a smirk.

"That's the spirit! Weiss?" Yang whooped at her fellow blonde before turning to the heiress.

"I'll pass," Weiss declined, daintily crossing her legs.

"Aw, you never wanna play." Ruby couldn't hide her disappointment.

"I'd rather not embarrass myself." Weiss was resolute in her decision, despite the silver puppy dog eyes which would've broken anyone else a thousand times over.

"Come on, Ruby. Help me set it up." Once again, it was Yang to the rescue as the sisters went to put the pre-game lobby together. That just left Jaune and Weiss for a moment, which normally would've been uncomfortable, but the boy already had something in mind to talk about.

"I didn't need anything at the shoe store, by the way. Thanks for asking," he said with a smile. To his astonishment, Weiss actually let out an amused little huff.

"Don't mention it," she dismissed jokingly. "I'm guessing Ruby told you the story?"

"She did," Jaune nodded. "It was funny. It definitely seems like something Blake would do," he continued. Weiss hummed in agreement. "So, did you actually buy anything while you were there?"

"No." The Ice Queen's voice took on a slightly miffed affect. "I've been trying to convince Yang to get this pair of boots she's been looking at for weeks, but she won't spend the money. I'll probably end up just buying them for her."

"It'd be funny if you got her a really small pair," Jaune observed. Again, Weiss gave a tiny laugh. Little more than a quick exhale, it was at least something.

"That's gloriously evil. I like it." Weiss gave the closest thing she could to a seal of approval. Her amusement brought a flutter to Jaune's heart. He'd never made her laugh once before, let alone twice.

What had he done right there, as opposed to when they talked most of the time? Usually, their
conversations had an air of, if not hostility, at least indifference from Weiss. Maybe she was just having a good day? Whatever the reason, he'd have to try and figure out why that little exchange went so well, and do it again.

He would've loved to continue their little conversation—for the sake of science—but a controller held under his nose cut off that train of thought. He thanked Yang for the paddle before moving to sit next to Ruby at the foot of the bed. Yang plopped down on the floor to his right. Weiss stayed behind them in the chair, watching the screen in silent contentment.

Jaune completely lost track of time while the three of them moved through about half of the Halo 3 campaign. Weiss, not one to be left out, offered comments here and there about the action on screen, though many of them were directed at how gross the enemies were. She did seem to like a couple of the characters, though, evidenced by how she listened when they spoke.

Jaune honestly couldn't remember the last time he'd spent an entire Saturday hanging out and playing video games with his friends. But, as the sun began its crimson descent across the sky, and Ruby fell into one of their by then customary parting hugs, the boy knew there was no place he'd rather be.
The next week came and went in a flash. If Jaune blinked, he probably would've missed it. He continued to spend study halls, lunches, and club hours with his friends. Every second was precious, irreplaceable like nothing he'd ever experienced. The five of them—or six, including Penny—grew closer as each day passed. Companionship and a love for music brought them together. Jaune was even back on speaking terms with Weiss. And the whole time, they all looked forward to RWBY’s upcoming show that Saturday.

Presently, Jaune stood outside the venue. It was a few hours before it would open to the public. Icy tendrils of hesitation gripped his heart as he looked at the building. It was a two story structure, much closer to the center of town than he expected, just barely clear of the taller monoliths of central Vale, nestled between other businesses. A dark band ran through the divide between the floors. Golden letters in chunky cursive spelled out Ebony's.

This was definitely the place. Still, Jaune wasn't sure if he should actually go in. It was a bar, after all. Just one year shy of the legal drinking age, eighteen, Jaune shouldn't have been allowed inside. Indeed, the only reason he'd be permitted entrance was because the band listed him as crew. That's also why he could arrive early. Or, rather, had to.

Standing on the sidewalk like an idiot, Jaune knew his fear was dumb. He was allowed inside, but more than that, his friends were waiting for him. That knowledge forced his feet. With a deep breath in, Jaune entered the establishment. Not through the front, though. There was a side entrance for staff which he'd been instructed to use.

Immediately inside the heavy metal door, Jaune found himself in the shadow of the second floor. There were booths on either side of him, two rows deep. They lined the east and west walls of the rectangular room. There were even seating arrangements on either side of the stage, though only one each. Most of the space was taken up by a big square dance floor. It was dimly lit. Hints of smoke clung to the fluorescent lights. On the far end from the doors was the stage, smaller than expected and raised to about chin height. A few random speakers and bagged instruments occupied it, but it was mostly empty.

In the middle of the dust and dim lighting, a girl stood alone. Solemn on the empty floor, Weiss Schnee glowed like a destitute angel. She wore tight jeans and a black t-shirt emblazoned with the logo of a band Jaune didn't recognize. The snug top accentuated her graceful curves, and revealed just a sliver of glorious pale midriff. She was far too pretty for a dingy place like this. Jaune walked toward her, waiting until he was closer to call out.

"Weiss!" He shouted into the nothingness. At the mention of her name, the girl turned. The ice in her pupils lessened at the sight of the disturbance, but a scowl still graced her lips.

"Hey, Jaune," she said once the blond was in speaking distance. "You're late."

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry. I got kinda lost." Jaune scratched the side of his face with a finger.

"Don't you have GPS?" Weiss raised an eyebrow at him.

"I'd… rather not talk about it." He looked at the wooden floorboards to his right.
"Well, at least you made it in the first place. I guess I should be grateful." That was Weiss's way of dismissing the situation.

"So," Jaune changed the subject before things could grow awkward. "What are you doing out here all alone?"

Weiss huffed. "I was supposed to be meeting the manager, but he's about as late as you were."

"The manager?"

"Yes, just to let him know we're here. It's a common courtesy thing." Weiss looked like she wanted to say something else, but the sound of an opening door cut her off. "Speak of the devil…"

From out behind the bar, which took up most of the back wall, strode a middle-aged man. Sunglasses concealed his eyes, and greasy dark hair fell in curtains from a midnight fedora. He wore a black pinstripe suit jacket opened atop a black shirt. Dark blue jeans and what looked like real brown snakeskin boots completed the ensemble. He would've been handsome, if not for his general skeevy appearance.

"Weiss!" He enthused. "It's good to see you again." As he approached, Jaune couldn't help but notice a slim black tail flick out behind him. This man was a Faunus.

"Mitch." Greeted the heiress simply. They briefly shook hands, a formality Weiss seemed all too eager to escape. Jaune noticed the subtle way she slowly wiped her hands on her jeans.

"It has been a while, hasn't it?" The manager—Mitch—pushed on, seemingly oblivious. His eyes shifted over to Jaune, noticing him for the first time. "I didn't even see you there. Though, why would I, with such a beauty at your side, right?" Mitch laughed, a mirth neither young patron shared. He cleared his throat and continued. "I don't believe we've been introduced. I'm Mitch, owner of Ebony's bar."

"This is Jaune," Weiss spoke before the blond had a chance to. "He's our…" Weiss trailed off, clearly at a loss for words.

"Jaune Arc." The boy stepped in, presenting an open hand to Mitch. "I'm RWBY's new roadie, and also their biggest fan."

"Ah, I remember seeing your name on the registry." Mitch exchanged a quick hand shake with him, one which Jaune thought may have broken a few bones in his hand. "Though, what are you doing all the way out here if you're a roadie?"

"Yeah, that's my bad. I don't know the area very well, and I got lost on the way here."

"Everyone gets lost their first time here. Don't sweat it, homie!" Mitch gave Jaune a rather forceful clap on the shoulder.

"Uh, thanks." The blond managed to bumble out.

"As much as I'd love to stand around and chat, Mitch, I need to be on my way." Weiss interjected, saving her friend from an increasingly uncomfortable conversation.

"Of course, of course," Mitch said with a passive wave. "Just let me know if you need anything."

"We will. Thank you for having us."
"Please, I should be thanking you for putting up with me," Mitch joked.

"You really should." Weiss made one final, snarky comment before turning on her heel and walking the opposite direction.

"See you around, Mitch." Jaune gave the Faunus a wave before jogging to catch up with the Ice Queen.

The teenagers traveled in silence a short distance to a door right of the stage. Ever the gentleman, Jaune rushed a couple steps ahead to hold it open for Weiss. She walked through without even so much as a glance in his direction. Jaune let his shoulders slump just slightly. He probably shouldn't have expected any different. One day. He fell in beside her, letting the door swing closed on its own. Weiss blew a misplaced lock of hair off of her nose.

"I'm glad he's out of my hair," she commented.

"I take it you don't like him very much," observed Jaune. Weiss looked at him like he'd said water was wet before refocusing forward.

"No one likes Mitch," she said. "He smokes meth, doesn't shower, pays his staff minimum wage; trust me, if we didn't need this gig, none of us would be here."

"He sounds like a real stand-up guy," Jaune quipped. Suddenly, he didn't really like Mitch, either.

"Oh, definitely," Weiss returned his sarcasm. "You handled him well, though."

"You think so?" Jaune said stupidly, trying to hide his elation at Weiss complimenting him. "All I did was tell him the truth, that I'm here to set up."

"But you did it in a way that allowed us to leave sooner," Weiss countered, and Jaune couldn't really argue.

"So," Jaune began in an attempt to keep the conversation flowing. "Where exactly is everyone else, anyway?"

"Well, Ruby's probably still talking to the sound guy, and Blake and Yang are moving in all our stuff," Weiss explained simply.

"Okay, so what are you gonna do, then?"

"I am going to help the staff hook all our equipment into the board," Weiss said with a hint of pride. "If you're looking for something to do, go help Blake and Yang. I'm sure they'd appreciate a hand from a big, strong man like yourself."

Jaune grimaced. He noticed the sarcasm on both big and strong in Weiss's instruction, but decided not to fight about it, especially when he knew matching wits with her was a pointless endeavor. For herself, the heiress just smirked.

"Sounds good," Jaune said with a nod. "At least I can make myself useful."

"Yes, at least," Weiss teased, but there was no real malice in her voice. "If you just go around the corner up there, you'll find a big garage door. You literally can't miss it."

"Okay. Thanks, Weiss."

"Of course."
Jaune quickened up his pace for a few steps, but not out of enthusiasm. He didn't want to be stuck walking next to Weiss in silence with their little talk clearly over. As he heard a door open behind him shortly after, however, he knew his trepidation was misplaced. A glance over his shoulder confirmed the Ice Queen was gone. Where? God only knew.

So, Jaune focused on his present task. The hallway he strode down was eerily similar to the one at the live house the first time he'd seen RWBY perform. Colorless walls, exposed electrical boxes, though there were more doors in this one. Ebony's was clearly a larger building. The left-hand corner Weiss mentioned was just up ahead.

The blond boy rounded it and found the foretold entrance. It was a standard sized garage door made of corrugated steel, pulled almost all the way up. The passage, however, was far too narrow for anything larger than a motorcycle to park within. Jaune looked to his left and found a wide open pair of double doors directly across from the metal one. Likely, this setup was designed specifically to load and unload equipment.

Jaune walked through the exterior door, but stopped just a few steps beyond it. Outside he did, indeed, find Yang and Blake. The former stood upon the bed of a big, dark blue truck, dragging a large amplifier toward the tailgate. Blake, he never would've found had the wind not caught her long, dark hair in just the right way. She had almost her entire being buried in the back of a sporty white SUV. From where she stood, Yang noticed the newcomer almost immediately.

"Hey, Jaune," she offered a quick greeting, still dragging her amp along.

"Hey," returned the boy. "Do you need a hand with that?" He pointed at the speaker. Before answering, Yang hopped down.

"Nah, I'm good. Thanks, though." she dismissed.

To prove just how good she was, Yang laced her fingers through the rubber handle atop the amp and dislodged it with a solid yank. Her muscles hardly even flexed as they resisted the thing's desire to swing freely. Jaune looked on in amazement. He knew she was strong, but that thing must've easily weighted fifty pounds, if not more. To Yang, though, it seemed little more than a feather.

"Go help Blake with the drums," Yang advised, pulling Jaune back down to Remnant.

"Help me with the drums!" Blake called from inside the SUV, her voice hilariously muffled. Jaune couldn't help but chuckle, and pray she didn't hear him.

"Be right there," Jaune called as he made his way toward the vehicle.

Once around the back side, he was greeted with the rather enticing sight of Blake Belladonna, clothed in a pale hoodie and impossibly tight dark jeans, bent over and rummaging through the SUV's cargo. He stole a quick glance at her, and immediately regretted it. His eyes flicked to the ground away from her rear end. Blake was his friend. He shouldn't disrespect her like that, no matter how much his teenage hormones wanted to.

Thankfully, he wouldn't have to distract himself much longer. Blake straightened up, dragging a big round hard shell case with her. She glanced over her shoulder, and immediately regretted it. His eyes flicked to the ground away from her rear end. Blake was his friend. He shouldn't disrespect her like that, no matter how much his teenage hormones wanted to.

"I'm giving you the kick drum, since it's the heaviest," she said.

"Gee, thanks," Jaune snarked. He grabbed the case by its handle and placed it in front of him. It
glided over the carpet with ease. "How much does it weigh?" The boy went to pull the drum out of the vehicle.

"With the case?" Blake sought clarification she never received. "About 40 pounds."

Gravity brought the drum hurtling to the ground, and Jaune threatened to go with it. The good graces of sheer dumb luck were all that kept them both from colliding with the sidewalk. Jaune stopped it just before it could smash the concrete.

"For the love of—" Jaune stopped himself short of cursing aloud. His mind was a different story, though. "I wish you'd told me that before I took it out."

"Don't look at me. You're the one who grabbed it." Blake fired back with a smirk.

And that was when Jaune, far too late, realized it had all been on purpose. He rolled his eyes and stepped aside for Blake to grab her own load. She slung a long bag over her shoulder and grabbed two much smaller cases, which Jaune guessed were the toms. With a quick nod Blake made her way through the garage door, and Jaune took position on her left.

"You know Yang was joking when she said you had to come help us set up, right?" Blake asked once they were inside.

"Yeah, I figured as much," admitted Jaune, "but I don't mind. I'm part of the club, so I might as well. Besides, it's not like I'm doing anything else today."

"Well, regardless, thanks for showing up," Blake said.

"Don't mention it." Jaune flashed her a smile. "I'm happy to help."

Silence passed between them, but it hadn't the time to grow uncomfortable. Being directly behind the stage, their destination was not far. The back entrance was more than wide enough for them to walk abreast, even with their respective burdens. A rather steep ramp led up to the pedestal. Jaune made slower progress up it than he wanted. Old sneakers provided little grip on the slick surface.

Blake didn't wait for him. With all the grace and agility of a panther she ascended the ramp. Those long legs lead her a few steps away from the incline to a white letter X drawn with tape. When she put her load down to its right, Jaune guessed that was where the drum set was supposed to go. When he himself made it up the ramp, his cargo went down just behind Blake's. It was likely on purpose she didn't cover the X.

Again without really communicating, Blake turned and went for the ramp. Going down was much easier than up, though it was all Jaune could do to keep from losing his balance. He probably should've worn his gym shoes. Those were brand new.

Without prompting, Blake spoke up. In that moment, Jaune thought it best not to bring up how much more talkative than normal she was being. Excitement for the upcoming show, perhaps?

"Ruby was supposed to help me with this, but no, she had to go talk to the sound guy."

"You sound bitter," remarked the blond.

"Me? Bitter? No," Blake drew out the last word. It dripped with sarcasm. She let out a short sigh. "But, someone has to talk to him. I'm just glad it's not me."

"I don't know," Jaune countered. "Something tells me we got the short straw."
"You're probably right about that," agreed Blake.

They reached the SUV. Blake dived into the back, once again inserting most of her being into the chasm. Jaune stepped immediately up right next to her, so he wouldn't even be tempted to catch an unscrupulous peek this time around.

"I'm giving you the floor tom next," Blake said, dragging a tall cylindrical case. "It's the second heaviest."

"I should've known," Jaune joked. "Who's car is this, anyway?" He changed the subject. To his knowledge, no one in the band drove something so unnecessarily big.

"It's one of several Schnee Family vehicles. Mr. Schnee may or may not know it's here right now." Blake gave an amused grin at that. "And the truck is my dad's. Why he needs such a monstrosity is beyond me."

Curiosity sated, Jaune grabbed his allotted freight and pulled it from the SUV, the ivory color of which now made perfect sense. The floor tom was notably lighter than the bass drum, but still a bit heavier than he wanted to deal with right then. At least the stage was close. After Blake gathered another long bag, a broad cymbal case, and what Jaune assumed was the snare, they departed once again.

And that was how Jaune became the first ever official unofficial roadie for RWBY. After moving in the drums, he helped Yang with the last of the sound equipment, and volunteered to help Ruby set up her drums, but other than that it was a lot of waiting around. None of it really felt like work. Instead, he was just hanging out with his friends. He couldn't think of a better way to spend his weekend, and the main event hadn't even started yet.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: I went back and forth a lot on this one. It was at one time longer, and then much shorter, featured different characters, had a different progression of events, and I even considered scrapping it entirely at one point. I wanted to show a little bit of the setup process for a proper show, but it took me a while to decide on doing that now, as opposed to later. I think it came out okay, if a bit boring.

If you liked this chapter, or even if you didn't, please remember to leave kudos and a comment. I love hearing from all of you.
In the past, Jaune read horror stories online about how awful soundcheck could be. They were supposedly boring, lengthy, and frustrating. Truly, experiences only the most patient could come away from with a shred of sanity. But, they couldn’t be that bad, right? Oh, how naïve he’d been.

Every act took the stage to test their equipment individually. That mean, after each band finished their checks, everything of theirs had to be moved off the stage and replaced with equipment belonging to the next band. After making sure all of their levels were okay, Yang made sure to inform Jaune this process was not normal. Any venue worth its salt would have its own speaker cabinets and maybe even amps, speeding up the process. Ebony’s was not worth its salt. The entire thing took almost two hours to complete, and by the time they were done, it was almost time to let in the first customers.

Presently, Jaune stood in the hallway backstage with the rest of his friends. It was either that, or share the lounge with the other two bands performing that night. Unanimously, they chose the latter. Yang leaned back in the corner, arms crossed. Counterclockwise from her found Weiss, Ruby, Jaune, and Blake, all in a messy circle.

“I’m just saying,” Yang began, “if you need expensive gear to get a decent sound, that’s your own fault. Which isn’t a slight against you, Weiss.” She added a quick glance to the heiress, who huffed and crossed her arms.

“I didn’t think it was.”

“It is a bit ridiculous though, isn’t it?” Blake offered her opinion. “No one needs a thousand dollar amp.”

“That’s what I’m saying!” Yang agreed with a wave of her right hand. They’d been talking about this for a few minutes. Apparently, the headliner’s lead guitarist had a very expensive amp which no one found necessary. Jaune agreed, but thought it best to keep his mouth shut, lest his ineptitude on the subject show itself.

A lull fell over the group, and Ruby took the chance to pull out her scroll. She ignited the display, and gave a quick squeal.

“It’s almost time to go on!” She said with barely contained excitement.

“Finally,” Yang said, popping off the wall. “I’ve only been waiting all day.”

“Is there anything you need me to do?” Offered Jaune from out of the blue. Unable to set up any of the equipment during soundcheck, he was desperate to make himself useful.
“Yeah, go keep Penny company,” Yang answered.

“Penny’s here?” Jaune raised an eyebrow.

“She makes it out to all our shows, whenever she gets a chance.” There was a hint of pride in Weiss’s tone, like she was glad to have a fan.

“Yeah, and twenty bucks says she’s out there right now, all alone, bored out of her mind,” Yang explained further. “Well, probably not bored. You know what I mean.” She corrected.

While Jaune couldn’t really see how going to talk to Penny helped the band out, he certainly didn’t want one of his friends to be alone in a place like this.

“Alright, I’ll go find her. See you guys after the show.” Jaune said before turning with a wave back to them.

“You know it,” Yang called back.

“See ya, Jaune!” That one was Ruby.

The blond boy made his way down the hall, and out the door into the bar proper. It was… much fuller than he expected. Yang said the headliner was kind of a big deal locally, but he never expected this. Every booth was full, not that there were many to fill. The floor played host to just the right amount of people. It was a stellar turnout, but a person could still move about with relative ease. The incoherent murmur of conversation permeated the entire room.

For a second, Jaune stood in front of the backstage door, scanning the crowd. Being a somewhat short girl, one may think it would be difficult to locate Penny among the sea of people. But, Jaune found her in just a few seconds. Hair that vibrantly ginger would stand out on the face of the Sun. The boy pushed his way gently through the crowd—offering apologies whenever appropriate—and made his way over to her.

“Penny!” He called out when she was within easy earshot. She twirled around at the sound of her name. The ecstatic grin plastered on her face widened at the sight of him.

“Salutations, Jaune!” She greeted him with a big wave, even though he was right in front of her.

“Hey, Penny. What's up?” Jaune came to a stop roughly a foot from her.

“I'm waiting for RWBY to come on,” she said, as if that weren't obvious. “How about you?”

“I just got done helping them set up not too long ago, so now I'm waiting like you.” Jaune paused for a second as something else occurred to him. “Wait, how did you even get in? I thought you were underage.”

“I'm eighteen,” Penny remarked. “Well, that's what it says on my license, anyway.” She smiled. Jaune gave a chuckle at the joke, but deep down his heart sank. Something about the thought of Penny driving a car terrified him.

He could've said more, but an approaching figure caught the corner of his eye. A rather tall man clad in all black walked behind him with a stony scowl on his face. The man elbowed Jaune out of the way as he passed, instead of excusing himself like a decent person. The strike forced some of the air from Jaune’s lungs and shoved him a step forward. The blond caught himself on the person in front of him, placing a hand on each of their biceps for support. Thankfully, they both remained upright. Jaune looked over his shoulder with an unimpressed grimace, but then returned to whomever he’d
collided with, afraid he may have hurt them. It was only then that he remembered the one in front of him had been Penny.

She had both palms flat against his chest, but that was mostly to help carry his weight. The girl somehow managed to shift one foot behind the other just in time to catch him. Jaune noticed her arms felt quite sturdy beneath his fingers. She was stiff and solid, much stronger than she looked. But, Jaune realized he'd also touched her without express permission. He took a quick step away, flinging his hands away as if they'd been burned.

“Sorry,” he muttered. “Are you alright?”

“I'm fine,” Penny confirmed. The smile returned to her face, but her eyes were soft around the edges. “That man was rather rude, though. Did he hurt you?”

“No, I'm okay.” Jaune shook his head. “Trust me, I've had worse.”

“Oh, then! It's good that you are unhurt,” said Penny, her previous mirth returning now in full. They both faced the stage, standing just inches apart as the crowd forced them together. A silent moment passed, one that Jaune was determined to stop from multiplying after such an awkward encounter.

“So,” the boy began, as he often did, “how many of RWBY’s shows have you been to?”

“Oh, almost all of them, at this point. The only time I miss one is when my father has made other plans for me, which isn't very often.”

“I guess that makes you their biggest fan, then. Do you listen to Punk Rock like they do?” That was actually something he'd wondered for a while. Penny seemed far too innocent for the brash genre, even moreso than young Ms. Rose.

“Hmm, not really,” Penny said after a moment's consideration. “I don't hate it, or anything, but I mostly come to support my friends.”

“Well, that's something we have in common,” Jaune agreed, though the music was starting to grow on him. Just a little.

They continued chatting idly for a bit. Any discomfort which may have lingered after the potentially unwanted proximity vanished after only a few words. It was as if nothing ever happened, like Penny didn't care. Perhaps she really wasn't bothered. Penny didn’t seem the type to get all worked up over a little physical contact, after all. Jaune really admired that kind, positive nature of hers. She was one of the most approachable people he'd ever met.

The minutes flew by as Jaune and Penny spoke, two voices indistinct amongst the crowd. Penny was always fun to talk to. No one ever knew what would come out of her mouth, and that made her interesting.

It was about twenty minutes later when the lights above the crowd went down, and those over the stage flickered to life. Instantly, delighted quiet gripped the room. Jane and Penny joined them, their faces both split in huge smiles, though hers shone brighter than his ever could. It was time. The moment they’d all been waiting for. The double doors behind the stage opened, and out strode RWBY.

Their appearance surprised the blond boy, two of them in particular. Yang and Ruby looked the same as when he’d seen them last. The former had her luscious golden hair up in a ponytail. An almost impossibly tight orange tank top covered her torso, while loose khaki pants hung from her
hips. White sneakers completed the ensemble. Ruby wore a violet band logo t-shirt, black mid-thigh length miniskirt, dark leggings, and combat boots. The purple didn’t necessarily match her hair, but that was probably the point.

Weiss was largely unchanged. The only difference was the white leather jacket she wore. It hung open to reveal the black shirt beneath, and stopped just shy of her matching belt. A multitude of short metals spikes poked up on the shoulders and all down the lapel. It reminded Jaune very much of a hedgehog.

Blake was the one who really stunned him. She wore even less than during the first time Jaune had watched them perform. Gone completely was the white hoodie from earlier that day. The only article concealing her chest was a black bikini top. It provided adequate coverage to leave plenty to the imagination, and yet revealed enough to draw every eye in the room. The black, thorny vine tattoo worked its way all the way up her right side, coming to rest on her shoulder. The lightly tanned skin of her slim midriff was on display for the whole world to see. At least the rest of her was unchanged, still concealed by black skinny jeans and matching boots.

Jaune had to forcibly tear his gaze away, lest he stare forever. His eyes fell upon Yang, who met deep blue with warm lilac. She showed that signature gigantic smile of hers, and gave him a thumbs up. After a quick scan of the crowd, she stepped up to the microphone.

“Good evening Vale!” Muted cheers rose up to meet her amplified voice. “We are RWBY, and we’re here to fuck your shit up!”

With a quick look behind and a nod, the drummer—Ruby—counted them off with a quartet of swift stick taps. The band launched into their first song. Everybody came in at once, playing on the same beat. It was a simple intro, two power chords with some accentuation on the treble via Weiss at the end of each repetition. Jaune’s expression brightened. Though it was the same opening number as during practice, it sounded entirely different. The crowd and the venue gave a unique atmosphere. The place was on fire, and the song just started.

The same chord progression continued into the verse. When Yang opened her mouth to sing, it was the same extremely loud and clear voice Jaune had come to know, almost completely devoid of grit or vibrato. He’d never caught her sing any of these songs to the fullest of her abilities, and couldn’t wait to hear Yang belt.

I don’t know you, but I think I hate you
You’re the reason for my misery
Strange that you’ve become my biggest enemy
And I’ve never even seen your face

When the chorus came around, it added a third chord, lending more power to the section. Weiss had the harmony in this song, and would in the next one as well.

Maybe it’s just jealousy
Mixing up with a violent mind
A circumstance that doesn’t make much sense
(Or maybe I’m just dumb)

The intro served now as an interlude, separating the chorus from the next verse-chorus combo, which shared the same instrumentation as the first time around.

You’re the cloud hanging out over my head
It all comes crashing down, welting my face
Magic man, egocentric plastic man  
Yet you still got one over on me

*Maybe it’s just jealousy*  
Mixing up with a violent mind  
A circumstance that doesn’t make much sense  
(Or maybe I’m just dumb)  
I’m a chump!

The intro played once again as Yang shouted that last line. The chord progression looped around three times, and everything seemed normal, but Jaune wore a satisfied smirk. Things were far from normal.

Without warning, the song changed completely. The guitars fell away, leaving Ruby to pound an even beat on the kick drum, while Blake played a rapidly descending riff on her bass. Each root note was hit twice before a short walk brought it down to the next. A quick climb up brought the whole thing to a repetition, only to start the process anew.

The entire audience, which had been somewhat bombastic the whole time, quieted down dramatically at the sudden change. A few pumped their fists along with Ruby’s drum, but most waited patiently, completely enraptured by the drastic change. If the song shifted once, would it do so again?

Blake kept them waiting. She closed her eyes and leaned back on her left foot, the picture of pure coolness. The crowd watched on with bated breath, eager to see where the journey would take them next. But the groove was completely under Blake’s control. The riff looped around once, twice, three times, more and more to draw everyone in. On the eighth, Blake opened her eyes.

When again the bass riff repeated, Yang and Weiss shared a glance and accompanied it with a big power chord. It went around four more times in silence, and then another chord. Blake played twice, and then a chord. After that, she only had time for one entire phrasing before Yang and Weiss played over her.

The guitar chords became a pair, alternating high to low at the halfway point of Blake’s part. The song continued to build, until there was little space between the chords to speak of. At that point, Blake abandoned her riff entirely to play along with the guitars.

And then the madness hit. The melody became a single chord struck over and over again, punctuated by triplets from Blake. Ruby lost her mind on the drums. There we cymbals, rolls, and fills all over the place. The kick drum pattern from earlier was the only thing to keep it all together. Weiss and Yang chugged on their single chord, coaxing every ounce of aggression and volume from their instruments.

Yang hopped with each sound, just high enough to barely remove her feet from the ground. They only lasted a few seconds, though, before giving way to a wide stance, guitar slung low. She hung her head so long thick hair cascaded around her fretboard.

Suddenly, Weiss launched into a solo. Though, that may have been a generous term. She slid up high on the neck of her alabaster guitar and hammered out a rapid rhythm, sixteenth notes on the same lofty chord. She paused, and then did the same thing again. The band behind her was steady as the Ice Queen continued her assault. Again and again she played, never once letting up.

After eleven total intonations from Weiss, the song began to slow. It was just sustained power chords, punctuated by insanity courtesy of Ruby. Yang and Weiss took turns hitting the notes, while
the blonde assumed a normal posture. Eventually, Weiss hit the final note, letting it ride over
everything else.

When she did, the drum beat changed. It slowed significantly, to a more moderate pace. The cymbals
faded away, replaced by throaty hits on the toms. All other instruments ceased, but Ruby remained.
The younger girl held down the beat, propping up the entire show on her sticks.

For the audience, it sunk in after a few seconds that this was a completely different song. No matter
how many times Jaune heard it, he still couldn’t nail down exactly where that transition happened.
He looked over at Penny, to see if she’d caught on. Whether or not she did, her eyes shone with
admiration for her best friend’s time in the spotlight. Jaune returned his attentions to the stage in time
to catch said attention expand.

Blake made her entrance to the new song with a rapidly descending intro. She then transitioned into
a slick little groove, one which fell down and then climbed back up on itself in a constant battle for
neck control. It even ended with a few rapid chords, which—as Jaune understood—was rare for a
Punk bassist. When it repeated, Yang spoke up.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the lovely Ms. Blake Belladonna!” The blonde made a wide gesture to
encompass her bandmate, and the crowd cheered their adoration.

The bassist couldn’t hide her grin as she continued to play. Yang slid her guitar around behind her
back. A few more loops, and the blonde gripped the microphone with both hands, leaning forward
just slightly so it tilted toward the dance floor. The bass and drums spilled into the first verse, but the
guitars remained silent. Yang’s voice dropped down into her much more restrained chest range. She
sounded largely the same as before, but markedly quieter and with more vibrato.

I sit around and watch the tube, but nothing’s on
I Change the channels for an hour or two
Twiddle my thumbs just for a bit
I’m sick of all the same old shit
In a house with unlocked doors
And I’m fucking lazy

Yang straightened up, whipped her guitar around, and began to play on the same beat as Weiss.
Rapid chords ensued from their instruments, which gave way to a more regulated rhythm
accentuated with each on beat.

Bite my lip and close my eyes
Take me away to paradise
I’m so damn bored, I’m going blind
And I smell like shit

After the short chorus, the guitars fell away again, Ruby and Blake persisted, but the bass part
changed. It bounced between strings, hitting low and high notes before a rapid run slammed into
more chords. Jaune liked this one much better, but it only sounded twice before Blake switched back
to the intro riff. The second verse was upon them.

Peel me off this Velcro seat and get me moving
I sure as hell can’t do it (by myself)
I’m feeling like a bitch in heat
Barred indoors from the summer heat
I locked the doors to my own cell
And I lost the key
The full band came in for the chorus, in the same way as before.

*Bite my lip and close my eyes*  
Take me away to paradise  
I’m so damn bored, I’m going blind  
And I smell like shit

At this point, the song switched over to the bridge. It was rather simple, just a pair of guitar chords supported by a downward running bass groove and the ever-present anchor of Ruby’s drums. It was sung in full harmony, except for the very last word.

```
((I got no motivation))
((Where is my motivation))
((No time for my motivation))
((Smoking my))
Inpiration
```

The instrumental break following all of this was just the chorus, no bells or whistles, but also no lyrics. After that, Blake’s second bass riff, the one Jaune preferred, came back in as the guitars quieted again. It played through half of the last verse, before going back to the original.

*I sit around and watch my phone, but no one’s calling*  
Call me pathetic, call me what you will  
My father says to get a job  
But he don’t like the one he’s got  
When masturbation’s lost it’s fun  
**You’re fucking lonely!**

Yang screamed the last line, a rough, feral screech unlike anything Jaune heard from her before. It blared around the entire room, yet somehow managed to stay in tune. Jaune was so taken aback; he almost didn’t notice the chorus come around one last time. On this occasion it had two complete stanzas to play through, instead of just one. Yang went about them normally.

*Bite my lip and close my eyes*  
Take me away to paradise  
I’m so damn bored, I’m going blind  
And loneliness has to suffice

*Bite my lip and close my eyes*  
Take me away to paradise  
Some say quit or I’ll go blind  
but it’s a myth

The guitars shut up, and Blake played her riff again. After a single repetition, Weiss came in with a little part of her own. They were simple, trebly chords that gave the song an oddly tranquil ending. But if there was anything Jaune knew about RWBY, it was that the word “calm” did not exist in their dictionary.

The next bit was Jaune’s favorite of the entire forty-five minute set. Yang began to chug away on single palm-muted power chord. It started out quiet, but with each second it grew louder. At the same time, Blake, Weiss, and Ruby became gradually quieter. The result was an awesome shifting power dynamic. As everyone else faded away, the steady plod from Yang’s guitar took over. Before long, all that remained was a single chunky chord powered by an unruly mane of blonde hair. Yang played at her full volume for a couple bars and then began to sing in her normal, super loud and
crystal clear tone. For a time, it was just a girl, her guitar, and a message.

_**I know things are getting tougher**_
When you can’t get the top from the bottom of the barrel
Wide open road of my future now
Is looking fucking narrow

Ruby led into the chorus with a roll of the snare, and the entire rest of the band kicked in with full, unmuted notes. The song featured the exact same three-chord progression the entire time, short enough to fit in either the verse or chorus twice. Yang and Weiss shared the harmony on the chorus, both belting it out as if competing for the part of lead singer.

_(All I know is that I don’t know)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know nothing)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know nothing)_

When the verse started up secondly it featured all of RWBY, but was half the length of the first.

_We get told to decide_
_That’s right. As if. I'm not gonna change my mind._

_(All I know is that I don’t know)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know nothing)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know)_
_(All I know is that I don’t know nothing)_

For the third time, Weiss launched into a solo which was actually just a riff. Four quick, pulled-off notes repeated themselves, and then played through the progression on a single string.

Another verse followed, but with a bit of modulation. The first chord of the progression was played in punch couplets, a short rest between. The following notes came at regular intervals. Each repetition of it followed this pattern.

_What ya gonna do with yourself_
Boy, you’d better make your mind
What ya gonna do with yourself
Boy, you’re running out of time

There came an instrumental break. It was just the same chord progression again, but Weiss played it with full major chords instead of the power 5th variety. The difference was barely audible, but the added treble gave the song a completely different feel. There was also supposed to be a single line in the middle, but Yang chose to omit it for some reason.

The chorus returned after the break, and so did the palm muting from the intro. About halfway through it, Weiss abandoned her spot to stand next to Yang.

_(All I know is that I don’t know)_
All I know is that I don’t know nothing
All I know is that I don’t know
All I know is that I don’t know nothing

The unmuted chords and harmonies with Weiss came back for the big finish. The Ice Queen stood on her tiptoes to share Yang’s microphone.
RWBY ended with single strikes of the first chord of the song, separated by beat-long rests as Yang shouted her last line.

A single, sustained tone rang out from the stage, touching every corner of the room. A heartbeat passed by.

The crowd *exploded*. Cheers and clapping echoed off the walls. There were occasional words thrown out, but then promptly swallowed up in the noise. Jaune and Penny added their voices to the cacophony, though the boy almost wished they hadn’t. He never would’ve guessed Penny could be so loud. Something told him even the band could hear her.

“Thank you! Thank you!” Yang called over the audience, her gratitude barely audible even with the aid of a microphone.

That was absolutely incredible, amazing beyond all description. No matter how many times Jaune heard those first three songs in practice, nothing beat the real thing. The band was perfectly in sync, playing off each other to never miss a beat. They all carried their own weight, and added it to a concoction which was both mind-blowing and impossible, yet they pulled it off without a single ounce of strain.

They were unreal, a force of nature which shouldn’t have existed but did all the same. They defied explanation. The human brain simply couldn’t wrap itself around them. They were an enigma. And that was only their first trio of tunes. If the rest of the night continued in a similar fashion, the scraggily blond boy knew it would be the best forty-five minutes of his life. Jaune may not have liked Punk Rock, but he loved RWBY.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR’S NOTES: I think this chapter mostly speaks for itself. A little bit of Jaune and Penny, but it’s mostly about the band. Like I said in the notes on a previous chapter, I absolutely do not intend on writing out every second of longer sets like this. It’s just the highlights. I’m pretty sure most people don’t want to know about an entire 45 minute set and, honestly, I don’t feel like writing it.

I hope the little encounter between Jaune and Penny came across okay. It’s strange, really. Big, bombastic action set pieces I have no problem with, but little altercations like that escape me.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance:

1.) “Chump” - By Green Day. Chosen because it ends with the intro of the next song…
2.) “Longview” – By Green Day.

I know someone out there is about to argue with me, so let me give my side of it. We can talk all day about whether or not Green Day is a real Punk band, but there’s no denying that both Dookie and Nimrod are real Punk albums. In this instance, I think it’s about looking more at the music itself, instead of who made it. The messages of those songs, and the meanings behind them, are still real no matter who or what Green Day is. Pop-Punk and Power Punk are both legitimate, established subgenres, no matter how much some people out there refuse to admit it.

If you liked this chapter, or even if you didn’t please remember to leave kudos and a comment. I want nothing more than to know what you think.
The sounds of music filled the Ebony’s ballroom. Acoustics assaulted its hard walls, and swirled around the heads of its patrons. Being a somewhat slower tune, the energy they'd sported earlier in the show dissipated to sways and bobs of the head. Up on stage, RWBY played their penultimate song of the night.

Yang Xiao Long, as she often did, grabbed the center of attention. She balanced on the very edge of the stage. A single shuffle forward would send her over the edge. The golden locks upon her head were slightly frazzled from a near hour of jumping around. A bead of sweat ran down her cheek and then rolled down her cleavage before disappearing behind her orange tank top, a sequence of events Jaune Arc—watching from the crowd—truly tried to ignore. At least with every other pair of eyes upon the busty bombshell, his own wouldn't be much more offensive. …Probably.

A languid and almost beachy riff poured from her fingers as frets and strings fell to her whim. Blake and Ruby supported her with a solid rhythm, while Weiss waited patiently. This was Yang’s only proper solo in the entire show, and she was determined to make the most of it.

The audience focused entirely on the music. The former half of the current song had been faster, and much louder. The sudden tonal shift drew them in further, and reacquired the attention of those who may have begun to tire. Thus was the entire reason for including this song in the first place. In Yang's own words, "always keep the audience guessing."

Yang's little solo consisted of two riffs which repeated a few times, then alternated. When the first came back around, Jaune knew the song was almost over. Yang retreated from the stage edge to her normal spot in front of the center microphone. Notes sprang from her beat up yellow Squier Strat until, with a big chord, they ceased.

As they had every time a break in the music happened—no matter how brief—the crowd rose up to fill the air with clapping and cheers. Jaune joined in on the former, but his throat was starting to hurt from previous strain. Not a fan of losing his voice, the boy instead elected to just applaud with hands which were also a bit sore.

Penny, however, had no misgivings. A joyous cry escaped her lips, and Jaune winced at the sudden pain in his ear. Seriously, she was louder than the instruments. Still, it was kind of endearing, in an odd way. She was having the time of her life, a sentiment Jaune could whole-heartedly agree with.

While the crowd continued to offer its adoration, Blake began on a new groove. It was a simple six note progression which only lingered on each for a short time. At her ministrations, the audience quieted down. This was to be RWBY's final song.

The tune started out normally enough, but swiftly diverged in a way Jaune hadn't expected. The vocals should've come in after the second repetition, but didn't. Instead, Yang took that time to speak with the crowd.

"You guys have been a great audience," she began. "Thank you all for actually coming out to see the opening act." That little quip garnered a chuckle or two from the patrons.

"Thank you to Mitch and the staff here at Ebony's for putting up with us. I don't know how you do
it." More laughter. Her eyes met Penny's.

"Thank you to Penny Polendina for being our biggest, most adorable fan." Yang's gaze swung right, and locked with Jaune's. She lingered there in silence for a moment, and gave him a huge smile.

"And, last but not least, thank you to Jaune Arc for helping us build tonight's setlist and for helping set up. We couldn't have done it without you." Yang kept eye contact for a second longer, then looked out over the crowd.

Jaune's face burned. His heart soared. He, of course, didn't expect to be thanked like that. Really, he didn't do much, certainly not anything the band couldn't have done alone. And yet, Yang still thanked him for some reason. Though the boy didn't understand it, he decided to put it in the past for the moment. He had more important things to pay attention to.

The show pressed on, whether or not Jaune paid attention. He snapped his gaze back to the stage just in time for Blake to complete a loop of the same riff she'd been playing. When it came back around, Yang opened her mouth to sing in the same reserved tone she'd used earlier that night.

Will we lose out in the end
I've got nothing left to spend
Don't ask me for my name
To you, we all look the same

The first chorus came around. Weiss and Yang joined in with palm muted chords as the progression altered just slightly. In a switch-up from most other songs in their set, Blake had the harmony. She was the only capable of singing lower than Yang.

(And they don't care about us)
(And they don't care about us)
(And they don't care about us)
(Yeah, they don't care about us!)

Yang belted out the last line. A sustained chord and little fill from Ruby led them into the interlude. The progression changed again a little bit from the ones before. Weiss played a riff consisting of the same chords with accents on the high strings, and little grace notes between.

The next verse hit hard. Guitars ridden with overdrive banged out hefty chords with all the volume and force their players could muster. Ruby smashed the drums with a fervor seen rarely, even for her, though the beat itself was rather simple. Even Blake—the most reserved member—nearly broke a string with each pass of her pick. Yang opened her mouth, and the entire room shifted. Words fell from her lips in a display of pure passion, and a volume which threatened to drown out all other sound.

Are we saved by the grace of gods
I can't tell if you're right or not
(Bleed for me and I'll let you in)
(Breathe your life into my skin)
(And I've missed my chance again)

Ruby played another fill, and the chorus hit in full harmony.

((And they don't care about us))
((No, they don't care about us))
((And they don't care about us))
The band fell away, save for Weiss and Ruby. The latter beat a simple rhythm on her snare, while her alabaster bandmate played the same riff from before the second verse.

One of two bridges followed immediately afterward. Yang and Blake teamed up to play a simple pair of chords. Weiss followed with the same notes, but on single strings instead of full voicings.

In the next bridge, things diverged from the original version. Weiss was supposed to play along with the chord progression, but instead launched into a full-blown guitar solo. One of the most complex things she'd played that night, Jaune knew it still paled in comparison to her true potential. The bridge progressed lower on a quartet of occasions, and Weiss did the same. She hit a run with each change in pitch, a melodic jangling in the major scale. It was brief, but demonstrated why Weiss took the position of lead guitarist. She simply was a cut above the rest.

When all of the instrumental breaks concluded, the music once again simplified. It was only Yang's restrained voice accompanied by Blake's bass musings. The dark-haired girl still had the harmony.

```plaintext
Will we lose out in the end
I've got nothing left to spend
(Bleed for me and I'll let you in)
(Breathe your life into my skin)
And I've missed my chance again
```

One final fill from Ruby led the band to shout the last chorus with all the passion in their hearts.

```plaintext
((And they don't care about us))
((No, they don't care about us))
((And they don't care about us))
((No, they don't care about us))
((And they don't care about us))
((No, they don't care about us))
((And they don't care about us))
((No, they don't care about us))
```

A single chord diffused over the crowd, barely audible over the applause and shouts. Jaune mustered enough energy to provide one final cheer. No words, just raw emotion. Meanwhile, Penny still had the same fervor as when the show first started, and all the volume of a foghorn. They screamed in unison the appreciation which couldn't be put into words. From the smiles of those onstage, they got the message.

"Thank you, Vale! Goodnight!" Yang yelled through the microphone before unplugging her guitar and heading for the back of the stage. Blake and Weiss did the same in order to follow her. Ruby waited until they all passed to do the same. The double-doors behind the stage opened, and they were gone, replaced immediately by a swarm of Ebony's staff.

With nothing left to cheer at, the crowd quieted down. Jaune joined them, but not for a lack of entertainment. It was just like last time. After so much music, and dance, and screaming his lungs out, Jaune simply couldn't convince his mouth to form words. He stared at the stage, idly watching the workers cart things away with a blank look on his face. For a second time, RWBY left him speechless.

Slowly, the boy turned his head to look at Penny. She did the same a moment later. Wide blue met
tantalized green. Their expressions were literally identical. For a moment they just stayed there, exchanging dumbfounded faces. Suddenly, Penny let loose a joyous little chuckle, and they both burst out laughing.

Penny clutched her sides, while Jaune allowed his shoulders to hunch and roll with the exuberant undulations. Distantly, the boy realized he'd never actually heard Penny laugh before. It was a melodic little chirp, sweet and innocent.

"That was stupendous!" Penny enthused after they'd both calmed down a bit.

"You can say that again," agreed Jaune, wiping a tear from his right eye.

"That was stupendous!" Repeated the redhead, and Jaune gave a chuckle at her stupid little joke.

"It was even better than when I saw them the first time." That had also only been three songs, but Jaune left out that tidbit.

"RWBY is always wonderful," agreed Penny, "but that was one of their best shows."

"Have they ever had a bad show?" The question Jaune asked was genuine, but also meant to be a little bit ironic. In his eyes, RWBY could do no wrong.

"Maybe one of the ones I missed," Penny said with a thoughtful tilt of her head. "But I've never seen a bad one, myself."

"I've only ever seen two, so I guess you'd know more than me," admitted Jaune, though the redhead probably already knew that. "Yang did say you were their biggest fan, after all."

"Don't worry, Jaune. I'm sure you'll see plenty more of their shows."

Penny's tone was soft and patient. Strange, did she actually think he was sad about it? He appreciated how much she seemed to care, but it was woefully misplaced. Maybe he laid on the sarcasm a bit too thick? Blame hanging around Blake, in that case. He was about to correct the kind ginger's misconception, when his Scroll vibrated in his pocket.

"Sorry. Just one sec..." Jaune extracted his Scroll and gestured toward Penny with it. She gave him a little nod, and he turned on its screen. It was a text message from Yang, which he promptly opened.

"Wanna come help us load up all our shit?" A question, which wasn't really a question, was what it said. Jaune smirked at the screen.

Honestly, no, he did not want to help them put their equipment away, but as their official unofficial roadie, he guessed it was his responsibility. He stowed the device and looked up at the girl currently in among the audience with him. His eyes diverted from hers at first. He felt bad, leaving her all alone in a place like this. But, his band needed him. With a second to steel his resolve, Jaune met her gaze.

"Hey, Penny? Sorry, but I have to go help the girls put their gear away. I'll be right back, though."

"Oh, that's okay. I was just leaving, anyway." Penny's chipper smile wavered not once as the two of them exchanged their own bad news.

"You're not sticking around for the headliner?" Jaune raised a confused eyebrow.

"I want to, but I promised Father I'd be home right after RWBY’s set."
"Oh." Jaune deflated a bit, not in disappointment, but understanding. "I guess I'll see you Monday, then?"

"You will," confirmed Penny. "Good night, Jaune."

"Yeah, goodnight."

Penny waved a cute little goodbye at him before she spun around to weave her way through the crowd, destined for the front door. Jaune watched her go, for a moment. Penny had an indomitable quality about her. She was just *interesting* to be around. He didn't know her very well, but Jaune was glad to have seen the concert with her, even though it had been unexpected. With a short smile for his friend, Jaune turned and headed for the backstage entrance.

Once through the door, the crowd noise died almost completely, once again surprising him with just how soundproof it was behind the stage. A familiar barren hallway greeted him, and he could barely hear the pitter-patter of working feet around the left turn at its end.

The scene awaiting him around the corner was more or less what he expected to find. Several members of Ebony’s staff ran to and fro, carting with them pieces of RWBY’s equipment. They didn't carry them out to the doubtlessly waiting vehicles, though, and instead placed the cargo along the walls before flashing back to stage for more.

It seemed the job of actually putting the stuff away belonged to the band itself, an assertion supported when he saw Ruby Rose stand from where she'd been hiding in a pile of gear. She had a cymbal case in each hand, and a long black bag slung over each shoulder. She spun on her heel and made for the open garage door directly across from the stage entrance. Never once did her gaze cross the blond in the hall. Jaune almost called out to her, but thought doing so would only slow her down.

Jaune approached the collection of amps, speakers, and other assorted gear to look for anything he could take. Oddly, it didn't look like nearly as much coming off the stage, as it did going on. There probably was a psychological reason for that, but he hadn't the patience to figure it out. His sister, Carnation, was going to school for psychiatry. He'd have to ask her about it.

Among the still growing pile of unsorted items, Jaune found an old nemesis. In front of a speaker cabinet sat the bass drum, taunting him even from inside its hard case. The boy heaved a heavy sigh before placing himself in front of it.

"We meet again," he menaced down at the drum. "Come here, you!"

Jaune all but lunged forward. He grabbed the handle and, with a great heave, lifted it into the air. To his delight, picking it up from the floor required *far* less effort than whipping it off the bed of a truck. It was still heavy, but not unbearably so. With a contented smile at having bested his most troublesome foe, Jaune turned to go deposit it.

"Jaune!" He only made it a few feet before a familiar, chipper voice called out to him. He craned his neck around to see a yellow mess approaching him.

"Hey, Yang." He returned her mirth, but as she wheeled a speaker cabinet up to him, his face turned stony. The band's lead singer calling out to him right after a show probably wasn't a good thing.

"You need anything?"

"Just to talk to you," Yang said as she fell in beside him. He walked along with her toward the exit. "I heard you talking shit to the bass drum. Did you give him what for?"

"Uh, yeah." Jaune hefted the drum in his left hand, "got him right here." He was a bit mortified at
being caught threatening an inanimate object, but he'd never let Yang know that lest she lay on the teasing even thicker.

"That's good," Yang said with a nod before changing the subject. "What did you think of the show?"

Jaune pondered the question. "I don't even know where to begin..." he said after a moment, trailing off. "I think I said that last time."

"I don't remember," Yang denied with a shrug.

The two of them crossed into the night. A refreshing blast of cool air enveloped the teenagers. Outside, Jaune found the white SUV and blue truck in exactly the same configuration as earlier in the day. There were a few other vehicles around, which assumedly belonged to the other bands. He also found Blake standing in the truck's bed, rearranging some of the stuff already in there. For a split second, Jaune was disappointed to see her pale hoodie had returned.

"Alright," Yang said as she placed her speaker on the truck for Blake to grab. "If you can't think of where to start, then describe the show in one word."

"Um..." Jaune took a few seconds to think. He put the bass drum down on the asphalt, completely forgetting what he was supposed to do with it. "I guess, just, wow." Yang giggled at his breathy response. Jaune decided to ignore her. "Even though I heard it all in practice, seeing it live was completely different. It was... amazing. I can't really think of the right word."

"Anything in particular jump out at you?" Yang continued to grill him. This time, Jaune didn't even have to think about his answer.

"I really liked the beginning." He looked at Blake, who was hopping down from the truck bed. "It was a really good idea to combine those songs, Blake, and you bass work on Longview was incredible."

"Thanks," the bassist offered a short but sincere apology.

"I'm guessing you liked it, then?" Yang said, a smirk on her lips.

"Loved it. I can't think of any other way to say it. I loved it."

"I have to agree. That was easily one of our best performances." The voice of Weiss preceded her before she, along with Ruby, joined them. She carried both toms in cases stacked atop one another. Ruby, on the other hand, had the last of the cymbals.

"Yeah!" Ruby chimed in. "It was, like, so good. We were on fire out there!"

"If only we hadn't wasted it on a place like Ebony's," intoned Blake with an audible scoff.

"Aw, don't be like that, Blakey." Yang gave her shoulder an affectionate little jab. "Now we know what to shoot for!"

"And, we can make the next one even better!" Ruby added. A pleased ghost of a grin graced Blake's lips, something the sisters returned to her tenfold.

"Not if we don't get all this stuff put away. Come on." Yang went for the building, and everyone fell in behind her.

After that little respite, the five resumed their task of putting everything away. The doors to the stage
were closed, and the equipment all along the walls. The moody musings of blues rock seeped into the passage. Disappointment shuttered through Jaune at the realization he'd missed the headliner's first song, but it lasted merely a moment. He had more important things to worry about.

With the exception of the floor tom, the drums had all been accounted for. With another sigh, Jaune resigned himself to his fate of lugng it around. Blake and Yang each pushed along a speaker cabinet, while Ruby and Weiss gathered an amp head in each hand. With them all in tow, there were only a few smaller speakers and effects pedals to take care of.

Few words passed between them as they went about their task. While Jaune enjoyed talking to them, he preferred to work in silence. That way, everyone got done sooner. Not that there was much left to do. With one final trip, the last pieces were loaded into Weiss's vehicle—or the S-U-Schnee, as Yang called it. Weiss slammed its hatchback closed and moved to join where everyone else had gathered between it and Blake's truck.

"That's the last of it," commented the Ice Queen as she found a spot in the rough circle between Jaune and Ruby.

"Good. I was getting tired of carting all that shit around." Yang gave her shoulder a few exaggerated rolls for emphasis.

"Did it seem like less to you guys?" Jaune finally broached something that had been bothering him for several minutes. "I don't know, it just feels like we put more on the stage than we took off."

"Oh my Gosh! You, too?" Ruby bounced in place and turned bright eyes toward him. "I've been saying the same thing for years, but none of them believe me." She made an adorable, frantic gesture toward her bandmates.

"I swear, you two are the same person," Weiss remarked with a shake of her head. Jaune was just glad someone agreed with him.

"Well," Yang said suddenly. "I don't know about anyone else, but I'm exhausted. Were any of you thinking about staying for the main act?"

Blake's response was a yawn. Ruby shook her head.

"And take the chance of running into Mitch again? Not gonna happen." Weiss crossed her arms at the thought.

"Jaune?" Yang turned her attention to the only boy present.

He just kind of looked at all of them for a second or two. Yes, he did want to watch the other bands, but not alone. It didn't sound like very much fun to stand in a sweaty, crowded room without his friends nearby. If Penny had stayed, then he would've as well. But, with her gone and the band leaving, the idea of doing so no longer appealed to him.

The blond boy shook his head. "No, I guess not. It's getting late anyway, I should probably go home."

"Boo, lame!" Yang jeered, despite the fact that she had the same plans. Jaune just rolled his eyes, a gesture shared by Blake.

"Good night, guys," the raven-haired lady said a moment later. "Good show tonight." At her dismissal, the others offered their own version of good night. Blake gave a contented nod, and made for the driver's side of her father's truck.
"I should also depart," Weiss said. "I'll see you all Monday."

The sound of a closing truck door cut off anything else she might've said. The remaining trio of folks bid her farewell as she went to her own vehicle with one last wave.

Ruby, Jaune, and Yang retreated closer to the building as the cars roared to life, Blake's noticeably louder. It was a noise anyone would've more associated with the bombastic blonde member of the band. But, then again, the truck didn't actually belong to the reserved girl. Blake pulled straight onto the street after a few seconds, hanging a right. Unable to turn around in the narrow alley, Weiss did the same a few seconds. Her vehicle exited the opposite side of the alley, and turned in the same direction.

And then, just like that, there were three. Jaune was almost surprised how fast it happened. They barely said anything before going their separate ways. They were probably all tired—he certainly was—but it just seemed to happen in a heartbeat. Maybe that was a good thing, though. The longer they lingered, the harder it would be to leave. A succinct end to a great night like this was good as any other, he supposed.

"We should probably get going, too." Yang's words snapped him back to reality. "Come on, Rubes."

"Okay!"

Instead of following immediately after her sister, Ruby instead slipped into Jaune's already waiting arms. Their parting hugs were still automatic as ever. It may have been a bit awkward at first, hugging a girl, but now he didn't even hesitate to return her innocent embrace. He hadn't for a while.

She gave him a little squeeze. "Goodnight, Jaune."

"Goodnight, Ruby," he returned. They broke apart and the younger girl jogged over to her sister. "Night, Yang."

Jaune spared a big smile and a wave for his fellow blonde before turning to exit the alley the same way Weiss had. His eyes graced over hers for a split second prior to spinning completely around, and she almost looked disappointed. Strange… Must've all been in his head.

"Hey!" Yang called after him. He twirled to face her once again. "I don't get a hug?"

Fire instantly sprung up beneath Jaune's cheeks. Did Yang really just say that? No. Absolutely not. She could be a bit bold at times, but there's no way she wanted him to hug her. It was a joke, or maybe he misheard her altogether. But, when he saw the expectant and almost hurt look in her eyes, Jaune knew it to be the truth. And, he knew there wasn't enough willpower in ten lives for him to deny her such a simple request.

"Sorry, Yang. I… wasn't thinking." Jaune said after a too-long pause. He started toward her.

"Damn right you weren't," agreed Yang, though she stayed rooted in place.

Jaune did his best to act natural as he closed the short distance between them. All the while, his mind whirled at a mile a minute. Was this really okay? She'd asked for a hug, after all, and gone out of her way to do so. Obviously, it was fine. Still, could he go through with it? Sure, Yang was sweet, but she was also Yang, the most unattainable girl in Vale. How could he, Jaune Arc, even dream of standing so close to her?

For all the hesitation which gripped his soul, Yang clearly felt none of it. The moment Jaune was within arm's reach, she threw her arms around him. The girl gave a contented hum and nestled her
cheek against his right shoulder.

Jaune's immediate reaction was one of pain as he was pulled into an embrace of bone-crushing proportions. He then became acutely aware of how good it felt to have Yang's soft chest squished up against his own. His face went even more red than before, if that were even possible.

But there was a lot more to it than that. Tangled up in her arms, the boy felt so warm, so safe, and so cared for, as if Yang were actively trying to protect him from all the bad things in the world. It was... nice. He'd never realized something so simple as a hug could convey so many different things, but when they came to a mutual agreement to release, he wished it didn't have to end.

Yang took a step back and looked up at him with the enormous smile he'd become so used to seeing on her face. It was contagious expression he couldn't help but mirror. As the grin split his mug, Jaune realized he wasn't afraid anymore. All that trepidation from seconds ago was gone, as if it didn't even matter.

"Goodnight, Jaune," Yang said.

"Yeah, goodnight."

Ruby spared him one final, enthusiastic wave before allowing herself to be led away by a sisterly hand between her shoulder blades. Jaune returned it, but with only half a heart. He watched them go, eyes transfixed on that lovely head of golden hair until they disappeared around the left-hand building.

The moment they left his vision, the bumbling boy's senses returned in full force. He remembered how Yang felt pressed into him, thought he could still feel her warmth lingering in the air. Most men would kill for the chance to hug a girl like Yang, and yet she'd been the one to offer it to him. It was her idea, an embrace freely given.

As Jaune once again began to exit the alley in the opposite direction of the sisters, one thought prevailed in the very back of his mind. He couldn't believe that just happened.

Chapter End Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES: Lucky guy... Just like with set up, I don't intend to spend any further time on tear down, unless it becomes plot relevant again. Now that you all know roughly how it works, I don't feel the need to repeat myself.

Songs featured in this chapter, in order of appearance.

1.) "Southbound" – By MxPx. I'm not a big fan of MxPx, but I love this track. It's one of the first Punk songs I ever heard, and has a very special place in my heart.

2.) "Don't Care" – By The Briggs. I still don't want to go all in on the big anthems too soon, but this is a perfect ending song. The second verse in "Don't Care" is one of the most famous verses in Street Punk history. It has to hit like a freight train. I hope I did it proper justice.

Expect something totally different next chapter.

If you enjoyed this chapter, or even if you didn't, please leave kudos and a comment. I
love hearing from my readers.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!