Summary

AU: Blake was damaged, too damaged. Her parents had brought her along on their vacation to Maine out of pity, and Blake could only look forward to a summer of trying to find and put together all of her broken pieces. It wasn't like there was much else to do on the island of Patch. Here, there were only sailboats, lobsters, and Xiao Long Shipyard.

"We don't just build," Yang explained, gesturing to the boat above them. "We fix things, too."

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Maine wasn’t exactly a welcome sight. Blake stared dismally out the window at the passing trees. Unlike on Menagerie, there were so many pine trees. She might have enjoyed the greenery had it not been so cold, so cloudy, so rainy, so damn wet.

Her parents had booked the cottage months ago, long before she finally left Adam for good. They were bringing her along out of pity, which she resented, but it wasn’t like there was anything else she could do. Leaving Adam—leaving him to rot in jail back on Menagerie—had also involved leaving her whole life behind. Her job, her home, the few friends she still had…

Now it was just her and her parents. She was as dependent on them as any kid, and she hated it.

Ghira was trying to speak to her. Hurriedly, Blake pulled an ear bud out. “Yeah?” she asked, not bothering to look in his direction.

“I said, we’re almost there.”

“Oh. Great.”

As they traversed the small road that led to the island of Patch, Blake was a little disappointed that she couldn’t see ocean through the thick trees. This was Maine. There was supposed to be ocean.

Yet even the ocean was a let-down. They crested a hill, and the sulky blue of the sea blended in too well with the gray sky. Even the water looked unsettled, with choppy waves turning to whitecaps and providing the only contrast of color out there. Blake stared dully at it. She was aware that her parents were talking, but she couldn’t be bothered with the conversation. Her body might be in a safe place now, but her mind was still trapped back on Menagerie.

With him.

The cottage wasn’t impressive, either. As her parents had booked the cabin with only themselves in mind, there was only one bedroom, meaning Blake was stuck on the sofa. She flopped onto it immediately, earbuds still in her ears.

“What? What was that?” she asked, pulling one out. Kali wore a slight frown as she exchanged a glance with her father.

“We… just wanted to know how you’re feeling,” she asked, her words in a rush. “You’ve been pretty quiet the whole way here.”

“Oh. Yeah, I’m good. I’m pretty tired, though, so I think I’ll turn in early tonight.”

“It’s only six,” Kali said, bewildered.

“Is it your ribs again?” Ghira asked anxiously. Blake’s cheeks burned as she shook her head.

“No. I’m just… tired. It’s been a long trip.” She shrugged. Still seeing the concern on their faces, she added, “I’ll be fine tomorrow. Promise.”

“At least stay up long enough to get some dinner?” Kali pleaded.

This could have turned into a power struggle. Everything was about power, after all, and Blake weighed her options. She wasn’t hungry, but she knew her parents would give her hell about not
eating. And honestly, Blake was just too tired to argue. There was no fight left in her.

“Fine,” she sighed.

There was only one place on Patch that served food, and it was a tiny diner at the center of the island. It also served as a convenience store that, to Blake’s numbed astonishment, continued to rent out movies. Some of them were pretty old, judging by the yellowed covers. Blake studied them as her parents greeted the cashier.

“Sit anywhere you like!” he said with a wide smile, gesturing to the adjoining room. “You must be new here.”

“Just arrived this evening!” Kali, of course, was already making friends with the blond boy. Blake tuned out the conversation as she trailed a thumb over the cover of Castaway.

She was wondering about phone reception on the island-- was that why rentals were still a thing here?-- when she heard the bell at the shop entrance jingle.

“Jaune!” a laughing voice rang out. “Is our pizza ready?”

She watched the couple suspiciously, the red-headed girl giggling as she clung to the arm of someone who must have been her boyfriend. Blake sidled around the side of the DVD rack, wanting to stay out of the line of fire. The redhead looked too peppy, and Blake didn’t want to risk being pulled into that.

“I think so! Ask Ruby.”

“Ruby? Isn’t she racing tomorrow?”

“Yeah, but she wanted the extra shift.” They were deep enough in their conversation that Blake felt safe enough to slip around them toward the diner part of the building. “Sailing ain’t cheap.”

“But Weiss--”

“--got cut off, remember?”

“Oh, yeah. Shit.”

Again, Blake tuned out the conversation. The diner was small enough that she found her parents’ booth immediately.

“It looks like they’ve got pretty standard stuff,” Ghira remarked, flipping to the back of the menu. “Oh, nice, they’ve got calzones.”

Blake started to put an earbud in, but Kali caught the movement.

Not now, her eyes pleaded. Blake sighed and slipped it back into her pocket.

“Just a couple more minutes!” a high-pitched voice whined from the kitchen. “You just called it in. Of course it isn’t ready yet!”

“Just don’t burn it again!” the redhead replied threateningly.

“They look about your age,” Ghira told Blake, his bass voice low enough to not be overheard. “Why don’t you introduce yourself? You could make some friends here!”
Blake shook her head. “Maybe another day. I'm still pretty tired from the ride.”

One of the young women laughed, though Blake couldn't bring herself to care who had made the sound.

She wasn't in Maine to make friends. She was only here because there was no place else to go, and a tiny island was a safe place to lick her wounds in peace. It hadn’t even been a month since she’d moved back in with her parents, and the time she’d spent with them was barely a blip compared to the years she’d spent under Adam's thumb. Too much was different, and she knew they were still tiptoeing around her. She heard their hushed conversations whenever they thought she was sleeping.

*Maybe they could try this therapist,* they'd mutter. *Or that doctor.* This wasn't the daughter they remembered.

It wasn't like they would have expected her to be the same when she’d moved back home. They'd seen how she looked at the hospital; *nobody* could be the same after spending years with someone capable of *that.* But she knew her parents expected a little more from her, but Blake just couldn’t provide it.

Blake was a disappointment, as she always had been.

“You ready for the race?” she heard a male voice ask.

“Yes! Weiss said she was going to triple-check everything on *Crescent Rose* tonight. She gets so nervous.”

“I heard she nearly ripped Yang's head off this morning.”

“Yeah, well, Yang was pretty much asking for it. She’d just been clamming, and she tracked mud all over the deck! I thought Weiss was going to throw her overboard.”

“Like she could!” the red-headed girl chimed in, laughing.

Blake's eyes glazed over her menu, letting the conversation wash over her as white noise. She could only hope her parents wouldn’t want to stay here too long. The only thing she was eager to do on this godforsaken island was go to sleep.

Her parents’ appetites were big after the drive, but Blake could only bring herself to eat a bowl of soup. It warmed her stomach, but it did nothing for the ever-present chill in her heart.

That night, she thanked the god of Ambien as she drifted off on the lumpy sofa.

Kali was up bright and early the next morning, pulling the curtain. Sunlight hit Blake's face and she groaned.

“We're going to watch the race,” Kali announced. Her voice left no room for argument as she added, “And by *we,* we also mean *you.*”

“Sounds boring,” Blake grumbled.

“It's a nice day out. You're *not* staying inside all day.” Kali reached to her, as if to brush her tangled black hair out of Blake's eyes, but stopped, remembering that Blake’s aversion to touch.

“I guess.” Blake sat up, yawning, and reached for the mug Kali handed her. Tea in the mornings was always a calming ritual. Maybe it could help lessen her irritation with her mother.
“It’s a pretty fun race!” Kali went on, as if Blake was actually interested. “They do it down at the
shipyard here. There’s a pier where people can watch. It might not be one of the biggest races, but I
guess they usually have at least a dozen boats racing. It’s the biggest event of the year on Patch.”

“Not like that’s hard,” Blake muttered. “They’ve got, what, a hundred people here year-round?”

“Something like that.” Kali bustled back to the kitchen, and Blake pulled out her phone. It was new,
but she still half-expected to see the usual dozen missed calls from Adam’s phone.

But he couldn’t call her anymore, she told herself. He was in jail. He didn’t even have her new
number, anyway.

Paranoia had become a comfortable passenger in her brain.

There were too many people on the pier. So many fucking people. Blake folded her arms tightly
across her chest, glaring at the bustle of the crowd. Ghira and Kali didn’t even seem to notice the
chaos; this was their element. Hell, in the crowd, it almost seemed like they’d forgotten about Blake
entirely. Ghira hoisted a laughing Kali into his arms. He said something to her that Blake couldn’t
hear over the din, but Kali nodded with a happy smile. He hoisted the small woman onto his
shoulders, where she balanced with a natural ease.

Both were laughing, so much more than Blake had seen in the time since she’d moved back.

She looked around again, then made her decision. She couldn’t be here, not in this crowd. Her breath
was already quickening, and she’d broken into a cold sweat. She physically couldn’t be here.

Taking a deep breath, she broke free from the crowd, running back in the direction they’d come.
With such a throng here, the rest of the island would be empty. There had to be other places to watch
the race from.

She wove around the small buildings, making her way down to the rocky coastline. She was well
above the tide line, safe from the waters, but the rocks were steep and unwelcoming, Blake frowned
and narrowed her eyes in the direction of the starting line. It wasn’t a great view, but it was better
than being stuck on the pier.

Blake leapt to another rock, always wary of the crashing waves not so far away.

To her untrained eye, it was difficult to tell one boat from another. Not that she knew if she was
supposed to root for any in particular. The people at the diner last night had mentioned they were
going to cheer on a boat called *Crescent Rose*, but even Blake’s good eyesight couldn’t tell her
which one that would be.

The high shriek of a whistle pierced the air, and Blake clamped a hand over her cat ears. If she had
enough hands to cover her human ones, she would have done that as well. She glared in the direction
the whistle came from; it wasn’t from near the pier. It was much too loud for that.

She found the source quickly. The figure’s orange tank top was conspicuous on the gray rocks.
Blake stared.

The woman in orange stretched out her long arms, making as if to embrace the sky, blonde hair
blowing in the stiff ocean breeze. She didn’t seem to even notice Blake, as intent as she was on the
distant boats. A metal whistle dropped from her mouth to dangle on her chest. The look on her face
couldn’t be called a *smile*. The quirk on her lips was too humorless, too smug, to be called something
so simple.
And then the woman jumped, disappearing from sight as she dropped down.

Blake’s heart dropped, and without thinking, she found herself running in the direction of the woman. These rocks were dangerous. What if she’d gotten hurt? There were small crevices and grottos that Blake wouldn’t have trusted a blind jump, and her mind’s eye was full of that woman, leg stuck in a hole, and probably broken…

But the woman was fine. Her legs were all well-defined muscle as she hopped from rock to rock, moving down the coastline to a stretch of gravelly beach. When she got to it, she stopped, looking back over her shoulder to the boats. She tilted her head, as if thinking about something, then continued to bound along the rocky shore.

Blake couldn’t have been able to explain why she continued to follow the woman, but she did. She couldn’t move so fast-- her ribs still ached if she moved them too hard-- but she trailed along as quickly as she could. Despite herself, she was intrigued. Did the whistle mean she played some part in the race? If so, why was she ignoring the boats now? The woman crouched down for a moment beside a clump of seaweed, giving Blake enough time to get closer.

She clutched the sore spot on her ribs, panting slightly.

“You okay?” the woman asked, getting to her feet and turning to face Blake. She wore a true smile now, but there was a touch of concern to it.

“Yeah. Just-- sorry!” So the woman had known she was being followed, and the red that stained Blake's cheeks was no longer just from exertion.

The woman made an undignified snort. “For… what? For being too out of shape to follow me properly?”

Oh, how her cheeks burned.

“I-- I didn't mean--”

The blonde woman waved a good-natured hand. “No worries. I don't get chased by pretty girls every day.” She winked and Blake suddenly couldn't find her words. “So, you all right now?”

“I-- yeah.” She looked away, to ocean, to the boats, to anything that weren't those lilac eyes. “I was just… curious. That someone else was out here.”

“Why are you?” the woman countered. She craned her head to try and capture Blake's eyes again.

Reluctantly, Blake allowed their eyes to meet. “I don't like crowds. There were just too many people there.”

“Oh, I hear ya.” The woman shot a quick glance back over to the boats. “It's a better view over here, anyway. Down the beach a little more, at least. Wanna walk with me? I'll show you.”

Blake stepped back, watching the woman warily. She might have looked Blake's age, and seemed harmless, but the idea of being alone with a stranger still didn't seem right. The look on the blonde woman's face softened.

“You don't have to. I'm only asking since you were out here, anyway.” She opened her mouth again, as if to say more, but thought better of it. Blake was relieved that she didn't mention again that Blake had been following her.
The sunlight glinted off a patch of skin on the woman’s arm, a large expanse of puckered skin. Blake frowned.

“What’s that?” she asked, pointing. The woman spared only the smallest glance at the massive scar.

“What’s left of a bad decision!” she replied with a laugh. “I grew up on the shipyard, played on things I shouldn’t have played on, and bam! Now I’ve got this!”

“Oh… I’m sorry.”

“Please. It was years ago.”

Blake’s gaze lingered on the scar— or, maybe not just the scar, she thought guiltily. The woman had some impressive biceps, as well.

“I’m gonna keep walking. My sister’s racing, and I don’t want to miss it.”

“Your sister?” Blake found herself following the woman, her worries dismissed in favor of curiosity. “She’s racing?”

“She’s pretty good, too!” the woman said proudly. “Crescent Rose is one of the fastest yachts I’ve ever had the pleasure to build.”

Crescent Rose. The boat that belonged to the girl in the diner? “You… built it?”

“Well, yeah.” The woman turned around, grinning at Blake as she walked backward, parallel to the shore. “Well, not just me. I’m not that good.”

Blake broke their eye contact to look back at the boats. “Which one is it?”

“That one.” The woman pointed a calloused finger. It passed close— probably too close— to Blake, but she followed along the point anyway. “The one with the red hull, and the black and white…”

“Oh!” Blake watched in fascination as the yacht rounded a buoy, just ahead of the others. “Is it winning?”

“Sure is!” Her grin was smug. “Crescent Rose is one helluva boat.”

Without warning, the woman darted ahead, and Blake followed, too deep in it now to let her get away without a proper dismissal. Alarm bells were going off in the back of her head, but it had been so long since she had been interested in something like this. This playful woman could have been a siren here on these deadly rocks, and Blake still would have followed.

The woman clambered up the face of a massive rock, seeming to already know the hand- and foot-holds. When Blake caught up, she grimaced at the idea of climbing. Perhaps this was a bad idea, after all…

“Here.” The woman got down to lay on her stomach, stretching an arm to offer Blake a hand. She eyed it suspiciously, still uncertain at the idea of touch. She looked back up. The woman’s eyes sparkled as she gave Blake a smile. There was something in those eyes, something soft. Warm. Her smile was kind. “I’ve got you. I won’t let you fall.”

Blake took a deep breath, then reached for the proffered hand. There was something… comforting in the weathered skin and callus. It had been a smooth, unblemished hand that had betrayed her so often in the past. This, though, was an honest hand, one that made a promise to not let you fall and would
keep it. The woman pulled her up, and Blake’s feet found small ledges in the rock to step into on the way up.

“Wow,” she breathed. This view was much better than the pier. There was little between them, the yachts, and the vast blues of ocean and sky.

She felt eyes on her.

Blake turned back to the woman, whose smile hadn’t faded. “Told you this was a good spot,” she preened. Her eyes focused on the small fleet, searching out the familiar bright hull of *Crescent Rose*. Finding it, the woman brought the whistle back to her lips and blew before Blake knew what was happening.

“God! The hell was that for?” Blake groaned, rubbing the ears on the top of her head. The woman looked back over, surprised.

“What? Oh, shit, I’m sorry. Faunus have sensitive hearing right?”

“Why are you whistling?”

The woman’s expression turned sheepish. “It’s… sort of a tradition we have. When Ruby first started racing without me, she’d get nervous, so I told her I’d blow a whistle to prove I was still watching her.” She laughed. “It’s kind of stupid, considering she doesn’t even hear it most of the time, but y’know, it’s—”

“That’s very sweet.” The smile that twitched at the corner of Blake’s lips felt so unfamiliar, unused. “It sounds like a good tradition. If it wasn’t so loud, anyway.”

“It’s really hard to hear over the wind and waves,” the stranger admitted. “But that first day, Ruby swore she heard it. Then again, she’s told me she’s heard it even when I haven’t blown it, so there probably isn’t much point to it.”

She stepped ahead of Blake, standing close to the edge of the rock. On her left shoulder, Blake saw a small tattoo. She peered closer. An anchor.

“Yeah, Ruby’s going to win for sure!” she announced suddenly and decisively, interrupting Blake’s musings on the tattoo and causing her to jump. Adrenaline shot through her body and her heart thundered at the abruptness. On instinct, Blake’s shoulders hunched and her muscles stiffened. The woman turned back to face Blake, eyebrow cocked at Blake’s sudden change in posture. “Hey, you sure you’re all right?”

“Yeah.” Blake took a few deep breaths, angry at how quickly panic could seize control of her functions. There was no reason to freak out. The woman looked at her oddly.

“So, uh,” she said, showing the first signs of awkwardness Blake had seen thus far, “What did you say your name was?”

“I didn’t.” Blake took another deep breath. “It’s Blake.”

“Nice to meet you, Blake. I’m Yang.” She extended a hand, which Blake took reluctantly. “Are you just here for the race?”

“For the summer.”

“Oh! Nice. I’ll probably see you around the island, then. I live by the shipyard.” Yang’s smile was
contagious, and Blake’s lips quirked into one of her own. “Let’s get back. Ruby likes for me to wait on the pier for her.” She wrinkled her nose.

Blake watched with trepidation as Yang bounded down the rock with ease. On top, she could almost forget the trouble it had taken to get up in the first place. Getting down was another matter entirely. She took a deep breath and found her first foothold.

“Want me to help?” Yang asked, reaching her hands up.

Don’t touch me, she wanted to snarl, but Blake couldn’t find another ledge to place her foot, and her ribs were protesting the effort. Unhappily, she nodded.

She tensed as Yang placed one hand on the small of her back, and another hand took her own. She guided Blake one step further down. “All right, I’ve got you from here.”

“What?”

Yang moved her hands to Blake’s waist. “Let go. I’ll catch you.”

“No.” Yang’s hands were too close, her body too high up, and panic reared up again. “Please, don’t touch me.”

“Huh? You’re gonna tumble. You don’t have a good grip.”

“I can’t.”

She cringed away from Yang’s hands, but she was aware the other woman still held them up, less than a foot away, ready to catch her.

“Listen, I’ve got you. Let me bring you down,” Yang said, her voice even. Blake’s ribs throbbed, as if in memory of what happened when people got too close. She pressed herself closer to the rock, clutching at it fiercely.

I can find my own way down, she thought desperately. I can do it.

She moved a foot, whimpering when she couldn’t find a place to put it.

“Blake. I’m right here,” Yang insisted, and Blake wished she would just shut up and let her find her way down. Her next words unsettled her. “Sweetheart, I’m not going to hurt you.”

In the end, she didn’t know if it was due to the fact that her ribs ached, or that she was losing her grip, or if Yang’s tone held just the right note of tenderness that made it easier to let go. Yang’s hands were back on her waist, and she let herself be plucked from the rock. She came back to earth slowly, Yang taking her full weight as she lowered Blake to the ground.

“See? Not so bad,” Yang told her warmly, but the anxiety and humiliation made her look away from Yang’s eyes.

“Thanks,” she muttered, pressing a hand against her aching ribs.

“Are you hurt?” Yang’s voice was suddenly serious, but Blake shook her head.

“N-No. It’s an older… thing.” She wasn’t about to tell a stranger that her ribs had been broken so recently. It didn’t matter if this woman had shown her a shred of kindness; Blake was finding it easier to pull back into herself, to hide behind her walls.
“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” Blake shifted her weight uncomfortably. “I… should probably head back.” It dawned on her that she hadn’t told her parents where she’d gone. They were bound to be worried.

“Right.” The look Yang gave her couldn’t have been called _suspicious_, but it seemed to know something was up. She sighed. “I need to go meet Ruby, anyway.”

“Great. Nice to meet you,” Blake mumbled by rote, to which Yang only chuckled.

“Here. I found this when you were trying to catch up to me.” Yang extended her hand, palm-up. In it glittered something white.

Curiosity won again. Blake frowned, peering closer at it. “What is it?”

“Y’know how seaglass washes up on shore? I collect it. But this a piece of porcelain. I find some once in a while, though not very often.” Yang seemed to sense Blake’s interest, and that relaxed smile spread across her face. It was a small fragment, though Blake could see intricate blue lacing spread across it. “You can have this one.”

“I-- No. Why?” Blake narrowed her eyes at the blonde woman, who shrugged.

“I’ve already got some, and I can’t really do the same stuff with it as I do with seaglass. Still, it’s pretty.”

“Seaglass, porcelain… Do you have, like… a thing for pretty broken things?”

Yang stared at her a moment, smiling fading into a quizzical expression. She blinked, then shrugged. “They just seem to find me, I guess.” She cast a glance at the yachts. “Shit, I need to get back. I’ll see you around, though.”

Their eyes locked for the briefest moment, lilac on gold. Behind the smile, Blake could almost see something sad in the depths of those eyes. She must have imagined it, she told herself as Yang shot her a salute before making her way up the rocks. She was just reading too deeply into things.

She looked at the bit of porcelain in her hand, sliding a finger of over the smooth side with the lacing. A part of her wanted to hurl it back into the ocean, furious with herself over the way she’d acted while climbing down from the rock.

Her hurts went beyond bruises, scars, and broken ribs. Apparently, that had been obvious enough for even Yang to see, and she hated that they had been noticed at all.

She covered her eyes, shaking with shameful tears, a cavernous ache in her heart for all that was lost and all that lay bare.

Her parents, as she’d guessed, were worried by the time Blake made her way back to the pier, dry-eyed. She needed to take her time climbing back up to the crowd; she knew she’d overworked her injured bones. If only cell reception hadn’t been so bad, she thought with irritation, she could have just sent her parents a text. Instead, she got to suffer through listening to them complain about her wanderings. They knew better than to try hugging her, though she knew they probably wanted to. It also meant she had to come up with excuses.

“Sorry, the crowd was just too much,” she explained, folding her arms. She wouldn’t tell them about her excursions on the rocks; Kali wouldn’t be able to resist scolding her for going against the doctor’s orders. “I found another place to watch the race. Who won?”
“A boat called *Crescent Rose* came in first,” Ghira told her. His worry over Blake changed to excitement; he was probably excited that Blake had shown any interest at all in the outcome. “It’s a lovely boat.”

*One helluva boat,* she heard Yang say in the back of her mind.

Curious, she looked at the people still on the pier. Some people wore shirts in matching colors in solidarity with a favorite boat. Blake couldn’t remember what the girl at the diner (*Ruby,* she reminded herself) had looked like, but she was more intent on trying to locate the familiar blonde hair.

It was nowhere to be seen.

“Blake? Everything all right?”

“What?” She’d been so focused on looking for Yang that she hadn’t realized Ghira had continued to talk. He raised his thick, black eyebrows.

“What’re you looking at?” Kali asked, concerned.

“No one,” she replied quickly. *Too* quickly. She winced, then amended, “Nothing.”

Her parents exchanged a look. It was one of those looks that Blake was coming to hate. *What’s wrong with her?* it almost seemed to say.

Tentatively, Ghira began to speak again. “I was just saying… one of the girls who runs that boat is younger than you. It’s pretty impressive for someone so young.”

“She’s pretty small,” Kali agreed.

Again, Blake was only somewhat paying attention. She looked desperately through the crowd once more, but to no avail. She sighed. Maybe she’d dreamed up the whole thing.

*But she hadn’t.* She reached into her pocket, where she’d set the small piece of porcelain. It was smooth under the pads of her fingers. She remembered the gentle, but firm, way Yang had promised, *Sweetheart, I’m not going to hurt you.*

Even if she hadn’t quite believed the words, they’d been a balm on her soul, comforting just to listen to.

During the car ride back to the cottage, Blake couldn’t stop thinking about how safe those hands had felt as they pulled her from the rock. She didn’t *like* being touched, not since she’d been with Adam. But this… It didn’t mean she was ready for *anyone* to touch her, but maybe it meant there was *some* hope left in the sensation of touch.

Maybe there was still hope for *her.*
It was two days before she saw Yang again. Two very long days.

Granted, it wasn't like there was much else to occupy Blake's time. She did have some things to keep her occupied, like reading and looking up places to send her resume. It was usually only during lapses in her concentration that the memory of those lilac eyes would slip into her mind. Each night, as she drifted off to sleep, she'd remember those sure hands at her waist and the promise they held. 

_Sweetheart, I'm not going to hurt you._

They'd been words her anxious mind had clung to. How had Yang known that they had been the right words to say?

The day after the race, her parents had taken her back to that pier. They'd wanted to take some pictures and take a lunch to one of the picnic tables there. Blake had wandered back to the rocks, half-expecting to hear Yang's whistle screech through the breeze.

Nobody had been there, of course.

The rest of her thoughts were so dull, so dead, that it wasn’t any wonder that Blake had felt drawn to the ones in shades of gold and violet. Each day, Kali would inevitably try to rouse Blake from her stupor on the couch. In the end, her mother was probably the only reason she got up at all, to shower or even eat. If Blake had truly been there-- if she had truly been alive-- she might have been able to see that there was more than just frustration in her mother’s eyes. Blake was blind to both the sadness and the love.

During a rare moment of wakefulness the next day, Blake had pulled up the website for Xiao Long Shipyard. Yang had claimed to work there, but that wasn't the reason she'd looked it up. That's what she told herself, anyway, as she scanned the pictures. Most of the pictures were of the projects they'd done, the boats they'd built.

The shipyard had been started in the 1940s, the site read, by Jinyang Xiao Long. They built and restored many different kinds of boats that Blake had never of before, but she zeroed in on the word _yacht_. She clicked through the menu, only stopping when she _did_ see a name she recognized. 

_Crescent Rose._

And there the sailboat was, in all her glory. On its deck stood two women, the dark-haired one holding up two fingers in a peace sign. The other woman had long white hair, tied into a ponytail. Neither of them was Yang.

There was no caption to the image, but the boat's name was a link. Blake clicked it, and she raised her eyebrows in surprise.

_Crescent Rose_ had a Facebook page, with 146 likes.

This had more photos of the boat, as well as some of the two women from the shipyard's website. Blake scrolled, studying the status updates and photo captions. The last update had been from the day before the race.
Wish us luck at the race tomorrow! it read. If you're in town, come to the pier at 9am. Come watch Crescent Rose kick some booty in person!

It was interesting that the page hadn't updated with the results. Without thinking, Blake clicked the page's Like button before clicking the Photos tab.

Ruby Rose and Weiss Schnee were the two-woman team that ran Crescent Rose, she learned as she browsed. From the pictures, Ruby seemed to be the playful one, always throwing up a peace sign or making goofy faces for the camera. The other woman, Weiss, seemed more subdued, angling herself in a way that made it seem like she knew how to take a good picture.

Funny, too, that for being Yang's sister, Ruby looked almost nothing like her. There were some similarities in the wildness of their eyes, in their smile, in their cheekbones, but for the most part, they didn't even look related.

She stopped at one picture. The aviators hid Yang's eyes, but the messy blonde hair was familiar. Yang leaned against Crescent Rose's mast, looking relaxed and holding a drink can. Her green flannel shirt was open, exposing an white bikini top and abs that Blake stared at for longer than she'd ever be willing to admit.

Shit. Why did she have to be beautiful?

Yang, my big sister who helped build Crescent Rose! :), the caption read. Blake stared at the picture, remembering all too quickly how real this woman had been. The porcelain shard felt heavy in her pocket.

She forced herself to click to the next picture. Ruby and Weiss, posing on the deck of the boat. In the background, Yang had grabbed onto one of the many ropes connected to the mast, in the same green flannel and denim shorts as the picture before. Though she wasn't facing the camera this time, Blake was focused more on her than the two women in the foreground.

Blake closed the window, cheeks pink. It was stupid, to be so enthralled over someone she'd met only once. It had to be because she was lonely, she decided. That was all. She was fixating on this woman out of loneliness, which couldn’t be a healthy thing to do.

God, how could she be so pathetic?

It was incentive, at least, to get out of the house. Laptop stowed in her bag, Blake asked her parents to drop her off at the diner for lunch the next day. This, she reasoned, would at least get her back into the world. Even if she wasn't up to meeting anyone, she'd at least be around other people. Kali could hardly contain her pleasure that her daughter was finally leaving the house.

“It does seem to be the cool spot for the younger people,” she remarked as they made their way up the hill to the diner.

“They've got free wifi,” Blake replied with a shrug. “And I'm in the mood for a burger.”

“Well, maybe you'll meet some friends today.” Kali smiled at her daughter. Blake didn't return it.

Her mother was too optimistic. The same shroud of gray settled around Blake as she set her laptop up at one of the booths. Job applications, she reminded herself. What a joke. She couldn't even concentrate long enough to fill out her name, let alone her employment history. Still, she had to try. The idea of being her parents’ charity case for the rest of her life wasn’t a pleasant notion.
Even the sounds around her were muted. She was aware of happy chatter coming from the direction of the kitchen, but she ignored it as she reached for her earbuds. She put one in, but before she could put in the other, she heard a name that made her cat ears twitch.

“...only because Yang wanted to take us to Portland. We had to crash at Pyrrha’s because Weiss got wasted.”

Discreetly, Blake lifted her eyes over her screen. At the wide window into the kitchen, the goofy young woman from Crescent Rose’s Facebook page was chattering to the blond cashier.

“She’s been doing that a lot lately,” the blond man said. There was worry in his voice, and she saw Ruby nod unhappily.

“The thing with her dad really messed her up. But it’s not affecting her job or the races, so there isn’t really much I can say about it.” The upset expression on Ruby’s face looked so out-of-place on someone who seemed so cheerful in photos. “But it was bad the other night. We got to Pyrrha’s and she, like, immediately started puking. Yang felt so bad that she’d taken us out at all.”

“It’s not like it was her fault.”

“But you know how she gets sometimes.” Ruby shrugged. “It was nice to see Pyrrha, though, even though Weiss kind of ruined it.”

For one terrifying moment, Blake’s eyes locked with Ruby’s unsettling silver ones. Had she been caught eavesdropping? God, she wished she could stop the heat from creeping into her cheeks.

Footsteps, and Blake hunched her shoulders reflexively, prepared for confrontation.

“Sorry if we were talking too loud!” Ruby smiled sheepishly when she’d approached Blake’s booth.

“No. It’s fine.” Blake couldn’t figure out how Ruby was apologizing for her own eavesdropping.

Ruby furrowed her brows as she regarded Blake. Then she broke into a grin. “Oh, I remember you now! You were here other night, right? I remember, because of the ears.” She stuck up her hands, using her fingers to mimic cat ears. Hesitantly, Blake smiled.

“Right.”

“It’s good to see you again... ah...”

“Blake. My name's Blake.”

“Blake! Of course!” Ruby’s face lit up, and for a moment that made her gut clench, Blake wondered if Yang had brought her up in conversation. Would that have been a good thing if she did? In the end, it didn’t matter. “You liked Crescent Rose's Facebook page!”

Blake blushed. “I... Yeah. I did. I saw you race the other day.”

“We kicked butt, didn't we?” Ruby preened. “I get so excited whenever I see someone else liked the page. I remembered your name.”

Blake laughed weakly. “You caught me.”

“So, are you staying on Patch?” Ruby asked, taking a seat across from her. Blake nodded, then shut her laptop. She would have guessed from the photos that Ruby would be an outgoing person, and she wouldn’t have been wrong. She wished the younger woman would leave her in peace, but Blake
was no good at shutting down conversation.

“Yeah. Eight weeks.”

“Ohhh, nice! So that means we can actually get to know you! We get so many people here who just
stay for, like, a weekend or something. It's the people who stay for the whole summer that are really
worth getting to know, though. That's how I met Weiss.”

“She races with you, right?”

“Yep!” The table started to wiggle a little; Ruby must have started bouncing her leg underneath.
“She was a summer person, but she moved in with us last year. Her dad's kind of an asshole!” This
last word was delivered in a stage whisper.

“That sucks.” Blake drummed her fingers on her laptop, which caught Ruby's attention.

“What's up?”

“Job applications.”

“Ohhh. I thought you might have been one of those writer-types who comes to Maine and tries to,
like, channel Stephen King's vibes or something.” Ruby laughed, a tinkling noise that might
have been similar to Yang's.

“Ruby!” an exasperated voice called. “We don't pay you to sit with the customers!”

“Sorry!” Ruby jumped back up. “It was nice to meet you. Wanna hang out sometime?”

“What?”

“I could give you a little tour of the shipyard! And you could meet Crescent Rose, too!”

If it was possible to use heart emojis in a verbal sentence, she would have been sure Ruby would
have done so. Her silver eyes positively glittered when she spoke of the boat. For all she wanted to
say no, all she could imagine was her parents’ disappointment if she did. She had to make some kind
of effort. Besides, if she had to, she could always cancel these future get-togethers.

“I… I guess.”

“Yay!” Ruby beamed. “What are you doing this afternoon? I get off in an hour, and we could walk
to the shipyard together!”

“I…”

“It's not that far! Just a half-mile.”

Blake looked back at her laptop, considering. Her parents would be pleased if she did, she thought
wryly. And Ruby didn't give her the same anxiety most other strangers would; there was something
so innocent about her. Seeing the boat would be interesting, as well, she had to admit.

Then, of course, there was the slimmest possibility that she would catch a glimpse of Yang. She did
say she lived by the shipyard, and Ruby was her sister, after all.

“Okay,” she agreed.

An hour and a text to her parents later, Blake found herself following Ruby down the hill toward the
shipyard. At first, Ruby's pace was too fast. It wasn't a sprint, but Ruby ended up doubling back several times when she'd gotten too far ahead.

“Sorry,” Blake said, stopping for a moment. She put a hand on the sore spot. “I cracked my ribs a few weeks ago, and I'm not supposed to work them too hard.”

“That's awful!” Ruby's eyes widened. “I'm sorry, I'll try to walk slower! How'd you do that?”

“It's… sort of a long story.” Blake grimaced automatically. Ruby nodded, looking more serious than she'd seen yet, and pressed no further.

Arriving on foot to a quiet shipyard was much different than arriving by car to a busy one. It was much emptier than it had been over the weekend. The large pier was empty, save for a couple people on the picnic tables. They might have been workers on break. Out in the harbor, boats were moored while the nearby docks had yet more boats tied up.

“That's Yang's boat,” Ruby said, pointing to a dingy-looking vessel at the dock.

“Yang?” Blake was relieved that Ruby didn't seem to notice the way her ears perked up.

“Oh! Yeah! My sister, Yang. She works here. She helped build Crescent Rose, actually.” She led Blake down the dirt road. “Maybe I can introduce you. Anyway. That's her boat, but she didn't build it. She mostly uses it to go lobstering.”

“Lobstering?”

“Y'know, catching lobster.” Ruby shrugged, having apparently mistaken Blake's incredulity for ignorance. “A bunch of people here do it. She doesn't really do it for profit, but she loves it.”

“That's… pretty cool.”

Ruby stopped them by a small building and poked her head in the door. “Weiss! I made a new friend!”

“Good for you. I'm busy.”

If Blake hadn't been a Faunus, she might not have heard the other end to Ruby's conversation.

“Don't you wanna meet her?”

“Maybe later. I really need to get this paperwork done.”

“Boo, that's so boring.” Ruby wrinkled her nose. “I'm gonna show her Crescent Rose.”

“Don't let her touch anything,” Weiss warned.

“I was gonna let her take it out!”

“And then I'd have to kill you.”

Ruby stuck out her tongue, then turned back to Blake. “Sorry. Maybe you can meet Weiss another day!”

Blake wasn't sure when she had started smiling, but the muscles in her face ached in protest at the strange sensation. “I'd love to.”
Ruby led her down to the docks, bouncing past Yang's *Ember Celica* to get to the much prettier, sleeker *Crescent Rose*.

“Whatcha think?” Ruby asked giddily. She hopped aboard with ease. “You can climb on if you want!”

After a moment’s hesitation, Blake gripped the side and carefully stepped aboard. She should have been ready for the way the boat rocked on the water, but actually experiencing it was *different*. She stood as still as she could, gripping a metal fixture on the side of the boat to hold her steady. Ruby needed no such help; she zipped across the deck, stepping over ropes as if the rocking ocean was no factor in her movements.

With light slaps on the various parts, Ruby gave her a short lesson on the parts of the boat. Blake could retain none of them as she looked up the naked mast. It was as though Ruby was speaking in a foreign language, and it all went over Blake’s head.

“If you want, I can show you our trophies and ribbons! They're back in Weiss’s office,” she explained. “We've got a *lot*. Oh, *and* we've got another race next week, in Rockport.”

“Where's that?” Blake wasn't *that* curious about small Maine towns, but the conversation was horribly one-ended. She needed to contribute somehow.

She sat down and looked over the other side of the boat, where there was a better view of the harbor. Across the way, Blake could see quaint summer cottages dotting the shore, between the vibrant evergreens. On this clear summer day, she could understand what drew people to this quiet state. The day she arrived may have been gloomy, but on a day like this, she could begin to enjoy the scenery. On the gently rolling water, she could pick out points of color. *Buoys*, she thought. She didn’t know they came in so many colors, and she wondered what they meant.

“I was just giving her a hard time!” Ruby whined. Blake gave a start. She hadn't realized she'd completely tuned out the smaller girl. She whirled, and her stomach flopped.

Yang, hair pulled up and a hand on her hip, was smirking at her sister from the dock.

Blake’s sudden movement caught her eye, and smirk changed into bright smile.

“Hey, Blake!”

“Hey, Yang.”

“Wait, do you guys know each other already?” Ruby looked between them, her lower lip bulging out in a pout.

“We met at the race the other day. I was hoping I’d see you again, sweetheart.”

The fine hairs on the back of Blake’s neck rose. There was that word again. She could almost see the hidden meaning to it, the reminder of the way she’d acted when Yang got her off the rock. With that word was the reassurance of the promise she’d made (*I'm not going to hurt you*), that it still stood.

Her eyes were so soft.

“Oh! You should've told me!” Ruby wrinkled her nose.

“I didn't think it mattered,” Blake said, shrugging, trying not to betray the trepidation she felt.
“Ouch.” Yang’s grin widened by a fraction. “Good to know I made an impression.”

God, if only she knew.

“Have you offered your guest a drink, Rubes?” Yang tutted at Ruby’s cringe. “So rude. I thought I taught you better manners than that.”

“She wanted to see the boat! Blake, you want anything to drink? I wanna grab a coke, anyway.”

“Water’s fine.”

“Oh, since you’re in Maine, you should try Moxie!” Ruby grinned wickedly and Yang made a gagging sound.

“Ruby, I thought this girl’s your friend. If you give her Moxie, she’s never gonna want to come back.” Yang hopped onto the deck to flick Ruby’s temple with her finger. “You mind grabbing me a coke, too?”

“You shoulda brought your own, jerk,” she grumbled, pushing her sister out of the way as she stepped back onto the dock. The shove made something low on Yang’s chest catch in the sunlight, and Blake realized that even though it wasn’t racing day, Yang still wore a whistle. “I’ll be right back. Oh!” She rounded back on Yang, jutting at Blake with her head. “Don’t do anything mean, like knocking her overboard, okay? She busted her ribs pretty recently and has to take it easy.”

A look of concern crossed over Yang’s face, and Blake wanted to melt into the floor, or maybe just throw herself into the ocean. She didn’t want pity, but she had a feeling she was going to get it anyway. She wished Ruby had kept her mouth shut.

“They’re broken?” Yang asked, her voice low. “Shit, and I had you climbing around on rocks.”

“I didn’t exactly tell you,” Blake pointed out. “And it was fine.”

“Yeah, but you could’ve really hurt yourself.” Yang treaded lightly across the boat, sinking onto the bench beside her. All playfulness had left her features as she regarded Blake intently. Too intently. Silence bubbled between them, one that made Blake more aware than ever of the burning knot of anxiety in her stomach and Yang’s scent—God, she was close enough to smell the sawdust, the chemicals, the sweat, and underlying, something like citrus. She wondered where the citrus came from. “Did some-- I mean, what happened?” Yang finally asked.

The ocean, she had to just keep her eyes on the ocean and hope her face wasn’t red enough to give anything away. “It’s complicated,” she said stiffly.

“You don’t have to tell me,” Yang replied in a rush, forcing a smile. “I’m just nosy.”

Blake shrugged. “It’s nothing.”

She risked a look back up at her, slightly surprised that Yang was still focused on her, just as intent as before, just as kind. She nodded in understanding, her blonde ponytail bouncing.

“I was hoping I’d get to see you again,” Yang finally went on. The tension broke as the relaxed tone returned to her voice and the smile reappeared.

“Why?” Blake asked, frowning, finding and clinging to suspicion.

Yang shrugged, setting a hand on the bench between them. Though the hand was close to her thigh,
Blake resisted the urge to pull it away. Yang had touched her before, hadn’t she? It had been a nice touch. That, at least, she could admit. Maybe it wouldn’t be a bad thing if Yang accidentally touched her again. This thought may have been completely at odds with her constant fear, but her skin craved something gentle.

“I don’t know yet!” Yang replied cheerfully. “Maybe, if we get to know each other better, I’ll find a reason.”

Blake blew a loud exhale through her lips, trying to stop the amused smile that tried to spread there. “You think you’re pretty smooth, huh?”

“I’m very smooth!” The contagion of Yang’s smile was too hard to fight anymore, and Blake finally returned it. She made it look so easy. The fingers on the hand closest to Blake drummed the bench. “So! Isn’t she gorgeous?”

“What?” This definitely wasn’t the way Blake thought things were going, but okay. She’d play along. She pictured Ruby. She wouldn’t have picked the word gorgeous, though the younger woman was pretty enough. “I… guess she’s pretty? Not exactly my type, though.”

Yang stared at her for a long moment, disbelieving. Then she cracked up. She roared with laughter, doubling over. Blake smiled politely, the laughter infectious enough for her to almost think about doing it herself, even if she didn’t understand the joke.

“Oh my God,” Yang wheezed, smacking the side of the bench. “I think I’m dying.”

“What… what’s so funny?”

“You thought I was talking about Ruby!” Yang’s face was blotchy with color from the hard laughter. “I’m talking about the boat. Good to know you have a type, though.”

“Oh my God.” Blake buried her face in her hands, knowing her face would be completely red. “I’m such an idiot.”

“Hey, that’s not true.” Blake looked through her fingers at Yang, whose smile was reassuring. “I forget that boat talk takes some getting used to.”

Cheeks still on fire, Blake lowered her hands. The fact that she’d rested hand even closer to Yang’s than it had been before was purely coincidental, but she didn’t move it. Yang looked down at it, her expression as warm as ever.

“I’ve been wondering about you,” she finally said, eyes finding Blake’s again.

“Have you?” Blake asked breathlessly. There was no pressure in Yang’s smile, no expectation. It was the same smile she’d worn while offering that piece of porcelain in the palm of her hand.

“Y’know… Most people come to Maine to eat a lobster roll, and go to the beach, or watch the boats.” Blake couldn’t have broken their stare even if she’d tried. Those light eyes had pulled her into their riptide, drowning her. “But you came to the rocks, which is probably more Maine than all those other things.”

“I was just trying to get away from the crowd…”

“And you went to the rocks. And followed me.”

Blake gulped. This was a precipice of some kind, and she was teetering on the edge. She couldn’t
remember the last time just talking to someone made her feel like this. They weren’t even touching; they didn’t need to.

A breeze picked up, playing with the blonde strands that had escaped Yang’s ponytail. Blake’s own hair whipped across her face, and she quickly tucked some behind her ear.

“So?” she asked, breaking the eye contact at last. It was too much.

“So,” Yang repeated, amused. “You stuck out to me. But then, when you were coming down from the rock—”

Blake cringed, wishing that this wasn’t being brought up. “Can we… not talk about that?”

Yang said nothing. Instead, she slowly reached her fingers up to brush the bangs back from Blake’s face. Blake winced on instinct, even though the touch barely grazed skin. She lifted her eyes back to Yang’s, expecting to see irritation at the interruption, or expecting her to suddenly yank at the hair she was smoothing into place. Yet none of that was there, none of the aggression or violence she had come to expect with touch. The pads of Yang’s fingertips were soft on her temple.

And then the hand was gone, Yang withdrawing it from Blake’s hair with a thoughtful expression. “We don’t have to,” she said with a shrug. Belatedly, Blake realized that it wasn’t fear that was making her heart pound. “I was just… worried, I guess.”

“Don’t be. I’m fine.” Blake folded her arms across her chest. “You don’t even know me, anyway.”

“Maybe we can fix that?” Yang asked, smoothly steering the conversation into something new, something hopeful. “I’m off tomorrow afternoon, if you’re interested.”

“For… what? A date, or something?”

“If that’s what you want.” Yang’s smile seemed to relaxed, so open, that Blake only stared. She didn’t know what she’d expected, so she didn’t know what to say. She opened her mouth slightly, but no sound came out.

“Got ‘em!” Ruby announced, and Blake twitched, jerking away from Yang like she’d been caught doing something illegal. “Cokes for us, water for Blake.”

“Awesome! Thanks, sis!” Yang said, taking one of the coke cans from her sister. “And thank you for not bringing the Moxie.”

“We were out, anyway,” Ruby sighed, handing Blake a water bottle. “I think Pete drank them all.”

“Moxie, the drink for old men.” Yang shook her head in amusement, holding her can up as if in toast.

“What is Moxie?” Blake managed to ask, though her brain was still stuck on Yang’s offer.

“It’s, like… the nastiest soda. And it’s only a Maine thing. It’s like, the state beverage,” Ruby explained.


“Please don’t say those words again,” she begged.

“Ruby drank way too much of it a few weeks ago, and I guess she’s swearing off the stuff for good, or something.” Yang snorted, taking a sip of her coke. “It tastes a lot better than Moxie, though.”
“You guys are so… Maine,” Blake remarked, shaking her head. The sisters laughed.

For a few minutes, conversation was light and pleasant. They spoke of the sailboats, of the upcoming races that summer. Ruby went into detail about the recent race, not holding back on her brag about leaving her biggest rival, Sharp Retribution, in the dust. All three of them were laughing, and Blake couldn’t remember the last time she’d truly done that with anyone. Before today, she’d been convinced her laughter had been left behind on Menagerie. She was relieved it was still inside her, after all.

“Well… I should probably get back to work,” Yang said with an exaggerated sigh. Blake was alarmed by how disappointed she was in this declaration, but she took heart in the smile Yang gave her. It was a different sort of smile than the one she used on Ruby. This was more gentle, an almost private sort of thing.

And it was hers.

“It was good seeing you,” Blake told her, and Yang laughed.

“Don’t say it like that. I’m seeing you tomorrow, right?”

Ruby’s dark eyebrows raised, interested. “Ohhh?”

“I…” There was a split second where Blake considered backing out, saying no. But she couldn’t. She already knew she needed to see Yang again, and that need scared her. Still… “Yeah. Okay.”

“Where am I picking you up?”

With a quick glance at Ruby, as if to make sure this was okay, Blake rattled off the address of the cottage. Ruby narrowed her eyes at her sister, but said nothing.

“I’ll pick you up around two. You might want to wear a swimsuit, but bring sneakers,” Yang instructed. She gave Blake a long look, full of her smile. “I’m looking forward to it.”

“M-Me, too,” Blake stammered.

“Is this a date or something?” Ruby finally asked, suspicious. To her surprise, Yang blushed, a pretty color tinting her cheeks.

It was a date, Blake realized then. It was, and, stranger still, she didn’t regret that it was. Somehow… she was glad.

“I guess so,” she said, eyes meeting Yang’s. Her stomach fluttered at the look Yang returned to her. It wasn’t just the softness, the warmth, that Blake so loved about it. It was the joy that seemed to encompass it all.

“Then I’ll see you tomorrow,” she replied, her voice low.

Blake’s stare after her might have been too obvious, for she heard Ruby snickering at her. She didn’t care. She wished she had the words to describe the way she felt as Yang vanished into a tall building. It was completely unfamiliar, but the fact that it was there at all meant something. Until now, there hadn’t been any light in her life. Everything had been so dull, so dark.

But Yang could’ve been sunlight.

Later that night, from her nest in the couch, she saw Ruby had sent her a friend request on Facebook,
presumably finding her on *Crescent Rose*’s page. With a strange lightness in her heart, she accepted.

Not even five minutes later, she got a second notification.

*Yang Xiao Long has sent you a friend request.*

“What’re you smiling about, honey?” Kali asked, almost daring to be cheerful, as she passed through the living room.

“Nothing,” Blake said, shaking her head.

She clicked *Accept.*

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU to [@syntaxhighlights](https://twitter.com/syntaxhighlights) for your sailing expertise! "I’m a Lesbian that can sail!" Aaaand you’re hired.

For those on social medias, feel free to follow me! Tumblr is [@pugoata](https://tumblr.com/pugoata) and twitter is [@pugoata](https://twitter.com/pugoata). I always update those right away when I post a new chapter.

clamfam plz interact
Blake hated her reflection. She hated how she looked in her swimsuit, she hated the bags under her eyes, she hated how limp her hair was…

She hated everything, and Yang was going to arrive in twenty minutes.

Adam still haunted the woman in the reflection. She could hear his voice, pointing out her flaws. Even now, she didn’t own a two-piece bathing suit because of him. She could still hear him telling her, “Only sluts wear swimsuits like that. Are you a slut, Blake?”

So she wore a one-piece, and even that didn’t feel like enough on the rare occasions she’d gone to the beach with him. She always had to keep her eyes down, never even daring to look at anyone else. Just the slightest glance at a stranger could stir that jealousy, that rage, in him. More often than not, she’d wear jeans and a sweatshirt to the beach, even on a hot day. They didn’t just cover bruises, but they protected her from the potential stares of beachgoers. They protected her.

Though she covered her swimsuit with a t-shirt, there was only so much she could do about the rest of her appearance. Blake had managed a shower that morning without being prompted by her mother, but having clean hair didn’t mean it would look good. It hung, lank, down her back, and there was little she could do to it to make it look date-worthy. She considered braiding it, but couldn’t muster the energy. Loose would have to do.

Since her visit to the shipyard the day before, Blake had been torn by panic, excitement, and regret. She was eager to see Yang-- for their date-- but she had already begun to warp their meetings in her head. She’d been too much of a mess on both occasions. There was no way Yang would want to date her. That they were seeing each other at all was probably due to pity on Yang’s part. Hell, she’d probably sounded so desperate for a date that Yang couldn’t bring herself to say no.

And despite this, Blake still ached to see her again.

Her parents had noticed her jitters at dinner the night before. “Is everything okay?” Ghira had asked.

“Yeah.” Blake had paused, unsure of what to tell them. She couldn’t say it was a date-- they probably wouldn’t trust her judgement, and rightfully so-- but she would have to tell them something. “I… met some people today. At the diner.”

“Oh?” Ghira looked up sharply. “What kind of people?”

Of course his mind had jumped straight to worry. “Just some of the locals,” Blake had told him quickly. She hesitated. “I… I’m going to hang out with them tomorrow.”

“Oh?” Kali’s ears pricked up, giving away her excitement. “So you made some friends?”

“Something like that. I think.” For reassurance, Blake had reached into her pocket to touch the porcelain Yang had given to her on the day they’d met. It was quickly turning into a habit, but one that Blake couldn’t bring herself to break.

Kali had fired question after question at her about them. How did they meet? What did they do? What were their plans? To the last question, Blake hadn’t known what to say.

“You might want to wear a swimsuit,” Yang had said, “And bring sneakers.”
Blake had no idea what that would mean.

Both of her parents had been fascinated to hear about the visit to *Crescent Rose*. There hadn’t been much to tell them, but they had still wrung every scrap of information out that they could get.

“How did Ruby get into sailing?” Kali had asked.

“It’s basically the family business,” Blake explained as she nibbled at her chicken. “Her dad owns the shipyard, so she started sailing when she was just a kid. I guess both she and Yang were counselors at sailing camp for a while, and—”

“Yang?”

God, it was weird to hear her dad say Yang’s name. “That’s Ruby’s older sister. She doesn’t race anymore, but she works on the shipyard. She’s actually the one who’s picking me up tomorrow.”

She’d been relieved that neither of her parents had noticed the blush that had started creeping into her cheeks.

The knock at the door was ten minutes early and it jolted her from her reverie. Blake jumped off her perch on the couch, but it was Ghira who answered.

“Ah, you must be Yang. Please, come in!”

It was crazy to imagine how much more full, how much more alive, this cottage was when Yang stepped inside. Everything that had seemed so dull and drab now seemed open and infused with color. Blake caught herself staring and forced herself to look away. Yang’s red flannel was so bright, drawing her gaze like a moth to flame. She wouldn’t be surprised if she got burned.

“Nice to meet you, Mr... Belladonna, right?” Yang extended a hand to her father, the picture of politeness. She caught Blake’s eye, then winked. Blake felt herself turn a whole new shade of red.

“Ghira, please! I don’t want to be Mr. Anything on vacation.” Blake rolled her eyes.

“And I’m Kali!” Her mother bustled over, offering a warm hug that Yang didn’t seem to expect, but caught onto quickly enough. “It’s so nice to meet you!”

“You too!” Again, those lilac eyes caught Blake’s over Kali’s shoulder. “You ready?”

“Yeah.”

“So, what’re you guys doing?” Ghira asked as Blake tried to slip out the door. Blake winced, but Yang didn’t seem to mind the interruption.

“It’s low tide, and I know a place that has a lot of tide pools.”

“Oh? Where is this? And what time are you getting back?”

“Mom!” Blake groaned. Kali wasn’t good at playing it casual. “I’m not a kid.”

Again, Yang didn’t seem to notice Blake’s irritation or her mother’s intrusiveness. Instead, she was peering curiously at the various kitschy trinkets on the mantle. She picked up a small carving of a seagull and grinned.

“This looks like something my uncle made,” she told them, setting it back down. “He carves when he isn’t working on the boats.”
“Really?” Kali slid over to the mantle, looking at it with new eyes. “He made it? It’s so intricate!”

“Dad keeps trying to get him to sell to some of the local gift shops, but he keeps saying he isn’t going to be a sell-out.” Yang laughed at the word. “But I bet I could hook you up if you want something of your own.”

“I might have to take you up on that! It almost looks like a real seagull, doesn’t it?” Kali passed it to Ghira. Her dad pretended to be interested, holding it up to look at the various angles.

“Sure does,” he said politely. He wasn’t into little knick-knacks like this, but Blake appreciated the effort he was putting into keeping up appearances.

“Anyway, you ready to go, Blake?” Throughout the conversation, Blake had noticed the glances Yang kept throwing her way. She tried not to read too deeply into them.

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

“Should we wait up for dinner?” Kali asked, relieving her husband by taking the small seagull away from him.

“Nah, I’ve got it covered,” Yang said waving her hand. “It was nice to meet you!”

She ushered Blake into the warm afternoon. Leaving her sweatshirt behind had been the right move, she quickly learned. It was muggy, and already her t-shirt clung heavily to her skin. For a moment, they stood on the deck, and Yang faced her with her familiar, bright smile.

“So!” she said, putting her hands on her hips, daring Blake to speak.

“So,” Blake echoed, her voice much softer and more timid. She paused, then said in a rush, “I’m… uh… sorry about them. They can be a little… protective.”

Yang shrugged. “That wasn’t bad, really. Weiss’s dad was always ten times worse than that. And your parents are nice about it.”

“I guess.” Blake folded her arms, suddenly nervous and struck with the impulse to look away, which she did.

The silence was what drew her eyes back up. Yang’s expression had softened. “Hey, it’s all right if you don’t want to go. We can always--”

“No!” The quickness of her reply made her cringe, but she couldn’t stop it from tumbling off her lips. Yang’s eyebrows shot up. “I-- I do want to-- I’m just…”

Again, she had to look away, unable to bring herself to say nervous, or scared. It would hit too close to everything she wanted to avoid. Instead, her heart rattled in her chest, probably even loud enough for Yang to hear if she listened hard enough.

Surprisingly, she didn’t wince when Yang reached forward, plucking at a strand of hair. The roughened fingers caught on her hair, but didn’t pull. Instead, they curled the hair around them with a sailor’s deftness. Blake could hardly bring herself to breathe, let alone look back at Yang.

“It’s okay to be nervous,” Yang said. She was close enough for Blake to feel her breath as she spoke. She stopped moving her fingers, letting the hair slide out from between them, but didn’t move her hand. It’s a trap! Blake’s mind screamed, but not even that fear stopped her from tilting her head, her cheek resting lightly against Yang’s palm. The roughness was so different from the smoothness
of her own skin. There was something comforting there. She closed her eyes at the *rightness* of it. “I know someone’s hurt you,” Yang murmured, brushing her thumb on Blake’s cheek. Yang’s hands felt cooler as heat rose to Blake’s face.

“It’s-- I didn’t--” she began, but Yang’s thumb drifted across her lips. It wasn’t the same as when Adam would clamp a hand over her mouth; this was a gentle request, not a demand.

“You don’t need to explain,” Yang said, her voice level and reassuring. “I just… don’t want to force you coming with me, if you don’t want to.”


At this, Yang laughed a little. “I’m *okay,*” she chuckled.

“I-- I didn’t mean like… *okay,* like *that.*” Blake opened her eyes again, unsure if she’d inadvertently offended Yang. She didn’t *look* offended. She was only focused on Blake. “I mean--”

“It’s okay, sweetheart.” The smile that broke across Yang’s face was genuine. “I think you’re *okay,* too.”

*This* elicited a small laugh from Blake. Still smiling, Yang pulled her hand back from Blake’s face and she missed the touch before the fingertips even left her skin.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Yang said, smile fading and tone becoming more serious. “I mean that.”

It was so easy for words to be *just* words, for promises to be broken. But Yang’s… were different. These words had the enormity of a tidal wave hidden beneath the ocean’s calm surface. She tried to hold back her expectations, but she was already being swept away by Yang’s promise.

She could only nod.

As it turned out, Yang didn’t have a car. Blake had never been on a motorcycle before, but Yang helped her with the helmet.

“Is it going to be too much for your ribs?” she asked as she helped Blake situate herself behind her.

“This should be okay. As long as I don’t fall off.” Blake’s face must have betrayed her nervousness, for Yang offered a reassuring smile.

“I haven’t lost a passenger yet. You won’t be my first. Just grab a hold of my waist-- don’t worry, you won’t squeeze too tightly.”

Not wanting to seem cowardly, she set her hands very formally on Yang’s waist. It was difficult to try not to think about the muscles under her palms-- they were *hard,* even under the cushion of Yang’s flannel. She wouldn’t think about that. She couldn’t afford to.

Yet as the bike picked up speed, Blake’s restraint was tossed to the wind. Out of nervousness, she secured a tighter hold around Yang’s waist.

The place Yang took her to was off the island, at the tip of a sharp peninsula. Swathes of pink and purple flowers lined the road as they made their way to the very end, where the trees thinned out and gave way to tall grass. By the end of the ride, Blake was embarrassed by how closely she had slid to Yang; their bodies were almost completely flush by the time she pulled into a small driveway.

She was relieved that Yang made no remark about it as she helped Blake off the bike. “How was
that for your first ride?” she asked instead, grinning.

“It was… different.”

“But you liked it?”

“I think so.” Yang took her helmet, and Blake was better able to check out her surroundings. It was another cottage, though it appeared vacant. She frowned. “We’re not trespassing, are we?”

“Here? Nah.” Yang worked at the buttons on her flannel. “This is Maria’s cottage. She’s, like… some distant aunt of Ruby’s, I think. She’s super old and she’s off on a safari or some shit. But she’s like our grandma. We’re always welcome here.”

“As long as you’re sure.” She looked away as Yang stripped off her flannel. Underneath, she was already prepared for walking the shore, with the white bikini top she’d been wearing in that one Facebook picture. The anchor tattoo on her shoulder rippled with movement as she tossed her flannel over the seat of her bike. The whistle around her neck hung low, drawing more attention to her chest than was truly necessary.

Blake somehow kept herself from gawking, but didn’t move to take her own shirt off. Adam’s accusations still rang in her ear.

Yang led her down a small sandy path through the grass. The path ended abruptly with a short descent down a few steps of rock. Yang helped her down, reaching up with her scarred arm to clasp Blake’s hand in her own. This climb was different than the other day. It wasn’t as steep as the rock she’d climbed down during the race, and she was a lot more comfortable with the concept of being helped.

She could almost admit that she liked the way Yang held her hand.

Once they were actually on the rocks, it was a fairly level walk. As they got closer to the mounds of seaweed and debris that marked the tide line, Blake saw the pockets of water in the rock. She knew what tide pools were, but she seldom explored them on Menagerie. The first one was shallow and lifeless. Yang peered into it, then shook her head.

“The ones with the rocks and seaweed in them are our best bet,” she explained, leading Blake further down toward the shore. “If there’s any critters, they’ll try to hide from the sun.”

“So we’re hunting animals? Like what?”

“Crabs, mostly. There’s also starfish sometimes, and sea urchins, and lots of mussels. More periwinkles than you’d know what to do with…” Yang knelt beside a deeper pool, going wrist-deep to lift a slimy rock. “We find little lobsters once in a while.”

Blake knelt beside her, looking for any movement amid the cloudy silt.

“Careful,” Yang warned, replacing the rock. “Don’t scrape your knees on the barnacles or shells.”

“I’ll be careful.”

Yang reached forward for another rock. This time, Blake caught a flutter of movement, and Yang’s hand slipped in faster than Blake could react. A look of concentration crossed over her face as she scanned the water. When she pulled her hand out, she was gripping a tiny green crab.

“He’s a cutie,” Yang cooed to it. “Wanna hold him?”
“Will he pinch?”

“Maybe. But he’s little, so it won’t hurt.” Blake held her palm out and Yang set the small creature there. Its little appendages wriggled against her and she had to cover him up with her other hand to keep him from escaping.

“It feels so weird.” Blake made a hole between her thumb and forefinger, looking in at the beady eyes.

“It’s no different than holding a bug. Then again, I’ve been catching these guys my whole life.” Yang sat back on her haunches, watching with a satisfied grin as Blake gently lowered him back into the water. “Isn’t Menagerie an island? Have you ever done this before?”

Blake frowned as she wiped her hands on her shirt. “Not… exactly,” she said slowly. She hesitated. “The… guy that-- my ex, actually-- he wasn’t really into that sort of thing.”

Yang’s eyes glinted as the expression on her face hardened. “And I guess you never got much of a chance to do it by yourself?”

Blake said nothing. Her eyes were scanning the water again. She squinted at a slight movement, then reached her hand in. The little creature she pulled up was tiny, but easy enough to catch.

“I didn’t know you had hermit crabs,” she remarked, surprised. Compared to the hermit crabs that she sometimes saw at pet stores, this one was unimpressive. It ducked into its shell as Blake stared into the hole.

“Oh, yeah. I see these little guys a lot.” There was nothing in Yang’s voice that betrayed anything other than mild curiosity at the little critter, but Blake had a feeling that the topic of Adam hadn’t been forgotten.

The shell this crab lived in was the size of Blake’s fingertip, and with him hiding in it, Blake could barely see the little legs.

“Ruby tried to keep one as a pet once, but she left it in the garage and forgot about it,” Yang told her with a sad sigh. “Poor Jude.” She shook her head woefully.

Blake smiled as she replaced the little thing back into the tidal pool. This may not have been the bright, colorful life one might find in the tropical waters of Menagerie, but Maine’s creatures had their own practical charm.

Yang carefully steered them away from the seaweed-covered rocks (“They’re slippery, and I don’t want you breaking any more bones!”) toward the smoother, more predictable path along the rocks. A washed up buoy was tucked, sun-bleached, into some rocks just beyond the tide line. Broken bits of crab shells were strewn about the rock, leftovers of the hungry birds that had dropped them there.

Small crabs were the most plentiful creature they’d found, though Yang did find a starfish clinging to a grimy rock. She lay it on Blake’s palm, where it barely stretched from one end to the other. It was rough, almost spiky, yet somehow graceful.

“Ruby has a starfish tattoo, y’know,” Yang told her as she lay the starfish back into the pool they’d found it in. “It’s her only tattoo, and she swears it’ll be her last.”

“That’s cute. I don’t have any, but maybe I should.” Truthfully, Blake had never considered the idea, but she liked the look of Yang’s. It would also be one more way of severing herself from Adam, who’d always told Blake how bad they looked on women.
“If you need someone to hold your hand when you get one, let me know,” Yang replied with a wink. Blake blushed.

There was a small expanse of sandy shore that Yang led her to. Both kept their eyes peeled for seaglass or any other washed-up treasures.

“If the edges are sharp, it isn’t really seaglass,” Yang informed her, demonstrating with a dark brown shard they’d picked up. “This is probably just from a broken beer bottle not too far from here. Real seaglass is more worn-down.”

“I… still have that porcelain, you know. That you gave me the other day.” Her confession came out more awkward than she would have liked, but Yang still smiled brightly.

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Blake reached into her pocket, pulling out the small fragment. “I know, it’s probably silly that I’ve still got it.”

“Not at all.” Yang stepped closer to her, taking it from Blake’s hand. The smile she wore as she looked it over was a tender one. She handed it back to Blake. “You can think of me whenever you look at it, yeah?”

“I do.” Her cheeks warmed at the admission, but she had no inclination to take the words back. It was the truth, after all, she told herself. There was no shame in that, not when Yang was looking at her like this.

Embarrassed, she slipped the porcelain back into her pocket. Yang said nothing, only reached out to run a hand down Blake’s arm in a way that gave her goosebumps. She turned to walk back down the shore, feeling Yang’s eyes on her back.

The tide was beginning to creep back in when they finally called it quits on the tide pools. The breeze off the ocean had a cooler hint to it than when they’d first arrived, and Blake began to regret not bringing a sweatshirt. Her shirt was damp from where she’d been wiping her hands all afternoon, and a shiver ran up her spine as they got back to the bike.

“Oh, here!” Yang dug around in her saddlebag, coming up with a zip-up sweatshirt.

“I can’t--” she tried to protest, but Yang set it over her shoulders, her hand lingering on her back as she smoothed it.

“It’s getting chilly, and being on the bike is gonna make it worse,” she told Blake firmly. With a sigh, Blake slid her arms in. It smelled so purely of Yang and of the shipyard that it could’ve made her high. “And we’re eating outside, so it’ll come in handy then, too.”

“Oh? So you do have a dinner plan?”

“What sort of date would I be if I didn’t?” Yang asked with a grin. “We’ll grab some food from Leviathan, then eat on the pier.”

Leviathan. She’d almost forgotten the little convenience store/diner/movie rental place had a name at all.

“Why the pier, if it’s going to be cold?” Blake asked, zipping up the sweatshirt. It was well-worn, the lining no longer fleecy, but somehow even more comfortable because of that. On one breast, Maine Maritime Academy was written in nondescript letters.
“We won’t have any privacy. Ruby and Jaune are working tonight, and if Ruby’s let slip that I’m on a date… You’ll be meeting the entire island. I’d rather just spend time with you.” The way Yang spoke was so casual, but it set Blake’s heart to pounding.

For the ride back to the island, Blake was less nervous about holding onto Yang’s waist. Spending time with her had eased a lot of the tension she’d been feeling, and though it hadn’t completely alleviated, she was a lot more relaxed around Yang than she had been that morning. It was hard to hold up walls when the person in question was so good at seeing past them.

“Yang! What’re you doing here? Weren’t you-- ooooh!” Ruby bounced out of the kitchen, eyes darting back and forth from Yang to Blake.

“We’re just picking up dinner!” Yang laughed. “Mind your own business.”

“But Yang! She’s wearing your sweatshirt!”

Blake blushed and crossed her arms, as if it could hide the name of the school. Yang shrugged.

“She got cold.”

“Cold?!”

Blake buried her face in her hands, and Yang surprised her by throwing an arm around her shoulders. “Be nice. Not everyone expects Maine to start getting cold at night.”

“Oh, is this the girl you were telling us about?” The blond cashier-- Jaune?-- joined them in the diner, looking interested.

“Have you told everyone?” Yang accused her sister, who shrugged innocently.

“Define everyone.”

“Well, definitely me, Ren, Nora, and Weiss,” Jaune said, ticking off his fingers. “Probably Pyrrha. Maybe Oscar…”

“Christ, Ruby.” Even Yang was starting to turn a little pink. “You couldn’t even wait a day?”

“This is Ruby we’re talking about,” Jaune clarified. All three of them looked at the younger girl, who shrugged.

“It’s a small island,” she said by way of explanation. “Word gets around.”

They didn’t stick around the diner long enough for anyone else to show up, much to Blake’s relief. While they waited for Ruby to put together their sandwiches, Jaune oversharped about his own life on the island. Blake nodded politely as he went on about his sisters.

“…Saph keeps saying I could move in with her in Argus, but city life might just be too much for me…”

Blake nodded blandly, even after he stopped talking, Yang snorted and rolled her eyes. “You’ve been saying that for two years now. This isn’t exactly news.”

“But I might actually do it this year!”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.”
It still took longer to escape than either of them had thought. Ruby kept trying to wheedle details out of them, and Jaune only egged her on. Apparently, on an island the size of Patch, there was no such thing as privacy. Blake took advantage of the overlapping chatter to pay for their dinner, which Yang loudly protested as Jaune handed her card back.

"Jaune, I thought you were on my side!" she complained as Blake signed her receipt.

"Then you should have been paying attention." Blake smiled slightly, shoving her receipt into her pocket.

"I'll get it next time," Yang promised, holding the door open for them. Blake watched her curiously as she stepped out.

"So there’s going to be a next time?"

For once, Yang seemed at a loss of what to say. She opened and closed her mouth several times, letting the door slam shut behind her. Finally, she said, "...I mean, if you want to."

"I do," Blake admitted, blushing. "Of course I do."

"Good." Yang gave a relieved sort of grin as she packed their sandwiches into her saddle bag. "Then I'm buying next time."

In the sweatshirt, Blake hardly noticed the chill in the evening air. Yang had rolled her sleeves back down, but otherwise gave no indication of the cold. "My body temperature runs pretty high," she explained as she tried to cram an errant onion back onto the sandwich. "Ruby likes to say I'm like a furnace, but I wouldn’t say it’s that hot."

"She does seem to have a way with the dramatics," Blake replied before taking a bite. The tuna salad had a little too much celery for her liking, but it was tolerable. Yang popped an olive off of her sandwich, flicking into the air and catching it in her mouth.

"Tell me about it! God, when she and Nora start going at it, all you can do is duck and cover!" A seagull soared over them, and Blake suddenly wished she was sitting beside Yang instead of across from her. It was stupid, she was being stupid. But she’d been pushing people away since even before she’d finally left Adam. When had been the last time she’d actually longed for closeness?

She didn’t speak until she finished eating. She was content enough to just listen to Yang talk about the island. Patch and the surrounding area was pretty much dominated by a handful of families-- the Xiao Longs, the Roses, the Branwens, the Arcs. They owned most of the rental properties and businesses. Yang went into detail about the various small-town politics, sometimes forgetting about her own sandwich.

"Do you know who your parents rented their cottage from?" Yang asked, balling up the paper bag their dinner had come in. Blake shook her head.

"I don’t know. I haven’t really been paying attention."

"Let me know if you find out. I bet I know the owners. I might even be related to ‘em. We’re related to practically everyone. That’s one of the weird things about island life."

"I bet."

"Do you want me to show you around? The island, I mean." Yang sat up straight, eyes intent on Blake.
“When were you thinking?” Blake didn’t want to look too eager, but Yang had no such reservations. She lit up with a radiant smile.

“I work till five tomorrow-- I don’t think I can get away with another afternoon off this week, but--”

“You took an afternoon off to be with me?” Blake’s eyebrows shot up, but Yang shook her head.

“Nah. I was gonna go clamming today, so I was already planning on the afternoon off.” She winked. “This was a lot more fun, though.”

“Was it?” Even though Blake couldn’t imagine a better afternoon, it was strange to imagine that Yang had enjoyed herself, as well.

“Uh, yeah! Clamming is good… work? I guess? But I wouldn’t call it fun.”

“How does clamming work?” Blake’s question was rewarded with a dramatic gasp-- apparently, Ruby wasn’t the only drama queen in the family.

“Come with me sometime and I’ll show you. It involves lots of mud.” Yang paused, grinning wickedly. “Though we probably shouldn’t get mud involved till at least the third date.”

Blake was so surprised at the unexpected innuendo that she laughed out loud. She caught herself, still unused to the rusty sound that squeaked out of her throat. Yang leaned in, settling her chin in one hand and cocking her head to the side.

“I love your laugh,” she said simply.

They made sure to swap numbers when Yang returned her to the cottage. They’d go out again soon, Yang had assured her as she punched the digits into Blake’s phone. As soon as Yang could figure out a good time, she’d give Blake a tour of the island, or take her clamming, or take her out on Ember Celica. Yang was already full of dozens of ideas for dates and Blake was struggling to keep up.

“God, this is such a tiny cottage,” Yang said, wrinkling her nose and stalling for time. Blake nodded.

“My parents…” she began, then stopped. Would it be crossing a line to tell her this? She considered, then decided to continue anyway. There was nothing secretive about this. “My parents booked this cottage ages ago. I wasn’t living with them at the time, so they only needed a place with one bedroom. They didn’t plan on bringing me, but they didn’t want me to be….” She stopped, trying to find a word that wouldn’t garner sympathy. She sighed. “They didn’t want me to be alone for the summer. But… yeah. I’m sleeping on the couch.”

“Shit,” Yang said, making a face. “For the summer?”

“Yeah.” Blake forced a weak smile.

“If you ever feel the need to sleep in a real bed, just send me a text,” Yang replied, her tone too serious to suggest something like a hookup. “We’ve got a big house, and we have an extra room. In case, y’know, the couch throws your back out or something.”

“I’m young, I can handle it.” Blake shrugged, mimicking the words Ghira had used when they’d first proposed bringing her to Maine with them.

“Just know the offer’s there.”
Somehow, they were standing at the steps to the cottage’s deck. Behind the trees, the sky was turning a dusty blue. Night had descended without Blake even consciously registering that it had.

Well, the sun had been with her this whole time, she thought stupidly, staring at Yang.

“Thanks for coming with me today,” Yang said after a moment, staring right back. In the coming darkness, it was harder to see what Yang’s expression might have been saying. The smile, though, was enough.

“It was fun,” Blake agreed. She was overcome with an urge, a more intense and crazed feeling than she could remember feeling in years (or ever), to throw her arms around Yang, to bury her face into her shoulder, to cling.

She wouldn’t be so foolish.

“I’ll see you around, sweetheart.” Yang smiled, then backed away, returning to the bike. Blake saw her turn to look over her shoulder once. With Blake’s luck, Yang should have been struck into a pillar of salt right then, but just for tonight, there were no biblical disasters to destroy Blake’s hope.

She didn’t realize she was still wearing Yang’s sweatshirt until she got into the cottage. Kali had already set up the couch for the night, already anticipating her daughter to go to sleep early.

“What’re you wearing, honey?” Kali asked as Blake brushed past her. Blake stared down at the sweatshirt, horror-struck.

“Oh, shit. I borrowed it when it got cold.”

Kali gave her a measuring look, a trace of suspicion there. “From?”

“God, Mom, just lay off, okay?” Blake begged, pushing her way into the bathroom. Accusations--why was she always followed by accusations?

The sweatshirt hung loosely around her reflection. She allowed herself to look at it for only a moment before pulling her phone out.

I still have your sweatshirt. Do you want to come back for it? she texted to Yang.

With Yang on her bike, she wasn’t anticipating a reply as quickly as she got one.

nah. you can hold onto it for now. looks better on you anyway.

A small smile quirking her lips, she immediately replied, I hope you’re not texting and driving.

i pulled over first, dont even worry about it. There was a pause, then another text came in. i was hoping youd text me.

Blake blew out a puff of air, then looked back at the reflection. This morning, her reflection had looked so nervous, so unsure. She saw none of that in her eyes now. The sweatshirt was armor against whatever negativity that might have tried to worm in. She pulled at the fabric as she hugged herself, wishing it was possible to sink even deeper into it.

It was another cold night.

At least, that was Blake’s excuse as she pulled the sweatshirt on over her pajamas. Being able to smell Yang on the sweatshirt as she drifted off to sleep was only a pleasant bonus.
Typically, Blake would shut her phone off before going to bed each night. Irrational anxiety over the phone ringing would seep into her nightmares too often when she left it on. Even off, she still dreaded the thought that somehow, somewhen, her phone would ring and ring and ring. She feared the constant beeps of ceaseless texts. That had been Adam’s way. Going to work, she would always know that he’d send her texts to supposedly “check in” on her. There would be voicemails on top of the texts, and she knew that opening them was a gamble. She never knew which side of Adam would rear its ugly head in those messages.

She was asleep when her phone beeped with a text.

Blake shot up, panicked for a moment before remembering herself. She was on the sofa, in a tiny rural town, far away from Kuo Kuana and the man imprisoned there. She hadn’t shut her phone off, she realized. After taking her sleeping pill, she could recall the conscious decision she’d made to leave it on. She and Yang had been texting, and even after Yang’s last have a good night sweetheart, she hadn’t wanted to turn it off, just in case she’d sent another.

Which she apparently did that morning.

good morning! didn’t want to text you too early…didn’t want to wake you :) Yang’s message read.

Blake smiled.

You didn’t, she replied. She smoothed a hand over the sweatshirt she still wore. It had been broken-in and well-loved, making it the perfect material to sleep in. Was it weird, to enjoy having this little essence of Yang with her?

im gonna be stuck at work all day, but id love it if you could stop by!

Blake considered.

“You’re up early,” Kali remarked, sounding surprised as she stepped into the living room from the kitchen. Blake set her phone down, trying not to look too guilty.

“I slept well,” she said with a shrug. One of Kali’s ears twitched.

“Are you sure your friend isn’t going to mind you sleeping in their sweatshirt?” she asked, and like the night before, Blake caught the barest suspicion in her mother’s eyes.

“I’ll wash it before I return it. It was cold last night.”

“Uh-huh…” Kali didn’t seem to buy it, but she let the subject go. “Dad and I are gonna head out to New Harbor. They’ve got an old fort, a beach, a lighthouse… wanna come?”

“I think I’ll pass this time.” Blake pressed the button to wake her phone up again, still opened to Yang’s offer. “I might visit the shipyard again.”

Kali regarded Blake for a moment, her golden eyes narrowed. She wasn’t the type to miss anything, and Blake held her breath.

“I… suppose,” she finally said. She smiled, a light and easy thing that made Blake wonder if the suspicion had been there at all. It was entirely possible that the paranoia was winning again. “I’m so glad to see you’re coming out of your shell a little bit.”
“The people here are nice.” Which was the truth; none of the people she’d met so far had seemed like bad people. Some were just nicer than others. Her mind raced back to Yang, the careful touches she’d given Blake, and how each one meant something. “That makes it easier, I guess. Mind dropping me off before you head out?”

“Sure thing.” Kali paused, her looking turning uncertain. Blake felt her hackles rise. “Are you… You’re not… seeing someone, are you?”

“Mom!”

Kali regarded her warily, taking in the bright red of Blake’s cheeks and the way her ears fell flat on her scalp. “Just… please, be careful, Blake. It’s… hardly been a month since--”

“God, Mom, I know!” Blake covered her eyes with one of her hands, not wanting this conversation to happen. “Do you think I just forgot?”

“I didn’t say--”

“I’m being careful! Can’t you just trust me?” She looked back up at Kali, and was dismayed that her mother only looked away, not answering.

Still, an hour later, she was deposited at the entrance to Xiao Long Shipyard. Before they pulled away, Ghira extracted a promise from Blake to show them around the place one of these days. As if Blake knew anything about the sprawling buildings or the boats that were sprinkled throughout the property. He seemed unaware of the tension between his wife and daughter, and Blake was grateful that Kali had said nothing to him about that morning.

She was being careful, wasn’t she?

“Excuse me,” she called out, knocking on the door of the main office. “I’m… looking for Yang Xiao Long?”

She didn’t really need an introduction to the woman who answered. Weiss Schnee, co-pilot of Crescent Rose, looked up from her paper-strewn desk with a piercing stare. She frowned.

“I’m sorry?” she asked. “Can I ask who--?”

“Blake,” she replied quickly, wincing. Already she was making a fool of herself, and Weiss’s pale eyebrows shot up. “I mean, I’m Blake, and Yang said I could--”

“Oh,” Weiss said, some kind of realization dawning. “Belladonna.” She rolled her eyes. “I had to listen to Yang going on and on about your date all morning. Of course she invited you here.”

Weiss made no mention of how Blake’s face went scarlet as she pushed herself away from the desk. She gave Blake a once-over, eyes lingering on the ears at the top of her head.

“She didn’t mention you were a Faunus,” she remarked, surprised, but Blake was relieved to see there was no disgust in that surprise. She spent a few more seconds looking her over, then stood up and extended a hand. “Weiss Schnee. I do… accounting? But I’m also the receptionist. I’m the only responsible person on this whole shipyard, I guess.”

Blake stared for a minute, but Weiss’s mouth creased with a hidden smile. A joke. Blake relaxed, then shook her hand. “And I guess you know who I am already.”

“Are you kidding?” she groaned. “Ruby’s bad enough on her own, but she, at least, moves onto
other things. Yang, though…” She shook her head, her white ponytail bouncing, “She won’t stop.”

She led a still-blushing Blake out of the office, down the dirt road. Instead of veering right, toward the docks that she’d visited the other day, Weiss steered her to the left. A massive, disused building blocked them from whatever lay beyond, but Weiss picked out the worn trail around it.

“Did Ruby give you the grand tour last time?” she asked, catching the way Blake stared, wide-eyed, at the building and various boats that were propped up around them.

“No. I think she just wanted to show me Crescent Rose,” she replied, looking up at a large blue-hulled boat propped up on legs. Semblance was written on the back in gold cursive. “This is… pretty cool.”

“I guess it is, for tourists.” Weiss’s casual snobbery was almost amusing; she didn’t even seem to have noticed her own patronizing tone. “I’ve been coming here every summer since I was a kid, and moved here after college. I practically grew up here.”

“So you knew Yang growing up?”

“Unfortunately. She’s the reason I needed stitches when I was twelve.” Weiss sighed dramatically. “We were fooling around on a boat that definitely wasn’t done yet, and, well…” She kicked up a leg, showing off a long scar on her calf. “I thought Dad was going to sue this place.”

“She’s got pretty big one on her arm, too. Must be a theme here,” Blake said, amused. Weiss scrunched up her face, looking more uncomfortable than annoyed now.

“That was-- yeah... “ Weiss trailed off, fidgeting with the collar on her shirt. Blake looked over, frowning. There was something she was missing, or something was being hidden, but before she could address it, Weiss plowed on. “This one on my eye, though… This wasn’t Yang’s fault, actually. I got this on one of Dad’s fishing trips, when-- oh. Yang, you’ve got a visitor!”

Blake almost jumped, looking around.

“Oh! Hey! Awesome!” Yang’s cheerful voice came from above, in a boat that Blake hadn’t caught the name of. “I’ll be right down!”

Blake watched with raised eyebrows as Yang shimmied along the deck of the boat above her, swinging a leg over the side and coming down a ladder that stood beside it. There was a sheen of sweat on her arms and forehead, and the blonde wisps that had escaped her messy bun had plastered against her temples.

“How’s she coming?” Weiss asked, setting a hand on her hip to give the boat a critical eye.

“Slowly, but surely! Glad you decided to stop by, Blake!” Yang rubbed her palms on her thighs, drying off the sweat before throwing her arms around her.

A hug. Such a simple gesture, and one she had wondered how it would feel to receive from Yang, but Blake still gave a violent twitch in response. She sensed Yang’s surprise as the taller woman nearly released her, which wasn’t what she wanted. So Blake made the quick decision to return the embrace, uncaring of Yang’s sweat-drenched shirt. Yang’s arms wrapped back around her more gently and in the space of a few seconds, they had found their balance.

It was too brief. Yang pulled away, grinning, looking happy—genuinely happy— to see her.

“I would’ve brought your sweatshirt, but it probably needs to be washed first,” Blake told her, but
Yang was already shaking her head.

“I told you, you look better in it, anyway.” Yang pulled a purple bandana from where it had been dangling from her pocket to wipe her forehead. “You can have it. God, it’s hot.”

“I can’t just take it,” Blake protested, but Yang only huffed and crammed the bandana back into her pocket.

“Sure you can. Unless you really want to fight me for it.” To make a point, Yang stretched out her arms over her head, muscles rippling with the motion. Blake nearly gaped, but caught herself before she was too obvious.

“God, Yang, leave her alone.” Blake almost jumped. She’d nearly forgotten about Weiss, who was giving Yang a disbelieving stare. “Blake, just keep the sweatshirt. It’ll end up a rag if you don’t, anyway. Just like other clothes she’s borrowed from people.” She glared pointedly at Yang, whose eyes widened innocently.

“Moi? I’d never do such a thing!” Yang gave Blake a quick wink. “And even if it did… It was only once.”

“Three times, Yang. I can make you an itemized list of all of my things that’ve ended up covered in grease.”


“We have to when dealing with people like you!”

“But, to be fair, I can’t be held responsible for that ugly cardigan you had. That was all on Ruby.”

“I wasn’t including it, you… buffoon.” Blake watched the exchange with amusement, surprised when Weiss actually lifted a leg and stomped her foot on that last word. Yang was snorting with laughter.

“But you knew exactly the sweater I was talking about, though!” she declared, pumping a fist in victory. “You knew it was ugly.”

“So? My style was… questionable at the time,” Weiss replied hotly with an embarrassed scowl.

“It was Goodwill chic!” Yang mock-whispered to Blake, who grinned. “Only an rich kid from Massachusetts would think thrift store clothes are edgy.”

“Oh, you are such a bitch.” Weiss stared at the pair of them for a minute, then shook her head with a slow, grudging smile. “Anyway… I oughta get back to work. It was nice meeting you, Blake. I’m sure I’ll see you around.”

“If you ask her real nice, I bet she’ll come to the race next week!” Yang told her, shoving both hands in her pockets, still grinning.

“What’s the point if you’re planning on doing that yourself?” Weiss shot back, eyebrow raised. Blake bit her lip to keep from smiling— at least, until Weiss had turned her back and was walking away. Then the grin took over her face.

“The Ice Queen does make a point,” Yang said when Weiss was out of earshot. “What’re you doing next Thursday?”
“It sounds like I’m going to another race with you.” Blake thanked whatever gods were on her side that she was able to speak without her voice trembling or cracking. She almost sounded *smooth.* Yang snorted.

“Well, I was gonna ask first, but yeah. If you want to?” Yang’s boisterous grin changed then, dropping into something smaller, softer. She was offering an out, Blake realized. There would be no tricks into a date, no bullying her into saying yes. This was Blake’s choice, and Yang wasn’t going to assume anything. It was a relief to hear, even if she knew it didn’t change her answer.

“I… would love to,” Blake replied, even more confident in her answer than she was before. “So, uh… are you building this?”

“What?” Yang looked back at the boat she’d been working on, as if surprised to even see it at all. Blake suppressed a smile. “Oh, nah. Just making some improvements to the mast, and then I need to put this anti-corrosion stuff on… Not as exciting as building a whole new boat, but it’s just as important.”

“Oh, I get that.” Yang led her around the boat, Blake admiring it politely. She didn’t know anything about boats-- it was bigger than *Crescent Rose,* but bulkier. She guessed it probably wasn’t made for racing. It was beautiful, though. Someone had put a lot of care into the words *Dew Gayl* that glittered on the back. “It makes sense.”

“Yeah.” Yang stepped back, looking up the the large hull with a pleased look. “I mean, I love building boats, too. But we don’t just build,” Yang explained, gesturing to the boat above them. “We fix things, too. So I guess I’m like a boat mechanic or something.”

“*Boatbuilder* does roll off the tongue a little more nicely.” Blake shook her head, amused, then muttered, “Boat mechanic.”

It was close enough to lunchtime that Yang didn’t go through the trouble of getting Blake up onto the boat itself. Yang hopped back up to wrap up whatever she was working on. After lunch, Yang assured her, she’d haul Blake up and really teach her a few things about boats.

“I’d take you up to *Leviathan* for lunch, but they’ll take too long. It’s easier just to go back to the house to eat.” Yang called down. She peeked over the edge, as if to make sure Blake hadn’t suddenly left her, then added, “I know leftovers aren’t really romantic, but I just made the chili yesterday for Ruby, and it’s pretty good.”

“Chili sounds fine. How hot is it?”

“Not very.” Yang had gone back to her tools, so Blake couldn’t see her face, but she heard the smile. “We’re Mainers. We’re wimps when it comes to spice.”

“That’s okay. I can handle spice, but I don’t like it when there’s too much. I’m sure your chili is perfect.” Yang swung back over the edge, the height of the ladder not even an issue to someone who was so used to it. Blake knew she’d make a fool of herself if she tried to climb it, but she’d cross that bridge when she got to it. No wonder Yang had been up and down that rock so easily on race day.

The house was on shipyard property, making the walk there quick. Though large, the walls made the space seemed closed-off and almost cramped. Blake was used to the open-concept houses of Menagerie and, to a lesser extent, some of the more modern homes in Vale. The Xiao Long house was much older and boxier than many of those houses, but it was quite cozy.

Yang led her through the entryway and past a staircase to the kitchen. It was dated, with aged
linoleum and walls that were painted an uncomfortable green. At least the pictures were cute, Blake thought with a small smile. Two little girls sat in a yellow lobster trap, big grins plastered on their faces. The blonde was in pigtails, her smile wide enough to show a missing tooth. The other girl, darker of hair, looked to be trying to pull herself up from the opening she’d been set in.

Blake’s eyes flicked back over to the grown Yang, who was pulling gaudy blue bowls out of a cupboard. It was easy to see how the little pigtailed girl had grown into this woman. She had all her teeth now, but she still smiled with the same creases in her cheeks.

“How much d’you want?” Yang asked, pulling a container from the fridge.

“Probably not too much.” She didn’t have much of an appetite these days, but Blake was curious about Yang’s cooking.

Chili probably wasn’t the best sort of meal for a hot summer day, but it was hearty and delicious, thick with beans and beef and corn. Yang had sprinkled enough cheese on her own bowl that it melted into an unappetizing-looking glob. Blake finished her bowl quickly, and surprised herself by asking for another helping.

“I didn’t expect it to be that good,” she admitted when Yang returned with a fresh bowl.

“That’ll teach you to doubt me,” Yang replied smugly, lifting her spoon. The cheese hung off her spoon in long strings, and Yang cut them off with her tongue before taking a bite of her chili.

“Anytime you want to come by for dinner, just let me know.”

“I might have to now.”

And the idea was tempting. Lunch with Yang was more pleasant, and much more animated, than the sullen meals she shared with her folks. She couldn’t bring herself to talk as much as Yang did, but Blake was slowly figuring out the mechanics of conversation again. It had been crippled by the time she’d spent with Adam, where she’d carefully censor every word that came out of her mouth. It wasn’t necessary here; with Yang, conversation could be unfiltered again.

“God, I’m stuffed.” Blake stood up, grabbing her own bowl and the one Yang had pushed away when she’d finished.

“No, I got that,” Yang said, jumping up to take the bowls from her. She didn’t even give Blake a chance before taking them to the sink.

“You sure?” Blake frowned.

“They’re only dishes. I’m a big girl, Blake, I think I can handle it.” Yang gave her a wink, and Blake had no choice but to back down.

“I know, but you took care of the lunch part. I just… I’m not used to just sitting around, letting someone else do all the work.” She got up, going over to the sink to watch Yang rinse the bowls. There were splotches of cheese stuck to Yang’s, which required a little more scrubbing. Blake ran a finger between the green tiles of the countertop absently.

“Even if the work only takes a couple minutes?” Yang asked, a grin playing on her lips again. Sure enough, once she’d stuck the bowls in the dishwasher, she was done.

“It’s not that. I just don’t want you to think I’m…” she said, but hesitated before she could finish her thought.
Lazy, she heard Adam whisper in her ear. She grimaced.

“I…” Her train of thought had crashed with that small, remembered word. Fighting the sinking of her heart, she scraped one of her fingernails into the grout a little harder than she intended. She shook her head, keeping her eyes trained on the countertop. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Yang had dried her hands off a dishcloth before turning to lean against the counter. “Everything all right?”

“Yeah…” She wasn’t going to say anything. She didn’t want to talk about this ever again. But Yang was looking at her with such concern that she scooted just a little closer, sheltered in the protective glow that Yang seemed to emanate. If they were going to spend much more time together, then maybe Yang deserved to hear the truth. At least, the beginning of it. “I…” She scraped at the grout more insistently, her fingers full of nervous energy. “I just… I just got out of a relationship. And it… was bad.”

“Bad?” Yang repeated. Blake couldn’t tell which one of them had moved; they were so close now, almost touching.

“Bad.” She frowned at the floor. “I’m just… still trying to get over that. I was… with him for years. And a lot of… stuff happened.”

“I get it.” Blake was still working on the grout, but stopped when Yang lay her fingers on her hand. “Was he the one who did… this to you?”

Yang didn’t need to gesture for Blake to know that she was talking about her ribs. She nodded and a dark cloud fell over Yang’s face. Her grip over Blake’s hand tightened only slightly. “How fucking dare he,” she growled.

“He’s… in jail now,” Blake said quickly, not wanting to stir up anger over nothing. “It’s just… hard to get used to. Life without… all of that.” She tried to soften her frown. It felt as though her face had frozen it in place. “So, I’m sorry if I’m… I don’t know. I just, like… get weird about it sometimes, and--”

“It’s okay, baby. I get it,” Yang said reassuringly, her rough fingers ghosting over Blake’s knuckles. “I really do.”

And she sounded like she meant it. Blake closed the small fraction of space between them, not drawing back when her body slid into place beside Yang’s. They fit the way a doorknob clicked into the jamb, secured and immovable. Yang’s hand moved around Blake’s back, slowly, giving her the chance to pull away.

She didn’t.

Blake blew out a breath, her body relaxing as she sunk against Yang’s frame. For the second time that day, both of Yang’s arms were around her. Blake buried her face in Yang’s shoulder, breathing in unfamiliar smells of the shipyard and the more comforting scent of Yang herself.

She had missed touch like this. Even Adam couldn’t have beaten this need out of her, and she was starved for this gentle touch. She just hadn’t been able to identify that need before. One of Yang’s hands traced her spine, slowly ascending over each curve. Her body, trained to brace itself against any touch, surrendered more and more of its tension until she’d practically melted into Yang. For such callused hands, Yang’s touch was achingly tender on her back.

“Wanna just… sit down for a bit? I’ve got some time before I need to get back,” Yang murmured.
She paused, then added quickly, “Not to… I mean, just sit. We can just sit. Or watch TV, or something.”

“Okay,” Blake breathed. She was loathe to let go, and Yang seemed to feel the same way. Her hand trailed away from Blake slowly, fingers lingering longer than they had to.

Yang laced her fingers through hers, leading her away from the counters and out of the kitchen. The living room was further down the hall, and Blake was so focused on the warmth of Yang’s grip that she didn’t pay attention to the photos on the wall at first. At one, however, she stopped, and Yang came to a halt when Blake did.

“Is this you?” Blake asked with a small smile, nodding at a family portrait. Four people, sitting in the grass under a tree, surrounded by wildflowers. A yellow-haired toddler in a lavender dress was standing at her father’s shoulder, grinning so widely that her eyes crinkled into narrow slits. The woman beside her father looked so much like Ruby that it was obvious that this was their mother—she couldn’t remember if anyone had told her the woman’s name, but if they had, she couldn’t remember it. In the woman’s arms was a baby who couldn’t have possibly been over a year old, with a nimbus of dark hair. Ruby. “This is absolutely adorable.”

“I was a pretty cute kid,” Yang replied, her voice light. Blake looked up at her, but her smile faded when she saw Yang wasn’t even looking at the picture. She was looking at the blank wall over it, face pleasantly blank.

For someone who had such open facial expressions, it was strange to see it so carefully neutral. Yang’s free hand rubbed absently at the scar on her arm.

“I guess you took after your dad, huh?” Blake asked, watching for any kind of reaction. There was none. Yang only shrugged.

“Well, Summer wasn’t really my biological mom… but that’s kind of a complicated story. I’ll tell you sometime.” Not once had Yang’s eyes looked to the picture, but she dropped her hand away from her scar. “Here, the living room’s just around here.”

The topic was closed. The small indents of nails Yang had left behind on the puckered scar tissue spoke volumes, but Blake didn’t press the topic further. She didn’t want to risk ruining this (whatever this was) with inappropriate questions about something Yang clearly didn’t want to talk about. She did, however, give Yang’s hand a quick squeeze. Yang returned it, a small smile returning to her face.

On the couch, Blake settled back into Yang’s arms as if she’d never left. Had she ever been held like this? She couldn’t remember the last time she’d felt so comfortable with someone. There had been times Adam had held her, but Blake had always feared that those moments would come with a price, that affection would turn to pain. But this…

She curled her body under Yang’s arm, closing her eyes. This was nice. This was safe. This was peaceful.

“Are… you sure this is okay?” Blake asked. Insecurity was never far away.

“More than.” Yang’s fingertips strummed her back. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she replied softly. She slid a hand around Yang’s stomach and waist, muscles tight under her arm. Her own heart was pounding hard throughout her body. How could Yang not feel it? “It’s… It’s okay. When it’s you.”
Yang’s grip tightened slightly, and Blake found herself wriggling even closer.

They didn’t need words as the minutes passed. All Blake needed was Yang’s rhythmic breaths and the occasional whistle of the wind outside. If she could have stayed there forever, she might have even been convinced it was heaven.

It was Yang who broke the silence.

“I don’t want to do anything you don’t wanna do,” she said, voice low. Blake nodded, unsure of what to say to that. “I want you to be able to trust me.”

Oh, she had promised her mother that she was being careful, but this conversation was already treading a dangerous line. She knew, more than anyone, that not everyone could be trusted, not even the people closest to her. She’d learned that the hard way. Would Yang snap like Adam had, taking her trust and manipulating it until she couldn’t remember who she was?

But Adam had never been as gentle as Yang was. Even at the beginning, when Blake had been infatuated with his intelligence and ideals, there had been always been a razor on his tongue, and his temper had been a match, ready to strike at any moment. His monster was always lurking just under the surface. At the time, Blake had thought it was only a deadliness that would power his passions, that could be channeled for good. But his monster was still a monster, no matter the pretty picture he tried to paint on it.

There were no sharp edges to Yang’s personality. Even in the way she interacted with Ruby and Weiss, everything had been transparent.

It would be so easy to trust that.

But she couldn’t. Not yet. So even as she lay in the crook of Yang’s body, she had to remind herself to be careful. But her heart yearned for connection. Yang was already bringing light to her blackened soul. She craved more.

“Then don’t let me go yet,” she replied, close to a whimper. Yang wrapped her other arm around her, shifting her own body to pull Blake closer and resting her chin on her head. At this angle, Blake could hear Yang’s steady heartbeat against her ear.

Getting up was harder than she had imagined, but Blake didn’t want to be the cause of Yang’s tardiness. They pried themselves apart regretfully. Soon, Blake told herself, even if she wasn’t sure she believed it. They’d be able to do this again soon.

“As long as my hours even out in the end, it doesn’t really matter if I’m just a little late,” Yang assured her as she stood up. She pulled her hair out of its bun, shook out the messy blonde locks, and fixed it into a ponytail. “Plus, it helps when your dad’s the boss.”

“Then sounds like you’re abusing your privilege,” Blake remarked with a teasing smile.

“Only when pretty girls are involved.” Yang winked, then offered a hand. “C’mon. I’ll give you a real boat education as I work.”

“Are you turning me into a sailor, Xiao Long?” Blake asked, taking the hand and letting Yang pull her off the sofa.

“I’ll try, but I’m not a miracle worker for you landlubbers.”

“Weren’t you a sailing camp counselor? Wasn’t it your job to teach kids to sail?” This made Yang
laugh.

“It didn’t mean I was always successful. I may have lost one or two overboard.”

Was this what a normal relationship was like? Holding someone’s hand and laughing? It was such a foreign concept, but while Yang led her back down the path to the Dew Gayl, Blake could almost forget that Yang had been a stranger only days ago.

But she couldn’t forget. Always, there was that little part of her mind that wondered. Was she rushing things? Was she being foolish? And always, always, always, Adam’s voice whispered its own admonishments in her ear.

*Slut*, he said.

“You okay, sweetheart?” Yang asked, brows furrowed. “You looked a little lost for a second.”

“Yeah.” Blake shook her head, trying to shake the thought from her head. “I’m fine.”

She would be. She had to be.
Blake may not have become a sailor that afternoon, but Yang definitely put her on the right track to becoming one. While she worked, she pointed out the different parts of the boat to Blake. While Ruby had done that a couple of days before, Blake hadn’t retained any of it. Yang explained it properly. From Yang, the terminology made more sense.

“I’ll have Weiss dig out those old booklets we’d give to the kids at camp,” she added, climbing down the ladder. “Then you can study at home!”

“Yes, Miss Xiao Long,” Blake said, pitching her voice high like a schoolkid. Yang laughed.

“Watch it, sweetheart, or I’ll give you homework, too!” At the bottom, she held up her hands, ready to catch in case Blake lost her footing.

Though she came down more slowly than Yang did, she didn’t need the extra help, though Yang insisted on helping anyway. On the third step to the bottom, Yang grabbed her by the waist, just as she had on the day they had watched the race. Blake shrieked a little, but it devolved into a strangled giggle.

Giggling. Yang had her giggling.

“I love making you laugh,” Yang told her, eyes alight as she sat Blake down, though her hands didn’t leave her waist. “You don’t do it often enough.”

Blake smiled back uncertainly, then put her own hands on Yang’s waist. Her shirt was damp with sweat; the deck of the boat had almost seemed to absorb the sunshine and exacerbate the heat of the day. She looked into Yang’s eyes, falling into those lilac depths, her hands curling onto the firm muscle. And her lips looked so soft. For one beautiful moment, she allowed herself to imagine what they might feel like on her own.

But she looked away. She couldn’t afford to think of things like that. Not yet, anyway.

“Need a ride home?” Yang asked, only then choosing to let go. Blake pulled her hands away, no longer as secure without Yang’s touch.

“I-- Yeah.” Blake pulled out her phone, looking to see if there was a text from her parents, but she had no reception. “I have no idea if my parents are back yet. Service here sucks.”

“Most services do. Verizon isn’t as bad, though. It’s almost impossible to use anything else. I guess that’s when happens when you live in east bumfuck,” Yang said with a shrug. Blake chuckled at the epithet.

“I think that’s part of the charm. People like being somewhere remote and beautiful.” Blake looked out over the harbor, at the secluded cottages on the opposite shore. “It’s an escape.”

“I can imagine city-people would need one, yeah?”

“That’s why my parents came. They came to Maine once before and loved it, so now they’re back.”
“I’m glad they brought you this time.” Yang’s tone, again, didn’t seem teasing, and neither did her smile. Maybe coming to Maine this summer wasn’t as terrible as Blake had thought it would be.

When Yang brought out her motorcycle, Blake found that she was a lot less nervous about riding it this time around. It was no longer fear that made her wrap her arms around Yang’s waist as she sat on it.

“You seem a lot more comfortable with this today,” Yang remarked as she pulled her helmet on. “Bumblebee can take some getting used to, but you’re doing great.”

“Bumblebee?”

“My bike.” Yang laughed, then revved the engine. “We name boats, so naming the bike seemed like the right thing to do.”

“Bumblebee,” Blake repeated, amused, then tightened her grip as Yang sped the bike down the road.

Though the evening was drawing near, the sun hadn’t yet set. “If you’re not in a hurry, do you want me to take you around the island?” Yang called over the roar of the bike.

“Sure.”

Yang slowed down enough to be able to point out the sights— the wharf, the chapel, an old cemetery. “That’s the Schnee house,” Yang said, stopping the bike. She pointed at a large white house on a well-manicured hill. “That’s where Weiss spent her summers before moving here. They won’t be here till late July.”

“Did… something happen with Weiss?” Blake asked, unsure if it was appropriate to ask the question. She’d only met the woman once, and she didn’t want to intrude.

“Oh… did you hear about that?” Yang looked over her shoulder at Blake, frowning slightly. “It’s hard to keep secrets on an island this small. But yeah. She was, like, an heiress, but she got disinherited last year. Her dad runs the Schnee Dust Company and he’s been getting involved in some shady shit. Weiss confronted him about it, but Jacques is a guy who… doesn’t like being challenged.”

“Oh, shit.”

“Yeah.” Yang shook her head. “So she left, and moved in with us. She’s still… pretty upset about everything. She wanted to make a difference, and now she feels like she lost that chance. She took it pretty hard.”

From the little Blake had seen of Weiss, she could see how that might be. She’d prided herself on being responsible, and she was put-together enough to be a successful sailor. She was the sort of person who seemed comfortable with control. Losing it over something major like the Schnee Dust Company couldn’t have been easy.

“That’s horrible,” was the only semi-intelligent response she could come up with as she stared dismally at the grand, empty building.

“Yeah. Her dad’s a prick.” With one last hard look at the house, Yang drove them away.

Some of the cottages they passed had elaborate gardens in the yard, full of blooming flowers that nearly knocked Blake off the bike with their aroma. However, it wasn’t in front of any garden where Yang stopped the bike again. A small clearing beside the road was full of the pink, purple, and white
flowers that Blake had so often seen while being driven around.

“These are lupines,” Yang told her. Blake moved to get off the bike, but Yang held up a hand. “Hold on, we won’t be here long.”

She bent over the flowers, her back to Blake, who had begun to suspect what she was doing. She smiled, embarrassed, as Yang returned to the bike, a small bouquet of the the lupines in hand.

“You’re so cheesy,” Blake told her, taking them. Yang grinned.

“I’m a cheesy person. These flowers are pretty special. There was this book Ruby and I read as kids called Miss Rumphius, about this woman who’d walk around Maine, tossing lupine seeds and letting them grow.” She smiled fondly. “She wanted to make the world a more beautiful place, so she did. They called her ‘The Lupine Lady.’”

“That sounds… really sweet, actually.”

“It’s still one of my favorite children’s books.” Yang hopped back onto the bike, and Blake’s hands went back around her, bouquet and all.

Surprisingly, the flowers stayed intact for the rest of the ride. Blake didn’t know if there were any vases back at her parents’ cottage, but she’d put the flowers in a glass if she needed to. Even if the place seemed dreary, she knew the flowers would do what they had done in Yang’s book. They would make her world a more beautiful place.

“Thanks so much for having me over,” Blake said after getting off the bike, giving Yang a shy smile. “That was… a lot of fun.”

“Watching me work? Man, you really haven’t been out much, have you?” Yang grinned at her. “We’ll do better stuff this summer. Promise.”

“Just this has been enough.” Blake’s fist tightened around the tall lupine stalks, looking away as she admitted this. Her parents’ car was parked in the driveway, and she knew she’d have to go inside soon, if only to tell them that she was back.

“Do you have any plans on Saturday?”

“Aren’t we already going to the race next week?” Blake asked, amused at the pink that rose in Yang’s cheeks.

“Well… yeah. But I’d rather not wait that long before seeing you again.” She winced. “I mean… unless you’d rather wait?”

“Oh-- no! I mean…” Now it was Blake’s turn to blush. “I’d rather see you sooner, too.”

Yang laughed, a musical sound that filled the cooling air. “As long as we’re on the same page. Y’know, you really made work a lot more fun today. I bet before you know it, you’ll be sailing, too.”

“I wouldn’t push your luck,” Blake said with a small snort. Yang shrugged, the anchor on her shoulder rolling loosely.

“We’ll see about that.” She lifted a hand to Blake’s face, and before she could register that Yang was leaning closer, she felt lips brush against her other cheek. For someone who worked in the sun, Yang’s lips were surprisingly soft as they left a delicate kiss behind them. She looked into Blake’s
eyes for a long moment, her own lavender ones bright with promise. “I’ll see you soon, sweetheart.”

Struck dumb, Blake only nodded as Yang crammed her helmet back over her thick ponytail. With a smile and a wave, Yang pulled away, around the corner and out of sight.

It took another minute for Blake to recover her senses; she couldn’t stop herself from staring after the woman who’d left her there.

*Come back,* her mind called after her. *Take me with you.*

It was such a shame to fall back to reality.

Flowers in hand, Blake returned to the cottage with a strange giddiness in her heart. Had she ever felt this way about Adam? It had been so long that Blake honestly couldn’t remember. She put a hand to her cheek, recalling the warmth of the lips that had pressed it so briefly. She could see herself in a sitcom, declaring, *I’m never going to wash my face again!* It was corny, but the notion seemed less crazy to her now.

“Those are nice,” Kali commented. “Are those the flowers that grow on the side of the road?”

“Lupines,” Blake supplied, heading straight to the kitchen to find something to put them in. “They are.”

“They’re pretty.” Kali followed her into the kitchen, watching as Blake set the flowers on the counter and began to rummage through the cupboards. “Blake… was that Yang out there?”

She froze, hand half-stretched out for a clear vase hidden among stack of tupperware. She looked back over her shoulder at her mother, brows furrowed.

“Why?” she asked, straightening, already knowing where this was going. The curtains in the windows hadn’t been drawn when she’d gotten home. Of course her mother could have seen the exchange.

Still, her mother hesitated. “Is… that the person you’ve been dating?”

Her giddiness dissipated as she saw the worry in Kali’s eyes. Blake, the lovestruck young woman, had vanished, leaving behind Blake, the fragile girl who’d so recently been pulled out of an abusive relationship. She shrugged.

“Mye. What does it matter?”

“Blake.” Kali both looked and sounded tired. “You know we love you. But you can’t just be diving back into a relationship with someone after everything you’ve been through.”

“I’m not!” Blake snapped. “This isn’t anything serious. She’s… good, Mom. She’s different.”

“And how would you know that?” Kali asked quietly. Though nobody had said anything before to imply anything about Blake’s judgement, hearing it now felt like a slap. “You were with Adam for six years. God only knows what happened during that time. Dad and I thought we were never going to see you again, and after seeing you in the hospital…” Kali spoke her words with conviction, but held her emotions in check. For the space of a few seconds, she let the words hang. “And now that you’re finally back, and safe, you’re… immediately throwing yourself at other—”

“I’m not throwing myself at anyone!” Blake knew her voice was rising, but was powerless to stop it. “I told you, we haven’t done anything serious! I’m not moving in with her. I’m not marrying her, for
fuck’s sake. She’s the only person on this island who isn’t treating me like… like glass. I’m not going to just break.”

Instinctively, she reached her free hand into her pocket, where the bit of porcelain waited for her. A little piece of Yang to offer comfort. She gripped it tightly, feeling the cool material dig into her palm.

Ghira stepped into the kitchen, looking between his wife and daughter with a frown. “Is everything okay?”

“Blake is dating someone already,” Kali said, turning to him in exasperation. “I’m trying to remind her why that isn’t a good idea.”

“Could you fucking stop?!” Blake begged. “You should just… be happy that I was out, having a great time, instead of staying cooped up in the house! Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Blake,” Ghira said warningly. “Don’t swear at your mother. We’re not trying to tell you not to have fun. We just don’t want you to get hurt again.”

“And you don’t think I don’t worry about that every day?!” Blake smacked her free hand on the countertop. “I was the one who had to worry, every single day, about every little thing I did or said. Do you think I’m looking to get right back into that?! I told you, I’m being careful. Can’t that be enough?!”

Her parents stared at her. They looked to each other briefly, and Blake felt the heaviness settle into her stomach as she could sense the silent conversation they were having about her.

She needs more pills, she needs a doctor, she needs therapy…

“Just… please. Give me space tonight,” Blake told them, the fight leaving her system as quickly as it appeared. “I’m tired.”

Kali and Ghira exchanged one more look—there was exhaustion in it, and grief, but they nodded.

“We’ll talk about this more this weekend,” Kali told her quietly. “This is serious, Blake.”

“I know.” Blake loosened her grip on the porcelain to stroke it with her thumb. “I know.”

When her parents had left her for their bedroom (she knew they would continue to talk about her), Blake finally put the flowers in their vase and set it on the end table by her sofa. She dropped into the cushion, staring vacantly at the silent TV.

What if her parents were right? Was she just immediately trying to jump into a relationship? She looked at the flowers, trying to catch the feeling she had felt when Yang had handed them to her. Already, that feeling had fled, and Blake was only left with a void in her heart. She got back up. Even though the sun wasn’t down, her brain was shutting down, desperate for sleep.

As she changed into her pajamas, her phone beeped.

*i had a great time today!* Yang’s message read. Blake stared at it with an almost detached glaze. Earlier that day, a message from Yang would have sent a shiver of excitement racing through her, but now, there was nothing.

She didn’t respond.

A couple hours later, she awoke on the couch. The sun had set by then, and a quick look outside told
her that her parents had gone out, probably to dinner. Blake wasn’t hungry, and a part of her was
tempted to take a sleeping pill to knock her out for the rest of the night. She reached for the phone,
intending only to look at the time, but her thumb hesitated over the screen at an unread text from
Yang.

*hey, everything ok?*

Blake gulped. *Yeah, why?* she asked.

*just got a little worried when you didn’t respond...and your parents are at lev w/o you*

Lev… *Leviathan*. Apparently, privacy *didn’t* exist on a small island, just like so many people had
told her. Blake closed her eyes for a moment before responding. It took her a few tries; she didn’t
know what to say, or if it would be too much, or if she sounded too whiny. She finally settled on, *We
had a fight.*

*shit, im sorry. you ok?*

Blake stared at her phone again, unsure. Instinct told her to lie, but now that she had rested a little,
she found herself wanting to reach out to Yang. Hadn’t she listened to Blake earlier that day with
such patience and empathy? She bit her lip.

*Not really. But I’ll make it.*

Yang’s reply was immediate. *wanna talk about it?*

*Not right now, Blake told her. But thanks.*

She lay back into her blankets. The emptiness had morphed into longing, and Blake closed her eyes,
remembering the way she’d cuddled up to Yang earlier that day, remembering her closeness as Yang
lay a kiss on her cheek. Her need for it was almost painful. It was almost shameful to admit that.
Maybe Kali had been onto something, after all. Maybe Blake was nothing but a dependent, clingy--

Her phone beeped again.

*just know that im here to talk if you need to*

Blake held her phone against her chest, the closest physical contact that she could get with Yang that
moment.

The next day was dull, accented only by texts from Yang throughout the day. Blake had opted to
stay in the cottage, still feeling low from the argument with her parents the night before. They’d
barely spoken to her all morning before they left the house to go on some whale watch. Blake
huddled under the blankets, alternating between reading and scrolling through her phone.

*wanna go lobstering with me tomorrow?* Yang asked.

*You’re asking me?*

*unless this isn’t blake’s phone...in which case i want to know what youve done with her :)*

Blake *did* smile at this. *I’ll go only if you promise I won’t drown.*

*ruby might let you drown but i never would, * Yang said. Nearly a minute passed before she added, *i
liek you too much to let you drown, quickly followed by a liek* and a *shit.*
Blake laughed for the first time all morning.

It was with the promise of going out with Yang the next day that Blake was able to maintain civility with her parents. There were no vague encouragements from them to get out of the house, which Blake might have been grateful for if her parents hadn’t still been upset. A part of her wished she could make things straight with them, but she knew that was impossible as long as they continued to see her as a victim.

She may have been one before, but she wasn’t with Yang. If only she could get them to see that.

It was overcast when Yang picked her up on Saturday morning. There would be rain later that day, but for now, Blake was just happy to have a break from the heat. She wore Yang’s sweatshirt outside as she waited on the porch, as if proud of their growing connection. Sure enough, when Yang parked and pulled off her helmet, she grinned.

“Nice sweatshirt,” she commented as Blake darted down the stairs. “Ready to lobster?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” she replied, slowing down as Yang hopped off the bike. Tentatively, Blake slid her arms around Yang’s waist, reassured when Yang wrapped her own arms around her. She inhaled deeply, instantly calmed by Yang’s scent. The citrus was more prevalent today than the sweat or sea salt. It must have been a lotion, or soap.

“I’ve missed you,” Yang said lowly into her ear. Blake huffed a small laugh.

“It’s been one day,” she teased, even though she returned the sentiment completely.

“So? It still feels too long.” She rubbed Blake’s back once before pulling herself away. “You should visit me on the shipyard again sometime. It definitely helped the time pass more quickly.”

“Yeah, because I distracted you.” Blake rolled her eyes, taking the helmet Yang held out to her. "Weiss won’t let me back if I keep you from doing work.”

“Please, she only pretends to be the boss.” Yang hopped back onto Bumblebee, Blake settling in right behind her. “You ready?”

It was even cooler on the docks, and Blake began to wonder if Yang’s sweatshirt would be enough. The wind blowing off the ocean was downright cold. The goofy-looking rubber overalls Yang had them wear would prevent their pants and shoes from getting too wet, which would help overall. But on shore, Blake had to keep herself from laughing. These things were anything but sexy, even if she had to admit Yang could make them look good.

“Okay, so *Ember Celica* is a little different than the sailboats. She runs only on motor, which is a little more convenient than having to rely on wind. Have you been on a boat before?” Yang asked, untethering the line to the docks. Blake inspected cockpit. It was grimy, and the fishy smell might have been unpleasant to some, but it was tolerable.

“I went on a cruise once.” She racked her brain. “I’ve also been kayaking a couple times.”

“That doesn’t count.” Yang rolled her eyes. “So I guess we don’t know if you’ll get seasick. Do you at least know how to swim?”

“Do I have to?” Blake asked, suddenly suspicious.

“I’m not pushing you in, if that’s what you’re worried about. But would you feel better in a lifejacket?” Yang pushed the boat from the dock, and Blake grabbed a hold of the side while she got
used to the motion. She shook her head.

“I can swim. Just because I’m a cat Faunus doesn’t mean I can’t swim, you know.” Still, she stared at the dock as the gap between it and the boat lengthened.

“The water’s cold,” Yang warned. “Like, wicked cold. If you fall in, you might be too surprised to-”

“I’ll be fine.” Blake offered up a reassuring smile, even though her knuckles were still white where the griped the boat. “Promise.”

The rocking of the boat took some getting used to, but Blake was relieved that it didn’t make her nauseous. Once Yang started the engine and the boat moved forward at a steady pace, it actually wasn’t too bad. She loosened her grip, watching as the marina grew smaller and smaller behind them. Though they didn’t leave so far from shore that it disappeared, it would have been a long, difficult swim.

Somehow, being alone with Yang on the open water felt different than being alone with her before. There had always been a means of egress before; there would be no escape from her as they went further out to sea. Here, her burgeoning trust in Yang would be put to the test. “I don’t have many traps out right now,” Yang told her as she steered the boat further from the shipyard, “but we’ll probably have enough for dinner tonight. Usually, I take them to the co-op, but this is your first time lobstering! We gotta make something out of it.”

“What if I didn’t like lobster?” Blake asked, suppressing her smile. Yang turned her head to look at her, narrowing her eyes. She stared at Blake for a short moment before breaking into her own grin.

“That’s the shittiest poker face I’ve ever seen, Belladonna.”

As they went further out, Yang explained a little more about lobstering. Each lobsterman had their own particular buoy, she said, and the buoy colors were displayed on the boat’s hull. Her own had black and yellow stripes.

“That’s where I got the name Bumblebee,” she added. “For my bike. You’ll see when we pull up to a buoy. The colors mean that it’s my trap.”

Yang pointed out an incoming buoy, bobbing on the rolling water. “See? That’s one of mine.”

Using a hook, Yang reached for the line, shaking off the seaweed that had accumulated around the buoy. With a few quick motions, Yang hooked the line onto the pulley (the pot puller, she informed Blake) and set it cranking. The contraption whirred, and when yellow began to catch beneath the murky surface, Yang leaned over. Her biceps strained as she reached for the lobster trap, and Blake pretended to be focused on the trap itself rather than the all-too-visible muscles that flexed beneath the short sleeves as Yang set the trap on the edge of the boat.

There were a couple lobsters in it, but both were too small to keep. Yang pulled out a small gauge, holding it beside one of the lobsters to demonstrate its too-short length. “This little vent right here,” Yang said, tapping a small plastic panel on the side of the trap, “is there to help the littlest ones escape.”

Yang tossed the small lobsters over the side, resetting the trap with fresh bait. Blake wrinkled her nose, understanding at once why the boat smelled so fishy. The bait absolutely reeked.

“You sorta get used to it,” Yang told her with a shrug at seeing the look on her face. “And I always scrub really well after I get back,” she added with a devilish wink that turned Blake red.
After setting the fresh bait bag into the trap, Yang pulled the trap shut and maneuvered it back into the water. By the time they pulled away, all that Blake could see of the trap was the bumblebee buoy.

“That was… less complicated than I thought it would be,” she remarked as they left the buoy bobbing in their wake.

“It’s a lot of work, but it isn’t too terrible.” Yang had jumped back to the wheel. “I’ve got a commercial license, so legally, I could have up to eight hundred traps set up at a time.”

“What?”

“Yeah, but I don’t have time for that.” Yang shook her head. The salty air was already having its way with her hair, fluffing whisps out of its ponytail to puff up in a cloud around her face. “I’ve only got about twenty traps out right now, so it’s more of a hobby. Since I don’t sail much these days, it’s my excuse to spend time on the ocean.”

“Do you miss sailing?” Blake asked, joining her beneath the overhang that protected the cockpit. Yang shrugged.

“I go out with Ruby now and then, but I don’t enjoy it as much as she does.” Yang turned, leaning her side against the wheel to face Blake. The chill of the air had put roses on her cheeks, making her almost cherubic when she smiled. “Whatcha think?”

“I definitely didn’t think I’d be doing this when I came to Maine.” Blake returned the smile, inching closer to Yang. “Aren’t you cold?”

“Nah. I’ll work up a sweat soon enough.” Yang wrapped an arm around her, pulling her close. “I told you I’m naturally pretty hot, right?”

“So modest.”

Yang broke into a laugh. “I was talking temperature, but I’m glad you didn’t argue the point.”

“Oh.” Through her embarrassment, Blake still managed a laugh. “Right.”

They had better luck on the next traps, where Yang banded the claws of the three lobsters and plopped them into a holding tank. The way they flopped around in the lobster trap had surprised Blake at first; lobsters truly were like fish, in a more insect-like way. Still, it was Yang who held her attention. She didn’t even seem to need the small gauge to measure their size; she was good at eyeballing the size of most of the lobsters and tossed the small ones back into the water without a second glance.

“You’re so good at this,” she said as Yang tossed another small lobster overboard.

“I’ve been doing this for so long that it’s, like, second-nature,” she replied, grabbing a fistful of bait to shove into the bait bag. “I apprenticed with my uncle Qrow. He tried teaching Ruby, too, but she wasn’t into it.”

She tipped the trap over the side, and Blake peered over the edge to watch the yellow wire fade away into the green water.

It was so different than the bright, turquoise waters of Menagerie. There, the water was crystal clear and popular with snorkelers for that reason. There were bright reefs and colorful fish, so tropical and relaxed. On the Maine ocean, there might not have been a bottom. This ocean was so green, so wild,
so unknown.

So different.

“I’m glad I could do this with you,” Blake finally said, pulling herself away from the edge to rejoin Yang by the wheel. “It’s… been a long time since I could…” She frowned, unsure of where her thought was headed. She shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Yang turned away from the wheel, giving Blake an encouraging look. There was no pressure in it, no impatience. Only compassion. “It’s all right, baby.”

Again, Blake shook her head, determined to try again. “I just… I’ve felt so… dead, I guess. For so long. I didn’t think I could… I don’t know. I didn’t think I could, like… enjoy things. But this… this is fun.”

Yang’s arms were around her again, encircling her in her body heat. She was warm, more warm than she had any business being on a cold morning like this one. Blake collapsed into her with relief and gratitude, barely aware that behind her back Yang was pulling off her wet gloves and tossing them onto the dashboard.

And her hands were running through Blake’s hair, combing the dark strands between her fingers. Blake sighed contentedly, relaxing into the touch.

“Fun, huh?” Yang repeated, sounding amused. “I just thought this was work.”

“You make it fun.” Blake drew back, looking into Yang’s face. She was so free with her expressions, and Blake loved that. There was no malice hidden there. No sneakiness. Everything that crossed her face, from the creases in her brow to the smile on her lips, was genuine.

And it was so close. Blake could feel Yang’s breath against her lips. More than anything, she wanted to bridge the distance between them, to feel those lips again, on her own lips this time. From the other day, she remembered how soft, how warm, how full those lips had been. More than anything, she wanted them on her own.

So she took them.

Yang didn’t seem overly surprised; she returned the kiss gently, slipping a hand out of Blake’s hair to cup her cheek. She closed her eyes, tilting her head into Yang’s touch. Blake tasted salt, which shouldn’t have surprised her, given where they were at that moment. Yang was the ocean, full of hidden depths and wildness and intensity.

Blake would have happily been swept away in her current.

She stared, wide-eyed, as Yang broke the kiss off, but didn’t pull away. Their faces, still close, were full of each other. Yang’s hand was still on her cheek, and she brushed it with a thumb.

“I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you,” she confessed, her grin tinged with mild embarrassment. “For days.”

“And you…” Blake’s words trailed off again, but not from anxiety or uncertainty. She gave Yang a slight smile. “I… I guess since the day we met. You’ve, like… taken up space in my head.”

Even with her rubber overalls on, Yang’s hand still felt comfortable as it slid down to her waist. “Can I stay there?” Yang asked, leaning in again.
Blake smiled. Her kiss would be answer enough.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize if I got any of the lobstering stuff wrong! I did my best. :)

I was going to wait till tomorrow till I posted this... but I was encouraged to do it tonight. :FIST:
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

After spending the whole morning and some of the afternoon out in the cold on a rocking boat, being able to sit on something cushioned was heaven. Yang plopped onto the sofa beside Blake, towel around her shoulders and smelling a lot better. The smell of the bait fish had permeated her skin so strongly that it was almost too much.

Almost.

It hadn't stopped Blake from leaning against her on the boat, from wrapping her arms around her, from kissing her to distraction. Yang had laughed, pointing out that Blake was going to stink without even touching the bait. But she didn't care. Stink was temporary, but she couldn't get enough of the physical contact. She would have drowned in the stench if it meant she could hold onto Yang for another few minutes.

In the end, Yang was definitely the worse off of the two of them, and once they got back to the Xiao Long house, Blake insisted that she take the first shower.

"You really oughta take one, too," Yang told her with an emphatic sniff. "Sorry, but I think you got second-hand stink. Just give the water heater a few minutes."

Second-hand stink or not, it didn't stop Yang from throwing an arm over Blake's shoulders and pulling her close. "Is doing this going to give you third-hand stink?" Blake asked, curling her legs underneath her as she leaned into Yang's side.

"Nah. Everyone already knows I stink, anyway."

Yang had sent out the texts as soon as they got back to shore. They'd caught enough lobster to have some friends over for a small get-together. In addition to Weiss and Ruby, they'd be joined by a couple named Nora and Ren, as well as Jaune from Leviathan. Her father would probably drop in, Yang warned, as well as her uncle.

"This isn't… about showing me off, is it?" Blake had asked nervously.

"Not so much that as it is about sharing the catch," Yang had assured her. "Nora would be pissed if she found out we were having lobster without her."

It was almost a crime, Yang had added on their walk to the house, that a summer person like Blake had already been in Maine for a week without having eaten any.

But there were more important things than lobster. Blake inhaled deeply, the notes of citrus on Yang's body a nicer scent than bait.

She must have fallen asleep, for she was nudged awake some time later. "Your turn," Yang murmured, kissing her gently on the top of her head. "You should have plenty of hot water now."

"Shit… sorry," Blake groaned, pulling herself off.

"It's okay, really." Yang smiled fondly at her as Blake got herself off the couch with a stretch. "It was a long morning. Besides, you were pretty adorable."
Blake shook her hair, still thick with sea salt, out to the side. She hoped it would cover her reddening cheeks from Yang’s view. "How long was I out?" she demanded, grabbing her phone and wincing. It was already three, giving her a couple hours before Yang's friends were due to arrive.

"Not too long, don’t worry." Yang was still smiling as she bounced off the sofa.

She led Blake up the creaking staircase, down the hall to a cramped bathroom. Across from it, a bedroom door was open. The red bedspread was crumpled and laundry was strewn over the floor, as if the occupant had long since given up on organization. Blake raised her eyebrows.

"Ruby is definitely not the neatest person in the family," Yang explained, laughing. "You should see Weiss's, though. It doesn't even look like it should be in the same house!"

The bathroom was small and cramped, and the rack that hung from the shower head was literally full of shampoos and soaps, some of the tubes squished in wherever they could fit. The edge of the tub, too, was lined with even more. Loofahs were strung up where there was space, and a razor holder was suctioned to the wall, empty. Yang showed her how to work the ancient faucet.

“Don’t use the Aveda stuff. That’s all Weiss’s, and it’s expensive enough that she’ll freak out if anyone else even looks at it.” Yang’s brow wrinkled in a slight frown. “It’s one of the few luxuries she lets herself have, so we try to be respectful of that. Help yourself to everything else, though. Towels are in here…” Yang opened a closet, pulling out a towel. “If you need more, or a washcloth, help yourself. Just toss the towels in the hamper when you’re done.”

“Thanks, Yang.” Blake smiled appreciatively. “Really.”

“You’re always welcome here. Anytime.” Yang’s returning smile was bright as she leaned in for a kiss.

Though she’d never kissed Yang until that morning, it felt so natural that Blake had wondered how she had lived for so long without it. Her lips felt so right.

It didn’t take long to find the familiar smell of citrus. Once Blake had found the Citrus Breeze, she didn’t even stop to look at whatever other scents there might have been. This was Yang’s smell. Nothing else compared.

When she’d finished, Yang met her outside the bathroom, holding a fresh t-shirt.

"Your shirt probably still smells,” she said apologetically. “And Nora will make fun of you if you stink.”

Blake lifted her collar, sniffing. She hadn’t planned on making a big deal over stink, but since Yang brought it up…

“Thanks,” she said, taking the shirt with relief. “You didn’t have to, though.”

“And leave you to Nora’s mercy? I’m not that much of a bitch.”

There was something wonderfully close about smelling like Yang, wearing her shirt, and cuddling up with her on the couch. So little felt right about her world, but just for this afternoon, everything had slotted into place. It was more comfortable than anything she could remember, and delightfully safe under the length of Yang’s arm.

“All right… It looks like Nora and Ren are gonna grab some corn and drinks at Hannaford,” Yang said, texting with her free hand. “That’s the grocery store in town. They both work at the Y, so it’s
not much of a hassle for them to go.”

“Town?”

“Yeah. Kuroyuri is what we consider *town*. It’s got the closest grocery store, at least.” Yang chuckled, making Blake bounce gently against her. “But it also has the Y, and some restaurants. I’ll take you there one of these days.”

“You keep making promises like that,” Blake said, pushing herself up a little, making a show of trying to get closer, even though they were practically sharing the couch cushion.

“I only make promises I plan on keeping.” Yang’s thumb brushed Blake’s arm. “They might keep us busy for a while, but we’ll get through ‘em all.”

She’d forgotten what sincerity sounded like, or maybe that it was even real. It was refreshing to hear.

Blake couldn’t blame Yang when her breathing slowed and her muscles relaxed. It had been a long morning, after all, and Yang had done most of the work. The couch was too much to resist. It was nice, to enjoy peace with someone, to watch them slip into an easy sleep. There was no need to keep one eye open. *This* was rest. Blake followed Yang there.

She was still fast asleep when a loud bellow of “Wake up!” jolted her awake. The sound ripped her back to Menagerie-- she shouldn’t have been sleeping, he’d caught her napping, he wouldn’t let her get away with being so lazy-- and she jumped, heart racing.

“No!” she gasped. Yang held fast, pulling her back in, reminding her where she was. But her blood was already pumping hotly through her veins, rushing through her ears, even as Yang eased Blake back down beside her.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Ruby,” Yang snapped. “You scared the shit out of us.”

Blake looked up at Yang’s face, startled to see that her eyes had changed from their delicate lilac to a burning red. Ruby and Weiss stood on the other side of the coffee table, Ruby looking stricken.

“Sorry! I-- Sorry, Blake.” Ruby’s silver eyes were wide with worry. Weiss frowned, looking from Yang to Blake. “I didn’t mean to scare you. I just wanted to wake you guys up. Nora and Ren are on their way back.”

Though her heart still pounded, it was beginning to slow down. Blake shuddered and sank against Yang, who tightened her hold in reassurance.

“D’you mind setting up the pots?” Yang asked, sounding calmer. Ruby bobbed her head. “I’ll help in just a sec.”

“Yeah. C’mon, Ruby.” Weiss tapped Ruby’s arm, gave Yang a measuring look, then led the younger girl back to the hall.

“Fuck,” Blake muttered, rubbing her eyes. “I didn’t--”

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Yang asked, and Blake noticed that her eyes were back to their soft purple. She nodded.

“Sorry. I was just-- surprised, that’s all.” She closed her eyes, taking comfort in the way Yang tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. The touch was so gentle, unlike anything she would have expected after a fright like that. Yang kissed her forehead.
“You’re safe here,” she murmured. “God, you looked so scared.”

Blake shook her head, denying, but she didn’t fight it when Yang pulled her onto her lap, because even though her chest still hurt, she believed Yang when she’d said she was safe. She took a few deep breaths, taking the time she needed to find her baseline. Somehow, Yang’s presence was helpful, with enough steadiness to help her regain her balance easily. She collapsed against her.

“Sorry,” she repeated, but Yang shook her head.

“Please. Don’t say that. Ruby loves pulling this sorta thing. I should’ve texted her to leave us alone.” The last words came out in a growl.

“I know she didn’t mean to freak me out” Blake said quickly. She pulled her head back, face inches from Yang’s. “It’s not like anyone would know I’m… like this.”

Except Yang had known; she had sensed it that first day, somehow.

“I’ll be fine now. Promise.” Yang looked into her eyes for a moment, almost sad, before nodding. She traced the line of Blake’s jaw with her thumb.

“Okay.” She finally smiled, and Blake was struck by the simple beauty of it. She kissed it, wanting to feel that smile on her lips. Maybe she could absorb some of that smile, some of that kindness, into her own skin. Yang happily gave it to her.

Blake recognized Nora and Ren immediately. Nora’s loud voice had been so distinctive at Leviathan on the day the Belladonnas had arrived on Patch. Even if she couldn’t exactly remember what the couple had looked like, Blake recognized the voice. Nora trilled a greeting as she bounced through the door, Ren on her heels.

“So,” she said, her blue eyes glinting with excitement. “How’d ya meet?”

“This is Patch,” Yang said exasperatedly. “It would’ve been harder to not meet.”

“I still wanna hear the how!”

It was interesting to hear it from Yang’s perspective; she’d headed out to the rocks to watch the race like she always did, but as she started to make her way down the shore, she caught a glimpse of someone following her.


“Be nice or shut up,” Yang replied with a snort.

“I only followed you because I thought you’d hurt yourself, jumping off that rock,” Blake hurried to say. “It was a pretty big one.”

“Yang’s got a damned death wish!” Nora rolled her eyes. “She’s sprained her ankle doing that sort of thing before, so I wouldn’t’ve been surprised if she did hurt herself.”

“I do not have a death wish.” Yang said this with a tired air, as if this was an old argument. Blake could almost hear Nora’s second eye roll.

She hadn’t been to a gathering like this since she’d left Adam, and it was a lot more laid-back than the ones he’d dragged her to. The clouds were dark and gray, but everyone hung out on the porch, ready to run back inside at the first raindrop. Weiss and Ruby were in charge of the lobsters and the
corn; since Yang had done the catching, someone else always took care of the cooking. It meant that Blake could stay at her side, guilt-free, for much of the evening.

“Have you ever eaten a whole lobster?” Yang asked seriously as they sat at the picnic table. Ruby had already dismantled her own and was pulling the meat from a claw with her fingers.

“Not really.” Blake stared as Ruby tossed a bit of claw meat into her mouth. Water from the lobster soaked through her paper plate and onto the picnic table, but she’d taken no notice of it. “Maine lobster is sorta hard to come by in Menagerie.”

Methodically, Yang demonstrated with her own lobster on how to remove the claws and the tail. Blake followed along step-by-step, somewhat shakily. Yang helped her pull the tail meat out of the shell and ripped off the vein. “You’ll be a pro by the end of the summer,” she assured Blake.

“Mhm!” Ruby agreed beside her, sucking on one of the legs.

“First lobster of the summer,” Weiss remarked dreamily, using a fork to dig out her claw meat. “I’ve been waiting for this.”

“So you haven’t had any yet this year?” Blake was surprised when they all nodded.

“Well, the summer is still young!” Yang said cheerfully, taking a bite of her tail meat. “Next time, maybe we can get Pyrrha down here.”

“And Penny’s coming next month!” Ruby added. “She loves lobster.”

“We’ll make a real lobster bake out of it!” Yang grinned at Blake. “Who needs those fancy restaurants? This is the real Maine experience, right here.”

“And clams next time!” Nora yelled from the other picnic table. “God, I’m dying for a good clam.”

Blake caught Yang’s smirk and burst out laughing.

“Real mature,” Weiss muttered, but even she smiled.

“Clams?” Ruby asked brightly. “Are you going clamming this week? I know you were going to this week, but…” She smiled apologetically at Blake. “…you got busy.”

Blake blushed, but Yang squeezed her thigh as she said, “And it was totally worth it.”

“Uh, guys? I just felt a raindrop…” Ren commented. Everyone looked up, as if everyone expected to watch the heavens open up above them.

“Let’s move everything inside.”

Lobsters, corn, and everyone’s individual plates and drinks were brought inside quickly, with surprising efficiency. Nora grumbled the loudest.

“It’s only a little rain! It’s not like there’s any--” Thunder boomed overhead, making everyone laugh as Nora promptly shut herself up.

Most of them had finished eating by the time Taiyang and Qrow arrived, shaking off their wet jackets in the entryway. “It’s pretty bad out there,” Taiyang announced, shaking out his damp mop of hair. “I hope some of that lobster is still warm.”

“We saved the coldest one for you!” Ruby teased, grabbing a couple paper plates for the newcomers.
“Hey, Dad. This is Blake.” Yang gestured to Blake, who nodded at the blonde man. “Blake, the blond one’s my dad, and the other one is my uncle, Qrow.”

“The other one,” Qrow repeated, bemused, making a beeline to the fridge. “You sure know how to make a guy feel welcome.”

“By all means, help yourself,” Taiyang sighed as Qrow grabbed a beer. He turned back to Yang and Blake, offering a hand. “Call me Tai.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” His hands were even thicker with scar and callus than Yang’s were, more ingrained with dirt, but just as warm.

“I’ve heard a lot about you,” he said, grinning slyly. Yang groaned.

“All good things, I hope,” Blake replied. His eyes, though blue, had that bright softness that made Yang’s so endearing. The familial similarities were obvious here.

“You know it.” Taiyang chuckled, and Ruby came up that minute with a plate of lobster and corn. “Thanks, kiddo.”

“Should we send some home with you, too?” Yang asked Blake. “We’ve got a few extras, and this has a more personal touch than any lobster roll, right?”

Blake bit her lip. This could be a peace offering to her parents, she thought, so she nodded. “I bet they’d like that.”

Due to the poor reception, it took a few minutes for her text to go through to them, telling them where she was and that they could take home some extra lobster. Nora, Ruby, Jaune, and Weiss were deep in a game of Egyptian ratscrew, getting progressively louder as the game became more involved.

“I’m happy just watching,” Yang said, amused, as everyone made to slap the cards. “Besides, I’d kick all their asses.”

“You wanna bet, Xiao Long?” Nora roared, her grin showing teeth.

“Next time, Valkyrie. I’ll serve your ass on a silver fuckin’ platter.” Yang stretched an arm around Blake, making it clear what who she’s rather spend her time with that evening.

But all too soon, the Belladonnas arrived.

“Good to see you, Yang,” Kali said politely. Yang raised an eyebrow, perhaps surprised at the notably cooler greeting than the other morning. Unlike that day, she made no move to hug Yang, or even shake her hand. “It sounds like you had a nice time today.”

“Fuck you!” Nora screeched at whoever had bested her in the game. Kali blinked.

“Right… So, uh, Blake. You ready? Dad’s waiting in the car.”

“Yeah.”

Blake gave everyone a quick wave, not wanting to interrupt the intense game. To her surprise, Ruby tossed her cards down and jumped up. “I’m so sorry about earlier!” she said with a pained smile.

“It’s okay. I just spook pretty easily.” She caught a flicker of Weiss’s eyes on her, but the other woman said nothing. “It was good to see you.”
“What’s your number? I have a picture to text you.” The poor reception meant that whatever the picture was, it would be a few minutes before Blake could see what it was, and Ruby whined at the delay. “Ah, well, let me know when you get it. I think you’ll like it, and maybe it’ll make up for this afternoon.”

“Lobsters are all packed up!” Yang said, raising a paper bag in the air triumphantly.

“I’ll see you later!” Ruby grinned, plopping back into her chair. “I’m sure it won’t be long.”

Yang walked Blake out, adjusting her load of lobsters to be able to hold hands. The day had been too rich to worry about things like parents and their reservations, and she didn’t even think about the way Kali’s golden eyes glanced down at the joined hands. Blake held tightly, even when they descended the stairs through the rain.

“I’ll text you,” Yang told her, sparing a brief glance to Ghira as he jumped out of the car.

“Thank you so much for these,” he gushed as Yang handed him the lobsters. “It’s nice to have connections around here.”

“That isn’t really too difficult on Patch. Everyone knows everyone.”

“Still… this was very nice of you.” Blake was relieved that he didn’t comment on their budding romance, or address Yang any differently. Kali, however, got back into the car without even a goodbye.

“Anytime, uh… Ghira.” Yang gave him an awkward smile, still unsure with using his first name. Blake reached out and squeezed her arm. When he turned away to put the lobsters in the car, Blake snuck a quick kiss.

“I’ll see you soon, baby,” Yang told her quietly, giving her a playful wink. She stepped back, a regretful smile tugging at her lips.

“See ya.” Blake gave her a smile, but found it so hard to turn away, to get into the car.

Compared to the warmth of the Xiao Long house, the car ride was downright icy. Nobody spoke as they made the drive to the cottage, the windshield wipers filling in the silence with their rapid pulsations. Halfway home, Ruby’s photo finally came through, and Blake couldn’t stop a smile. Apparently, before Ruby had so loudly woken them up, she had snapped a picture of Blake and Yang, dozing on each other. The photo captured the serenity perfectly.

“What’s smiling about?” Ghira asked, and Blake saw his bushy eyebrows lift up in the rearview mirror.

“Just… some pictures Ruby took today.” Blake saved the photo to her phone, realizing that this was the first picture she actually had of her and Yang together. And it was a good one.

Blake pulled her pajamas on as soon as she got inside. She had still been wearing Yang’s shirt and sweatshirt, though they had been splattered by the rain. The shirt she’d worn that morning was still at Yang’s, but there would be more chances to pick it up later. She smiled. It was nice to have something to look forward to. This summer was now full of potential.

She spread her blankets out on the couch. For once, she was nowhere near tired, even though this had been one of her most active days in a long time. She could hear the quiet buzz of her parents talking in the kitchen, but Blake turned the TV on to cover their conversation. If the conversation was about her, she didn’t want to hear it.
An hour later, Blake turned the TV off, still feeling something close to contentment. The rain still poured down, clapping against the roof in its calming way. It was always easier to fall asleep to the sound of the rain, and tonight would be no exception.

“Going to bed?” Kali asked. Blake looked up.

“Yeah. It’s been a long day.”

“I’ll say. You were up pretty early, weren’t you?” Kali leaned against the back of the couch. Blake knew these were just transitory words; her eyes narrowed as she stared her mother down.

“Yeah. Yang had about twenty traps she needed to check.”

“Mmm.” Kali pursed her lips. Yang’s name had been the trigger word. Blake braced herself. “I know… it’s always exciting to date someone new. They’re nice to you, they pay attention to you… and you tend to overlook their faults.”

Blake scowled.

“Yang seems like a lovely young woman,” Kali went on. “But you really should be thinking about yourself right now.”

“I am,” Blake replied quietly. “I’m doing something I want to do. She isn’t making me do anything.”

“I wasn’t saying she was.” Kali bowed her head, as if thinking. “But I can see you’re getting pretty… attached to her already.”

“So? Isn’t that what dating’s for?”

“Blake.” She hated, hated, hated the patience in her mother’s voice. The schoolteacher in her was coming out, and Blake roiled inside. She wasn’t an elementary school student. Kali had no right to talk to her this way. “I think it would be a good idea to… get away for a few days. Maybe we could go to Acadia…”

“You want to get me away from Yang,” Blake said flatly. She clenched her fists.

“It’s good to have some space in a new relationship, especially when you just got out of a… bad one.” Though Kali smiled at her pleasantly, there was an edge to it that made Blake recall white hospital walls and fluorescent lights. “If you give yourself a few days, you can come back with a clear head.”

“My head is clear.”

“Blake.” Kali’s tone was firmer. “If... How do we even know that she isn’t taking advantage of you? If you give yourself time—”

“She isn’t!” Blake pushed the blanket off her lap and leaped up, hackles raised. “Nothing happens that I don’t want to happen.”

She thought of the kiss, how Blake had been the one to make that move. That had been proof of Yang’s caution, hadn’t it?

“Honey,” Kali pleaded, “didn’t you say something like that about Adam?”

Hearing the name out loud was a slap, and a thousand thoughts whistled through her head, fluttering to the ground like slips of paper. He had been pushy, even in the beginning. She’d only been a
teenager, with a heart full of romance novels. He’d been so witty, so smooth, and hadn’t she reassured her parents by saying things like, “Don’t worry, he’s always so good to me!”, even when he’d already grabbed her hard enough to leave bruises? It had never been his fault, she’d convinced herself. If she hadn’t been so lazy, so thoughtless…

“Honey?” Kali’s voice cut through her thoughts. Blake had left the little porcelain fragment in her jeans; nothing was there to comfort her. “You need to take some more time to think about what you’re doing. Just running to another person to solve your problems won’t—”

“That’s not what I’m doing!” Blake snapped between clenched teeth. She was shuddering, but she didn’t know when that had started. Kali reached a hand out to her, but she pulled herself away. “Don’t talk to me about Adam. Yang is nothing like him.”

“How would we know?” Kali demanded, her own voice finally starting to rise, to match Blake’s. “You never told us what was going on. You cut us out for years! So how can we trust you on this? You were with him for so long that—”

“I said, don’t talk about him!” Blake wished she had something to throw, something to hit. Her eyes cast around wildly, landing on her phone. She grabbed it.

“Blake—”

“I’m not staying here tonight. I’m not talking about this.” She punched a quick text. Are you busy? What's wrong?

Could you pick me up?

There was no hesitation on Yang’s end.

im on my way

“Blake,” Kali tried again, quickly moving around the couch to physically block her. “You can’t just run—”

“Watch me,” Blake hissed, gliding around her mother. She scooped up the sweatshirt, mentally blocking out her mother’s protests. Ghira had joined them in the living room, Kali frantically explaining to him what had transpired. She didn’t hear. She opened the door.

“Blake, we can talk about this. Let’s all just sit down…”

The rain was coming down in sheets, but Blake didn’t look back. She didn’t want to tempt herself with the cozy couch cushions, or soft blankets. She wasn’t a child. They couldn’t coddle her into submission. Now that she’d finally found a taste of freedom—true freedom—she wasn’t about to let it go. She had choice, stretched out before her, and they were trying to prevent her from reaching for it.

Choice. She hadn’t had it for so long, and her parents would dare to keep it from her.

“Why don’t you give me some space instead?” Blake asked, staring out into the rain. “I’m going to Yang’s.”

“Blake.” Ghira had rushed to the door, spreading his arms in an attempt at calm. “It’s raining out there. At least wait inside—”
It would be a ploy. They couldn’t trust her, nor could she trust them. If she stayed, they’d talk her out of it. She shook her head. “Yang won’t be long. I’ll text you tomorrow.”

Any protests they made had silenced with the slam of the door. She was still shaking violently as she darted down the steps. She pulled her hood over her ears, trying to create as much distance between her and the house as she could. It was cold, but she didn’t feel it. The rain was nothing compared to the dark thoughts that pelted her mind.

Adam had twisted her life irrevocably, the way he’d twisted his knife on her skin. Her time with him had tainted how her parents viewed her; they didn’t trust her. She was no more than a child to them anymore. He had ruined how she viewed herself, as well. Maybe she deserved to not be trusted.

Maybe she deserved the misery she felt when she looked into a mirror. Maybe this happiness was no more than an illusion, and maybe she was kidding herself with the vague idea of choice.

She stood at the end of the driveway, hugging herself, willing the memories to wilt away.

Blake had lost her sense of time and direction. Her head turned slowly, looking both ways up the road for Bumblebee’s headlights. Maybe she’d deserve it, she thought sullenly, if Yang simply didn’t show up at all.

High beams fell on her, and Blake squinted. They shut off, and the sedan that pulled up stopped beside her. Of course Yang wouldn’t be on Bumblebee tonight, she thought stupidly as Yang leaped out of the driver’s seat. It was raining.

“What happened?” Yang asked, wrapping Blake up in a quick hug.

Safe. Yang’s arms was where the safety was.

“Parents,” she said shortly. That’s all she could say. Anything further and she knew she would break. Yang nodded, ushering her to the passenger side.

“Are you okay?” she asked as she got back into her own seat. She pulled her jacket off, handing it to Blake.

“I’m just… stealing all your clothes,” Blake said with a weak laugh. She had to laugh, or else she was going to start crying.

“Don’t even worry about that.” Yang waved a hand, dismissing it. “But are you okay?”

Blake took a deep breath, pulling the jacket on. She hadn’t realized how clammy her skin had been until she felt Yang’s residual warmth pressed against her. She couldn’t lie, not when she was taking in Yang’s own heat. She shook her head.

Yang reached over, taking her left hand and giving it a squeeze.

The dinner guests must have left not too long after Blake had; other than the smell of lobster that filled the air, there was little sign anyone had been there. Most of the downstairs lights were out, and Blake followed Yang upstairs. Ruby’s door was open, and at the sound of footsteps, she darted to them.

“Everything okay?” she asked, eyes flickering from Blake to Yang.

“We’re good. Weiss in bed?”

“She’s in the shower.” Yang nodded. Ruby offered Blake a smile small. “Good to see you, Blake,”
she added, as if she hadn’t seen her already that night. Blake nodded, head buzzing, while Ruby retreated back into her room.

“Weiss has to come through my room to get to hers,” Yang explained, leading Blake to the end of the hall. “It’s usually not a big deal. The guest bedroom is on its own, though, so she won’t disturb you.”

The guest bedroom. Right. The selfish part of her was disappointed that she would sleep a whole room away from Yang, but it would be better that way. It would be more proper. Still, Yang led Blake to her own room first to dig through her dresser.

Yang’s bedroom was neater than Ruby’s, with less laundry and mess, alive with bright golds and purples. The ceiling lamp was a small chandelier, and to Blake’s amazement, she saw it was beaded with seaglass. She stared openly at it until Yang shoved a bundle into her arms.

“Pajamas. Yours are all wet.”

Blake stared at them, suddenly feeling like she’d overstepped. All of this was too much. It had been enough that she’d gotten to spend the day with Yang, and somehow, she’d been weak enough to succumb to the idea that she could invite herself over. Kali’s words rang through her mind, resonating like a bell. She was running straight to another person, expecting them to solve her problems.

She held the pajamas tightly against her, gritting her teeth. Had she just ruined everything with Yang by being so dramatic?

“I’m so, so sorry,” she finally said. She shook her head slowly, to deny what she’d done.

“What?” Yang looked over at her from her dresser, confused. “For what?”

“I shouldn’t-- I should have--” Blake hadn’t stopped shaking her head, but she couldn’t bring herself to. “This was stupid. I’m sorry.”

“What was stupid?” Yang came to stand before her, a tentative hand reaching for her waist. Blake flinched, and Yang froze. “Baby, talk to me.”

A harsh sob wracked her body at the last endearment, and Blake more crumpled than leaned against Yang, who clutched her tightly. The pajamas in her arms dropped to the floor, forgotten. This was the break she had feared, the one she’d been expecting since the fight with her mother went down. She had thought she could swallow it, but some things were too large to go down. Eventually, she had to choke.

She only wished Yang didn’t have to watch.

The soft words she whispered in Blake’s ear were nonetheless comforting. A breakdown, Blake thought distantly, was much easier when someone was there to hold onto. She buried her face in Yang’s chest to hide the shame of her tears.


“I’m so sorry,” Blake gasped out when she could speak once again. “I’m so sorry.”

“Oh, baby, no.” Yang began to sway on her feet, rocking Blake gently. “Please don’t say that.”

She felt Yang’s lips on the top of her head, between her ears, holding there until sobs turned to gasps
and then to whimpers. The shudders dissolved into trembles, and despite her embarrassment, she was grateful for Yang's steady grip.

Blake would have to be the one to speak first, but in the meantime, she was relieved that Yang wasn't breaking the silence. She sighed, careful not to move her face; it would be swollen and blotchy. This wasn't how she wanted Yang to see her.

"I'm... probably being dramatic," she mumbled at last. "My parents... They don't really... trust me, I guess. And they made that very clear tonight."

"Oh?" Yang's question wasn't a probe. She would let Blake go at her own pace, to share as much or as little as she wanted to.

Blake thought about it, but her head was pounding and her heart hurt. She shook her head again. Not tonight.

"I'm just... tired," she finished lamely. She felt Yang nod, then slowly pull away. Blake suddenly felt cold, and she could only watch as Yang bent down to pick up the pajamas.

"We've got some extra toothbrushes in the bathroom closet," Yang said, her cheerfulness sounding forced. She hesitated, then added, more gently, "Do you... Would you rather stay with me tonight? In here?"

Blake furrowed her brow, which Yang must have taken for a no, because she began to stammer, "You don't have to. I just thought-- I mean, it wouldn't be--"

"Yeah," Blake interrupted, and despite her tear-streaked face, she managed a small smile. "That... would be nice."

Yang looked slightly relieved as she leaned over Blake, her lips fluttering over her swollen eyelids. "Then stay," she said simply. She handed the pajamas back to Blake, then ran her fingers through her rain-soaked hair. Blake closed her eyes to the touch. "Let me hold you tonight."

She staggered on an inhale, but nodded. There might have been rain outside, there might have been wind, and even the ocean crashed against the world. But within these walls, in Yang's arms, there was none of that.

Here, at least, there was calm.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so bad at responding to comments, but I'm trying to make sure I respond to every single one. It just might take a little while, heh. Sorry! I read them all and they all make my day!

Also, thank you to niphyx for my very first thorough beta-reading! I've had people read over my stuff before, but never to go over my grammatical issues. You da bomb! Let's see if it made a difference. ;}
Chapter 7

It took a moment for Blake to realize who was lying beside her.

Yang was on her back, an arm thrown behind her head. They’d fallen asleep together, Blake remembered, Yang’s arms looped around her. She remembered, too, the odd look Weiss had given them as she passed through Yang’s bedroom to get to her own. The disbelief had been plain, but something deeper had not been. It had made Blake nervous, but Yang hadn’t even spared Weiss a second look. Yang had exuded peace, a peace that had ultimately lulled Blake off to sleep.

The look on Yang’s sleeping face now was anything but peaceful.

She was frowning, working her jaw like she was clenching and unclenching her teeth. Her hands twisted in an odd, repetitive motion that Blake couldn’t place. Her breathing came quickly, punctuated by an occasional groan. Blake frowned, sitting up.

“Yang?” she asked softly, touching her shoulder.

Yang’s eyes snapped awake and for the space of a second, the irises blazed red. She blinked, eyes light again as she recognized Blake.

“G’morning, babe,” she said, slowly sitting up and yawning. “What time is it?”

“Probably early.” Blake tried to give her a smile, though she was still disturbed by how quickly Yang’s discomfort had vanished. Or been masked, she thought. “It just… looked like you were having a bad dream.”

Yang stared blankly at her before chuckling. “Maybe!” she laughed. It didn’t even sound forced; maybe she was reading too deeply into it. “I always get weird dreams when it rains.”

She settled back into the blankets, stretching an arm out for Blake to curl into. Maybe she’d only imagined it, Blake thought, resting a head against Yang’s chest. It wouldn’t be the first time she’d created conflict over nothing.

With a twinge of guilt, she thought of her parents. She knew her mother had meant well, even if it didn’t feel that way. She closed her eyes, focusing more on the feel of Yang’s fingers as they stroked her back. The guilt was heavy, but Yang’s touch was light.

“How’re you feeling?” Yang asked, her voice low and husky.

“Like I got hit by a bus.” Her head did ache, though Blake guessed it had been from the sheer force of her sobs the night before. She buried her face into Yang’s shirt, embarrassment catching up to her. She felt Yang huff with laughter, then kissed the top of her head. Blake sighed, then turned her head back to Yang. “Thanks for picking me up last night.”

“Anytime.” Yang’s smile was surprisingly alert for someone who’d just woken up. She hesitated. “Is… everything going to be okay?”

“I don’t know,” Blake said, biting the inside of her cheek. “They don’t trust me. And… I probably deserve it.”

“Why would you say that?” Yang’s smile had faded with Blake’s words, turning into a soft line of concern. Blake couldn’t face it, so she looked up at the seaglass chandelier.
“Six years,” she replied quietly. Telling Yang wouldn’t be like *reliving* the memories, she told herself. Not if she could express it in a clinical, detached way. “Five of them, I barely spoke to my parents. And I thought that it was *normal*. I thought everything was. Everything he did…”

So much for detached and clinical. Her voice cracked, and she tried to disguise it by clearing her throat. Yang’s arm tightening around her meant that she hadn’t been fooled.

“So, I don’t have the best judgement,” Blake went on, trying to find her balance again. “It’s… only been a month since I… moved back home. My parents think I’m rushing, dating someone again so soon.”

“Do you think that?”

“No!” Blake insisted. It was easier to find confidence by daylight, after waking up to contentment in another woman’s arms. “I just… I just want…” She shook her head, breaking her gaze away from the seaglass above her to face Yang again, who was regarding her with that gentle look in her eye.

This. *This* was what she wanted. To lay beside someone without fear or anxiety. To feel hopefulness in her heart. Softness of touch, of words, of gaze. They were all things Blake hadn’t been able to experience in years.

And Yang…

“I just want to be here. With you.”

Yang shifted onto her side, to be able to look down at Blake. She brushed away a strand of hair from Blake’s forehead so casually, as if this simple gesture hadn’t been one that would have terrified her a month, or even a week, before. It was one Adam had done before, often followed by a backhand.

Instead, Yang kissed her. From her, no pain would follow a tender touch or caress. *This*, Blake thought as she returned the kiss, was what she wanted.

It had still been early enough that they both drifted back to sleep guiltlessly. Blake was still semi-conscious when she heard the creaking of the door and Weiss’s footsteps pad across the room, but as Yang had promised, her bedroom location caused little trouble. They slept until late morning, when the sun finally broke through the gray clouds and filtered in through the curtains.

Yang’s sleep was more peaceful this time, and Blake sat up in bed to just watch her. She couldn’t bear the idea of waking her. A strange warmth flooded her senses, unfamiliar but welcome. Even sleeping, flopped onto her stomach with her hair covering her face, Yang was stunning.

Lightly, in a way Blake hoped wouldn’t wake her, she traced the outline of Yang’s anchor tattoo, just visible beside the strap of her tank top. Up close, she could make out a rose that twined around it. Adam had been wrong; tattoos weren’t trashy on women. They could be beautiful.

As beautiful as the woman who bore it.

She kissed the anchor lightly, then let her lips wander across her shoulder to the back of her neck. Yang stirred with a pleased, sleepy hum.

“Feels good,” she remarked with a scratchy voice, reaching out to Blake’s waist. She used it as leverage to roll back onto her side. Blake draped her head over her, slotting their lips together. For just a few moments longer, she wanted to forget that she owed her parents a text. She knew they’d be worried. She owed them *something*.
But she just needed a few more minutes of Yang.

As predicted, Blake had a barrage of texts waiting for her when she turned her phone back on. They gave her that familiar twinge of anxiety, but even knowing that none were from Adam didn’t help to alleviate it. Yang’s presence was reassuring, at least. She winced as she glanced over her mother’s scoldings-turned-plea. Even Ghira, who was a terrible texter, had sent her a couple.

“That’s not a good face,” Yang commented, pulling her hair up. Blake tried to soften her scowl.

“Parents,” Blake muttered, to which Yang nodded sagely.

“Tell me about it.” Yang kicked off the blankets. Up close, her long legs were dented with the occasional scar. Absently, Blake traced a jagged one on her knee, making Yang laugh. “Have I told you about my mom yet?”

“Summer?”

“No, my biological one, Raven.” Yang wrinkled her nose. “The bitch.”

Blake couldn’t help it. She snorted with laughter, making Yang’s own smile light up.

“I love making you laugh.” She pulled Blake closer, kissing her playfully on the cheek. “Yeah, Raven left us, like, the minute she pushed me out of her. She owns a bunch of properties here, but only visits, like, once a year to give me a check and to tell me what an exciting life she lives as a single, unattached woman.”

“She sounds like a real winner.” Blake couldn’t comprehend how someone could just abandon their child, let alone someone like Yang. It was almost enough to break her heart. She moved down Yang’s toned calf, skating a finger over another scar. “What about Summer?”

Yang was silent for such a long moment that Blake worried she’d overstepped her bounds. She looked up, worried, but Yang’s face was blank. No anger, no irritation… There was just nothing at all. She stared at Blake’s hand on her leg.

“She… died. When we were kids.”

“Oh.” Blake bit her lip, scooting closer to Yang. “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. It was a long time ago.” Yang gave her a smile, but it didn’t reach her eyes. Blake took her hand, peeling back her fingers to open her palm. How could such tough hands feel so gentle on her skin? Yang looked down, watching the way Blake’s fingers slid to her wrist. The pads of her fingers pressed against it, feeling for the telltale flutter. For all her outward calm, Yang’s pulse was racing.

“You okay?” Blake asked, eyes locking onto Yang’s.

“Of course.”

“Your pulse…”

“Only because of you. You make my heart run wild.” Yang grinned at her, but Blake knew better; she had felt Yang’s heart with her own hand that morning. It had been slow and steady, full of the peace both of them had felt. Not this. This was a battle drum.

But if Yang didn’t want to go on, she wouldn’t press it. She knew too well how that felt. Her phone
was a stark reminder of that.

Blake changed back into her own pajamas, knowing it would rile her parents up if she were to go home in Yang’s clothes. The sweatshirt was probably the limit, she thought wryly as she pulled it back on, and even that was a stretch.

“Where is everyone?” she asked, joining Yang in the kitchen. Yang was hovered over the stove, heating the pan, and the smell of toast made Blake’s stomach growl.

“Weiss and Ruby are probably messing around on *Crescent Rose*, and I think Dad was going to help Qrow with some yardwork.” Yang slid the eggs onto a plate. “How do you like your eggs?”

“Scrambled is fine, thanks.” Yang bustled over to the toaster, pulling out a couple slices.

“Where’s on the table. We’ve also got jam in the fridge. Just give me a few minutes on the eggs.”

“No rush.” She took her plate and watched Yang crack a couple eggs into a bowl. “It’s nice to have someone make me breakfast.”

“Anytime you want a home-cooked breakfast, just hit up *Chateau de Yang!*” she replied cheerfully. “All I ask is that you please kiss the cook.”

“Like I need an excuse.” To prove her point, she did just that. “Though, breakfast is a plus.”

“I’d guess it’s more of a brunch though,” Yang said, glancing at the stove clock. “No Bloody Mary’s today, though. We’re not that fancy.”

“I didn’t come here for fancy. I came for the great customer service.” At this, Yang laughed out loud.

For all the lightness of the morning, Blake knew it couldn’t last. Yang borrowed Ruby’s car again (“You can’t ride Bumblebee in your pajamas, sweetheart.”) and from the moment she got in, Blake’s anxiety was back in full force. She’d shot Ghira a quick text to let him know she was on her way back, half-hoping that they’d gone out. No such luck.

*We’ve been so worried,* he’d texted back. *We’re so glad you’re coming back.*

“Did they think you wouldn’t?” Yang asked curiously as they wound their way down the road. Blake burned with shame. She should’ve known they’d jump to the conclusion that she’d run away for good.

“That’s… sorta what happened when I was with… him.” She couldn’t bring herself to say his name out loud. She looked out the window dismally. “I came home with a split lip one day, and they knew it wasn’t an accident. They tried to tell me that he was no good for me, but I… couldn’t hear it. So I left.”

“Baby,” Yang murmured, reaching out for Blake’s hand.

“They… probably think this is the same sort of thing.” Yang squeezed her hand slightly, and Blake squeezed back. “I don’t exactly have a good track record.”

“It means they care,” Yang replied. “That’s always good, isn’t it? It’s more than I could ever say for Raven.”

“I know they do.” Blake sighed and rested her head on the window. “They… flew down to Menagerie the minute I called them. It couldn’t have been cheap, but they did it anyway. I just...
wish they could see that you’re… not like him.”

“So I’ll win ‘em over! That can’t be too hard, can it?” Yang shot her a winning grin.

“Don’t underestimate my parents. They’re a bit protective these days.”

“Challenge accepted.”

Yang was still smirking as they pulled into the driveway, though it did fade when she looked back at Blake.

“You gonna be okay? I can stick around, in case you need rescuing.”

“I probably won’t die,” Blake replied, trying to sound optimistic.

“That’s reassuring.” Yang began to rub Blake’s arm. “Give me a call when things’ve settled down, okay? It’ll make me feel better.”

“Okay.” Blake leaned over the center console, awkwardly angled muscles not enough to keep her from resting her head on Yang’s shoulder. Yang slid an arm around her waist.

“Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help,” she added softly. Blake nodded.

The curtains in the cottage were all pulled back, so Blake didn’t want to risk upsetting her parents further with too long of a kiss. They had to be watching. She contented herself with a small peck on Yang’s lips. It wouldn’t be long before they’d see each other, she reminded herself as she got out of the car.

Still, her heart ached when Yang pulled out of the driveway. She didn’t let herself stare after it.

When she got to the top of the deck, her ears pricked up. A shrill sound rattled off not too far away. Someone nearby had blown a whistle. She halted, and through her uneasiness, she found it within herself to smile.

Which, of course, fell away the minute she stepped into the turmoil of the cottage.

Kali threw her arms around Blake, seemingly forgetting about her daughter’s aversion to touch. Blake grimaced, but didn’t push her away. Maybe Yang was starting to desensitize her to it, she wondered. Distractedly, she returned the hug, though it wasn’t hard as the one she received.

“God, I’ve been so worried!” Kali loosened her grip, holding Blake an arm’s length away to look at her. Blake looked away. “You shouldn’t have--”

“Kali,” Ghira said warningly. Kali’s mouth snapped shut. Blake pulled away, looking up at her father. The day they’d come to visit her in the hospital, he’d looked so old, and much more tired than she had remembered him. That haunted look was back in his eyes, and remorse hit Blake in a violent crash.

“I’m sorry,” she said, very quietly, unable to hold her father’s eyes for long. Kali covered her own with a hand, her ears drooping. Ghira sighed.

“Your mother and I talked last night,” he said, gesturing to the couch. Blake cringed. “Let’s sit down for a minute…”

“Could I, like… get changed, first?” The look her parents exchanged with rife with meaning, and Blake gave in. She sat down, eyes glazed as she stared at the coffee table. She’d have to see this out.
“We know that Mom might have… overreacted last night,” Ghira told her tentatively as he took a seat in the armchair. Kali shot him an exasperated look, but said nothing. “I think it’s wonderful you’re making some friends here, and I want you to be able to spend time with them. It’s good for you.”

Anticipating a but, Blake scowled. Surprisingly, it didn’t come.

“We’re not going to force you to go anywhere you don’t want to go. If we do go to Acadia this summer, we’d love it if you came with us, but only if you want to,” Ghira cleared his throat, and Blake finally looked up. “We do get worried, Blake. We’re not trying to stop you from… dating, if that’s what you want to do. But don’t shut us out.”

“We only just got you back,” Kali added. Blake could see now how bloodshot her eyes were and she felt a pang. “We… just worry that we’ll lose you again.”

“I’m not shutting you out,” Blake said, trying to sound as firm as possible. “You’ve met her, and I thought you liked her.”

“We thought we liked Adam, too,” Ghira replied quietly. Blake gulped. Hearing his name made her stomach sink.

“She’s… never done anything to me.” She wished there was a way to impart to her parents the tone Yang used to speak to her, how gentleness she used to touch. “She’s just… I know you won’t believe me, but I know she’d never…” Hurt me. “…do anything,” she finished, hating how large and stupid the words sounded in her mouth. “Believe me, if she was anything other than kind, or caring, or… or nice, I don’t think I’d… I’d be jumping into this. She’s always so careful about my ribs, and she’s always asking to make sure if it’s okay if…”

A blush bloomed in Blake’s cheeks while she’d went on about Yang. She shut her mouth before she could dig her hole any deeper. She wouldn’t go into too much detail with her parents, even if it had all been very innocent. Still, the corners of Kali’s mouth twitched.

“So she’s been treating you well?”

Blake’s ears shot up a little too quickly. “I’ve… I’d forgotten how… how nice people can be.” She paused, the pink in her cheeks turning into a hotter red. “I mean, her sister is really nice, too. Ruby. And their roommate, Weiss… and even their dad is—”

Ghira held up his hands. “Slow down,” said, his own smile more evident than the hint of Kali’s. “I believe you.”

“I’d feel better if we could get to know her a little more, though.” Kali’s light tone was underlined with seriousness. “Maybe we could have her over for dinner sometime this week.”

Blake heaved a sigh of relief. “I bet she’d love that.”

Ghira nodded in approval. Family dinners with the Belladonnas had never been Adam’s style; he’d preferred settings that he had control over. Blake had a feeling that Yang would be more than happy to join them.

“I’m… glad she’s being so good to you,” Kali said. “Just… take it slow, okay? She could be the most wonderful person in the world… but remember, we’re only here for the summer, Blake.”

“I know that.” It was only through her strength of will that Blake’s words weren’t a snap. “We’re not serious or anything, okay? We’re just… having fun.”
For all her fervor, the words even tasted like a lie.

It took another ten minutes to finally pull herself away from her parents. It was more difficult than she’d thought; they’d been pushing for more details about Yang that she wasn’t sure she wanted to give. She didn’t have a room of her own to hide in, so she settled for the bathroom as she got changed. It was also the most private place she could make a phone call.

“Did you hear my whistle?” Yang asked cheerfully over the speakerphone while Blake pulled a shirt over her head.

“I did. Did you stick your head out the window to blow it, or did you at least pull over first?” A smile had returned when Yang had answered the phone. It was almost unnerving to see her reflection with such an eager expression on her face.

“I pulled over. After I pulled out of the driveway, inspiration struck!”

“Uh-huh.” Blake ran a brush through her hair. “So, my parents want you to come over for dinner this week.”

“Do they?” Yang sounded pleased. “Does this mean they approve?”

“It means they’re giving you a shot. So don’t screw it up.” Yang laughed on the other end.

“I like to think I leave a good impression on people!”

“Do you?”

“Worked on you, didn’t it?”

“Shut up.” Blake chuckled. “If I knew then how cocky you’d be—”

“You love it. So when’s dinner?”

--

The next day found Blake back at the shipyard. After the talk with her parents, they seemed more relaxed when she’d broached the idea of meeting Yang for lunch again. Dinner was scheduled for Wednesday night, and she was hopeful.

“Did you want us to pick you up?” Kali asked that morning. Blake had shaken her head.

“Yang says she’ll bring me back after she’s done for the day. She’s pretty sure she’s going to turn me into a sailor.”

At this, Ghira had snorted into his tea. “She knows you’ve never so much as stepped on a sailboat before, right?”

“I have now!” she retorted, rolling her eyes. “She used to be a sailing camp counselor. If anyone can teach me to sail, it’ll be her.”

He didn’t have to know that the sailboats she’d been on hadn’t been out on open water and as Yang had told her before, a lobster boat didn’t count.

She stopped at the office first with a quick knock. “Weiss?”

“Come in!” Weiss called. She was typing something into the computer, glancing occasional at a
paper in front of her. “Give me a minute.”

“It’s okay. I just wanted to ask where Yang was. She invited me for lunch, so--”

“Hold on.”

Blake sighed, closing the door behind her. The office was stuffy, the only reprieve being an open window and a tiny fan on one of the filing cabinets. Half-models of boats hung on the walls, as well as a collection of ribbons. One shelf was dedicated to trophies, though taking the place of honor in the center was a framed photo of Weiss and Ruby, standing in front of Crescent Rose. Blake peered closer at it and recognized it as one of the photos on Crescent Rose’s Facebook page.

“This is… pretty cool,” Blake commented, more to fill the silence than to start a conversation.

“Hm?” Weiss looked over her shoulder, the curve of a proud smile trying to spread across her face. “Oh, yeah. We’re pretty good.” She tapped the keyboard a few more times, then said, “So Yang’s lunch technically starts in a half hour, so she can wait. I want to show you something.”

Even though Yang trusted Weiss, instincts were hard to fight when years had been spent on the defensive. Blake narrowed her eyes. “What do you mean?”

Weiss sighed, leaning back in her chair. “You don’t need to take that tone with me.” She frowned at Blake before adding, “It’s a boat.”

Of course it would be a boat. Blake flushed, but nodded.

Unlike most of the boats, this one was tucked away in a large garage-like structure close to the Yang’s house. Weiss said nothing as she led Blake there, but the pensive expression on her face meant that there were words waiting to happen. Blake readied herself for a fight.

The boat propped up inside was easily double the size of Crescent Rose, or even larger. Blake gawked, stepping closer to the hull. She reached out a hand to touch it; though unfinished, it was surprisingly smooth.

“She isn’t done yet,” Weiss told her, her voice uncomfortably like her mother’s school-teacher voice. Weiss joined her at the boat’s side, looking up at it almost sadly. “We work on it when we can, buy parts when I can afford them. It was supposed to be for my father, but after what happened… Tai refunded him and terminated the contract.” She paused. “Tai’s, like, the dad I wish I had. He… sorta took me in after my father… you know.”

“Yeah.” Blake couldn’t look at Weiss. Instead, she backed up, looking up at the unfinished boat.

“So Tai’s letting me work it off, and letting me keep it here for free. Ruby and I are saving up. We’ve wanted to sail the world since we were kids, and we might be able to pull it off with this boat. I’m hoping we’ll finish it by the end of summer, so we can do a test-run.”

“That’s… quite a goal,” Blake replied carefully. She knew nothing of sailing; she couldn’t tell if Weiss’s dream was anything further than a fantasy.

“And expensive one.” Weiss crossed her arms, and only then did Blake look at her. “I wonder, sometimes, if it’s stupid to keep this boat. If I sold it, I could move to Portland, or something. Live a real life.”

“But you love sailing.”
“I do. So I’m still here.” Blake regarded her for a moment, silence filling the gap between them. It was a moment before Weiss continued. “I’ve… wanted to ask you about something.”

Yet the silence leeched in again. Blake made no move to disturb it.

“Yang hasn’t really told us much about you,” Weiss said at last, “but I can sort of… figure some things out.”

“Oh?” Blake kept her tone neutral.

“My father was never exactly a… gentle kind of guy.” Her words were tinged with frost that sent goosebumps crawling up Blake’s spine. “I mean, he never took a belt to us or anything, but he wasn’t exactly… good to us, growing up.”

Blake said nothing, only continuing to stare at the hull.

“The other day… You sorta… freaked out a little when Ruby woke you guys up.”

“So?” Blake glowered at her. “I just get surprised easily.”

“I’m not criticizing,” Weiss replied evenly. “And I’m not trying to pry. I’m glad Yang can be there for you. To help you with… whatever is going on.”

“Okay.”

“I’m just… a little surprised that she is, and I want to make sure you understand why.” Weiss rounded on her. There was no malice in her eyes; it was that accountant look again, ready to list off checks and balances. “Because she’s getting attached to you, and I don’t want you to treat her lightly.”

“I’m not--” Blake began, but Weiss held up a hand.

“Let me finish.” It was strange to be on the receiving end of suspicion; the similarities between Weiss and Kali were starting to poke through at her. “Yang doesn’t get close to people. She gets along well with everyone, sure, but she’s very… aloof, I guess would be the best word. It’s why she’s never able to keep a relationship going for longer than a couple months. She doesn’t like to risk connection.”

That seemed to be at odds with everything Blake had experienced with Yang over the past week. She frowned. “I don’t see--”

“I don’t see it either.” Weiss shook her shoulders back dramatically. “When she was a kid, especially after the accident, she’d try to reach out to Raven now and then, but there’s only so much rejection a kid can take. She just got into the habit of pushing everyone back before they could hurt her first. She’s come to expect that, you know?”

Yang had laughed Raven off so easily the day before that Blake still had trouble seeing it. Any emotional trauma had been well-hidden. But… “Wait, what accident?”

Weiss’s pale eyebrows shot up, then she softened. “Of course she didn’t bring it up,” she muttered, almost to herself. She steeled herself “She watched Summer die,” she went on bluntly. “It was… a weird sailing accident. Yang nearly lost her arm, and she was in a lot of shock when that happened, so I’m not even sure how much she remembers…”

Blake remembered the bad dream Yang had the day before, how quickly she’d brushed it aside.
“She remembers enough,” she said aloud, paling. If only she could go back to the day before, back to Yang’s bad dream… She should have wrapped her arms around Yang then, should have given her the comfort she’d so freely given Blake. Weiss nodded.

“It… sorta messed her up for a while,” she continued, looking back to the hull again. “And then when Raven kept bailing? She didn’t even want me around when that was happening.”

Blake could see the pieces line up and break apart in Yang’s hands. It would have hardened anyone.

“How does she do it?” she asked. “How did she keep going after that?” Weiss let out a humorless laugh.

“She’s only ever skimmed the surface, really. Ruby came up with the idea that everything Yang feels is like a ship in a bottle; all these… elaborate feelings and worries are just locked up in a glass bottle, plugged up tight with a cork. But one wrong move and that bottle will break, and… I don’t know. Ruby could explain it a lot better than I do. That’s why I’m worried, about how hard she’s falling for you.”

“Falling for me?” For all the serious subject matter of their conversation, Blake blushed.

“Oh, please,” Weiss scoffed. “Isn’t it obvious?”

“I…” Blake’s mouth went dry. Weiss frowned.

“This is why I’m nervous,” she reiterated, pointing a finger at Blake. “You don’t even know. It would ruin Yang if you did anything to hurt her.”

Ruin. Yang’s bright smile seemed at odds with that word. It was a word that shouldn’t have even shared a sentence with Yang. Blake stared at Weiss in disbelief. Ruin.

Sweetheart, I’m not going to hurt you.

“I’m not going to hurt her,” Blake said, quiet and firm. “I would never hurt her.”

“You… should have seen her face. When you texted her the other night, to pick you up,” Weiss told her, her own voice lowering. “She dropped everything she was doing to go get you. She wouldn’t have done that for just anybody. She wouldn’t have… let just anybody sleep with her like that.”

All of Weiss’s confusion and suspicion no longer seemed so strange. She couldn’t fault her for it, just as she couldn’t fault her parents for feeling the same way about Yang.

“She cares about you. A lot,” Weiss added unnecessarily. “I just don’t want that to hurt her.”

“My mom feels the same way about me,” Blake replied smiling weakly. At this, Weiss cracked a smile.

“Maybe it’s what you both need. You both know what not to do to each other, so maybe that’s part of the reason you get along so well.”

Get along. Blake’s smile twitched just a little more. That was one way to say it.

All of the mixed feelings the conversation brought about were cut short as Weiss and Blake approached Dew Gayl. Blake’s heart leapt as Yang leaned over the edge, waving cheerfully.

“Gimme a sec, I’ll be right down.”
Weiss didn’t spare Blake another look as Yang clambered down the ladder. They had made their peace. There was nothing more to say.

Still, Blake looked at Yang’s scar with new eyes in the moment before Yang swallowed her in a hug. Yang nearly lost her arm, Weiss had told her. She watched Summer die.

But none of that past tragedy lingered in Yang’s eyes now. The lilac was a happy color, delighted in the company they kept. Their lips met automatically.

“Ugh, do you have to do that with me right here?” Weiss whined. Yang broke the kiss to laugh.

“Then don’t watch!” she teased. Weiss stalked away, grumbling, but Blake knew better. For all Weiss’s worry, she’d also sensed hope.
Chapter 8

Freak Sailing Accident Leaves One Dead, Child in Critical Condition

Mother of Two Dies in Sailing Accident

Island Town Reels After Sailing Tragedy

Blake closed her laptop, a sinking feeling in her gut. It only took a quick Google search to find answers about the accident, but after reading a few, she wished she had just left it alone. None of them went into gory detail, but Blake could surmise that whatever had happened was a grisly affair. On one July day, years ago, Summer Rose and Qrow Branwen had taken Yang out on Summer’s racing yacht. Inexplicably, a high-tension line had snapped. It had struck both Yang and Summer, though Summer had been the one whose wounds had been fatal.

If the scar on Yang’s arm was anything to go by, whatever had happened to Summer must have been much worse.

And Yang had only been eight.

Blake tried to fit the rest of the story together in her mind. She could almost see little Yang’s excited smile as she went out onto Summer’s sailboat. One of the articles had mentioned the light rain that had been falling, the blustery wind. That wind may have had to do with whatever had snapped that line.

*I always get weird dreams when it rains*, Yang had told her. God, how it all made sense. Visions of that blonde child standing in the rain on the deck of a boat, covered in blood, haunted Blake’s subconscious.

Not that she could let on that she knew about it. Though the accident was bound to be a well-known incident on the island, knowing about it still felt dirty, like it was a secret that Blake shouldn’t have been privy to. She kept thinking about Weiss’s analogy, how Yang kept everything locked away, like a ship in a bottle; Blake wouldn’t do anything to capsize that fragile ship if she could help it.

So she kept quiet.

Those headlines were still on her mind when Yang called a short time later. At least the excitement in her voice was enough to distract Blake from the articles and her own imagination.

“What should I wear?” Yang whined. “Do they expect me to dress up?”


“Are you saying I stink?!”

Blake knew she had no reason to be nervous for the dinner with her parents that night, but her anxiety was deep-seated. She was too used to things going wrong.

“I’m just saying it wouldn’t hurt to use some soap now and then.” The banter, at least, was enough to reduce at least some of the anxiety. She knew Yang wouldn’t stink; other than the occasion on the lobster boat, Yang had always had that same pleasant scent of salt and citrus that Blake had come to love so well.
“I’m going to jump in the tank of bait just for you, sweetheart,” Yang said with a laugh. Her cheerfulness was contagious, and Blake grinned. “So, is there anything I can do that would earn me bonus points with your parents? Other than showering, that is.”

Blake considered. Just showing up to the dinner and contributing to the conversation would speak volumes. “Honestly? Just… be yourself. They liked you well enough when you visited the other day…”

“Before they found out I was dating their daughter?” Yang teased. “I guess this probably means we shouldn’t make out over the dinner table.”

“I wouldn’t push it.”

“Noted.” She heard a rustle over on Yang’s end. “I was wondering… Would you want to stay the night at my place? Then we could head over to the race together in the morning.”

Blake blushed, though no one was there to see it.

“I mean, you don’t have to if you don’t want to. I just wanted to offer so that--”

“I’d love to,” Blake said, cutting off Yang’s rambling. It was cute, how nervous she sounded. “We can just head back to your place after dinner?”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Yang replied, her relief obvious in her voice. “Will your parents have a problem with it?”

“Not if you behave yourself tonight.”

“No promises there, Belladonna.”

It was so easy to forget, Blake mused as she hung up the phone, that there was so much Yang kept locked away. She exuded so much sunshine that it was easy to miss the shadows.

Yang arrived on Bumblebee ten minutes early, and Blake ignored her father’s chuckle as she raced out the door to meet her. Yang already had her whistle halfway to her lips, dropping it with a toothy grin as Blake darted down the steps.

“I heard the bike,” she explained as Yang pulled her helmet off. Somehow, the ride and the helmet had done nothing to ruin Yang’s hair. It hung loose over her shoulders, the perfect mix of messy and styled. This woman had turned haircare into an art.

“It is sorta loud,” Yang acknowledged as she tucked her aviators into her shirt pocket. “Good to see you, baby. It’s been too long.”

“A whole day was too long?” Blake asked, shaking her head in amused disbelief. Yang nodded solemnly, slipping an arm around her and reeling her in.

“I almost died.”

“You’re so dramatic.” Blake rolled her eyes, but melted into the kiss. Maybe a day had been too long a time to go without her lips, her touch. It felt good, to feel Yang’s hands on her waist again, her fingers so close to skin over the thin fabric of her dress.

“You look gorgeous,” Yang said when they pulled apart, looking her up and down appreciatively. In hindsight, maybe it had been good that her mother had told her to pack a dress for their Maine
vacation. Yang trailed her fingers up her side.

“And you don’t stink,” Blake told her quietly, responding to the soft touch with closed eyes. Yang’s snort of laughter ruined the moment.

“Told you I wouldn’t.”

Both of her parents were in the kitchen when Blake led Yang inside, which meant that they probably (fortunately) had missed their display outside.

“Behave yourself,” Blake reminded her in a low hiss. Yang shrugged innocently, pulling off her flannel and hanging it on the coat rack. Blake allowed herself only a few seconds to stare at her arms, to dream guiltily about the way her biceps felt when they wrapped around her, but she refused to be too obvious over dinner. Yang caught Blake’s lingering gaze and gave her a wicked smirk and a wink.

“I’m not the only one who needs to behave herself,” she replied lowly. Blake felt her cheeks redden.

“Good to see you again, Yang!” Kali said as she strode into the living room, offering her a quick hug. Apparently, any conflict she’d been feeling about Yang no longer affected embraces. “I’m glad you could come.”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Yang poked her head in the kitchen. “Anything I can do to help?”

“We’re just about done, but thank you.” Ghira, hands laden with a heavy tray, nodded politely at Yang. “Blake, could you get the door?”

On the back deck, Ghira had set up the table and chairs. Though the trees blocked much of the ocean view, the breeze off the water was enough to keep the bugs at bay. The evening was young enough that the sun still hung brightly in the sky, only beginning to soften with the promise of sunset.

“It’s… a great spot here!” Yang said, somewhat awkwardly, as she pulled out a chair. She gestured for Blake to sit.

“Show-off,” she muttered, amused at the blush in Yang’s cheeks.

“Pull out your own damn chair next time, then,” she replied, murmuring into Blake’s ear. Both of them suppressed a laugh.

“The last time we came to Maine, we stayed in Bar Harbor,” Kali explained, taking her own seat. “It was very nice, but a little crowded. We wanted something a little more secluded this time.”

“Makes sense. Can’t get more secluded than Patch!”

As they made up their plates, Blake saw that her mother's eyes never left Yang. They'd found their target. Blake held her breath, waiting for a strike…

"You and my daughter seem to be getting awfully close." Kali may have sounded casual, but Blake winced. She wasted no time. She wasn't going to let Yang get the first words in, to charm her in the way Adam had at first. This time, she was on the offensive.

Yang raised an uncertain eyebrow. "Well, I like her," she said bluntly. The smile she offered would have won Blake over, but Kali’s own was still pleasantly neutral.

"It's only been… what? Not even a couple weeks yet?"
"Mom," Blake hissed. Yang leaned back in her seat, not letting the tension in the air affect her relaxed stance.

Kali paid no attention to her daughter. She only dropped her eyes away to cut off a piece of her fish, a play at normalcy. Or power, Blake thought darkly. "A couple weeks seems to be pretty fast, doesn't it?"

"Time flies, for sure." Yang took a bite of her own fish, but Blake saw the movement was a bit jerky. Maybe Yang was nervous. "I'm glad I got to meet her so quickly."

"How did you meet?"

Even Ghira was caught up in their exchange, watching them over the glass of wine he'd raised. He didn't even take a sip as he watched the conversation play out, only tapping his lips on the rim from time to time while the women spoke.

"It was pretty cute, actually!" Yang brightened at the turn of the conversation and Blake suppressed a groan. She didn't want Kali to hear how she'd panicked while climbing down from the rock, or how Yang had been so quick to reassure her. She had shown weakness that day, and that was the last thing she wanted her parents to hear about. "We were on the rocks at the race, and--"

"Rocks?" Ghira asked, turning a frown to Blake. "What were you doing on the rocks? The doctor told you to take it easy."

If only she could have melted through the mesh of her chair. Seeing Yang's interrogation was hard enough without her own bad decisions being dragged in.

"Oh, she wasn't being reckless or anything. That's my job!" Yang said, voice close to a laugh. "That's why we met in the first place. I jumped off a rock, and she was worried I'd hurt myself."

It was a relief that Yang had omitted the part about how Blake had followed her down the shore. She had a feeling her mother might be appalled by that particular revelation.

"She's very caring," Yang went on, laying a hand on Blake's knee beneath the table. "You obviously did something right, raising her to be like that."

This, at least, got a slight blush out of Kali, though it was nothing compared to the bright red Blake's face had become. Yang's smile was cheerful and relaxed as she gave her knee a squeeze. Ghira had finally managed a sip of his wine, and he set the glass down to give Yang an amused look.

"And we know she thinks highly of you, too," he ventured. Blake covered her face with her hands. "I'd thought she'd forgotten how to smile in the years she was gone, but we can always tell when you send a text, because--"

"Dad!" Her ears flattened against her head with mortification, but Yang laughed and rubbed Blake's knee with the pad of her thumb. "Could we not?" she begged.

And then Kali was laughing, and Blake knew that, despite her own embarrassment, her mother was mollified… at least, for now.

Blake let her parents take the lead for much of the conversation. They asked simple questions about Patch, the shipyard, and island life, all things that Yang answered easily and with obvious pride. Even Blake was impressed by some of what she'd learned; there was a lot more to the island than she would have thought to ask.
“There were only, like, four kids in my entire eighth grade class,” Yang told them, grinning at their incredulity. “And we had to go up to Kuroyuri every day for high school.”

“Only four kids” Ghira remarked, shaking his head in amazement. “There were about two hundred kids in Blake’s entire eighth grade year.”

“And that’s nuts to me!” Yang took a sip of her wine. “Just going to Kuroyuri High was culture shock, and there were only about four hundred kids in the whole school.”

“Maine really is like a different planet,” Blake said, making Yang laugh. She nibbled on her asparagus, relieved at how easily the dinner had become. Compared to her last family dinner with Adam, this was nothing. That last dinner had slipped so quickly into an argument, and Blake had feared that Adam would come to blows with her father, and he--

“Y’okay?” Yang asked quietly, her tone light enough that her parents wouldn’t catch on that she’d completely zoned out. She nodded quickly. This wasn’t the time to get caught in the past again.

“Ouch, what happened there?” Kali asked, touching the scar on Yang’s arm. “That looks bad.”

“It was!” Yang replied, the cheerfulness back in her voice. Blake listened with a half-cocked ear, curious. Now that she knew the truth of it, it made her wonder how Yang could react to questions with such ease. “Shipyards aren’t exactly the safest places for kids to play.”

Blake couldn’t tell if she had imagined it, but Yang’s laugh did seem a little more forced than usual.

“What happened?” Kali pressed, her own ears twitching with concern. Yang frowned slightly.

“Mom,” Blake warned, putting a hand on Yang’s knee. When their eyes met, Blake was alarmed at the widening of her eyes, the twitch of her brow. There was surprise there, yes, but there was also… fear? She didn’t like how Yang wore that look.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m a little nosy,” Kali said, breaking the tension with a dismissive wave and a light laugh. “I don’t mean to ask for the gory details.”

“That’s all right.” Yang offered a shrug. “It’s a pretty big scar, so I’m used to questions. It was bad enough that I ended up needing physical therapy for it, actually. It’s mostly good now, though.” To demonstrate, Yang flexed her arm.

Blake, thoughts still on that odd look of fear, almost forgot to stare.

Aside from the initial tension and the hiccup over Yang’s arm, the dinner was largely a success. Her parents were clearly a lot more comfortable with Yang by dessert, where they got into a debate over the best brand of Maine ice cream (“You only like Gifford’s because that’s what they’ve got at the ice cream stands,” Yang asserted, “but Round Top is the best.”). At one point, Ghira ruffled Yang’s hair with a hearty laugh.

“I suppose you’re okay,” he told her while Yang quickly ran a hand back through her hair. “We’ll tolerate you for a little while longer.”

“Dad,” Blake groaned, but even Yang joined in on the laughter.

It wasn’t until Blake was grabbing her backpack that she finally sensed the disconnect with Yang. In her parents’ company, conversation gone on without a hitch. As Weiss had said only a couple days before, it was easy for Yang to get along with people when she was only skimming the surface. With dinner picked up and her parents busy in the kitchen, Yang abruptly detached.
“I could just pick you up here, if you’d like, instead of staying the night at my place,” she told Blake, who was busy stuffing her toiletries into her backpack. It took a minute for the words to sink in. She stopped, looking at Yang with numb shock.

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s honestly not that much trouble to just pick you up,” Yang said with a shrug. Blake frowned, stepping closer. Yang backed up, averting her eyes, expression stony.

What was she supposed to say to this? Blake tried to catch Yang’s eyes on her own, but Yang resolutely kept her eyes away.

“Do… you not want me to come?” Blake finally asked, trying to keep the hurt out of her voice. At this, Yang did look back up, startled.

“I was only asking-- I mean… shit.” Yang ran a hand through her hair anxiously, unconsciously making a fist of it. It had to hurt, Blake saw, but Yang’s pained expression had nothing to do with her hair. “That wasn’t how I meant it.”

“Then why did you ask?” Blake stepped closer, relieved when Yang did not back away this time. She reached out to Yang’s head, to the hand that was still clenched in her hair, and loosened it to take it in her own. Yang opened her mouth, then closed it again. She cast her eyes back down.

“You know what… happened,” Yang stated, voice low. She shook her head. “I guess… on an island this size, you’d find out eventually.”

Blake squeezed her hand more tightly. Was this the fear that she’d seen in Yang’s eyes? That she’d found out about the accident?


“What… what would I be mad about?” she asked, bewildered. “You didn’t do anything.”

“I mean, for lying about it.” She tried to pull her hand back, but Blake held on. What was it Weiss had said? Yang pushed people away before they could hurt her? “For not telling you myself.”

The defeat in Yang’s voice was painful just to listen to. Still not letting go of Yang’s hand, she shut the bathroom door before rounding back on her.

“I still don’t understand.”

“When you asked me what happened to my arm.” Frustration made Yang’s eyes flash a smoldering red. “I don’t… I don’t just tell everyone who asks, okay? I don’t want to have to go into that with everyone.”

“I get it,” Blake replied firmly. “Really. I didn’t tell you about my ribs right off the bat, did I?”

“That was different,” Yang insisted, but Blake shook her head.

“I’m not mad,” she said with as much gentleness as she could muster. “Please. I understand.”

Yang’s shoulders sagged, and she leaned back against the wall. Cheery facade stripped away, all that was left of her was exhaustion. Blake snaked her arms around her, pressing herself tightly against her body. The seconds stretched long before Yang finally returned the gesture, wrapping her arms around Blake’s waist.
“And it especially doesn’t mean I don’t want to spend the night with you. I want to stay with you,” Blake added, trying to sound reassuring, but the words came out closer to a plea. “You… you make me happy.”

Yang’s fingers tightened around the flimsy fabric of her dress, and Blake felt her breath catch. As she pressed a kiss into the top of Blake’s head, she slipped a hand underneath Yang’s tank top. Her back was tight with muscle, and so warm. Blake shifted her face up, finding Yang’s lips almost without needing to look. Yang’s tongue ran over her bottom lip before gently biting down on it.

There was more intensity in this kiss than Blake had shared with Yang before. Her nails scraped against Yang’s back as she dove deeper into her lips, blindly exploring her mouth with her tongue. There was heat, there was wet, there was possibility.

She’d let her do it, Blake realized as Yang’s tongue swirled around her own, thoughts running wild. If Yang’s fingers had slipped under her dress right then, to pull it up--

--but she didn’t. Yang’s hands dropped away, but the smile she wore was close enough to her usual light-hearted one that Blake felt relieved. They’d be okay.

“Let’s finish getting you packed up, sweetheart,” she said, clearing her throat. “Your parents are only just starting to like me. Let’s not ruin that.”

--

“You two are revolting.”

Blake rolled her head to the side. If she hadn’t already been flushed, she would have definitely turned that way from the sheer force of Weiss’s glare. Yang had no-such hangups, for she let out a booming laugh that made the bed shake.

“You don’t have to stand there and watch! God, Weiss, are you a peeping tom?!” Yang’s eyes went wide in mock fear. “Or… what’s the other word for it?”

“Voyeur?” Blake suggested helpfully.

“That’s it!” Yang said, beaming, flopping herself back down beside Blake. It was only slightly less embarrassing than her previous position of being on top of her. Though they were both fully-dressed, it had to have looked bad. “You’re a voyeur!”

“I can hardly be a voyeur when you’re putting on a free show,” Weiss pointed out. She squared her hands on her hips and deepened her scowl. “When you know perfectly well that I’d have to see it.”

“You’re supposed to be sleeping. Don’t you have an, oh, I don’t know. A race in the morning?” Yang pushed herself up, leaning against the headboard, and curled an arm around Blake.

“I can’t do that if you’re making the bed creak!”

“Shit, Weiss, we weren’t being that loud!”

“No, but I could imagine it.” Weiss tapped a slippered foot on the floor and Yang mimed puking.

“That’s attractive,” Blake muttered as she poked her in the ribs.

“Why are you imagining it?” Yang demanded, close to laughter.

“That’s not-- ugh!” Weiss stormed across the room to the hall door. “I’m sleeping in Ruby’s room
tonight. You’re making *me* feel dirty just having a bed so close to... *this*. And *I* need to be up early tomorrow.”

Weiss slammed the door behind her, and both Blake and Yang broke into laughter. “She *really* needs to get laid,” Yang snorted. She moved her arm, allowing Blake to snuggle closer. “Maybe she’ll learn to chill out, just a little.”

“Were we being too loud? I didn’t think we were making much noise…”

“Nah. I’m surprised she didn’t go into some tirade about hearing our sinful thoughts or whatever.” Yang rolled her eyes. “We probably should go to bed soon, though. We don’t need to be up quite as early as them, but parking’ll be a nightmare. There’s a chance of rain tomorrow, so we’re gonna take Ruby’s car.”

“I guess it’s a little harder to park than Bumblebee.” Blake wiggled enough for Yang to push the comforter down and pull it over them.

She had to admit, being able to lay in a bed again felt like a luxury compared to the couch. She sighed heavily, throwing an arm over Yang’s stomach. She resisted the urge to trace over Yang’s abs. If she did, she doubted she would be able to stop herself from going further.

“We could go to Camden after the race, if you want,” Yang told her, running a hand through Blake’s hair. “It’s a nice little town. It gets a little busy in the summer, but there’s plenty of places to grab lunch… get ice cream…”

“Sounds nice.”

“We could bring back some cheesy souvenirs for your parents.”

“Ugh, that’s the last thing they need.” Blake smiled, keeping her head firmly on Yang’s chest while she shook with laughter. “Would Ruby and Weiss want to come?”

“Probably, but they’ve *been* to Camden before. Besides, it can’t be a date if we drag them along.”

“A date, huh?” Blake closed her eyes. If she could just lay here, arm around Yang and having her hair stroked for the rest of her life, she might just die happy.

“Duh. Didn’t we already decide it was a date?”

“Well, yeah. But I like to hear it, anyway.”

“Date. Date. Date! Date!” With each word, Yang’s chant rose and she punctuated each word with a pump of her fist. She only stopped when Blake burst out laughing and pushed herself up on her elbows to give Yang the best glare she could muster.

“Weiss’ll come back in here and kick your ass,” she warned.

“She wishes.” Yang caught Blake by the back of her head, urging her in for a quick kiss. Mid-kiss, Yang gasped dramatically, clutching at her heart. “Blake! Guess what?”

“What?” she asked, already laughing again.

“We’re *dating*!”

How strange, to fall asleep with a smile.
It was still dark when Blake roused. There was a loud thud from outside the bedroom door and she shot up with a gasp. She strained her ears, relief flooding through her as she recognized the sound of Weiss’s scolding.

“You okay?” Yang asked sleepily from behind her. Blake grunted. She could hear Ruby’s muffled whine in response to whatever Weiss had to say.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to wake you.” She took a deep breath, willing her heart rate to slow.

“They scare you?” Yang asked, sliding over to circle both arms around her waist. “They’re just heading out.”

“Yeah, sorry.”

“Don’t apologize, baby.” Yang nuzzled her face into Blake’s neck, brushing a kiss over her pulse point. “Come back to sleep.”

Blake fit herself within Yang’s frame, stretching her neck out just a little further. On her waist, she felt Yang push her shirt up slightly, her bare arms wrapping around flesh. The touch was electric. Blake drew in a breath, waiting for the touch to go further, but it didn’t. Yang only sighed sleepily, pulling her in tight.

The longing rolled through Blake’s body with a ferocity that surprised her. She pressed herself closer against Yang, bridging the gaps between them. This was new. A couple weeks ago, she would have been happy to never be touched again, but now, she was as close as she could be to Yang, and it still wasn’t enough.

Maybe Adam was right. Being in someone else’s bed so soon after getting to know them, feeling what she was feeling… maybe she was nothing more than a slut. The thought was sobering, but she couldn’t bring herself to pull away from Yang. The touch was comforting, she told herself, even when she couldn’t shake the guilt of it.

Disgusting, she heard him whisper in the back of her mind.

But she wore Yang’s breath on her neck like a talisman, and not even his words could overpower it. They had no power when she was in Yang’s arms.

Yang’s touch was all Blake could think about during breakfast and during the car ride to Rockport, filling the silences like an unfinished sentence. It bordered on obsession until Yang’s coffee kicked in and conversation could begin in earnest.

“So their biggest competition is definitely Sharp Retribution,” Yang informed her as they wound their way up to Rockport. “It’s about the same size as Crescent Rose, though they have one more crew member. They’ve actually beaten Crescent Rose a few times, and Ruby gets super competitive whenever they’re involved.”

“Like a rivalry?” Blake asked, glancing back at Yang. She’s spent most of the ride staring out the window. This was her first official outing away from Patch since she’d arrived, and she was taking in the sights of coastal Maine. It was so much more peaceful, and quieter, than she was used to. Miles would stretch on with only trees or water on either side of them, broken up by the occasional house. And all along the road were hundreds of lupines. Even though the morning was foggy, the bright colors of the flowers made the morning a little less gray.

She wished the world could be this serene.
“Basically, yeah.” Yang hesitated before saying, “I sorta… used to date one of the crew members. I mean, we didn’t last very long, but I don’t want you to be surprised if it’s brought up, or if we see her.”

“Oh.” Blake blinked in surprise, but couldn’t find jealousy in her. Weiss had said that Yang had never been able to keep a relationship going for very long. Her relationship with Blake was an anomaly.

She couldn’t be jealous. She was the one who got to see the deeper parts of Yang. Whatever she’d had with this other woman had been superficial. Furthermore, it was over.

“Maybe trying to win races is all she’s got left,” Blake said, surprised at the confidence in her own voice. “Because I’ve got the real prize.”

Yang’s laugh was both surprised and relieved. She reached out her hand to Blake, who took it with a light squeeze.

Parking, as Yang predicted, was a nightmare. She bitched in a steady stream of profanities until she found a spot. It was tight, but she squeezed in, muttering things like “Massholes” and “learn to fucking park.”

Blake was laughing by the time she hopped out of the car.

“Can we use your broken ribs to land us a handicapped spot?” Yang asked, slamming her door a little harder than necessary. “I swear to God, tourists are the douchiest parkers.”

“I’m pretty sure handicapped parking spots don’t work that way.”

“If you limp, nobody would question it.”

“Why would I limp? It’s my ribs that were fractured, not my leg.”

“My pride was fractured!” Yang whined, but Blake had already approached her, giving her a kiss to shut her up.

As with the race on Patch, they veered away from the small crowd of people in favor of the shoreline. They had a little time; they’d arrived early enough that they could distance themselves from the docks. There was a small trail they were able to follow, grasses high on either side of the path.

“There they are,” Yang said, pointing to the boats. The view wasn’t as close as it would have been on the docks, but there were less people. Bright hulls were only just visible through the fog. “The brown one there-- that’s Sharp Retribution.”

Blake squinted. Other than the color of the hull, there wasn’t much difference she could see between it and Crescent Rose.

“Cover your ears. I’m gonna whistle.”

Blake groaned, but flattened her cat ears with her hands. Yang took a deep breath and blew. A few people on the docks turned in their direction, and Yang waved cheerfully at them.

“Isn’t that, like… embarrassing?” Blake asked, uncovering her ears.

“Nah!” Yang shoved her hands into her hoodie pocket. “Having Ruby know I’m here outweighs
any embarrassment."

“Even if she can’t hear you?”

“It’s the thought that counts, right?” Yang stared out at the boats, then pulled out her phone for a quick look. “Five minutes.”

Blake huddled closer against her against the slight morning chill. “You really are warm,” she admitted. Yang laughed and threw her arms around her.

“Better?”

She rested her head on Yang’s chest, breathing in the scent she’d come to love. “Mhm.”

The race may have been smaller than the one at Patch, but it was just as tense. *Crescent Rose* and *Sharp Retribution* were close enough that even Yang had trouble keeping track of who led. “I should’ve brought my binoculars,” she muttered, followed with a loud whoop of, “You got it, Ruby!”

The end of the race was tight enough that Yang couldn’t call it. Between the fog and the vantage point, it was impossible to say who the winner was. Grumbling all the while, Yang led Blake back down the trail, arm-in-arm. She tried to explain the finer points of racing as they walked. Blake managed to keep up with it at first, but by the time they got back to the docks, she was lost.

“Explain it like I have no idea how to sail,” Blake said, giving Yang a quick poke in the side.

“Hi, Yang!” a cheerful voice called out from ahead of them. A slender woman lifted her hand in a wave. The tall rabbit ears on her head twitched. “Good race, eh?”

“Who won? We couldn’t tell.”

“We did, but it was close. Ruby and Weiss did really well.”

Yang groaned in exasperation. “Damn.”

“Who’s this?” the Faunus woman asked, eyes immediately going to Blake’s ears.

“Oh, this is Blake. Blake, this is Velvet.”

“Nice to meet you!” Velvet held out a hand, and Blake gave it the briefest of shakes. She shot a quick, curious look at Yang. “Is she your new--”

“Ah…” Yang, to Blake’s amusement, turned pink. “Well…”

“Hey, babe.” A tall woman in sunglasses and a beret stepped up behind Velvet, giving her a quick peck before looking up at Yang. A small smirk played on her lips. “Hey, Yang.”

“Coco.” Yang gave her a curt nod. “Congratulations.”

“No hard feelings, yeah?”

“It was a good race.”

“Very tight,” Coco said with the slight incline of her head. “It’s nice to win one on your sister now and then.”

“Rub it in, why don’t ya.” The arm Yang had threaded through Blake’s arm slipped out to slide
around her waist. “They kicked your asses at the Patch race.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.” The movement of Yang’s arm hadn’t been lost on Coco. She peered at Blake over her sunglasses. “And this is…?”

“Blake!” Velvet supplied, not seeming to notice as Coco’s arm went around her own waist. “She’s a summer person, too.”

Before Coco pushed her sunglasses back up, Blake caught the flicker of her brown eyes from Yang to herself. Realization dawned. Blake almost sighed. “And we’re dating,” she added, nudging Yang in the side.

“Oh, yeah!” Yang grinned widely. Blake half-expected her to start pumping her fist as she’d done the night before.

“I see.” Coco did smirk then. “Good. She needs someone to keep her in line.”

“Bitch,” Yang muttered, and Coco let out a low chuckle.

“How anyone finds you charming continues to astound me.”

“I’m not with her for the charm,” Blake assured her. It was Yang’s turn to poke her in the side.

“Don’t forget, I’m driving you home,” she teased back. “I could just leave you here.”

“Coco!” someone called. Coco looked over her shoulder, her beret tipping with the motion.

“Be right there!” She held out a hand to Blake. “It’s nice to meet you, Blake.”

“You too.”

As they shook hands, Blake could feel Coco sizing her up beneath her sunglasses. She tried to firm up her grip to match the opposition.

Coco and Velvet disappeared into the throng, Velvet throwing back a quick wave. It was only after they were safely out of earshot that Blake turned back to Yang, quirking an eyebrow.

“So… Velvet, huh?” she asked. Yang frowned, confused, then smirked as she got at what Blake was trying to say.

“Please. It wasn’t Velvet I dated.”


“Very briefly!” Yang’s laughter joined her own. “I thought Ruby was gonna kill me for dating the enemy, as she put it… but she shouldn’t have worried. Coco and I weren’t really… uh… We sorta butted heads too much. Velvet’s definitely more her type.”

“I see.” Blake leaned against Yang, who tightened her grip around her. “So now everyone’s happy, right?”

“Oh, you bet.” Yang lowered her head, offering a quick kiss.

“Yang!” Ruby’s voice whined over the crowd. Yang pulled back, wrinkling her nose.
“Well, most of us are.” She sighed. “Prepare yourself… Ruby’s got a lot of bitching to do, I’m sure.”

Blake covered a smile with her hand. It wouldn’t do to look so happy when she was supposed to be sympathizing with Weiss and Ruby. She schooled her expression, hoping it would be convincing enough. Maybe later, she could see how this was the exact opposite of how she’d acted over the past six years of her life; how many times had she plastered on a fake smile to convince people she was happy?

Pretending was too hard with Yang so close to her. By the time Weiss and Ruby arrived, Blake was smiling again.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains explicit content! If you're at work, maybe save this chapter for later. Then again, the last time I made a note like this, I immediately got a bunch of comments saying "AND I READ IT ANYWAY" so I don't know if this warning is even going to be useful to y'all. Just behave yourselves.

Though Yang had told Blake that she preferred clamming in the early morning or in the evening, the forecast had said that Sunday afternoon would be cloudy. The reality was that there wasn't a single cloud in the sky, and the temperature soared.

Yang's arms were slick with sweat, glistening in the sun as she drove the rake into the mud. She only wore a tank top beneath her waders; the baggy rubber suit had to be roasting her alive, but she took it in stride. She seemed to know the effect she was having on Blake, as well, for she straightened up to wipe her arm across her forehead and send over a wink.

Blake raised her water bottle, arching an eyebrow in question. Yang shook her head and bent back over to keep digging.

The day before, Yang had teased her as they worked on Ember Celica, hauling up lobster traps. "You've been distracting me," she had told Blake, laughing. "I haven't been clamming since you showed up. I really oughta go tomorrow, if you feel like coming with me."

Blake had been half-tempted to make a suggestive remark about clamming, but she couldn't work up the nerve.

She took a sip of the water she'd offered Yang, then pulled out her phone. That Friday, she'd received her first response to a job application. It was only an office job in Vale, one that she hadn't felt particularly drawn to, but it was a start. Not that any of the jobs seemed appealing compared to the life she was living right now.

She looked at the open email, skimming the lines she'd already half-memorized. A phone interview on Wednesday.

It felt like a death sentence.

To her parents, a job interview meant progress. They were thrilled, chattering on about a fresh start. Getting a job meant she would be a step closer to independence, but who was she kidding? She could hardly remember what independence meant. With her luck, she'd end up living with her parents for the rest of her life, nothing more than a broken charity case.

She set her phone back down. Here on the rocks, watching Yang slog through the mudflat ahead of her, she could forget about that for just a little while.

It wasn't much longer before Yang finished. Clamming depended too much on the tide, which was slowly beginning to trickle back in. Her boots squelched in the mud as she trekked back over to Blake, who looked up at her over the book she'd been pretending to read.
"Good book?" Yang asked, pulling off her gloves and tossing them beside Blake’s phone. She made a face, moving the phone to her other side.

"Do you mind?"

Yang grinned at her, pushing away a blonde curl that had come free of her ponytail. "I was careful! I wouldn't get your phone muddy."

"It was pretty close."

"Yeah, well." Yang shrugged. She leaned closer, reaching a hand out to capture Blake's chin. She kissed her lightly. Even the sweat and the stink of the mudflats couldn't make Yang smell bad; this was the smell of hard work, more real than the artificial reek of perfumes or colognes.

"Damn it, Yang!" Blake complained when Yang moved back. A smear of mud ran down the front of her tank top. "Look what you did."

"The cost of kissing a clammer!" Yang sang, plopping her wooden basket down. Inside was a decent harvest: dinner. "Look. A whole family of clams."

"Or several families," Blake remarked. She reached in, picking one up, mud and all. It was opened just a little, enough for a small tongue-like protrusion to stick out. Blake tapped it, and she watched with fascination as it withdrew back into the shell and sealed shut.

"Nah. I'm sure it's just one family. They're all from the same mudflat, so they have to be related, right?"

"Clam logic." Blake rolled her eyes.

When they got back to Tai's truck, Yang pulled off her waders and tossed them into the bed. Her tank top was nearly soaked through with sweat and Blake tried not to stare too pointedly at the purple sports bra underneath. After a quick peek, she averted her gaze, hopping into the cab as soon as Yang had unlocked the door.

She knew she wanted Yang. That was a hard truth, playing out too explicitly in her head for denial. Every time she caught herself thinking about Yang indecently, a wave of guilt would flood her system, unpleasant and sticky. Why couldn't she just enjoy the feelings she had? Wasn’t it enough, to enjoy someone’s company without thinking about them in a… dirty way?

"God, I need a shower," Yang muttered as she climbed into the truck. "I stink."

"You always stink," Blake teased automatically, a smile curling.

"Yeah, but today, I reek." To further her point, Yang cranked her window down. Blake copied her, still looking away, and chuckled.

"I don’t know why I tolerate you sometimes," she remarked.

"You love the stink!" Yang started the car, and Blake was relieved as air blasted her face. All she’d been doing was sitting in the sun, but her skin was already warm. She couldn’t imagine how Yang must--

Her face went hot as Yang stripped off her tank top and dropped it onto the seat beside her. She still shone with perspiration, some of it beading on her back. She closed her eyes, craned her neck, and stretched out her arms to let the air blow onto as much skin as possible. She sighed heavily, not
noticing or caring about Blake's open stare.

At least she managed to look away by the time Yang opened her eyes.

After Yang’s shower, she prepared a simple dinner. There weren’t enough clams to share with the rest of the Xiao Long household, so they ate outside, where nobody could sneek a clam from the pot. Ruby did pop out for a few minutes, but every time she reached out to the pot, Yang would smack her arm.

“Did I see your blood, sweat, and tears go into making this dinner?” she asked on Ruby’s third attempt at clam-snatching.

“Blake didn’t clam, though, did she?” Ruby whined. “And you’re sharing with her!”

“She sweated. As she sat in the sun and watched, but still! Sweat was involved!” Yang said cheerfully, batting Ruby’s hand away again. Blake poked Yang in the side, making her squeal. Ruby took advantage of the distraction to seize a clam, pop it open, and peel it out in record time.

“Mine!” She slapped it into the butter, sending yellow drops flying onto the table. She giggled, running off as Yang bounced away from the table to chase her to the door.

“Clamburglar!” she yelled into the house before slamming the door. She stalked back, full of determined annoyance, but Blake caught the twitch at the corner of her mouth. “Sisters,” she sighed, sinking back into her seat.

They were able to eat, uninterrupted, for only a few more minutes before the door creaked open again. Both Yang and Blake looked up, suspicious, but it was only Weiss.

“I’m taking Wednesday off,” she announced, drawing herself up to her maximum height. “Winter is coming to Portland.”

“Oh, nice.” Yang pulled open a clam. “What for?”

“Well, she has some business at the Portsmouth Naval Yard, but she wanted to meet up.”

“Who’s Winter?” Blake asked, dipping her own clam in butter.

“My sister,” Weiss replied, her smile brighter than Blake had ever seen it. It was strange to see Weiss with such an expression; Blake hadn’t known Weiss was capable of looking so innocent, so young. “I don’t get to see her much, so we’re going to meet for lunch. I’m taking Ruby, since we need to stop at Beans for a new windbreaker.”

“What happened to the old one?” Yang raised an eyebrow and Weiss sighed dramatically.

“A giant rip, right up the armpit,” Weiss explained, making a gesture, indicating a ripped seam. “But I guess that’s what she gets for shopping at Walmart.” The last word was delivered like a curse, and Blake hid her smile behind her hand.

“I wish I could come! But I gotta get some work done here.”

“What about you, Blake? Wanna come?” The question caught her off-guard. She looked up at Weiss, surprised, and swallowed her clam.

“That’s… really nice of you to offer. But I can’t.” She took a deep breath, then looked at Yang. “I’ve got a job interview.”
Yang’s eyebrows rose up the barest amount. “Oh?”

“It’s for this, like, receptionist position in Vale. They’re giving me a phone interview on Wednesday, so I need to stick around here.”


Blake held up a hand. “It’s only an interview. Not a guarantee.”

It was hard to gauge how Yang felt. She gave Blake an encouraging smile, but something odd passed through her eyes as she turned back to the clam pot. The job interview was a reminder that things between them were temporary. They had to be temporary. Blake was in Maine for only a summer, and getting her hopes up for anything beyond that would be a recipe for heartbreak.

But she couldn’t think about that, wouldn’t think about that. She still had six weeks of spending time with this incredible woman, and she was going to live them to the fullest.

She just wished that thinking about the future didn’t sting.

Neither of them brought up the interview again that night. Why should they, when there were so many other happier things to talk about? There were moments where Yang could even make her forget about the interview altogether. She waved her arms grandly as she described things they might do and sights they might see.

“I’ll take you to Freeport and Portland later this summer,” Yang assured her as they picked up the mess of clam shells. “Maine doesn’t really have much by way of cities, but Portland’s the biggest we’ve got. I’ve got a friend there, and she always lets us stay with her. She’s really nice.”

“What’ll we do in Portland?” Blake asked, picking up the bowl of butter.

“There’s lots to do! Lots of food… bars… museums… oh, and there’s a Cryptozoology Museum, of all things.”

“Crypto… zoology?” She stared at Yang, baffled. Yang nodded, then held the door open.

“Like Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, Mothman… all sorts of weird shit.” She grinned as Blake shook her head.

“And that’s in Portland?”

“Sure is!”

“We’re going to Portland!” Ruby announced excitedly, having apparently heard the end of their conversation. She bounced over to them. “Did Weiss tell you that Winter’s--”

“--visiting. Yeah, she did.” Yang grinned as Ruby grabbed the clam pot from her, making a face when she saw there was nothing left but empty shells. “I was just telling Blake that I’m gonna take her there at some point.”

“Portland’s, like, one of the only places in Maine with stuff to do!” Ruby told her, laughing. “We’re gonna get Indian food!”

“It might not be exciting for you, but it definitely is for us,” Yang told her with a wink. “Hell, anything’s exciting when you grew up on Patch. It gets pretty dull around here.”

Blake could think of one unique thing on Patch that she found exciting and not at all dull, but she
didn’t speak Yang’s name aloud.

“...”

“Yes, thank you very much!” Blake said into the phone. The other line clicked and she heaved a sigh of relief. Nerves over the interview had made it difficult to sleep the night before, and anxiety had left her snappish at her parents that morning. Now that it was done, it felt like she could breathe again.

“How’d it go?” Kali asked, coming out of the kitchen with a mug of tea. She handed it down to Blake, who accepted it gratefully.

“Good, I think.” After a small sip, she opened her text messages, thumbing over Yang’s name. Just finished, she sent. “It’s not that far from home, either, and...” then come over! :) its boring without weiss, Yang’s next message read.

“And?” Kali asked, eyebrow raised.

“Uh...” Blake had completely lost her train of thought. “It’s basically a straight shot from our house.” She paused. “So, I was wondering...”

“Yes,” Kali sighed, moving to the front door and grabbing her car keys. “I know that look.”

Blake flushed.

Twenty minutes later, she passed the office, not bothering to knock. Weiss wouldn’t be there today, but Yang had already given her the name of the boat she was working on. She’d visited often enough to start recognizing which boats were which. Though Honey Passions was only brought it a few days ago, Blake picked her out quickly.

“How’s she coming?” she called up. Yang was perched on a ladder, paintbrush in hand. Her ponytail bobbed as she looked over her shoulder and grinned.

“That was quick!” she remarked, setting her brush down. She climbed down and pulled out her earbuds, cramming them into the pocket of her jeans. She gave Blake a quick peck. “Have you eaten yet?”

“No.”

“We can take a little extra time today, if you’d like. Weiss isn’t here to time my lunch, and Dad’s helping Qrow check his traps. We could go to Leviathan, or...”

Blake slipped her arms around Yang’s waist, pulling herself close and pressing her face into Yang’s hoodie, just breathing in her smells. Whatever she was painting with had the sharp twang of some powerful chemical, and the odor lingered. Blake didn’t care. She felt Yang chuckle and wrap her own arms tightly around her.

“Or we could just eat a sandwich at the house,” she murmured into the top of Blake’s head. She nodded.

The anti-fouling paint, as Yang called it, was put away with a quick snap of the lid. As she arranged her tools, Blake gave her a quick rundown of the interview and tried not to make it sound as boring as she thought it was. A healthcare supply company! Just saying it out loud was tedious. It certainly wasn’t as exciting as boatbuilding.
“It doesn’t sound too bad,” Yang replied with amusement, pulling out her hair tie as they walked up to the house. Blake shrugged.

“Yeah,” she mumbled. Yang gave her hand a light squeeze, a gentle reassurance in the face of an uncertain future.

Yang turned into the kitchen, though Blake bypassed it to plop onto the living room sofa. It was nice here. She felt so much more at home in Yang’s living room than in the one at her parents cottage. The sofa was comfortable from years of being lived on, the cushions relaxed and soft. She curled up on it, the worry over her future fading into sleepy bliss.

“You look comfy,” Yang remarked, leaning against the entryway. She grinned as Blake opened a bleary eye at her.

“I was just thinking how the couch at the cottage is so much stiffer than this.” She held out a hand, an invitation. Yang obliged, settling down beside her. Blake stretched her legs out over Yang’s lap. “This is nicer.”

“Are you saying you’d rather sleep on our couch?” she asked, amused. Blake snorted.

“You know that if I’m sleeping here, it’ll… be with you.” Even though it was truth, even though the two times she’d slept over had been innocent enough, Blake’s cheeks still tinged pink. Yang smiled, running a hand over Blake’s shin.

There was something electric in the way Yang’s hands felt on the smooth skin of her leg. She watched, entranced, as it rubbed back and forth, up and down. Blake leaned forward, into Yang’s side, aching for touch.

“You’re always welcome to sleep here anytime, couch or otherwise,” Yang told her, teasing. Blake huffed, then quickly drew breath again as Yang’s hand came to rest on her knee. She swallowed, staring at Yang’s hand for a moment too long. There was something vaguely irritating in the light touch, an itch that she didn’t know how to soothe, how to satisfy.

For all Blake knew, Yang’s touch meant nothing more than affection. But her body reacted differently, with a racing heart and a quick flopping in her stomach. Oh, Blake knew what she wanted, and she hated that she did. A slut, Adam would sometimes call her, even if all she’d done was just look at someone for a moment too long. What did that make her now?

But she felt Yang’s eyes on her face, studying her without judgment, but with intent. She wiggled herself closer into Yang, hoping it was enough.

Yang said nothing, only turned her hand to drag her nails over the top of Blake’s knee and slowly inched higher, only stopping at the hem of her shorts. Blake watched, blood roaring through her ears. She could feel her own heartbeat in Yang’s fingertips as they paused, so agonizingly close.

She looked back up at Yang, eyes wide. Her throat was dry, but she’d lost all of her words, anyway. There was only one she had left.

“Yang…” she pleaded.

“Yes?”

But her words were gone. She cupped her hand in Yang’s hair, pulling her to her mouth. There was a smile on Yang’s lips, and it tasted sweet. Blake nibbled her lower lip, her breath coming out in quick, airy exhales. Yang’s tongue probed, gently finding its way to her own.
Blake grabbed her hoodie, clenching it in her fist, as if the tight curling of the fabric could ease any of the fire that was raging inside of her. Yang’s own hand was more gentle on her waist, sliding up and down in a rhythm that couldn’t match Blake’s heart. She broke the kiss off roughly.

“Yang,” she said again, desperation bursting from that single word, “I need you.”

“You sure?” Yang asked, her voice soft, but husky. There was need there, too, and Blake could feel it in her breath, in the heat that rose from her skin.

“Yes,” she breathed. That was all Yang needed. The hand on Blake’s waist slipped beneath her shirt, meeting the sensitive skin and making Blake shudder. Their mouths were on each other’s again, only now with more intensity as Yang’s hand climbed. She closed her eyes, surrendering to sensation.

How did she never think about how much skin she wore? Blake wondered as Yang’s hand moved slowly, too slowly, up her stomach. There was so much skin there, and Yang was finding it all. She opened her mouth, letting Yang in, moaning into the gentle strokes of her tongue. It was a tease, she realized. Yang’s tongue was promising things Blake had hardly dared to dream of, but it was there now and God, she wanted it.

The burden of clothes was suddenly too much. She jerked Yang’s shirt over her head, pulling the hoodie off with it. She’d seen Yang in a bikini top before and the other day, she’d even seen her in a sports bra. She knew what her abs looked like, the smooth skin of her cleavage. But now it was close. Now she could touch her.

She trailed a hand over Yang’s abs, only pausing when she felt her own bra being pushed up, and suddenly, she was on her back, her shirt pulled up far enough to expose her breasts. Quickly, impatiently, Yang unhooked her bra and pulled it off with her shirt. Breathless, she lay flat against the cushions as Yang stared down at her.

Blake bit her lip, unable to watch as Yang’s eyes roamed her body. Being in such a vulnerable position made her reconsider. Maybe this was a mistake. She felt her cheeks redden.


“I--” Blake began to protest, but Yang was right. She was quivering.

“Are you okay?” she asked softly, leaning over her and kissing the curve of her neck.

“Yeah, I’m-- I’m just a little nervous.” She forced a laugh. It sounded fake to her own ears, and she cringed.

“If you don’t want to do this--”

“I do!” she replied, a little too quickly. “Don’t… Please, don’t stop.”

Yang laughed, the sound a low hum in the back of her throat. She pushed herself back up to meet Blake’s eyes. The look made he heart skip; there was such gentleness there. There was safety. She could give Yang the fragile pieces of her soul and take comfort in knowing that she would hold them. She would keep them, safe and sound, against her heart.

“Baby,” Yang repeated, pushing back a lock of black hair. “You’re so beautiful. You’re so fucking beautiful.”

Yang’s mouth was back on hers, not giving Blake a chance to argue the point. She cupped one of her breasts and rolled her nipple between her fingers, catching Blake’s moans on her tongue.
And then Yang pulled away, her lips soft and light as they traced down Blake’s neck, her collarbone, the curve of her breast. Blake’s hand caught in Yang’s hair, pulling tighter with each open-mouthed kiss Yang left on her body. She squeezed her eyes shut, but immediately forced them open again, to watch as Yang kissed her way to a nipple. She swirled her tongue around it, Blake whimpering when she finally sucked.

Yang worked at the button on Blake’s shorts, pulling them down far enough to slide a hand under the waistband of her underwear. The touch drew a deep, haggard gasp from Blake, and Yang’s mouth curved into a smile. Blake was slick and hot around Yang’s fingers as she rubbed lightly. She lifted her hips, allowing Yang to finish pulling her shorts and underwear the rest of the way down and off.

“I--” Blake began, licking her lips, but whatever thought she’d had fell apart with a gasp as Yang sank her fingers into her. She was dimly aware that she was shaking again, but not with trepidation. She began to grind onto Yang’s fingers, groans coming out deep and guttural as she chased the pressure.

Never before had it felt so good to relinquish control of her body, her mind, her soul. Yang consumed her in every way, from the sloppy way their lips met to the way she clenched around Yang’s fingers. Sex was a joining, it was always meant to be a joining, and Blake had never realized this until now. Two bodies, two hearts, collapsing into each other like the desperate gravitational pull of a supernova. There were no edges here, only a melding into each other. Lips, fingers, tongues, and an aching throb. And the heat…

“I want you to cum for me, baby,” Yang whispered into the curve of her ear. She circled a wet finger around Blake’s swollen clit. “Let me make you cum.”

Blake was beyond words. She tangled her arms around Yang’s back, gasping as her fingers circled, closing in to build her up. She stared up at Yang, eyes wide, but the softness in her gaze wasn’t lost on her. For all the build-up, it was this tenderness there that took her over the brink.

She shuddered, Yang’s name rolling off her tongue as she spasmed. She pulled Yang’s body flush to hers, wanting to feel all of Yang against her as she rode out her orgasm. Through all of it, she felt Yang’s eyes on her, studying the way she reacted with that slight smile on her face.

Yang kissed her, and though she hadn’t yet caught her breath, Blake returned it eagerly. It was too brief. Yang sat herself back up, a hint of smugness creeping onto her face and she sucked her fingers clean.

“God,” Blake croaked. Yang laughed, then maneuvered her hands around her back to unhook her bra. Blake was still too stuck in her haze to do anything but stare as Yang tossed it to the floor. She reached up a hand, letting the soft flesh fill her palm. Her eyes flicked back up to Yang’s face, somewhat pleased to see that Yang was biting her lip.

She didn’t have long to look before Yang bent over her again, her hair cascading around them in a curtain as they kissed. The weight of her breasts on her own, the skin against skin, was almost overwhelming to Blake’s senses. She ran a hand across Yang’s back, marveling in the smoothness of it, the tightness of her muscles. All too soon, she slipped away from Blake’s touch, moving off the sofa and onto her knees.

Yang kicked the coffee table back, then grabbed Blake’s calves to turn her back into an upright position. She didn’t fight the way Yang moved her, but she didn’t quite grasp the reality of how she was being repositioned until Yang guided one of her legs over her shoulder.
“What are you--?” she began, eyes widening as she realized. “Wait, I--”

She sucked in an inhale as Yang began to lick her inner thigh, lapping at the mess left there. Though the skin there was sensitive, Yang took her time so as not to overwhelm Blake’s nerves. She was half-tempted to close her eyes in enjoyment, but the woman between her legs was too beautiful to ignore. She lay a hand onto that soft hair, tangling her fingers in it.

By the time Yang’s tongue reached her cunt, Blake was ready for it. She moaned, tightening her fist in Yang’s hair as the broad length of her tongue pressed flat on her entrance. Yang didn’t tease long; Blake was already wet enough, desperate enough. She cried out wordlessly, hips canting against Yang’s mouth.

Her head fell back against the cushion, almost dizzy from the barrage to her senses and lost in the sheer pleasure of it. Even in her wildest imaginings, Blake had never expected to feel anything like this. Fingers filled her again, and Yang’s tongue swirled around her clit, slowly and lazily.

“Yang,” Blake whined, and only then did Yang suck.

Yang held tightly to her thigh as she twitched, building up again. Glinting red eyes flickered up to her to the briefest moment, and it was the last push Blake needed. Every seam of her body pulsed against its limits as she was wracked by another powerful orgasm. She almost didn’t recognize the sound of her own moans over the waves that rushed over her. Compared to this climax, the rest of the world was muted.

All of it, of course, but Yang’s satisfied, fiery eyes.

Utterly spent, Blake dropped onto her side. Dots danced across her vision and she panted. She couldn’t even think, didn’t even notice as Yang gently set her leg back down and pulled herself up onto the cushion beside her. It was a tight fit, but after all that had just happened, Blake didn’t think there was any such thing as too close. She curled automatically into Yang’s body, still twitching with the last throes of her orgasm.

Yang took her by the chin, tilting her face close for a delicate kiss. Blake could taste herself, her ecstasy written all over Yang’s lips. She closed her eyes to savor the way Yang’s hands felt as they rubbed over her bare back.

“I don’t… think I can move,” she admitted thickly.

“They don’t,” Yang told her, body rocking with a quiet laugh. Even then, despite the lust that had overcome them, her voice was still so calm, so soft. Blake tucked her head against Yang’s neck. “You can rest a little while, sweetheart.”

“But I haven’t… done anything for you yet.”

“You’ve done plenty, believe me.” Yang gave her a couple minutes, stroking her hair while Blake nodded off. When she opened her eyes again, it was because Yang had shifted beside her to slowly sit up.

“What’re you doing?” she asked, missing her warmth already.

“Taking you upstairs. It might be a little more comfortable than the couch.”

“The couch,” Blake echoed, unable to put up a fight as Yang gathered her up in her arms. All she could manage was a grumble. “This seems a little dramatic.”
“Dramatic. That’s me.” Yang grinned down at her. Blake reached up, wrapping her arms around Yang’s neck. It felt nice to be held like this, she thought as Yang carried her out of the living room. This was the way princesses were supposed to be carried in fairy tales. As strange as it was, Blake felt protected. Maybe there was something to fairy tales, after all.

Her eyes were already closing when Yang lay her in bed and pulled the blanket up to her chin. She sighed, curling up underneath.

“Lay down with me?” she asked.

“Just a minute. I gotta grab our clothes from downstairs.” There was humor in Yang’s voice. “The last thing we need is for Dad or Weiss to come home and find our clothes all over the floor.”

“Oh… yeah.” Blake opened one eye. Yang’s gaze was caring.

“You really are beautiful,” she murmured, stooping to give Blake another kiss.

“You keep saying that.”

“Because it’s true.”

If only Yang could see what she saw when she looked into the mirror, maybe she wouldn’t be so quick to say something like that. All Blake saw in her reflection were the ugly words that Adam had pelted her with over the years, that had erased whatever woman might have been there in the beginning. But then Yang went and said this, with such certainty and confidence, that it made Blake wonder if there wasn’t at least some truth to her words after all.

Yang rejoined her a few minutes later, slipping under the covers and taking Blake in her arms. She had evidently finished undressing before climbing in, for her bared skin was a comforting mold that Blake snuggled into.

But she couldn’t let herself sleep yet.

She explored Yang’s body with her hands, mapping out the softer places and tracing the carved lines of muscle. She pulled off the blanket when the heat began to be too much, as much to see the skin with her eyes as well as her fingers. Yang’s chest rose and fell, quickening, whenever Blake grazed somewhere especially sensitive. She kissed the curve of Yang’s breast, then ducked a hand between her legs. Her thighs were smeared.

"Jesus," she said slowly, looking back up at Yang with surprise. "You're…"

"You have no idea how badly I've wanted to touch you... like that," she confessed, her voice rough with need. "How badly I wanted to make you cum. I wanted to…"

Yang’s words trailed off as Blake’s hand sketched around her slit, coating her fingers in wetness. Yang bent a knee, opening herself more, giving every inch of herself to Blake's touch. There was vulnerability here, in the exposure of skin and the expanding of pupils and the longing she could almost feel, radiating from Yang’s heart.

She had never touched another woman in this way before, but Yang was vocal enough for Blake to get a sense of what she liked. It was remarkable, how easily Yang responded to her, which had to speak for how much she’d worked herself up already.

“You really do have the mouth of a sailor,” Blake remarked wryly, pumping her fingers slowly into Yang’s cunt. She curled them, as Yang had done for her, pleased that it made her profanities devolve into something incoherent. She bucked against Blake’s hand as she reached out blindly for the blanket to clench in her fist.

Blake could have stayed there forever, watching Yang writhe around her and studying every single way she responded to each subtle touch. She was almost overcome with the affection she felt for this woman and it made her heart thunder. In that moment, Yang was her world, and she needed to demonstrate that, to bring her to her own high. After all, Yang had done that for her, and more. Her heart was full. There was true happiness there, and if she could repay it in any way… She pulled her fingers out of Yang, dragging them up to her clit.

It didn’t take long.

“Blake,” she gasped. For all the volume she’d used while Blake had built her up, Yang said her name in a near-whimper. Her breath hitched, and Blake ran a hand through her hair as she shuddered. After a few seconds, Yang fell limp against her, breathing heavily. Blake wrapped an arm around her.

“You’re incredible,” Blake murmured, kissing her tenderly. Yang let out a long exhale.

“God,” was all she could say. After a minute, she rolled onto her side, her hair falling and pooling onto the pillow. “I’m not getting up again,” she finally told Blake with a groan. “If Weiss asks, tell her I got food poisoning and needed to take a sick day.”

“Food poisoning, huh?” Blake asked, amused.

“It’d be believable! Ruby did the cooking last night.”

“But wouldn’t that mean they’d have food poisoning, too?”

“Oh… shit. You’re right. I’ll think of something else.” Yang sighed, then licked her lips. In the short silence, Blake could sense something, another kind of precipice. “Blake?”

“Mmm?” Blake rolled onto her own side, facing Yang. The impassioned red of her irises had dimmed back to lilac, and for once, Yang looked unsure. She took a deep breath.

“I know… you’re only here for the summer,” she said, her words coming out in a quick gush. “But… I like you. A lot.”

“You don’t say,” Blake replied drolly. This, at least, tempted a smile off of Yang’s lips.

“Shut up. I just... Would you want…? I mean.” The redness in Yang’s cheeks wasn’t just physical exertion. “Look… be my girlfriend? Like, officially.” She paused, then added, “I can’t… I want you… to be with me.”

Blake’s eyebrows rose slowly. Logically, she knew she should turn Yang down. It made sense. She’d only be in Maine for a few more weeks, and then what? There was that future, the one she was always trying not to think about, the one she was always running from. Agreeing to be with Yang would only tangle her feelings with unnecessary knots. She knew they wouldn’t be able to be together long, and she wouldn’t-- couldn’t-- hurt Yang.

Yet…

She’d be lying if she said that Yang wasn’t already a major part of her life. She was the only thing
that actually made sense in Blake’s world. Even if she hadn’t used the word, she already considered Yang to be her girlfriend in most ways, didn’t she? Nobody felt as safe as Yang did. Nobody cared for her in the way Yang did. In so many ways, Yang was a part of her life.

Maybe there was a place for Yang in her future, too.

“Yeah,” Blake found herself saying. She tamped down the rational part of her mind. Here, in bed with this beautiful blonde woman, she couldn’t imagine saying anything otherwise. “I want… to be with you, too.”

“Then be with me.” A smile, small and relieved, cracked across Yang’s face. She brushed back Blake’s hair, then curled her fingers against her scalp. Blake scooted closer, aching for their bodies to touch. She breathed in, content in the smells of citrus, salt, sweat, and sex. She leaned in, capturing Yang’s mouth on hers.

“Okay.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing that Blake noticed upon waking was that she was naked. She was never the kind of person to sleep naked; there was too much vulnerability in nudity. Even after sex, she had always been quick to pull clothes back on. It wasn't just Adam's harsh words about her body, or cruel touches. Just the way he looked at her always made her feel inadequate, insecure. Clothes were her shield against that. It wasn't much, but it was all the protection she had.

But Yang was warm against her back. Her hand rested on her hip comfortably, and the gentle contact of her skin on Blake's was nice. She wriggled closer into Yang's body.

She'd never thought she could feel so protected in her vulnerability.

A kiss pressed against her hair, to the back of her neck. A small, contented sound made its way past Blake's throat at the sensation.

"How're you feeling, baby?" Yang asked, her voice low and sleepy.

"Mmm," was all Blake could manage. She rolled over, the bedsheets tangling around her waist, to lay her head on Yang's chest. Chuckling, Yang smoothed her hand along Blake's back, following the dip of its curve to rest on her ass.

Blake waited, fully expecting for the touch to turn into something harder, or insistent, but to her surprise, it didn't. Yang slid her other hand around to cup the back of her head, to give her a small kiss on her forehead. Despite their positions, despite where Yang's other hand still rested, this was a gesture that spoke only of intimacy, not lust. Blake hadn't realized there was a difference.

"You feel good," Blake murmured, only sensing too late how stupid that sounded. Yang didn't laugh. She only brought her arm up, to hold Blake closer.

"I'm glad you think so, 'cause I'm definitely not ready to move yet."

Blake closed her eyes as Yang's hands roamed her body, exploratory, her touch somehow both innocent and sensual. It was as if she wanted to learn every inch of Blake's skin with her fingertips. Never once did the touch feel judgmental, even when her fingers catalogued the odd ridge of questionable scars. Yang would never give her new ones. She'd never been more certain about the safety of someone's touch.

She trusted Yang.

That knowledge swallowed her in warmth. There was nothing more comfortable, more safe, than being in Yang's bed, their skins warm and pressed against each other. Blake let her own hands wander, not wanting any part of Yang to go untouched.

Yang had plenty of her own scars, but she didn't protest as Blake felt them out. Even as her fingers roamed the edge of the massive indent on her arm, she said nothing. Blake knew its secret. The fact that Yang was letting her map it out with her hands demonstrated a deeper level of trust that Blake was honored by. She brushed her lips over the puckered skin and was rewarded by the barest of smiles before trailing her fingers down the rest of Yang's bicep.
"I got that one from a sledding accident," she explained as Blake's hand grazed a long, smooth gash on her forearm. "There was a rock that none of us knew was there."

"Ouch," she replied with a wince. The mental image of a young Yang, in her winter coat and maybe the pigtails she'd seen in that one picture, was a cute one.

"Yeah. Needed stitches there." Yang grinned, to which Blake shook her head in disbelief.

"I've only ever needed stitches once," she admitted, and Yang's eyes softened as she brushed the jagged scar on Blake's hipbone. It was still pink, still new enough to look raw. She swallowed, then nodded. "Yeah."

"Baby," Yang murmured, covering it with her hand. Fingers outstretched, she could cover its length.

"That... was the end of that, I guess." Blake spoke detachedly, as if it were someone else's story, someone else's voice. "We were a... part of the White Fang. Have you heard of them?"

She looked up at Yang, who frowned as pieces clicked into place.

"They were in the news recently, right? Something happened to the leader?"

Blake nodded. "It's pretty pathetic, isn't it?" she asked, tone darker than she'd meant. Her fingers tightened on Yang's waist. "Out of everything the White Fang tried to do, people only remember that."

Adam had never given Blake the full explanation of what had happened to Sienna, but her sudden death had thrust Adam into the position of leader. Some of the darker corners of media had pointed fingers at him as the cause of her death, but nothing had been proven. After his elevation, Blake had been unsettled at the way he'd started to carry a long knife around, the red metal a warning in itself. Scarier still was the way he'd thumb it, or play with it, when he was angry or frustrated. Until...

Yang furrowed her brow, but said nothing. Sensing Blake’s need, her hold tightened, as if to keep the haunting memories at bay. Blake was grateful for it. She sighed.

"Adam... my ex. Became the new leader after that happened. And he just... Well, it was bad before. But after that... it was like something in him just snapped. I don’t know if it was stress or... I don’t know. But he..." The words died on her tongue, and she realized she couldn’t speak anymore. She’d reached the edge of what she was capable of saying. But at least what she’d managed to say had conveyed enough meaning; nothing more didn’t really need to be said, she realized as Yang pressed a kiss into her hair. She just shook her head before hiding her face in Yang’s chest.

"It’s okay," Yang murmured. Blake closed her eyes as she felt Yang’s fingers run through her long locks. And then, a softer, "I’ve got you."

Blake hadn’t realized that her heart had been pounding until the aggressive thud on her chest began to fade. She had to ground herself. She couldn’t allow herself to dwell on the past, or fear for the future, when the present was so warm, so soft, so comforting. She drew in a jagged breath and opened her eyes to look up at Yang. Her lilac eyes were hooded, but waiting. She kissed Blake, a final emphasis to the words she’d spoken.

It was okay.

Yang did have her.

Blake rolled onto her back, though she couldn’t yet bring herself to pull away from Yang’s body.
completely. The light that floated in from the window was still bright, bouncing off the seaglass of Yang’s small chandelier. The colors of the glass were soft greens and blues and dusty opaques that had once been clear. How could so many imperfect, broken pieces come together in something so beautiful?

“We made that, y’know,” Yang told her, pushing herself up a little in order to look at Blake. “Me and Weiss, but I designed it.”

“Really?” Blake’s eyes widened, and she stared up at it with new eyes. She could see, now, the way the wire wrapped around each piece, a bit clumsily in some places.

“It’s what we do in the winter. We usually just make jewelry, to sell on Etsy or something, but I wanted to try something bigger. It’s pretty simple, but I’d never done something like this. I wasn’t kidding when I told you I collect seaglass.”

“That’s… incredible. I had no idea you could do that.” Blake rolled back over to face Yang, who was smiling.

“Well, it gives us something to do when we can’t go out on the boats. Ruby doesn’t have the patience for messing around with seaglass, but Weiss and I really like it. It’s pretty relaxing. Maybe I’ll teach you this summer.”

“I’d like that.”

For a moment, their eyes held each other. There was such openness there, a vastness, a wide plain that matched perfectly to the other ways they had opened to each other. There was connection, and it was so close, nearly tangible enough to see. Blake rested her forehead against Yang’s, ran a hand along her side, feeling goosebumps form under her palm. There was a growing ache, a need to not let any part of Yang go untouched. Yang’s lips quirked.

Her lips. Maybe she’d start there.

As Blake kissed her, she also learned what places to touch that made Yang break out in more goosebumps, what ticklish spots made her smile, and where exactly hard muscle turned soft, yielding. She broke the kiss to watch the effects of her hands. She traced her fingertips along Yang’s breasts, watching the nipples harden. She skated over one with her palm, watching the resulting rise and fall of her chest as it drew in a ragged breath. The way Yang responded to touch was so much more different than watching the way a man did; this was subtle, more erotic, and somehow more beautiful.

When she couldn’t hold herself back any further, she kissed Yang again, surprised at her own hunger. It wasn’t just external touch she wanted, she recognized as she licked the inside of Yang’s mouth. Every part of Yang was something she wanted to know, her outside, her insides, her heart, her soul…

When she spread Yang’s legs apart, she was almost surprised at the extent of her wetness. Her breaths turned more shallow, more desperate; Blake hadn’t only aroused herself in her exploration of Yang’s body. Her pale irises had been engulfed in the dilation of her pupils. Blake drew a finger up her slit, earning a shallow gasp.

"Can I…?” she began, unsure of how to ask, how to vocalize her sudden, intense longing to taste her, to feel how Yang felt around her tongue. She shifted lower, raising an eyebrow.

"God, yes,” Yang breathed, sitting up and bending over enough to kiss Blake again. It didn’t last
long. Blake broke the kiss off quickly, so as to reposition herself between Yang’s legs.

And this was so much different than anything she’d ever done before. Yang ran a hand through Blake’s hair, a jerky movement that made her fingers stutter across Blake’s scalp. She kissed a thigh, taking her time, wanting to watch Yang crumble around her before building her back up again. Yang tugged at her hair, her groan deepening as she tried to move closer to Blake’s mouth. Any anxiety she may have felt about never having done this before melted away; reacting to Yang’s cues came closer to instinct as she pressed her tongue to her entrance.

It was worth it for the sounds alone. Yang wasn’t shy in her groans, her gasps, her exultations. She bucked against Blake’s mouth, giving her the roadmap of where to flick her tongue, when to suck. She uttered Blake’s name freely, though with each passing second, it lost more and more of its comprehensibility. By the time she came, the sound she made didn’t even sound like Blake’s name at all, only a loud, strangled gasp. She clutched Blake’s hair as she shuddered around her. Blake slowed her movements, coming to a gradual stop before pushing herself up. She licked her lips, gratified by the intent way Yang watched her tongue.

“I’m pretty sure the rest of today definitely counts as a sick day if I can’t even walk,” Yang finally mumbled, grasping at vague rationalizations. Blake laughed, moving up to kiss her. Yang returned it with her own tongue, as if searching for her own taste in Blake’s mouth.

“Makes perfect sense to me,” she replied when she pulled back. Yang’s hand brushed her thigh, and her eyes flashed red.

“And I think, what I’ve got… it’s contagious,” she told Blake seriously.

“Is that a threat?” Blake could feel wetness drip between her own legs. Yang found it, too, her smirk widening. Blake inhaled sharply.

“It’s a promise.”

Yang’s mouth found hers again, swallowing up Blake’s expectant moans.

Contagious, indeed.

---

“Yang, I wanted to ask-- Oh, Christ, never mind.”

The door slammed and Blake shot up in bed. Yang placed a reassuring hand on the small of her back, and she settled back against the pillows. She was still naked, and pops of wild memory filled her brain. She took in the pleasant ache of her body and the warmth of the one beside her, as well as the lingering dampness on the sheets. When Blake turned over, Yang’s eyes were twinkling.

“Guess they’re back,” she said, voice low and raspy. From the other side of the wall, they could hear Weiss’s complaints, muffled and shrill, though the words themselves were incomprehensible. “We should probably get dressed.”

“Oh, shit.” Blake blushed violently. Belatedly, she pulled the sheet up to cover her chest. What had Weiss seen? Yang laughed.

“I don’t think she actually saw anything important,” she told her, hoisting herself off the mattress. She her shirt from where it was strewn atop her dresser, pulling it on and taking a look at her phone.
“It’s almost dinnertime. Wanna just spend the night here?”

“If you don’t mind.” Blake wrinkled her nose, looking around for her own phone. “I should probably text my parents, let them know.”

A knock at the door interrupted her search.

“I hope you’re getting dressed in there,” Weiss called, sounding annoyed. “I’d kinda like to get changed.”

“I’m not stopping you!” Yang yelled back, grabbing an oversized t-shirt from a drawer to toss to Blake. “You’ve seen me naked before. And it’s not like we’re in the actual process of fucking—”

“Jesus Christ!”

“Yang!” Blake’s exclamation was horrified, but she couldn’t stop a giggle. Yang winked before hunting in her drawers for pajama bottoms. For her part, Blake drew the blankets up over the bed, as if a made bed might absolve them of their crimes.

When Weiss finally did enter, it was with pink cheeks and a heavy scowl. “A little warning would’ve been nice,” she told Yang accusingly.

“I didn’t think you’d be back till later. I thought you were gonna do dinner with Pyrrha.”

“Weiss still feels bad about puking in her living room!” Ruby said helpfully, bouncing in. “Hi, Blake!”

“Hey, Ruby.”

“Could we not talk about this?” Weiss grumbled, crossing her arms.

“You know she isn’t mad, right?” Yang asked, eyebrow lifting slightly. “I don’t think Pyrrha knows how to be mad.”

“I know…” Weiss grimaced. “I just… didn’t want to deal with that today.”

“Winter said everyone’s coming to Patch next week instead of later this summer,” Ruby explained. Yang made a face.

“By everyone…?” Blake asked.

“My father, mother, and brother,” Weiss told her stiffly. “I was almost hoping they wouldn’t want to come at all, after everything that happened, but I guess…” She trailed off, an odd set to her white eyebrows that Blake almost didn’t recognize on Weiss. It was defeat. Her usual bravado had been sucked dry, and Weiss suddenly seemed more like a husk than person, a doll more than a sailor.

“They’re not going to ruin our summer, Weiss,” Ruby said, an arm going around Weiss’s shoulders. “He might be here, but you’ve got the whole island on your side! And if he causes trouble…”

“We’ll kick his ass!” Yang said, pumping a fist in the air. Weiss rolled her eyes, but a ghost of a smile flashed across her face.

“You’ll do no such thing, or you’ll get arrested,” she pointed out. Yang shrugged, eyes glinting in a way that made Blake both smile and worry at the same time. She came back to the bed, settling down beside Blake and putting a hand on her knee.
“So other than that, how was Portland?” she asked, brushing her thumb in a way that Blake found only slightly distracting. Weiss pointedly looked away.

“Well, we got Indian food,” Ruby rattled off. “And it was really good--”

“It was passable,” Weiss amended.

“And then we went to Bean’s, which was boring--”

“We got Ruby a jacket and some new shoes.”

“And Weiss tried on way too many clothes!” Ruby flopped on the bed beside Yang, who drew her hand back hastily as Ruby toppled across her lap. “It was boring.”

Blake snorted. Ruby tilted her head up at her, blinking her wide silver eyes.

“Next time, you can come with us!” Ruby told her excitedly. “Freeport has a ton of cute little shops, but we didn’t get to go to any of them this time.”

“Because we’re trying to save our money,” Weiss reminded her. Ruby groaned and draped an arm over her eyes dramatically.

“Help me, Weiss is making me be responsible.”

“Ruby, you’re twenty-two years old and you just spent half your paycheck on video games. Seriously, if we ever want to sail the world, we have to save.”

“They’re pretty good games, though!” Yang told her before giving Ruby a shove. Ruby shrieked as she dropped unceremoniously onto the floor.

“And after that, you’ll never play them again!” She hopped up, pouting. Yang, now freed from her sister, slipped an arm around Blake’s waist, pulling her closer.

“So,” Blake said, rolling her eyes as Yang stuck her tongue out at her sister, “When is your family coming?”

“Not till after the Fourth, thank God. They’re supposed to arrive next Friday.”

“Our Fourths aren’t flashy enough for the Schnees,” Yang said with a snort. “Even when they were here for the Fourth, they always ended up going to a bigger town for better fireworks.”

“They’re spending it on the family yacht this year,” Weiss added with a sigh. “And then they’re going to spend a few weeks here.”

Though Blake didn’t fully understand the family dynamic, she gave a sympathetic wince.

“Just because they’re here doesn’t mean we have to think about them, though!” Ruby said, clambering back to her feet. “They’ll probably be so busy with rich people stuff that they won’t even think about us.”

“Or!” Yang went on, tapping Blake’s side with her fingers, “We could totally egg their house the night before they arrive.”

“Or TP it!” Ruby’s eyes widened with excitement. “Or we could do that thing where we set a bag of poop on fire--”
“We do what?” Blake asked, laughing with surprise.

“That would be childish,” Weiss said severely, but her mouth betrayed the quirk of a suppressed smile. “Besides, you know my father would press charges.”

“So we wouldn’t get caught!” Yang sported an open grin, and Blake was finding it difficult to concentrate on the topic at hand when Yang’s fingers curled on her side. How was Yang able to concentrate when they were only separated by the barest layer of fabric? “This is Patch. Nobody would catch us if we were careful.”

“And even if we did get caught, basically this whole island is on our side!” Ruby was quick to point out.

“I read online somewhere, about these kids who used some kind of chemical to draw something on the grass that, like, permanently killed the grass,” Yang told them excitedly. “So whoever owned the house had a big dick on the grass for, like, ever.”

“A big… dick… on the grass…” Weiss repeated weakly. Despite the absurdity of the idea, the four of them cracked, one by one, into hysterical giggles.

When they eventually made their way downstairs for some dinner, they had cleansed their laughter from their systems. Blake and Yang reached the bottom first, turning a corner to face a surprised Taiyang.

“I thought you were working late,” he commented to Yang, raising a pale eyebrow. “I didn’t see you when I got home.”

“Musta snuck in when you weren’t looking,” Yang replied cheerfully, not missing a beat. Blake resisted the urge to snort. “What’s for dinner? I’m starving.”

“Pizza, and you’re cooking it. Nice to see you again, Blake.”

“You too.”

“Ugh, so it’s not ready?” Yang whined, even as she dug into the freezer. “Some dad you are.”

“Excuse me, I keep a roof over your head, don’t I?” There was no true acid to his statement; Taiyang merely sounded amused. He looked back over to Blake. “I have no idea what you see in her.”

This made Yang laugh. “Blake sees me for who I am. A perfect, beautiful, gorgeous—”

“--egotistical maniac?” Ruby asked, peeking around the corner into the kitchen. “I’m with Dad on this one.”

“--No pizza for you!” Yang growled, setting the oven to preheat. “You get to starve.”

“She’s definitely not starving anytime soon,” Weiss added, giving Ruby a quick push into the kitchen. “You should have seen how many samosas she shoved down her throat. Even Winter said—”

“Winter’s opinion doesn’t matter anyway!” Ruby replied in a sing-song voice, hopping up to sit on the table. “Which you told her no fewer than twice, I might add!” Taiyang scowled at her.

“Asses off the table.”

“I thought I don’t have an ass.” She made a face at Weiss, who groaned.
Blake’s eyes flickered up to Yang, who only grinned back. It was all it took to make her cave. Blake doubled over with laughter, the force of it strong enough to make her ribs ache. She was unaware at first that others had joined her, but she could at least recognize Yang’s easy laugh after a moment. Being able to let loose like this was such a new luxury.

She couldn’t remember the last time something had made her laugh so hard that she cried, but somehow, Yang had found it within her, pulling it out of her and making it so easy to relate to these other women. Being carefree felt almost like being in a dream, but that couldn’t have been right. Even in dreams, she had never felt safe enough for a feeling like that.

Everything was safer with Yang.

She was the last to stop laughing, and when she did, Yang slid an arm around her back as she recovered. The touch was light, and strangely reassuring when anxiety and self-consciousness tried to work their way back into her mind. For a frightening moment, Blake had felt like that by laughing like that, she’d done something wrong.

But Yang was grinning, and Ruby was beaming. Even Weiss and Taiyang had small smiles on their faces.

“I’m glad you find my lack of ass to be amusing,” Ruby finally said, crossing her arms in a faux-huff. “But I’ve still got more than Weiss!”

“Hey!”
Taiyang shook his head, torn between amusement and disbelief. “Is all this ass really necessary?” he asked, putting particular emphasis on the one word that indicated a bad joke. There was a collective groan.

“Dad, just… No,” Yang told him exasperatedly. “That was bad.”

“Really bad,” Weiss added.

“You’re banished,” Ruby finished, hands on her hips. “You get to sleep in the doghouse with Zwei tonight.”

“Wow, tough crowd tonight.” He looked at Blake and gave a helpless shrug. “See how they treat me?”

“Only because you deserve it,” Yang replied, ruffling her dad’s hair.

Blake couldn’t remember if this was how families were supposed to be, and was almost overcome with nostalgia for what she had missed out on by moving out for so long. She couldn’t even imagine ever being so relaxed around her own parents, let alone tease them like this. It was so far removed from her own normal that it almost didn’t feel real.

By the time they’d finished eating most of the pizza, Ghira and Kali pulled into the driveway with a change of clothes and a few toiletries. Blake pushed her chair away from the table when she saw their headlights out the window, excusing herself hastily.

“There was something magical in the night, Blake thought as she saw the occasional wink of a firefly in the still air. She smiled at one such flicker of light as she darted down the steps of the porch. Or maybe it was just the shift in her mindset that made her think there was magic here. She’d once read
somewhere that the light from a firefly was to attract mates. Only that afternoon, her own body had lit up at Yang’s touch. They’d lain in bed together. She’d agreed to be Yang’s girlfriend.

Maybe she could understand a little bit what a firefly felt.

“What on earth are you wearing?” Kali asked, startled, as she handed over Blake’s backpack.

“Something of Yang’s,” she replied breezily, giving Ghira a wave through the window before rubbing her arms. There was a slight chill in the air that Blake hadn’t noticed until now. Maybe Yang had left a residual warmth inside her.

“Well, I packed your pajamas, in case you’d rather wear that.” Kali’s glance seemed suspicious, but Blake was grateful that she didn’t question further.

“Awesome, thanks.”

“Dad and I are leaving early tomorrow-- there’s this jazz festival we’re going to. Do you think you can get a ride back home yourself?” Kali asked. Blake nodded a little too quickly.

“Yeah, I’m sure Yang can take me at some point.”

“Just don’t spend the whole day here,” Kali warned. “Don’t distract her from work too much.”

For a fraction of a second, Blake felt a twinge of guilt. Already, Yang had given up an afternoon to spend it with Blake. Still… she couldn’t regret it for even a moment, and she had a feeling Yang didn’t regret it, either. A lot had come from that afternoon.

Her girlfriend. Just thinking about the word was thrilling.

“Did you have a good day?” Kali asked, to which Blake nodded again.

“Oh, uh… yeah. Yang showed me how to, um… change the lines. On the boat,” she told her, hoping she sounded confident enough to convince her mother that she’d spent some of her time productively. Kali nodded sagely, as if whatever Blake said had made perfect sense.

“Looks like she really is turning you into a sailor,” she remarked with a small smile. “Who ever would have thought? I guess if none of these jobs pan out for you, you can always sail the seas!”

Though Kali meant it as a joke, it felt like a punch to the gut. Blake’s smile dropped by the barest amount, and for the first time, she forgot about the fireflies. The job interview… right. She’d forgotten about it completely. Yang had drowned her dread about it, but now it was back in full force.

Still, she managed a jaunty wave for her parents’ benefit as they drove away. She wouldn’t be able to tell them that Yang was more than just a passing date, that Yang was actually her girlfriend. Was she completely stupid for agreeing to it, when she knew it wouldn’t go on longer than the summer? She was setting herself up for heartbreak and she knew it.

Yet when Blake got back into the house, everyone was laughing. Life still went on. She picked out Yang’s laugh easily, and she tried to quash her worries with its melodic sound. She had no reason to worry yet, she told herself. She’d be here for weeks. Maybe she and Yang wouldn’t work out together at all, and the problem would solve itself.

But how could she think that? There was something between them. Neither of them would have opened up to each other in the first place if there hadn’t been something deep between them. Their
relationship wasn’t one that would just fizzle out. That, Blake knew with certainty.

“How’re they doing?” Yang asked as Blake dumped her backpack on the floor. During Blake’s brief absence, Taiyang had apparently dismissed himself, leaving the girls to crowd the pizza pan. Ruby hunched over it possessively.

“They’re going to some jazz festival in the morning,” she replied, wrinkling her nose. “Would you be able to give me a lift home tomorrow, at some point?”

“Sure thing!”

“Oh! Blake! You’re gonna spend the Fourth of July with us, right?” Ruby asked, grabbing one of the last slices of pizza.

“I thought it was my job to ask,” Yang grumbled. She gave Blake a pointed look, lifting an eyebrow in question. She didn’t need words for Blake to know what she was asking. She considered, then nodded.

“Well, you’ve been monopolizing her enough already,” Ruby went on sternly. “Just because you’re sleeping together--”

“It’s not just that,” Yang interrupted. Weiss had covered her blushing face with her hand, but looked up as Blake snaked an arm around Yang’s waist. “It’s… actually a little more than that.”

“Oh my God, are you married?!” Ruby squeaked. The unexpected absurdity of the question made Blake burst into nervous laughter, though Yang merely rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, that’s how I do things. Skip the boring parts and go straight to marriage.”

“Boring?” Blake asked with a gentle poke to Yang’s stomach.

“Well, if we’re married already, what’s it matter if everything before that was boring?”

“So, she’s officially your girlfriend,” Weiss said, cutting right to the chase. Her expression was unreadable as she stared at Blake, though Yang didn’t seem to notice the sudden iciness.

“We’re gonna give it a shot!”

“Are you sure that’s such a good idea?” Weiss looked from one to the other, eyes narrowed. “Blake, you’re only here for the summer--”

“And you think I don’t know that?” Blake was surprised at the snap in her own tone. She forced herself to stop, to breathe. “Look. We just… I haven’t felt…” Lost, she looked up at Yang, who seized the reins.

“Weiss, you’ve been telling me for years that all relationships involve a little risk,” she said evenly. “That sometimes, relationships are worth it. And I’ve watched you not follow your own advice for the past few months--”

“Yang,” Weiss said warningly.

“--but I think I get it now.” Yang’s gaze bounced from Weiss, to Ruby, then finally settled on Blake. “Some things are worth every risk. If things are meant to be, they’ll find a way to work.”

“Like destiny,” Ruby remarked cheerfully before cramming as much pizza into her mouth as she could fit.
“A little dramatic, but sure.” Yang’s hand found Blake’s, and squeezed. “Like destiny.”

For all Blake knew, maybe it was destiny that she’d run into Yang on the rocks that day, that every domino had fallen in their favor. She allowed herself to envision the end of summer, a day that she wouldn’t leave Maine and instead remain here on Patch. It was completely self-indulgent, unrealistic… but it was a harmless fantasy that warmed her heart more than imagining a return to Vale with her parents.

Maybe someday, if things were meant to be… they’d find a way to make it work. She couldn’t remember the last time anyone had made her feel so happy, so peaceful, so wanted. If it was meant to be, they’d find a way. They had to.

Yang had so much of her heart already.

“I just... don’t want you to get hurt. Either of you,” Weiss said at last, but there was no fight left in her words.

“We’ll be careful,” Blake said firmly, hoping that her tone could convey to Weiss that she had no desire to hurt Yang, that she would be mindful of that delicate ship in a bottle. But as Yang said, relationships involved a little risk. “Really.”

“And better Blake than Coco!” Ruby insisted after a hard swallow.

“You just can’t let that go, can ya?” Yang asked, amused.

“A Rose never forgives and never forgets!” Ruby pumped a fist into the air, ignoring everyone’s eye rolls. She rounded back on Blake. “Anyway, about the Fourth of July…”

“Of course I’ll come,” Blake replied, giving Ruby a small smile, but her eyes were for Yang alone. Yang grinned, her smile full of light. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Chapter End Notes

Y I K E

This has probably been the longest time period between chapters since before I wrote Shelter. TBF, I was out of town for much of that time. But I'm back now, and hopefully I'll be able to churn stuff out regularly again. Thanks for y'all's patience! :)

Speaking of Shelter, HUGE thank you to mereel401 for pointing out that someone plagiarized it, and for everyone who helped report it and get it taken down!! I was in the middle of my high school class reunion (god, I'm old) when that happened, but y'all stepped up to the plate and I LOVE YOU ALL for it.

Finally, I'm ready to share my spotify playlist for this fic! I'm the kind of person who can't listen to music and write at the same time, but these songs get me in the mood and helped me think out various scenes. "Ship in a Bottle" especially helped me figure out Yang's character, and I've probably listened to it on repeat WAY too many times. Have at it! I'll probably add more as I find them, but the playlist is long enough to share now, haha.

I'm hoping to get another chapter done either before or during RTX. Stay tuned!
“No-- Nora, no! Nora-- Nora! I said no!”

Blake watched interestedly as Weiss made a lunge for the ladder that Nora had perched herself on top of, holding a streamer against the wall with one hand and a roll of tape in the other. Nora looked down, wrinkling her nose in annoyance.

“I already said I’d remember to take them down this year!” she huffed, kicking a leg out to keep Weiss from grabbing at the blue streamer. “C’mon, I’ve been planning this for months!”

“And by planning, she means Pinteresting,” Ren told them from his station at the grill.

“Yeah, but you’re not putting tape on the boats,” Weiss insisted.

“But if I take them down right after the fireworks--”

“I said no!”

A touch at her back meant Yang had come right up behind her. How funny, that Blake didn’t even wince anymore at her surprise touches. It was like she’d developed a sixth sense for Yang; somehow, she recognized Yang’s touch without even needing to see her. She looked up at her, taking in the glint of the whistle that hung around her neck, and all the bared skin of her arms that the tank top provided. The struggle between Weiss and Nora was momentarily forgotten.

“This looks like fun,” she remarked cheerily, eyes fixed on Nora’s apparent rendition of Stanky Leg to keep Weiss back. “Streamers?”

“And balloons. And those mini American flags. But, yeah, Weiss is pissed about the streamers.” Blake nudged herself into Yang’s frame, who immediately snaked an arm around her. They had gotten out of most of the work, as they’d been out on Ember Celica all morning. Blake was learning the ins and outs of lobstering, and they’d pulled in quite a haul for the party. Next time, Yang had promised, she’d let Blake drive the boat.

“Well, when she set up the streamers last year, she didn’t take them down before it rained,” Yang explained, making a face. “We were finding bits of tissue around the shipyard for weeks, and she didn’t pick any of it up. So I guess I can’t really blame Weiss. It was a pain in the ass.”

“I see.” They were silent for a moment, intent on the other women as Weiss managed to avoid Nora’s leg long enough to grab a rung of the ladder.

“C’mon, it’s gonna look so good!” Nora wailed.

“And I’m compromising,” Weiss huffed, “by letting you hang them up at all. But the boats are off-limits!”

“Hello!”

Blake could see Weiss’s jolt, as well as the exact moment she lost balance. Weiss looked over her shoulder, ponytail flipping, right as Nora rocked the ladder just enough. She let out a screech, an arm
letting loose of the rung and wheeling wildly. She tipped backward, landing on her ass in the dirt.

“Hey Pyrrha!” Yang called out, giving a quick wave to the red-haired woman who approached them.

“Hey, Yang. You okay, Weiss?” The newcomer, Pyrrha, made a short step toward Weiss, who pushed herself off the ground.

“I’m fine,” she muttered, dusting herself off. “I didn’t think you were going to be here so early.”

“And miss out on hanging out with everyone?” Pyrrha smiled, even though Weiss couldn’t meet the other woman in the eyes. She turned back to Yang and Blake. “And this must be Blake!”

“Yes!” Yang gave Blake a light push forward. She held out her hand politely, relieved when Pyrrha took it. Though she enjoyed Yang’s touch, she still didn’t know how she would react if Pyrrha had been a hugger. Some people, especially in the south, felt that greetings and introductions required hugs. People were different in Maine, she supposed. She wondered how much Pyrrha knew about her already; she’d seemed to recognize Blake pretty quickly.

“It’s wonderful to meet you! I’m Pyrrha. Pyrrha Nikos.”

“Blake Belladonna.”

“How’re you liking Maine?”

“Oh…” Blake couldn’t stop the automatic flick of her eyes toward Yang. “I like it more than I expected, I guess.”

“I can’t imagine why,” Pyrrha teased. Yang snorted. “If anyone’s going to show you a good time up here, it’s definitely Yang.”

“You give me way too much credit.” Still, Yang stuck out her chest proudly.

“So you say.” She gave Blake a last, knowing smile before turning to Weiss, who had apparently forgotten about Nora and the streamers. Nora took advantage of this by taping the up the streamers in a rush. “And what’s this about you and Ruby coming to Portland without even a hello?”

“We were sorta… preoccupied…” Weiss mumbled.

“We’ll see you around, Pyrrha,” Yang said, nodding at them before steering Blake away. Though Pyrrha gave a nod, her focus was firmly set on Weiss. Blake raised her eyebrows.

“Is that…?” she began when they were safely out of earshot, and Yang only gave a quick shake to her head.

“Don’t even say it. Any time I speculate, I end up jinxing it.” Yang sighed heavily. “Last time, I thought maybe a couple drinks would loosen her up a bit and make her a little less awkward around Pyrrha. Before I knew it, Weiss was puking on her floor.”

Blake grimaced.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in a flurry of activity. There weren’t as many people on the shipyard as there had been during the boat race, but it was still busier than Blake would have liked. Every time she turned around, there was a new person to meet, another conversation she was roped into. Occasionally, someone would pass her a fresh cup of water, or lemonade, but though the cool
drinks soothed her throat, it did nothing for her fraying nerves.

She had no idea how there could be so many activities crammed into a simple cookout. In the grass, Taiyang had set up a game of horseshoes, which kept the older crowd occupied. Qrow had started drinking early, the arc of his tosses widening as the sun crept across the sky. Blake, Yang, and Pyrrha watched in fascination as the horseshoes hit the ground, further and further from the mark with each throw.

Even he came over, though, when Ruby hoisted a measuring tape over her head and screeched that it was time for a watermelon seed spitting contest. Blake watched, surprised, as most of the partygoers took turns rearing back and spitting a seed. Most of the guests participated, though Blake was daunted by the idea and decided against it.

“I’m going to pass,” she told Nora for what felt like the dozenth time. She was finally saved when everyone erupted into applause; Ruby stepped up, a slice of watermelon in hand.

“I’m gonna kick your butt, Yang!” she whooped before taking a bite of the watermelon.

“You’re on!”

“No betting money,” Taiyang called out sternly to the crowd. “Don’t think I didn’t hear about what happened last year, Jaune.”

Blake looked over at Jaune, who gave a helpless shrug. She opened her mouth, to ask about what had happened last year, but the crowd silenced as Ruby held up a finger. A look of concentration fell across her face as she leaned back. With a quick forward thrust, she spat. Blake lost track of the seed almost immediately, but one of Jaune’s sisters, further down from the starting line, had been appointed to keep an eye out for the seeds. She darted over to it, picking out the exact place where it landed in the grass. It was much further than anyone else thus far, and Blake was stunned by the distance. Taiyang came up with the measuring tape, crouching down to read it.

“Twenty-eight feet!” he hollered. Ruby gave a triumphant shriek and jumped up in the air, holding the remains of her watermelon aloft.

“How’d she do that?” Blake asked, amazed. Yang laughed.

“It’s all about the tongue.” She gave Blake a wink, then lowered her voice. “And mine’s been getting a good workout, so I bet I can spit further than she did.”

“Yang!” Blake blushed and suppressed a smile. She looked around to make sure nobody heard that, but everyone was too focused on Ruby’s victory dance. “Is that what you’ve been using me for?” she asked, amused. Yang laughed.

“Ah, you caught me. That’s exactly why we’re dating, to kick Ruby’s ass in a watermelon seed spitting contest.”

“I knew there had to be some ulterior motive.” She leaned over, giving Yang a quick kiss. “For luck.”

“Thanks, babe.” When Yang pushed her way through the people to the spitting line, she was smiling brightly. “Enjoy your few minutes of being first-place, Rube, because I’m about to crush you!”

“Wanna bet?” Ruby demanded as Yang grabbed a slice of watermelon from the tray.

“No betting!” Taiyang reminded them hastily. Blake heard Nora groan.
The crowd cheered her on as Yang stepped up to the line. She took a bite, then looked back at Blake as she chewed. She offered a quick wink, turned back, and took a deep breath. The act of spitting was quick—almost too quick to catch the determination on Yang’s face, the way her cheeks pulled in before puffing out, lips puckering. But Blake saw it all, catching it all in a freeze-frame in her mind.

It was so fast that Blake didn’t even see the seed fly. She was too busy wondering if she’d be able to taste the watermelon on Yang’s lips after.

“Thirty-two feet!” Taiyang announced, standing up from where he’d bent over to read it. Ruby’s whine was loud, but the whoops and cheers were louder. Blake was surprised at the sound of her own voice joining in, slightly proud and full of a glee that had previously felt unknown to her. For that brief moment, the anxiety of the crowd was forgotten as Yang turned back to her, lips glistening as they curled into a smile.

As it turned out, they did taste like watermelon.

Surprisingly, more people showed up, even after the watermelon seed spitting contest had been declared in Yang’s favor. Another of Jaune’s sisters pulled up with a van of screaming children, all of whom Blake attempted to avoid. She lost Yang in the chaos, though she was kept occupied enough without her. She found herself stuck in a conversation with Ruby and a young woman named Penny, unsure of how to excuse herself without seeming rude. But her heart was starting to pound against her chest, against her skull. She wasn’t used to this much socialization.

The minute she did wrench herself free of their conversation, she found herself entangled in another one with Nora, Ren, and Jaune about island drama she didn’t quite grasp. She started tuning them out, only able to focus on her own breathing and the dryness of her mouth.

It was all too much. She was shutting down.

“Sorry, I need to, uh, use the bathroom,” she told them, unsure and uncaring if she had interrupted. She set her cup down on the picnic table, unable to take another swallow of whatever sugar-laden soft drink was in it. Maybe it was the excess sugar or dehydration that was making her head throb.

“I’ll be back in a minute.”

She gave a cursory look to the partygoers, but Yang was nowhere nearby. She considered searching for her, but she knew she wouldn’t be able to get far without someone waving her down and forcing her to talk some more. That, she wouldn’t risk. There was a slight ache in her chest that only a moment of quiet, a minute of peace, could abate.

She staggered more than climbed up the steps to the Xiao Long house, gripping the wooden rail like a lifeline. Just being away from the crowd was a relief, and even more so when she was able to shut the door behind her as she entered the quiet house.

Blake sighed, suddenly feeling guilty about slipping away like she had. She wasn’t like Yang, who could jump into any conversation and act like she owned it. Blake was slower to catch on, more boring, less energetic. But more than that, she was drained.

She almost jumped when the door creaked open. She was still just standing there, like an idiot, in the entryway. Belatedly, she pulled back, allowing more space to whoever had entered.

She certainly hadn’t expected to be Yang that walked in, a worried crease between her eyebrows.

“You all right, sweetheart?” she asked as she shut the door behind her. “I saw you leave.”

“I’m good.” Blake blew out a breath. “It’s just… crowds. I just needed a break.”
“That’s okay.” Yang gave her a small smile. “Take all the time you need. They’re definitely not going anywhere.”

Blake chuckled, gravitating into Yang’s arms as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And it was, wasn’t it?

“Would you be mad if I went upstairs to lay down for a bit?” she asked into Yang’s chest.

“Why would I be mad?”

“Because there’s a party going on? And hiding away from it is kinda rude?”

Yang’s huff was strong enough that it made the ears on the top of Blake’s head twitch. “You’re not being rude.”

“Whatever you say.” And God, she didn’t want to let go of Yang. She was way too comfortable, and smelled too good. There was no undertone of harsh chemicals in her scent, as she hadn’t been working on the boats today, but she still smelled unmistakably familiar and homey.

"Want me to stay with you?"

"You don't have to. There's a party out there, in case you hadn't noticed." Blake looked up to smile at Yang encouragingly, who raised an eyebrow when their eyes met.

"I'd much rather spend time with you," she replied, who returned the smile slowly. "If you'd like me to stay, at least."

“Only if you really want to.” Blake closed her eyes again, soaking in Yang’s comfort and letting it steady her heart. Her breathing deepened and slowed. Yang chuckled.

“Baby,” she said, tightening her hold around Blake’s back, “You’re here. There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”

She wasn’t sure if Yang managed to nod off during the time they spent away from the party, but Blake certainly did. She blinked her eyes open, grateful for the light pressure of Yang’s arm around her. She was nestled close into Yang’s body, curled inward. She had a slight headache, but otherwise felt more alert. Now, she’d be able to handle the party.

“How long was I out?” she asked sleepily, looking up at Yang. Her hair curled over the top of her pillow, some of it mingling with Blake’s. Black and yellow, she thought. Like Yang’s buoys. Like Bumblebee. Maybe this was another sign that they were meant to be.

“Maybe an hour? How’d you sleep?”

“I needed that.” With a yawn, she slid an arm around Yang’s waist. “I think I can survive now.”

“Good. I much prefer having a girlfriend that’s alive,” Yang replied cheerfully, wrapping her free arm around Blake.

Knowing there was a party to get back to, Blake didn’t linger much longer, even though she would have happily stayed there for the rest of the night. But she felt Yang’s stomach start to rumble, which made them both laugh. She pulled away, swinging her legs off the bed regretfully.

“I think my parents are supposed to come around dinner time,” she said as Yang rolled over to the edge of the bed. “They were going to do lunch with a family friend this afternoon, but wanted to be
back to see the fireworks.”

“Do they know about us yet? Should I be, uh, discreet or something?” Yang asked as she pulled a boot on. “I should probably warn Ruby and Nora and everyone to keep their mouths shut if they don’t know.”

“That’s… probably smart.” Blake frowned, straightening her skirt as she stood. “I mean… I’m going to tell them. But… you know how they are.”

“Yeah.” Yang made a face as she tightened the laces and worked them into a quick knot. “And I get it. It just makes things a little tough, huh?”

“You’re telling me.” Blake would have loved nothing more than to change her relationship status on Facebook. Just the pictures she was posting of her and Yang were suspicious enough; already, both Ilia and Sun had texted her, asking for details about this mystery woman. But the minute she made it Facebook official, her parents would know.

She didn’t look forward to having to deal with more conflict in her life, and she knew this news would cause it.

When they made it back down to the shipyard, not much seemed to have changed. There were still clusters of people talking, the horseshoe pit had been abandoned, and a few more people had beers in hand.

“If you need me to rescue you from people, just shoot me a text,” Yang told her, smiling reassuringly. “In case you’re too polite to get away from a conversation or something.”

“I’m not too po--”

“Yang!” Ruby screeched, running up to them so quickly that she might as well have been a blur. “Where have you been? We’ve already got the lobsters going--”

“That’s fine! As long as you saved us some. You did, right?” Yang asked, letting her tone sink into something more serious at the question. Ruby snorted.

“Duh! You guys did catch ‘em.”

“Then all’s right with the world.” Yang settled a comfortable arm around Blake. “Anyone else show up?”

“Nah. I think everyone who was gonna show up is here.”

“My parents?” Blake asked, heart sinking. Was their cover blown already? Ruby tilted her head, considering.

“I forgot they were coming. They’re not here yet. Are they still coming?”

“Yeah.” Blake breathed a sigh of relief. “They said they were gonna shoot for six.”

“Well, we should still have plenty of lobster by then! No promises on the cupcakes, though.” Ruby smiled sheepishly. “Nora and I already kinda killed a box mostly on our own.”

“Christ.” Yang snorted. “I’m cutting you off.”

“Make me.” Ruby stuck out her tongue and turned to leave, but Yang reached out an arm to stop her. “Wait, you’re not being serious, are you? I was--”
“No. Not about the cupcakes.” Yang rolled her eyes. “Look, can you let Nora and everyone know to keep me and Blake’s relationship on the down-low? Her parents don’t know yet, and they’re a little… uh…”

“Protective,” Blake supplied. She ran a hand up Yang’s back, hoping the gesture would be enough to signal her gratitude. Ruby frowned, then slowly nodded.

“Is that why we haven’t told many people?”

“You got it. We just don’t want anyone to slip up until we’ve had a chance to talk to them about it properly.”

“They might freak out if they found out,” Blake added, feeling the slightest twinge of regret at the secret. There had been a lot of secrets in her last relationship, too. She knew that was where the parallel ended, but she knew her parents wouldn’t see it that way if they found out through someone’s slip of the tongue.

“Got it. Your secret’s safe with me.” Ruby gave them a mock salute, then sauntered off in the direction Nora’s loud voice came from. Blake heaved a sigh.

“Patch is a small island,” Yang told her, sounding resigned. “Secrets don’t stay secret.”

“Just one more night. That’s all I need.” Blake leaned against her, resting her head on Yang’s shoulder. “I’ll tell them in the morning.”

It was easy to tell herself that she’d do something, but another thing to follow through. When her parents arrived, she couldn’t dislodge the anxiety that had wormed its way into her stomach. More people had started drinking. Tongues would flap.

“This is quite a set-up!” Ghira remarked cheerfully after they arrived, grabbing a beer from one of the many coolers set strategically along the pier. “Is this an annual thing?”

“I think so.” Blake took a sip of her cider. She wasn’t much of a beer drinker, and a cider was the best compromise she could find. Not that she would drink much; she didn’t trust herself not to blab if she had too much to drink. “Ruby was telling me that they rented a bounce castle last year, but Tai absolutely forbid it this year.”

“Sounds fun.” Kali smiled at her daughter, and Blake did her best to return it. “You’re really getting comfortable here, aren’t you?”

“I think so.” She bit her lip. It could be such an easy segue into bringing up her relationship with Yang, but she just couldn’t do it. She took another small sip instead. “It’s… nice here.”

“Maybe in the summer, but it gets pretty crazy up north in the wintertime. You don’t get snow in Menagerie, but here, it’s just another way of life.”

“Yang drives a snowplow in the winter sometimes,” Blake told them, unable to stop the slight smile that formed. “She plows driveways, and--”

“There you are.” They all turned, and Blake was surprised to see Weiss in front of them, holding an open bottle. “I was wondering where you went.”

Her cheeks were a little pink, and the beating of Blake’s heart began to pick up momentum. Had Ruby or Yang warned her to keep quiet? Panic began to creep through her nerves as she wondered how many drinks Weiss had gone through already. She’d heard the story about Pyrrha’s carpet
enough times to be worried about what Weiss might do-- or say-- while drunk.

“I need to talk to you about Yang--” Weiss began, but Blake interrupted.

“We’ll be right back,” she told her parents before Weiss could continue. She seized the woman by the shoulder and led her away from her parents. It was only when they were on the opposite side of the pier that she stopped. Blake faced her with crossed arms, ears lying back defensively.

“What was that about?” Weiss demanded, expression haughty and unrestrained.

“Sorry!” Blake’s heart still thundered against her chest. “They-- they don’t know I’m dating Yang. And I’m going to tell them, tomorrow, but if they found out now, they’d--”

“Freak out,” Weiss finished for her. She sighed, then gave Blake a stern look. “This is Patch. You can’t keep a secret on--”

“An island this size, I know,” Blake said, words close to a snap. She forced herself to take a breath. “I’m going to tell them.”

“Good.” The word came out slightly hitched, and Blake guessed that her assessment about Weiss’s sobriety had been correct. “But I needed to talk to you about Yang. Do you have a minute?”

“Of-- of course.” Blake felt heat rise to her cheeks. “What is it?”

“It’s in one week,” Weiss said, holding up one finger. “July eleventh. Do you know?”


“No!” Weiss glared. “Though you should know that one already, too.”

“I thought I did, which was why I wondered--”

“The anniversary of Summer’s death,” Weiss finished in a hiss, looking around to make sure Yang wouldn’t suddenly appear. “It’s in one week!”

“I-- really?” Blake’s eyes widened. “Shit.”

“She doesn’t usually make a big deal about it, and she probably wouldn’t tell you,” Weiss continued, “but it’s a good idea for you to know. Y’know… so you can take her mind off it.”

“Shit,” Blake repeated. Her mind started whirring with thoughts, but she made herself listen as Weiss continued to ramble.

“I mean, she usually doesn’t act like she even cares, or notices or anything. She doesn’t even visit Summer’s grave.” Weiss shook her head, as if in disbelief at something she already knew. “Tai and Ruby always do, and Qrow does sometimes, if he hasn’t gotten himself completely trashed by the time they go, but Yang never does.”

“Does she go other times, at least?” It almost physically hurt to think that Yang had detached herself so much as to never visit her mother’s grave, but Weiss only shrugged.

“Sometimes, if we drag her. But it’s like… she tries to forget, I think. I don’t know.” Weiss sighed. “But, just… she’s got you this year. It’s like… I don’t know. I’ve never seen her with someone the way she is with you. So, I guess… just keep the date in mind. Just be there for her that day, y’know?”
Weiss tipped the bottle back, downing the rest in a painful-sounding gulp. Blake winced, and found herself wondering again how much she’d had to drink. “Are you all right?”

“I’m f-fine!” The f sounded a little too drawn-out to give the word any validity, but she wasn’t puking or acting too erratic, so Blake figured there wasn’t much she could do. “But God, this is just gonna be an awful week, isn’t it? The anniversary… my family…”

Blake pulled out her phone, shooting Yang a quick text. Should we cut Weiss off? she asked.

shit. what’s she doing?

“Anyway, that’s about it!” Weiss finally said, gesturing up at the darkening sky. “Are you gonna stick around for the fireworks? I mean, what they do here isn’t that spectacular compared to some of the shows I’ve seen, but it’s still beautiful, and that’s something my father would never understand. He thinks that unless something costs thousands of thousands of dollars, it isn’t worth it.”

“He sounds awful,” Blake replied, her sympathy unfeigned. “I’m glad you’re living your own life now.”

“But I could have fixed it,” Weiss’s eyes were wide, still shocked at the injustice done to her. “He’s doing all this illegal testing, and if I could’ve just waited a little longer, I could’ve reversed everything! But no, I had to open my big mouth and–”

“Hey, Weiss!” Yang said, as cheery as ever, striding over to them so casually that even Blake might not have picked up on the speed of her step. She threaded an arm through Weiss’s. “When was the last time you drank some water?”

“Huh?” Weiss’s scowl almost looked sober. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Yang flashed Blake a wink. “It means that I’m refusing to risk having you puke in my bedroom.”

“Don’t remind me.” Weiss glowered at her as Yang led her away, Blake trailing behind. “I’m surprised Pyrrha’s even still speaking to me after that. God, you’d think she’d hate me for that.”

“She’s better than any of us deserve,” Yang replied with a wise nod, then tugged Weiss beside her to sit at one of the picnic tables. “Blake, could you grab us a water? Please?”

Considering they sat with Weiss for much of the evening, the rest of the party wasn’t too bad. Ruby bounced between them and the rest of the crowd, happily leaping into openings in any conversation, whether it was with them or with her other friends. Blake sat at Yang’s other side, resting a hand on her thigh under the cover of the picnic table. Her parents had seen her kiss Yang before, but Blake didn’t want to draw too much attention by abusing the privilege.

“I brought cupcakes!” Ruby announced happily as she plopped on Weiss’s other side. The effects of the booze having faded drastically, Weiss had laid her head on the tabletop, buried in the crook of her arm. “Uh-oh, is she asleep?”

Yang gave her an experimental poke, and Weiss shot up, looking alarmed. “Nope!” she replied. Weiss grumbled and collapsed back on her arm. Ruby set a small six-pack of cupcakes in front of her, and Yang raised an eyebrow. “Did you just steal a whole box of cupcakes?”

“It’s not stealing when I poured my heart and soul… and gas money… into picking them up at Hannaford!” Ruby pulled one out. “Blake, chocolate or vanilla?”
“Ugh, I can’t do any more cupcakes,” she groaned. She was of half a mind to follow Weiss’s lead and rest her head on the table. She was still stuffed. “I’ve had way too much sugar today.”

“No such thing,” Ruby scoffed, pulling the liner off the cupcake and licking the frosting.

“Can’t you eat that thing like an adult?” Yang complained as she pulled her own out.

“Boring!”

“You’re so--!”

“Shut up,” Weiss groaned. “I’m busy dying.”

Chuckling, Blake leaned against Yang, pressing her head onto her arm. “Good day?” Yang asked her, moving her arm around to pull Blake closer to her.

“Mhm.” Smiling had become so easy over the course of the past couple of weeks, but once in a while, it would strike her as nothing short of miraculous that she was capable of doing so. It was like a dream; only when her cheeks ached from prolonged smiling could she actually believe it was real. As she smiled, she closed her eyes.

“Aww, you guys are so cute!” Ruby cooed. Blake opened one eye and saw that Ruby had whipped out her phone. “Picture?”

At their nod, Ruby snapped one. Then another. And another.

“Why so many?” Blake asked, close to laughter.

“In case someone blinks or made a stupid face, then there’s another chance at getting one right!” Ruby beamed. “Now-- hey! Jaune! Can you get a picture of the four of us?”

Weiss groaned in protest, but she was able to pull herself together long enough to give the camera a surprisingly clear smile. If there was one thing Weiss Schnee could do, it had to be pictures. Blake suspected that someday, when Weiss was on her deathbed, she would sit up long enough to give a camera her best angle before promptly expiring.

“Aww, this is really good!” Ruby said excitedly, going back through the pictures. “I’ll put them on Facebook tonight.”

Blake nodded eagerly, transfixed when Yang swiped to the picture of the two of them. Though the light was dim, the picture was sweet, capturing the joy and care that exuded from them. Her own eyes glowed, and Blake couldn’t tell if it was merely a reflection of the light or from sheer contentment.

Why not both?

“How much longer before the fireworks?” Weiss asked, head sinking back onto the table.

“About an hour and a half. You gonna try to catch a nap?” Yang’s smile was surprisingly gentle; Blake had never seen her give Weiss that look before. It was incredible, to be with someone so empathetic. When Blake thought of the years she’d suffered with Adam, when someone like Yang had existed this whole time…

“I wish. Maybe I’ll just smother myself with cupcakes.” The corner of Weiss’s mouth twitched downward as she grabbed a cupcake from the pack. “I’m sorry,” she added ruefully. "I didn’t mean
to ruin your evening.”

“I got to spend the night with my best friend and my girlfriend,” Yang replied firmly, looking from Weiss to Blake. “I’d call that a win.”

“And sister-friend!” Ruby added, grabbing another cupcake. They all laughed.

With Weiss settled down enough to entrust her to Ruby’s care, Blake and Yang walked along the edge of the pier together, hand in hand. They avoided the children and knots of people, happy enough to be by themselves for now. There was enough chaos around them that simply having their own little bubble, a little oasis just for themselves, was a peace neither of them wanted to break.

“I’m thinking we go to Portland next week,” Yang told her when they reached the corner of the pier. They leaned on the railing, looking down at the dark water that lapped at the wooden posts. “I’ve got a long weekend, so I was thinking we could even stay till Sunday, if we wanted to. Do some touristy stuff, even.”

“Touristy stuff?” Blake asked, amused.

“Well, for your benefit.” Yang looked up at her, grinning, the lavender in her eyes catching moonlight. “And I don’t mind doing touristy stuff with someone who’s never done any of it before. Like, seeing what you think of everything is pretty fun for me.”

“Oh yeah?” Blake turned, still leaning on the rail, to face Yang. Her own smile grew a fraction.

“Yeah.” Yang mimicked her change of position, resting her elbow on the railing. “So, is it a date?”

“I might have to clear my calendar,” Blake remarked airily, trying to suppress her smile to really give some legitimacy to the tease. It didn’t work, and Yang laughed.

“I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again, babe. You’ve got an awful poker face.”

“Only with you.” Blake wished she could understand how locking eyes could feel so intimate. Even surrounded by so many people, when they stared into each other’s eyes, it was like the whole world went away, like they were the only two people on this pier. She didn’t think there was anyone else in her life who she was so comfortable sharing eye contact with. With Yang, doing so made her feel complete. She leaned in, brushing her lips against Yang’s, only closing her eyes at the physical connection.

The fireworks found them back on the picnic table, once again next to Weiss and Ruby. Weiss looked a little more lively; apparently, the two cupcakes she’d eaten had done her some sort of good. She kept sneaking glances at the people who walked past their table, as if hoping someone in particular would pass by. Each time she did so, Yang would catch Blake’s eye and smirk.

“They set ‘em off over the water,” Ruby explained, gesturing to the harbor. “It’s really pretty.”

Blake reached for Yang’s hand, giving it a squeeze.

The children on the pier squealed with delight at the whistles, crackles, and booms of the first fireworks. The colors exploded above them, but they also glittered and refracted in the water below. When Blake snuck a glance to Yang, she saw those colors burst in her eyes, as well. Yang returned the look with one of her own, grinning.

“Yeah, they don’t hold a candle,” she scoffed, waving a dismissive hand. Blake raised her eyebrows.
“To what?” she asked, bewildered. More pops of color danced across Yang’s eyes.

“To you.”

Before Blake could respond, Yang caught her lips on her own. Blake closed her eyes. She didn’t need to open them to see fireworks.

Chapter End Notes

This is probably going to be my last chapter till RTX is over. I'll keep writing when, but I'm gonna be hella busy this week.

That said, @ me on tumblr or twitter if you want to say hello at RTX!
Given the fact that Blake spent the rest of the weekend with Yang, Weiss, and Ruby, it was easy to forget about the anxiety she’d soon have to face with her parents. There were other, more pressing things to worry about: Weiss’s hangover the next morning, the streamers that were still taped to the hulls of some of the boats, and the drunken Qrow who didn’t rouse from his stupor on the couch until well into the afternoon.

“Is he dead?” Blake asked uncertainly as the four of them stared down at Qrow. There was a small dab of spittle at the corner of his mouth, and only when she looked closely could she see the rise and fall of his chest. So not dead, but he was certainly sleeping like it.

“He gets bad this time of year,” Ruby replied with a sad shake of her head. “Since… y’know.”

Worried, Blake cast a quick glance to Yang, who made no sign that she’d even heard her sister. Instead, she gave Qrow a none-too-gentle shake. “Up. Now.”

Qrow gave a groan, but made no move to get up. He didn’t even turn over. Yang sighed.

“Your dad might have to handle this one,” Weiss said with a grimace. She rubbed her temples; maybe the face she had made hadn’t just been for Qrow. ‘It’s a shame we can’t just pick him up and throw him in the ocean.’

“We dunked him in a lake one year,” Ruby added helpfully. “We went to Moosehead for a weekend a few summers ago, and he got hammered, so Dad dragged his air mattress out to the lake and dumped him in!”

“Sure woke him up.” Yang chuckled. Her eyebrows crinkled in one last show of disapproval, then she shook her head. This was a fight they didn’t have the energy to fight, let alone win. They needed to conserve what little they had for cleaning up the pier. The night before, it had been close to trashed. During the day, people had been better about cleaning up their garbage, but as people started drinking, simple things like picking up were forgotten.

Weiss rang up Nora, who didn’t answer until the second attempt at calling her. Apparently, she had been nursing a hangover of her own, but when Weiss mentioned the streamers, Nora’s groan was audible enough for Blake’s sensitive ears to pick up.

“Oh, shit,” she could hear through the phone. “I forgot about the streamers, didn’t I?”

“What happened to taking them down last night, huh?”

“It’s not like you reminded me. You were too drunk to even remember what day it was!”

With each passing second, Weiss held the phone further and further from her ear. So, it wasn’t just Blake’s hearing. The woman was naturally loud.

Not all the blame for the party’s mess could be put on Nora, however. They filled up several trash bags with not only streamers, but paper plates, plastic cups, and more watermelon rinds than Blake had expected to find. Bottles and cans, however, were nowhere to be found.
“Probably Jaune,” Yang said with a sigh. “He always takes them in to get recycled— you can earn a little money that way. I just wish he could’ve picked up some of this other shit, though.” With a grimace, she tossed a corn cob into the bag Blake held open for her.

“Jaune’s a cheap ass,” Nora grumbled, tying up the bag Ren held in place for her. “He’s the one that gets the money from the cans, but he doesn’t lift a damn finger to help clean up the rest!”

“Well, he didn’t get to drink much last night. He had to work this morning,” Ruby explained, leaning against the rail. “We’re good over here.”

“He’s still cheap.” Nora folded her arms irritably. “Christ, how do parties get so messy?”

“You were the one who insisted on streamers,” Ren reminded her. Nora only scoffed.

It was much too easy to just stay that night, as well, and for Blake to forget about her parents completely. After all, Yang had offered to make dinner, and who was she to turn down an offer like that? It was Ruby, though, who dangled the real carrot.

“Why don’t we all go out on Crescent Rose tomorrow?” she asked, head dangling upside-down from Yang’s bed. Her mop of dark hair bounced as she spoke, illustrating her excitement. “I know you’ve been on Yang’s boat, but it’s nothing like a real sailboat! I bet she stinks less than Ember Celica, too.”

“Watch it, that’s my baby you’re talking about!” Yang warned, bopping Ruby’s head with her foot. “If that’s your baby, then Crescent Rose is the kind of kid who goes to private school and gets all the scholarships, while Ember Celica is the misfit stepchild who probably dropped out to smoke a lot of pot.”

“Jesus Christ, do you want me to kick your ass?” Yang gave Ruby a push, sending her tumbling off the bed in a heap.

“I was just kidding!” Ruby whined. Weiss rolled her eyes, but Blake couldn’t hide her laughter.

“If you’re not careful, I’m gonna strap you to the front of Ember Celica and turn you into a figurehead. Then you’ll have to deal with the stink for the rest of your life.”

“Nooo! Weiss! Help me!”

“You did this to yourself,” Weiss replied boredly. “You should know better than to insult someone’s boat.”

To Blake’s surprise, and excitement, they spent most of the next day out on the water, cruising lazily around the island and up the coast. It was fascinating, watching Ruby and Weiss man the boat with such precision and ease. Even before Weiss had moved permanently to Patch, she and Ruby had raced together so often that their partnership was second-nature to them. Now it was instinctual. They hardly needed words as they set up; just a look or a small gesture was all that was needed to indicate who would do what.

“So those are lines?” Blake asked, nodding toward Ruby and Weiss as they each knotted a rope on each side of the boat.

“Those are mainsheets,” Yang corrected.
“So the sail isn’t a sheet?”

“The sail is a sail.” She grinned, relaxing onto the bench beside Blake. She’d explained that Ruby and Weiss had *Crescent Rose* so well under control that she would be more of a hindrance than a help when it came to their routine. Though she had teased Yang for using it as an excuse for laziness, she could see now that the other women moved in a way that seemed almost choreographed. Maybe Yang had been right, after all. “I know, there’s a lot of confusing vocab, but you’ll get the hang of it.”

They didn’t actually raise the sails until they were on the open water, and Blake tried to absorb each step they took with a puzzled frown. Yang explained the importance of wind direction, of speed. Ruby and Weiss hoisted up the mainsail with near grace.

“This is so cool!” Blake finally exclaimed as the sail caught the wind. Yang laughed. It was one thing to be pulled along by a roaring motor, but once it was turned off, all they could hear were the rippling of the sail and the lapping of the water against the hull.

“It’s all about wind direction,” Yang told her again, gesturing to the sail. She pointed out small red ribbons, the *telltales*, that indicated that the sails were set properly. “The wind helps us move, it helps us turn…”

“And they *race* this way,” Blake marveled, watching in fascination as Ruby and Weiss pulled the halyard to hoist up the other sail, the *jib*.

“There’s a *lot* of coordination to deal with, and it can still be unpredictable, but they know what they’re doing.” Yang gazed fondly in her sister’s direction. “They can go really fast, too, but we’re just taking it easy today.”

Ruby and Weiss spoke to each other as they pulled on various lines and pointed out directions, but the words were lost to the wind. Blake sighed and leaned into Yang. She looked out over the water, at the occasional lobster buoy they passed, but none of them bore Yang’s yellow and black stripes.

“You used to sail, right? What made you stop?”

Yang shrugged. “I always did it more for Ruby, I guess. After… the accident… it just wasn’t the same. I kept going to sailing camp and all, and even became a counselor, but I just never loved it like Ruby does.”

Blake’s ears twitched at the mention of the accident. She’d never heard Yang reference it herself, unprompted. She set an encouraging hand on Yang’s knee, touched by that trust. “That makes sense,” she agreed. If Yang was opening up, Blake wouldn’t shut it down. She’d let the conversation go in whatever direction Yang steered it.

“I’ve always been more a builder than anything else, anyway. And building’s always sort of… grounded me, I guess. I’ve always felt… I don’t know. Close to… drifting away, or something.” Yang stared out at the distant horizon, a small frown twitching at her brow. Suddenly, her eyes snapped back to Blake. Her face, her lilac eyes so bright against the blue sky, made her think of sunsets, of glory… of home. Her heart twinged for it. “So I just grab at what I can to hold me down.”

Yang turned, shaking out her hair and pulling aside the strap of her tank top. Without anything in the way, Blake could clearly see the anchor on her shoulder. The skin there was so smooth, and Blake’s eyes roamed the slope of her neck shamelessly before settling back onto the tattoo. “That’s sort of why I got this done. It’s a reminder for myself to stay… grounded, I guess.”
“Steadfast?” Blake suggested, bringing a hand up to trace along the crisp lines of ink.

“That’s a good word for it.” Yang said, nodding, closing her eyes as Blake’s fingers slid across her shoulder blade. “Because all I really do is just… float along, y’know? So an anchor seemed like a good idea to get. To keep me from drifting. Just like boatbuilding does, in a more practical sense.” She pulled the strap back up and spun back to Blake, an embarrassed flush creeping up her neck. “I know it’s sorta stupid—"

“It’s not,” Blake said firmly. Her hand found Yang’s knee again, and she squeezed. “I think it’s perfect.”

Yang’s grin was lopsided as she looked back at her. There was a sadness, deep in it, that Blake wished she could dive in and hold. In the month she had lived with her parents before coming to Patch, Blake knew what it was like to feel cast adrift. It was an empty, aimless feeling, and she could appreciate a desire for an anchor.

But there wasn’t just sadness in Yang’s smile. There was something more, something Blake couldn’t put a word to.

Something almost like an anchor in itself.

“Anyway,” Yang went on, tone perking right back up. “I’m a much better builder than I am a sailor. Dad keeps saying that at this rate, I’ll be in charge of the shipyard someday, which makes sense, since it’s been in the family for generations now and Ruby’s never shown a flair for building.” She shrugged, then her eyebrows lifted eagerly. “Oh, so I’ve been helping Weiss out a lot with her own boat, actually. Did she show you *Myrtenaster*?”

“Is that what its name is?”

“Yeah, but she doesn’t want to jinx it by using the name that much. It’s almost done, and she loves it... but she doesn’t seem to get it yet that it’s *real*. Y’know what I mean?”

Blake understood completely.

“We’re hoping to get her in the water by the end of the summer, and then she and Ruby might take her out on a trip somewhere,” Yang went on, eyes flicking over to Ruby with mild interest as she let out the sheet slightly. “Eventually, they want to sail around the world.”

“Weiss was telling me a little about that. That’s pretty amazing.”

“They’re ambitious, that’s for sure.” Yang stretched out her arms, letting one curl around Blake’s shoulders. “But both of them have talked about it for years. It’s so weird to think that they’ve actually got a shot. But if anyone can do it, they can.”

And with the determined glint in their eyes and sheer pleasure on their faces, Blake could believe it.

Actually being out on the water was a better lesson than having things explained on land. Weiss and Ruby walked Blake through tacking and jibing, and with their assistance, was able to change the direction they sailed. Yang cheered her on, always ready with a smile and a kiss whenever Blake returned to the bench with an excited flush.

“Sailing suits you,” Yang told her, brushing a strand of hair from her face and tucking it behind her ear. Blake snorted.

“Yeah, right.”
It wasn’t just sailing, or even the ocean, that suited Blake. It was being here, in Maine… with Yang. She curled up into Yang’s side, grateful for the warmth against the chilly ocean wind.

It suited her just fine.

She reached a hand up to Yang’s cheek, brushing over it with her thumb, over the skin that rounded out with her bright smile. Maybe someday, the salt in the air would weather her face, but for now, the skin was still soft. She leaned in, brushing her lips lightly against Yang’s before letting herself fully sink into it.

No touch was close enough. Blake slipped a leg over Yang’s lap, sitting herself up to straddle her without breaking the insistent lock of their lips. The wind whipped her own hair around her head, close enough now to stream out with Yang’s. Out here, it could have just been them, and the sea. By the time she felt Yang’s steadying arms wrap around her waist, she’d even forgotten that Weiss and Ruby were there, as well.

“That is not why we brought you out here,” Weiss interrupted, disapproval dripping from her voice. It was only then that they broke their kiss. Blake turned to look at her, almost annoyed at the interruption, but laughed as Ruby pretended to vomit over the side of the boat.

“You can’t just bring us out on a romantic daytrip and not expect the romance part to happen,” Yang pointed out, grin wicked.

“There’s nothing romantic about sailing!” Weiss huffed.

“And that’s why you’re single.” Yang rolled her eyes, adjusting herself so that Blake, still straddling her, could lean against her comfortably. “You always need someone to point out the romance to you. It isn’t always as obvious as it is in Twilight.”

“Such a stupid book,” Ruby said with a sad shake of her head. Weiss’s pale cheeks burned a deep red.

“It had some… interesting parts.” Her weak defense had Ruby snorting with laughter. Blake closed her eyes, letting the sounds wash over her. Maybe it wasn’t romantic to Weiss, who was so used to the routine of sailing, but to Blake, the rocking of the sea and the beating of Yang’s heart gave way to the most ticklish, warm sensations in her belly.

No romance novel could ever do justice to how this felt.

The sun was still out when they got back to the house, but ominous clouds were rolling in. There would be more rain that night, and Weiss commented more than once that she was glad that they’d taken down all the streamers before it hit. She settled onto the couch with a loud sigh. Ruby followed suit, stretching her legs across Weiss’s lap.

“Rub my feet, Weiss!” she declared.

“Like hell I will.” Weiss gave Ruby’s legs a push to get them off of her, and Ruby let out a whine and slid off the couch like she was melting. “If I remember correctly, you’re working tonight.”

“Life is so cruel,” Ruby mewedled sadly from the floor.

“I need to head out soon, anyway.” Weiss wrinkled her nose. “I have some errands to run in Kuroyuri. Want me to drop you off, Ruby?”

“Yes!” Ruby bounced up, despair cast to the wayside. “I’ll just eat there, Yang. I’m in the mood for
“pizza tonight!”

“Bring some back? What kind d’you want, babe?” The last question was directed to Blake, who shrugged.

“I’m not that picky,”

“Are you staying again tonight?” Ruby asked, bouncing on the balls of her feet. Blake felt a slight blush in her cheeks.

“If… If it’s okay with everyone.”

“Of course it’s okay,” Yang replied, setting a hand at the small of her back. “You know we love having you here.”

“I bet if you wanted to live here for the rest of the summer, you could!” Ruby added with a near-smirk. Blake shot a quick glance to Yang, long enough to see her cheeks grow pink.

“Ruby,” Weiss said warningly, but Yang managed a laugh.

“This is why you’re not in charge of my love life. When the first thing you asked us was if we were married already…”

“Hey! Weirder things happen!” Ruby shrugged with petulant grin. “One time, on Maury…”

“And that’s our cue,” Weiss groaned, grabbing Ruby by the arm and leading her back to the hallway. “We’ll see you guys later.”

“See ya,” Blake replied with a small wave that neither of them saw. She turned back to Yang, seeing new angles to the smile she wore. When the door shut behind Ruby and Weiss, the silence took on new meaning, as well. Blake licked her lips. “So.”

“So,” Yang repeated amiably, curling her fingers to slide up Blake’s back.

“We’re alone,” Blake remarked, her tone as casual as if they were simply talking about the weather, or the shopping list. Yang’s smile widened.

“So we are.”

“Anything could happen.”

“Yeah?” Yang’s hand drifted across Blake’s back, rounding lightly onto her side. The fabric of her shirt did nothing to detract from the sensitivity of that touch. Blake shivered. “And what would you like to happen?”

Her own hand came to Yang’s side, feeling the gentle curve, the tautness of muscle. She smiled.

“Everything.”

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“Help, Kali, there’s an intruder in the house!” Ghira called out when Blake walked in through the door the next morning. She rolled her eyes as her mother came out of the kitchen, looking first at Blake, then at her husband with a bemused expression.

“Very funny, dear.”
Ghira narrowed his eyes, then widened them dramatically. “Well, if it isn’t for our long-lost daughter. I’d almost forgotten I had one!”

“Shut up,” Blake grumbled, setting her backpack beside the couch. She wished she had a bedroom to hide in for a few minutes, to recover. She was still semi-lost in a reverie, remembering Yang’s lips on her own, the sound of her whistle reverberating in her ears after Yang had raced away on Bumblebee. As much as she loved her father, she wanted to linger in those fresh memories for a little while longer.

With the rain the night before, Yang had slept fitfully. Blake had spent much of it with her arms slung around Yang’s waist and holding her close. Maybe it was selfish, the flood of affection she’d felt as she’d murmured sweet words into Yang’s ear. But she was glad that she could be there to help in whatever capacity she could, and when Yang had opened her eyes that morning, she could see that Yang was glad, too. The sleepy gratitude in that look had made Blake not want to go home at all, or even to leave the bed.

They would see each other again soon, of course, Yang had promised her. They could still do lunches, or dinners, though she had a lot of work to get done before her long weekend.

“Which means no more afternoons off,” Yang had told her sadly over breakfast. “God, you should’ve seen the fit Weiss threw when she saw my timecard last week. She didn’t buy me being sick for even a minute.”

Blake had buried her face in her hands, embarrassed for the part she had played in that afternoon. Not that she could regret any of it, of course.

“And how’s Yang doing?” Kali asked, leaning against the entryway to the kitchen as Blake sat down.

“She’s good. I think we’re going to Portland this weekend, if that’s okay with you guys.” It wasn’t really a question of permission; she was old enough not to need permission to do things. However, after living with someone for so long who had required permission to do anything, she still felt the need to check.

“Of course.” Kali raised her eyebrows, her ears following the motion. “For the weekend?”

“Well, we’re leaving Friday. Yang has a long weekend.”

Blake was relieved when Kali didn’t ask why. Ruby had been the one to explain how the anniversary of Summer’s death had turned into a memorial holiday of sorts. She and Taiyang always visited the grave together, though Yang never did. It was also a day to keep an eye on Qrow; he tended to drink more than usual when the anniversary rolled around. With all of the heaviness the day came with, it was better for everyone to just take it off.

“Are Ruby and Weiss going, too?”

Blake grimaced, and fought her initial instinct to lie. Of course they’re coming, she could have said. But Ruby was scheduled to work that weekend, and lies didn’t stay hidden very well on Patch.

Like other things.

“Actually… it’s gonna be just me and Yang. We’re going to Portland on our own. We…” She had to bite the bullet. She had to. “We decided to… be together. For the summer, anway.” Blake forced her ears to remain upright, though they automatically would have flattened against her head in preparation for Kali’s disapproval. Instead, her mother only sighed, sounding more tired than angry.
“Are… are you mad?”

The question came out more pathetic than she’d intended, and she winced. Ghira looked up sharply.

“Blake.” Kali’s voice was soft. “We’re not going to be mad for whatever you and Yang choose to do. She’s a lovely girl.”

Blake’s shoulders sagged with relief. “She’s… she’s so good,” she told them, hoping they didn’t notice the crack in her voice. “She’s so different than… and she cares about me. I… I’ve never met anyone like--”

“But.” Kali’s words came out harder than Blake expected. She held up a finger, and Blake stared at it, confused. “You can’t forget that we’re only here for the summer.”

“I know--”

“You say that you know,” Kali went on, her golden eyes boring into Blake’s, “but do you?”

Blake fell silent, the blood roaring in her ears. She longed for the quiet serenity of Yang’s room, with its red pillows and its seaglass chandelier and the soft cradle of Yang’s body against her own. In Yang’s room, she could forget about things like the end of summer and the future. Here at her parents’ cottage, it was all laid out neatly before her, where she couldn’t look away.

“When we leave here next month, I don’t want you to leave with a broken heart.” Kali stepped closer, placing a hand on the back of the couch. Ghira looked up from his daughter to his wife, a slight frown almost masked behind his beard. “You keep telling me that you’re being careful. You know you can’t stay on Patch, Blake. There aren’t enough year-round jobs here, especially for people with your degree. So when we go back to Vale, I don’t… I don’t want to see you sink right back to how you were before.”

Blake could imagine it very well; the return to Vale with her parents, depression and heartbreak flooding her body to the point of numbness, of pain. Going every day to a job that she hated, taking just enough medication to keep the edge off, wilting away in her parents’ house like a plant starved of sunlight. Was this what her parents saw? Was this what they expected from her at the end of the summer?

She slipped a hand into her pocket, finding the piece of porcelain Yang had given to her weeks ago. She wished she were as smooth, as hard, as that little fragment. Even so, she thought bitterly, being hard and shiny hadn’t been enough to keep it from shattering in the first place.

“For now, maybe it’s fun, and happy, and pleasant,” Kali continued, her voice rising with what might have been desperation, for Blake to see what she saw. “But you can’t forget that we’re only here for another month. I don’t care what you do, who you become friends with, or where you go. I only want for you to be happy, and stay happy.”

“She’s…” Blake began, but trailed off, unsure of what she had been about to say. She looked down at the floor, lost.

“We know how much you like her.” Ghira’s deep voice was oddly gentle. “Neither of us are stopping you from seeing her, or spending time with her. She’s been good for you.”

But, but, there was always a but. Everything was conditional. Blake clenched her teeth, trying to lock herself away from her parents, lock herself away from reality. She pulled the porcelain from her pocket in a clenched fist, hoping just a little of Yang’s confidence could seep from it and into her skin.
“But you just need to keep this summer in perspective. Even if not for yourself, then think about Yang. What does she think is going to come after all of this?”

*There* was the gut punch. Blake stared at her father with something akin to horror. It was bad enough, imagining her own future past the summer. But Yang’s...

*Ruin*. That was the word Weiss had used, wasn’t it? That was what would happen if she hurt Yang?

It wouldn’t happen. Blake would never let that happen. She took a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down. Her parents fears would be for nothing, of that she was certain-- she *had* to be certain. If she and Yang were meant to be, then they would find a way to make this work. Whether someone ended up moving or whether they had to be long-distance for a little while… if it was meant to be, it would be.

“I… know you’re worried,” Blake finally said. Kali’s eyebrows shot up, and Ghira gave her a puzzled frown. It wasn’t the reaction they were expecting, and it showed. It emboldened her. “None of this has been easy. But I still want to see where this goes. Maybe it’ll just… not work out, and then you’ve got nothing to worry about, right?”

But she could feel, deep in her bones, that it wouldn’t be the case. There had been something so deep, so eternal, about the way Yang looked at her the day before on the sailboat. This was more than just a summer fling. So Blake set her jaw.

“Or maybe it *will* work, and maybe that’ll mean some things will have to change,” she continued, not stopping when she saw Kali open her mouth to interrupt. “But if they do? It’ll be good change. It’s something that we’ll work through together. It isn’t like… before. Nobody is trying to tell me what to do here. Whatever we decide… we’ll decide it together. Me and Yang.”

Blake fully expect a protest, at least from her mother. The silence that followed her words certainly wasn’t encouraging. She looked away from them, aware of how the porcelain dug into her palm. It would leave a mark, a jagged indent, but that seemed like the least of her worries.

“Okay.”

“What?” Blake looked up, startled by the simplicity of Kali’s reply. Her mom offered her a weak smile.

“I said, *okay*."

“I mean… what?” she looked from Kali, to Ghira, then back to Kali. “Okay what?”

“If you’ve… thought it through. If it’s a risk you’re willing to take, if *Yang* is willing to risk it… I’ll support you.”

“So will I.” Ghira nodded along with his wife’s words. “I mean… you’re an adult. We can’t stop you, anyway. But we won’t try to talk you out of it. And… we’ll be here, if you need us. Whether things go perfectly or… if they don’t.”

“As long as you *let* us,” Kali added firmly. “We… don’t want it to be like last time.”

“Of… of course.” Blake was too surprised to panic at the reminder of her past. When the comment *did* sink in, the fear didn’t drag her away this time. Somehow, the remembrance flitted across her consciousness, too brief to leave its mark. She loosened her grip on the porcelain, slipping it back into her pocket. “It’s… not like last time.”
“I know.” Kali breathed out, a slight hitch to it. “I know.”

Slowly, Blake rose from her seat. The acceptance seemed too easy for her mother; all she could remember about her mother from Adam’s early days was the constant arguing, the smothering, the frustration. They had both learned, she supposed, during their years apart. Blake had been a volatile teenager, her mother desperate and worried. Neither had been innocent, but neither one had entirely been at fault, either.

And there was something different now. Adam had been a wedge between them; now, in his absence, Blake could actually see her mother. All of her tiredness, all of her worry, all of her love.

This time, there was trust, too. It was strange, to receive so much of it all at once. First from Yang, then from her parents. It was almost overwhelming.

She wouldn’t break it this time.

Blake couldn’t remember the last time she’d given her mother a hug— every time since they’d been reunited, it had always been Kali to initiate. At first, it had been Blake’s uncertainty that had held her back; years with Adam had taught her that soft touches usually came with a price. Then there had been the anxiety over being touched at all, when she had cringed away from Kali’s arms. Maybe Yang had helped with the concept of touch. It was no longer the uncomfortable burden it had once been.

Giving it so freely was so new.

Kali seemed small in her arms, almost breakable. But Kali returned the embrace tightly, with more strength than anyone might have guessed from such a slight woman. With it, Blake found there had been love all along.

“Thank you,” Blake whispered. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

RTX was amazing. I posted a few pictures to twitter, and there's an album floating around somewhere. Good times were had by all!

Also, keep your eyes out for my Bumbleby Week prompts next week. I might dip into old AU's, some might be canon compliant... and one of the days will have a little excerpt of the fic I'm planning next. :) Stay tuned!

End Notes

Please excuse any fumbles I've got with sailing jargon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!