Summary

When one’s family cannot be trusted or counted on to raise one well, one suffers. But when you have the support of a noble name and the very beings that once terrified you? Jaune Arc, for all his flaws, could still be a Hero- could still be someone worth loving and worth giving love in turn. (AU)
Prologue

AN: What the fuck? Me writing an actually (more) serious RWBY fic? Crazy, right?

A Family Arc

Prologue

The Masks We Wear

It was the last name of Arc. A name lauded in the annals of history since the days of the King of Vale, a rumored ancestor to the name itself. Whether they were bastard children who could not take the royal claim, or simply a knighthood held in high esteem by the man who helped form the Kingdoms as they were, no one alive knew. From the days of the Great War, to the Faunus Revolution- where they aided the weak and protected both the humans and the Faunus who refused to take part in the bloodbaths of the time- all the way to the current era.

His grandfather, Absinthe Arc, had been a warrior of great talents. A man who wielded the sword Crocea Mors in defense and love of all of mankind- whether they held the additional traits of the Faunus or not. He was not as noteworthy as General Lagune for his failures, or the victors amongst the Faunus, but it had been only another piece to add to the noble name of Arc.

His father, Roux Arc, was a renowned and powerful Huntsman throughout Sanus. For close to a whole decade, he’d worn the name Arc proudly in his business and used it to further the pride and glory of the name, until he’d met Nevena Hauteclere, now formally known as the Lady Arc.

His very own beloved mother, a Huntress just like his father. His grandmother, from what he’d been told, had been against the marriage, but the two had “fallen in love at first sight” and promptly eloped after a year of fighting alongside one another. It helped that their firstborn child, his oldest sister Camillia, arrived barely a month after they tied the knot.
Amongst noble circles, it was seen as a slight upon the name, but no one would ever dare say such a thing to the fire-haired Lord of the Arc house. It seemed year after year, his parents’ love grew and grew, as did their family.

Now, at the age of fifteen, Jaune had been their final child. The sole born male heir to the Arc name, and thus the one most likely to propagate the name of Arc further. Camillia had grown up resentful of their parents after she’d become a Huntress herself, their parents’ coddling and dismissal of her dream as “unsafe” had fully alienated the oldest blonde child from them. Saphron, the second oldest child, had left to marry another woman and settle in the newly established city of Argus near Mistral.

Tenderly, the next to come after his sister Saphron had been the rambunctious and tomboyish Jade. Jade’s great fortune in birth as the middle child had left her free-willed and insightful, to a degree he did not think any other could replicate. Where Camillia was a woman born and bred in the fire of battle and quenched in the blood of (metaphorical) Grimm and person alike, Saphron had been a young lady well-versed in etiquette but given to a taste for-

-Well, to be frank, the soft flesh of other women. Jade was everything a young woman ought to have been outside of the rigors of court society. She was tough, as sharp as a blade, and sixteen times more dangerous with her words or a deck of cards.

Gods, he hated playing cards with Jade. He was by no means a bad player- in fact, some of his acquaintances (for he could not call them friends) insisted he cheated against them- but Jade’s preternatural ability to win almost every hand seemed like a Semblance of some variety- not to mention her damnable luck that always saw her through anything she cared to do.

An adventurer in the flesh, that sister of his. Then had come the twins, Bleu and Azula. Hellions in the finest ways, as if to replicate the feats of their eldest sister and young energetic Jade. That they’d grown so beautiful had never tickled suitors as much as it had pleased the Arc Matriarch. The twins had been her favorites since time immemorial by his own reckoning. It had probably helped that- unlike Camilla who had come to love neither the sword and shield of their ancestry nor the guns their mother loved so- they were the ones who took most immediately to his mother’s most favored and beloved of past-times besides her adoration of her lifestyle as the Lady Arc.

There were only two other sets of eyes that you did not want upon you beyond the barrel of a gun than the eyes of Nevena Arc. The twins, not Huntresses themselves, could shoot targets as small as a copper coin at a pace that would make anyone wince. That they commonly did so adorned in the fanciest of gala dresses only further ensured that their lack of suitors was only partially caused by his mother’s overprotectiveness. That was to leave alone their predilection towards obscene humor and social-standing-harming pranks. Nevena Arc had firmly birthed two women just like her- without his mother’s love for gin and whiskey.
Then, there had been Peri, the second youngest of the Arc girls. Nearsighted at birth, she’d embraced the stereotype that had come with a life that required glasses. She was the first of the Arc children to have graduated from a civilian college, and then proceeded to become a Teacher herself in lovely Ansel, where the Maison d’Arc resided. It was under her tutelage that Jaune himself had learned the inner workings of animals raised on the farm within and without. No pets were allowed within the hallowed halls of Arc, but Peri had mitigated that rule by simple virtue of making her life about caring for creatures.

Roux and Nevena Arc had insisted it would always be a point of contention, that the children would not be able to share either a pet or more expensive modern gadgets. This had, in all it’s estimation, done absolutely nothing to abate any of the eight childrens’ interests in animals or expensive toys. It had, however, been right in the end.

The youngest daughter, Violette, had been shy and bashful. Growing up pretty, and the closest in his age, she had been the second to marry after Saphron herself- but sadly the marriage had been in shambles by the time a year had worn on.

Jaune wished his mother had just killed the young man. Instead, he found out later that the social suicide he suffered had led him to commit actual suicide.

One did not play games with the heart of an Arc child, lest they learn what Dust-shot did to one’s body- if they had only mildly annoyed the Lady Arc, of course. Many feared Roux Arc for what he might do to them, but the bare truth was that his father would simply maim them.

His mother would make Remnant a living, breathing, fresh hell every new day that she could figure out something novel to do to you.

And then, he had been the last. His mother’s womb barren of eggs, and no longer able to handle the strain of childbirth, he had been a difficult pregnancy that had ended with him being watched over for days by doctoral specialists and even those few Aura scientists that would be ready to save his life if need be.

That he had been fine within a week had been attributed to a miracle, and so he had been lauded as the child to be doted upon. His father, ever distant and threatening in his powerful physique and blood-red hair. His mother, always babying and adoring him with her overprotective and zealous need matched only by the beautiful blonde waves that she wore like a veil. His sisters, all mindful of his gentle nature and innocence. His youth was one spent in lessons of nobility, shielded from the darkness of the world as best as could be.
The expectations upon him were simple, continue the line of Arc. As he’d become a teenager, he’d fell more in line with the thinking of his oldest sister– idolizing the very ground his parents walked on and longing to be like them. Etiquette lessons held him, music and art tutors gave him an escape from the courtesans whom were hired to teach and encourage him to know the ways of the world when it came to women not related to him. He learned to please others with cuisine and pages of poems about lineage and the shade of one’s blood.

It had disillusioned him with people. Not to the point of social recluse like poor Violette had been until dragged out of her shell by sweet Saphron and her wife, but it had taught him that– for all of his mother’s pleased smiles and his father’s proud words . . .

It was rarely as simple as confidence and genial nature. Jaune still thought that the world was a place where Good ought to be done, but that he needed to be the Hero that people had seen in his ancestors.

He’d stepped up to his parents, and told them of his dream when he’d turned twelve. Both had worn forlorn looks for the night and the day afterwards.

. . . But they had eventually come around. The pressure from the fear of being treated his whole life like a stud for grooming and sale had evaporated when they had sat him down and– in a show of solidarity– even dragged their errant red daughter home long enough to see him.

Perhaps in a way, it had been an attempt to disillusion him, but it had not went that way. That night, the Arc house was filled with soft tears, platitudes, and the strong arms of his family as once again, the disconnected House Arc was filled with hope and love.

Camillia still would not forgive their father, but she told him everything of the life of a Huntsman. From the dark, disturbing things done by man to other man, to the bright and blinding light of man making a world swarming with the tides of Darkness step back in fear and give back the thing that Jaune wanted most to give the world around him.

Hope.

Hope that he would bring to those who had none. Victory he would hoist on high like a flag atop a spear-pole. Light to burn away the darkness that ate at the hearts of others.
“This feels silly.” Jaune noted, carefully pressing the Aura-sensitive mask to his face. It was- in showcasing his status and eligibility- a deep and rich lacquered black and designed to hide the curve of his cheeks, brow, and leave only his lips and jaw exposed. Upon it’s pristine surface were marks like scar-like paintings in gold that symbolized the warrior’s spirit, alongside a pair of diamonds in white to tease the cheeks and state mourning of one’s lost youth. The mask was accompanied by a foppish hat that was accented with a set of deep blue plumes.

It was only one of ten masks to adorn the faces of the family Arc tonight- though three would go unworn. Camillia, Saphron, and Violette all refused to attend the party for different reasons, though his Scroll had been blown up with videos from his errant sisters.

Violette was watching over the newest addition to their little family, little Adrian, while Saphron indulged in a night out with her dusken-skinned wife.

A hand brushed down the shoulders of the old-fashioned suit that he wore, his gaze turning from the floor-length mirror that remained one of the few vain pieces of his room. An orange-painted smile greeted him as he looked upon the mask that hid all of the features of his mother’s lovely face save for those rich ochre lips that he knew would soon spout yet another of her favorite phrases.

“Now, sweetheart, you know these things are expected of us as nobles. Besides, isn’t it fun? You can enjoy yourself, and we have so many guests tonight! Perhaps you’ll even find a suitable girl to make a bride?”

Jaune tried desperately not to squint at his mother’s playful interference in his (dead) love life. Put in this situation, he could “schmooze” with the best of them, but it always felt . . . fake. Romance had always seemed so much more brilliant in a book, a comic, or a video game rather than at places like this.

Not being leered at and judged by people who saw only a name, or a means to further themselves. To marry into the “illustrious family of Arc”, even though he could almost always add a mental sneer to those words.

No one cared that he was Jaune. That he felt shy and nervous around beautiful girls, that he secretly loved dancing and thus had become one of the best he could be, that he loved sugary sweet
cereals with rabbits for mascots, and indulged his parents in these parties and the displays of nobility purely to see them both smile.

Jaune Arc was, in so many words, a good son.

“Perhaps even more than one?” Nevena Arc continued, fixing the rim of his hat as she stepped away and smoothed down the pleats of her own richly golden gown. The mask that hid her face was ironic in its fine make, depicting her as a witch worn down by time from the red lines that made beautiful patterns upon the white lacquer. If he had thought his mother to be like him, he would have seen it as self-deprecation.

Instead, he knew it was a measure of her own mortality. Today was his birthday, and thus her time as the Mother was over, now she was the Crone. Even unto her dying day, however, Jaune knew no one would dare call her anything but beautiful.

That she had such a sense of humor that had been instilled within each of her eight children simply reminded him how truly loved they all were. Despite himself, Jaune smiled.

“I don’t think I’ll be so popular, Mom. But-” He cut her off as she prepared to “boost his confidence” with words of affection that only a doting mother could share, “- I will try.” He finished, affecting a proper air of pomp and circumstance accented by the “anonymity” given by the mask.

“That’s all I ask, Jaune. Now, come. Your father’s likely been driven mad with boredom by now, and your sisters won’t step down the stairs without you alongside them.”

The step down into the ballroom was filled with the sound of instruments, some of which he could even play to an acceptable degree. From the bannisters stepped the sisters still home in their own color-coded gowns and with their masks affixed with varying degrees of design and required care. Peri was the most immediately noticeable, since she still required her glasses to be worn and thus she only settled for a simple domino mask that went well with her high-worn ponytail and the gentle dress that gave life to her namesake Periwinkle color. The twins were more outrageous in their designs, horned features mixed with fanged protrusions that partially covered blue-painted lips, with the defining features being that one’s mask had a larger horn on one side over the other.
He could tell which was which by simple virtue of how they wore their hair differently. Bleu wore her’s curled, while Azula let her’s straight as a curtain of gold. Jade was more ostentatious, grinning a nearly fanged smile in far better state than the lacquered masks that the twin sisters wore by virtue of him knowing the evil that lurked behind those green eyes. A jester’s mask designs and colors standing out in stark relief from her earthy green dress.

And here he was, adorned in almost funerary black with gold and blue to accent it all. With his mother at his arm, his four present sisters curtseyed and he and his mother returned the public favor before splitting off after he bowed to her own curtsey. A server, a young brunette he knew to be one of Jade’s school friends once upon a time, offered him a glass filled with light champagne which he took and throated with ease.

The liquor content of drinks like it were just enough to offer a pleasant heat to those uninitiated to harder drinks. Perfect for a young man now in the age of majority- and likely an effort by his sisters to see him loosen up.

He hardly needed it, in his opinion. His nerves always made him reflect back on trained instincts, rather than his own nervous whims.

With their arrival, he watched the hall begin to gather around as the stage the band was upraised upon was filled with the gargantuan size of his father and shortly joined by the glowing form of his mother. While his father wore no noticeable blade, he knew beneath the skirt of her dress, his mother had her own gun strapped to a thigh.

The presence of armed guards was gauche, in her own words. That did not mean it was not necessary, just that it was better to accessorize with weapons rather than ruin the mood of their guests.

Blue eyes that had been taught by his oldest sister, mother, and father slipped over the few men and women who wore jackets alongside their attire. If it weren’t for the music, and the bustle of the crowd, he was sure he would have been able to hear the fabric straining under the weight of knives, handguns, and other such tools of death.

It almost distracted him from the hush that fell over the crowd as his parents spoke.

“Welcome to our house, honored and beloved guests. This quaint little Masquerade, hosted on the eve of our son’s manhood.” Of the family, his father’s voice was the most easy to hear in speech.
Tone-deaf to a key, all that he was, Jaune had yet to meet a better orator. He was sure they existed, however.

His mother’s lovely singing voice had been passed down to the daughters, and even he hoped that he held that sweet honeyed tone that made his father cry when his mother saw fit to sing for him.

It was a bit of personal pride, one of few he ever wore openly.

“To come all the way from distant Atlas, Vacuo, and even Menagerie, I must thank you all for celebrating this wonderful time in our family’s life. I applaud you humbly.” Jaune watched as his father’s huge scarred hands raised and clapped, the crowd joining him after a few thunderstrokes of those giant palms.

Hands that had beat him senseless time after time after he’d unlocked his Aura two years ago. Perhaps he was still a poor fighter, but if he had learned nothing else from his family, it was how to take a blow. He had been denied time at a proper Combat School, but he would not have traded time with his parents or Camillia for the world.

The hush returned, and his mother stepped up, offering a pleased smile beneath the lights that made her glitter and gleam like all the jewels of royalty. “To all of you whom I have made careful considerations,” She began, and he felt a chill roll down his spine like a melting brick of ice, “I encourage you to enjoy tonight’s festivities to the fullest. As you well know, I have given the young ladies in attendance a task that you may begin now that our son has arrived. And now he has been forewarned, so--”

He swallowed thickly past a wave of nausea.

“--May your hunt be fruitful, and may you find the beast stalking tonight’s hall.”

He tried to restrain a laugh, adoring the way she made him out to be what he was not. Sadly, it was held down by fear of what his mother may have told those “eligible ladies” in attendance.

As the music resumed again, he broke away from proximity with his family, seeing it as the only way he would go unnoticed. A huge man and a motherly woman, both adorned in black and with purple accents alongside full-head masks that did not quite hide wisps of inky black hair that fell down from the pristine white masks that looked akin to roaring wild-cats, offered commentary while he circled the dance floor as it filled with a few couples.
“This is so wonderful, Ghira.” The woman remarked, and he could only smile at the woman’s happy tone. “A party we were invited to. And it’s so cute. The masks are nice. Why, we could pretend not to know one another!”

“Except you’ve already used my name.” “Ghira” noted, using a large set of knuckles to brush the hip of the woman. Jaune had to admire the easy grace which both showcased a fond connection, a feeling he one day would desire for himself.

As the violin picked up within the band proceeding into “L’Vampyr”, a song about a man’s lust for a woman, his eyes drew to a white-haired woman wearing an elfin mask that concealed the whole of her features as she stood aimlessly by the refreshment table. A winter maiden awash in a sea of more colorful creatures, he admired the way she stared at the dance floor through the holes in her mask. The curtain of her freely worn hair only mitigated by beads woven into the sheet of white in soft blues and grays.

Feeling inspiration, he slunk up to her and greeted her with a deep bow which he put his left foot forward for, one hand at his waist while the other fist against his back. Without words, he offered her a hand and turned the features of his mask towards the floor. In offering to his own silence, she stared at him- giving him a view into ice blue eyes hidden away behind pristine white unmarked by paint or design but with exaggerated pointed ears- before softly taking his hand in one swathed in a silken elbow-length glove.

Parading her forward unto the floor, he took position in the formation that had begun to occur and started the dance. A hand cupping her hip while the other held her’s up high and proclaimed the tickling of the bow’s strings against the fine instruments.

The deep, hard bass of the drums led his steps, while she spun and twirled with him. The chorus of voices being directed to howl in delight and despair of the song’s story telling his feet when to twirl and when to die in stillness while mask stared at mask.

While young, pretty woman hid away from him, and he hid away from the dangers of his mother’s predations.

For a magical, lovely moment, he forgot. He remembered his love for dancing, and one song became a second. The whispers of faerie wings played by plucked strings, and he attacked. Joined by a few other couples, he lifted the light young woman up into the air, earning him a muted “Ah?!” as he settled her back upon her dancer’s heels and then led her into the stages of the King and Queen’s embrace.
A hand shaping to the form of her shoulderblade, another to gather the edge of her skirt as they swayed. He felt her discomfort in being so close to him, but she did not pull away.

She was, like him, trapped in this game of the King and the Queen lilting through the wonderland of snow and magic. Finally, the music changed and she abandoned him with a stiff curtsey. He watched her go with a feeling between sadness, and acceptance.

Another passed into his arms, a gown of rich chocolate brown met his eyes as he looked over his newest partner as the dancers on the floor grew synchronized once again. A fist pressed against his breast while the other swept inwards and then away as she greeted him in turn with a swirling curtsey and then pressed her back to his.

Sweet, unrelenting friction made him aware of her perfume, and of the smell of jasmine in her black hair. Equally brown eyes, the same as her gown, lilted over a cream-colored shoulder as he wound his fingers against hers and then upraised them to twirl her away and then draw her in once again as they stepped inwards and outwards from one another. The new song a gentle, playful tune that promised the birth of friendship-

-and wound its way into passionate energy. Closer now to her, and with his focus able to be on her face rather than the way she moved, he knew her immediately by the sight of a beauty mark beneath her nose and lower lip. Ah- Camillia’s old friend Ochre. He remembered her well, a mother of two now.

He offered her a smile, and her eyes glinted in return. They separated, and his next dance partner was a man of an older age, salt and pepper hair tickling into a moustache that could not be defeated by the white mask painted to look like a checkerboard that hid his cheeks and brow, but did not contain the proud mane of hair that he wore just as distinctly.

Man danced with man, and lady danced with lady. Solidarity and kinship expressed in closeness and steps that were as basic as any Waltz could be without being three steps long.

As he parted from the older gentleman with a bow, he quit the floor and moved through the crowd to where a group hogged a pair of servers with champagne flutes and small treats. He eavesdropped on the conversation as he let his gaze grace over a glass and was offered it by a man in a jacket. He nursed this glass much more gently- like an aperitif- than the first he’d put back like a thirsty man.

“How outdated.” A portly man remarked to a similarly out-of-shape woman, their conversational
partners a pair of young women likely to be the couple’s daughters from the way their hair-colors and features- from what he could see around the masks.

“I think it’s quite neat.” The younger of the two girls noted with a pleased air, “Most parties nowadays are more formal and political. This is more like something out of a romance novel. And-”

The younger girl who wore a gown of bloody red, was interrupted by what he presumed to be her sister, the other girl adorned in a more pastel pink. “-shouldn’t it be? After all. This party is the Arc’s way of finding a wife for their son before he goes to Vale to that Huntsman Academy, isn’t it? Do you think he asked for all this?”

Jaune would have loved to butt in and to insist that not a lick of this had been by his word, but he kept his mouth shut firmly as he finished his flute and returned it to the armed server, snatching a vegetable-rich bit of finger food to chew as he slipped from one section of the floor to another. In the periphery of his gaze, he saw the white-attired girl being spoken to by an older gentleman in a white suit, and he put it aside from his mind.

As he stepped around another gathering of gossipers, he spied the broad form of his father looking put off by a local politician. The hairs on his nape stood on end as he turned and raised a hand, not surprised to find Jade greeting him with the entwining of her own fingers in his and a grin that promised only pain.

Nonetheless, he obeyed her as she stepped back unto the floor to dance. The music now a heavy, overbearing tempo. “La Résistance d’Chevalier Faunus”, a piece written explicitly about his very own grandfather. A piece not to luxuriate in one’s own nobility to, but instead to condemn the evils of one’s without.

It was music written to stand against one’s foes, not to dance to. That was why so few couples remained on the floor, as a stray few men and ladies twirled and thrust their arms open wide as if accepting the condemnation.

Within the center of that mass of regret and promised protection, two siblings Arc battled with touches to the arms and shoulders. Depicting scars worn through battle, blades broken by ardent combat. It was one of the very first songs he’d ever been taught, both to play and to know the meaning of.

Family history was of the most importance, after all. A knife-like palm rested against his heart, and he cradled his wild sister’s nape with his fingers as they stepped in circles and faced one another like they participated in a duel, rather than an elegant dance.
They broke away, imploring with outstretched arms to dancers without, and then turned in again and Jade fell into his arms. The last few notes of the song droning on in the death an era of war- and any future attempts of peace.

It was a lament, one that they broke away from. Jade curtseying to him in kind as dancers rejoined the floor, and he was greeted by the woman whom had been speaking to her lover earlier. The proud visage of that snarling cat making his lips curl into a smile as she curtseyed and then kept one side of her skirts pinched while a softer tone overtook the band.

“My daughter would love you, I think.” She noted, the first all night to have spared words for him. Despite his wish to remain unknown, her comforting presence made his lips peel back over his teeth. Painted lips curled up in amusement in response.

“I’m honored,” He noted, earning a laugh like tinkling bells, “Does she hate parties, and so she didn’t come herself?”

They stepped, one foot each going outwards but towards each other as he led her through the “kicking of the heels” that some called a movement much more difficult to learn than one might think from looking at it. “Sadly, she chose another path in life.” The woman’s voice hinted at sorrow, and he could only nod his head in return.

“Then, for her, I am glad you and your husband came.” He offered an easy smile, one his sisters had insisted he never use upon a woman while his mother had uttered dark threats to her husband while he’d simply grinned in turn. Confidence is all you need. He remembered Roux Arc’s words in that moment.

The music paced back down as they spoke of inconsequential things. She and her husband were from Menagerie- and he was proud of himself for having ascertained how deep their relationship was- and they’d come to the party as dignitaries invited for their importance. He knew enough about Menagerie that he wished he could more perfectly know who he was dancing with, but the fact that she calmed him alone was enough to make him glad she came.

As her husband arrived to cut in, a bemused look on what he could see of the large man’s visible face, she curtseyed and moved unto a dance with him while Jaune returned to slinking his way back through the revelers.

Finally, he found an excuse and slipped past the band and the stage out unto the balcony. Out
amidst the stars, he could lean against the stonework and think without feeling the pressure upon his shoulders.

Two years. Two years more of training and then he would go to Beacon Academy, under the recommendation of his sister Camillia. The proximity to Ansel had been the quickest reason for his parents’ acceptance of that, and so he’d seen no reason to pry into Atlas, Haven, or Shade.

That it was considered the premiere one under the head of Ozpin himself was irrelevant. Sanus was a large continent all it’s own. Vale was, by airship, several hours away. Even with a ground vehicle, it would take the better part of a day to reach the city itself.

It would be the first time outside of family trips that he’d been away from home. Vacations to Shion, and Mistral would never compare to life in the dormitories- he already knew.

It would be freeing. To be away from the pressure of nobility that he was suffocated with here in Ansel. No one would see “Jaune Arc, son of the House Arc”, they would see just “Jaune Arc, Huntsman Trainee.”

At most, they would perhaps remember Camillia Arc, and that would be the teachers there, assuredly. He would be amongst men and women his own age.

He was not a bird in a cage, but he longed to know what it was like to be just another young man. To find love, to build glory, and- eventually- become a hero BECAUSE he was Jaune Arc, not because he was Jaune Arc.

Part of a legacy to be proud of.

As he turned to return to the party, he caught the sight of his mother standing at the door back into the ballroom, an amused smile on her lips.

“Miss Schnee won.” Nevena Arc noted, and he raised a brow behind his mask. “Two dances with her, and only one with everyone else. So, if her father will permit-”

He winced, already not liking where this was going.
“- we will invite her to come again. Her pedigree is good, and though I don’t . . . like . . . her parents, I think you would be good for her, hm?”

The fact that his mother wouldn’t approve of someone wasn’t new, though he had to wonder what the young white-haired woman’s parents were like to earn such immediate ire. Then again, the name she offered told him enough.

Schnee. Atlesian dust sellers, with news outlets all over- especially Faunus friendly ones like those surreptitiously backed by the White Fang- going on at length about their mistreatment of workers in the mines.

No, he doubted anything would come of it. That thought settled him back down.

“I don’t think it will matter.” He responded easily as he stepped away from the balcony’s edge and towards the gold-adorned form of his mother, as she offered a beatific smile that told him his self-deprecation would soon be earning him a gentle scolding.

“Probably not,” She instead agreed, “From what I know about her mother and father, the best we could hope for is a rebellious jaunt into your arms. But-” And that was when his mother’s expression warped from one of familial warmth to an expression he’d only ever seen on her when she trained him.

Calculating, cruel intent that scared him to know existed in the golden-haired woman whom had given him and all of his sisters life. “- she wishes to be a Huntress as well. Perhaps if she goes to Beacon, you will be partnered with her and grow close. Young women are much more likely to grow fond of someone who offers them stability, you know.”

He could only shake his head as they returned to the party. That was two years from now, and so he knew it was his mother simply seeing gold where only wheat existed.

True to form, Weiss Schnee did not accept an offer to return and speak of a potential courtship.

Two years passed, and Jaune found himself praying that the air sickness medicine would last the flight up to Beacon from Vale, and then he set foot upon the place where- for the first time in his life- he would grow to truly appreciate all that his family had ever done for him.
Chapter One

Chapter Summary

The pre-Initiation event.

AN: In another display of how much I love Dishwasher’s artwork, Jaune’s outfit in this story is heavily inspired by his RWBY 3.0 look.

A Family Arc

Chapter One

An Anthem of Triumph

On the bright side, Jaune lasted until he could put his feet back on solid ground before he erupted his lunch into a nearby trash bin.

The downside, the medication hadn’t worked as well as he’d hoped. Score one more for nerves and a rebellious body that couldn’t orient itself from the off feeling of his own weight.

Pulling a handkerchief from his jacket pocket, he dabbed away the mess and promptly pulled a bottle of water from his side satchel to clear the disgusting taste from his mouth. As more and more students offloaded from the Bullhead, he checked his appearance and was secretly glad he hadn’t worn his favorite hoodie and jeans.

Everyone around him was so much more dressed up, and if there was one thing Nevena Arc did not believe, it was that one could be overdressed for an occasion.

Fixing the lapels of his jacket, he let out a sigh as the crisp clack of his greave-like boots filled the air as he started down the path heading towards the city.
Only to be interrupted by the sudden sound of an explosion. He would have liked to say he didn’t panic and damn near draw Crocea Mors as a result, but that would have been a lie on his part. The sword was in his hand just as quick as he could have thought about it.

Only to see a dark-haired girl flopping down onto her back. He must have missed the goings on, though nonetheless he strutted- not ran, STRUTTED- over. “Hey, you okay?” He asked as he drew up above the girl, reaching down with a glove-clad hand.

That was when he met Ruby Rose for the first time.

+x+x+x+

“A sword and a shield, isn’t that too classic?” Ruby noted as they walked along the drive, leaving him fuming somewhat. As “fun and quirky” as the girl was, it wasn’t his fault that she had such an immensely technical mecha-shift weapon.

“I’d like to see you get some shrapnel in that thing and be unable to change forms.” He noted in return, definitely not pouting. His first friend at Beacon, and she was a weapon elitist. What was his rotten luck?

“Ah?! I would never let anything like that spoil my baby!” The red-tipped girl remarked with a frightful noise, cradling the compact form of her weapon as if it were her very own child. Then again, with how she considered the thing, she might very well treat it that way. Still, she was much more pleasant company than some. Rolling his shoulders in a shrug and trying to push away the malaise in favor of an easy grin, he moved on.

“Sure, sure. So, you must be excited for your first day at Beacon?”

“Sure am! If my sister hadn’t bailed on me, it’d be going great, too.” His attention was grabbed by that, an eyebrow raising as he regarded the girl. A fellow sibling, huh?

“What’s your sister like?” His question must have caught her off guard, as she seemed so much more defensive all of a sudden. Ah, overprotective, as well. Though he missed the signs of her looking at his face over as he turned his gaze back unto the walk as they grew closer to the auditorium the entrance ceremony was supposed to be held in.
“Er... she’s—she’s—” Her stammering was cute, though he couldn’t help but worry as to the siblings’ relationship if it was that hard to say anything about one another. Did he just step in a minefield? “She’s— the bee’s knees.” Yep, he sensed either some resentment or disappointment there.

Wincing at his faux pas and discreetly looking around to see if his mother wouldn’t somehow pop out of some portal to brain him for saying something that would upset a lady- he noted, “You don’t have to lie to me, Ruby. If you want to be friends, we can be honest with one another.”

The response he got was not what he expected. A confused, thoroughly caught off guard stare that made him wonder just what she’d been thinking. “What- no- I mean, Yang’s great, don’t get me wrong!” Ah, so he had misunderstood something. “It’s just- well- people only ever wanted to be my friend so they could get closer to her, y’know. She’s... she’s beautiful. I’m just a normal girl with normal knees.”

What?

Shaking his head, he tried to push that queer turn of phrase aside. “Ah, I see what you’re getting at. Don’t worry about that, then.” He raised an arm, offering the most casual greeting he’d come to understand- an extended fist. “I think you’re pretty cute, too, Ruby.” Oh damn, I didn’t mean to say that-

Yup, and there was the flush, too. Shit, he’d let his senses rotate into the ease of responding to a courtier. One always hid flirts, insults, and everything else between the two in other words, and here he was applying that to a girl who very likely had no clue how “high society” worked. Her nerves cleared as he let his arm rest back at his side, coughing, “Sorry, Ruby. Didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“I-it’s fine.” It sure didn’t look like it was, and he winced a lot more internally than he had before. Good job, Jaune. You try to get away from politics, and you just drag it with you, why don’t you?

It was after a few more moments of uncomfortable silence that they arrived at the auditorium, and Ruby seemed to spy someone, excusing herself in a mad dash off towards a blonde girl. Blinking, he could only laugh to himself as the scene settled in his mind. Give her some time to calm down, and maybe we can salvage it. For now, let’s listen in to the gossip.

Clack-clack-clack resounded from his feet as he slipped against the throng of people, loitering on
the edges of the groups. All he really caught was some concerns and concessions to former classmates. A few moments passed--

--“like tall, blonde, and scraggly over there.”

His brows perked as he turned, and what he didn’t expect to see was a head full of hair that he’d recognize anywhere—though this was the first time he actually was seeing her face as he started towards the group—only briefly noticing that Ruby was looking uncomfortable and the blonde—presumably Ruby’s sister—was starting to stand between the scythe-wielder and . . .

“Miss Schnee,” He noted, pleasantly, as he stopped within a few feet of the Heiress and gave her that same well-trained bow from those years ago. A fist against his waist, and the other pressed against his back, a leg cocked forward. “Why, I thought you would do anything but call attention to me after you refused my mother’s courtship agreement.”

A complicated look crossed over Weiss Schnee’s features while Ruby’s eyes lit up. In turn, the blonde woman’s face perked and looked rapidly between the other three. Jaune hated the smile that had been plastered on his face, but he hated even more the idea of disappointing his family by not addressing the insult offered to him.

He had no bad blood with the Heiress, but . . . “Do I . . . know you?” Weiss ventured, looking guarded for a moment. His “courtly smile” melted a little bit more into an easy grin.

“Maybe not face to face, but you did come to my birthday party two years ago. We even shared two dances—” Ah, there was the response he was expecting—but dreading. A look of realization flashed across her pretty—if scarred—face before her cheeks lit aflame and she took a step back from him. He relaxed his posture, keeping the hand behind his back comfortable while his other arm went limp at his side.

“Jaune Arc?!”

“The one and only.” He noted, hating how utterly—smarmy—he knew he had to sound to say such a thing. Ruby and her sister’s faces registered confusion, and he catalogued that for later.

Maybe Ruby and her sister would make for good friends.
“You- you remembered that night?” Weiss hissed, even while he remained straight in posture and- in his mother’s words- “powerful” before her agitation. One never showed an ugly face, only ever a smile. Arcs smiled, just the same as their family symbol. Of course, she had always meant in public, but it was a thing drilled into his head since youth.

A smile could be even more terrifying than a frown, or a snarl. A smile meant control, meant contentment. Something Jaune knew he had at that moment, as Weiss was showcasing her discomfort. “Why wouldn’t I?” He reached up, raking his free hand through the blonde locks at his nape as he calmed himself a little bit with the nervous tic, “It was a very nice party. Thank you for having come, and dancing with me. That you were offered a courtship arrangement was my Mom’s doing.”

His eyes lilted from Weiss’ face long enough to see how Ruby and the blonde reacted to that news. Ruby had flushed again, looking between him and the Heiress, while her sister . . .

Ah, that gleeful grin reminded him of Jade. That was bad. Weiss began to gather her senses. He saw the retreat before it even came out, the white-haired woman curtseying and noting- as pleasant in voice as she likely could garner from the “ambush”, “Well- thank your parents for having invited me and my father, Sir Arc. I- I did have a good time, but I feel I must leave, by your grace.”

He bowed his head in acknowledgement and Weiss took off immediately, having forgotten her probable “beef” with the two sisters. Shaking his head, he could only be amused at using his childhood tutoring for “good”. His gaze turned onto the two sisters, and he offered a much more lackadaisy, comfortable grin. “Well, I know Ruby already, so you must be her sister, Yang was it? Nice to meet you. Jaune Arc. Short, sweet, ladies love it.” He offered her a gloved hand, and was surprised at the strength with which it was taken.

Oww, those were his knuckles, you know. “That was smooth as hell, lover boy. I haven’t seen a girl tuck and run like that before.” Privately, he winced at what he construed to be an insult, but he knew he would let it slide. After all, this was Ruby’s sister- and the red-tipped girl seemed like she could be a good friend. “Thanks for scaring her off, though. I guess she’s got a problem with Rubes.”

He rolled a shoulder in a shrug while flexing sprained fingers, turning his gaze unto Ruby. “Seems so-” He would have continued, but the lights started to dim and the stage lit up. Throwing the two girls a thumbs up, he stepped back into the line-up and let his hands rest at his hips- feeling the safety of Crocea Mors’ sheathed form like a comfort blanket.

Up on stage, a blonde woman called attention and he settled in for a speech. They always started with speeches.
“--I see wasted potential--” Wow, fuck this guy.

+x+x+x+

As people settled down to prepare for evening- for bedding down, he stepped from the auditorium’s main theatre into the hall beyond where the restrooms were, a blonde brow raising as he saw a few students loitering around near the entrance. As he turned into the bathroom and promptly unshouldered his satchel, he unfolded a set of simple silk sleeping pants and began to undress while a few other prospects did the same. For a moment, he paused as he stood again and slung the satchel stuffed with his “hunter attire” with Crocea Mors carefully clipped to the side up unto his shoulder again, admiring himself in the mirror for a moment.

Letting out a surprisingly resigned sigh, he flexed an arm and admired the scars that decorated him in sparse places. They weren’t enough to mar him- especially amidst the students whom would see them purely as displays of his hard work- but he couldn’t help but feel the way they stood out against his abdomen and shoulders made him look . . . untrained. Rough.

It made him miss the comfort of his full-length pajamas. Camillia had made it clear under threat of death- a threat he knew well she would carry out- that he wasn’t to wear Pumpkin Pete at her old alumn.

As he tried to dismiss that soberingly dour thought, he made his way back into the auditorium and slid past a group of the other guys posturing for the girls without paying mind to the group of girls making note of it.

“Well hot damn,” He blinked, stopping as he turned his head to spy Yang and Ruby alongside Weiss and a seated dark-haired girl, “Looking good there, lover boy.” He could only snort out a laugh, surprised at the compliment. Stepping in closer to the girls- and not hearing the snarl of the men behind him- he ruffled the gold curls at his nape.

“Uh- thanks, Yang. Who is your new friend-?” He started to ask, before a set of amber eyes narrowed at him in turn. He recoiled back a step, blinking at the sharp gaze that had settled unto him. Weiss seemed ready to retreat on her own with his nearness, but now the dark-haired girl had his full attention.
An amazing prospect, considering how little Yang and Ruby were wearing.

“Jaune Arc, hm.” Oh, well, it seemed SOMEONE recognized him . . . but he didn’t know her at all. “You’re the grandson of Absinthe Arc, correct?”

He blinked, but nodded his head. Returning to a more “formal” stance, he bowed at the waist with a fist against his heart. “My pleasure to meet you, Miss. You’re perfectly correct.”

The girl’s narrow gaze evened out, and he noted the utter confusion that once again lay on Ruby and Yang’s faces. Praise the gods, the two didn’t know a damn thing about his family history, apparently. Weiss, however, was quick to escape while he was distracted. He could only feel amused at how quickly his mother’s chosen target had gone so awry.

A stable man indeed.

“I hope you’re as great a man as he was.” Jaune blinked, caught completely off guard by the phrase, though he could only recover by offering that mask of regal pleasure.

“Thank you, deeply. I’d be honored to call you a friend, sometime.” Ruby and Yang looked uncomfortable for a moment, and he had to wonder if he was the one who had gotten the most response out of the quiet looking girl yet.

“We’ll see.” It was a dismissal, and he was fine with that. He hadn’t even gotten her name- but he would rather not ruin Ruby and Yang’s perception of him with . . . more. He could try and approach her later, perhaps.

Blue eyes shot over the two sisters, Yang with her fists cocked on her hips and a raised brow while Ruby bounced somewhat on her heels with those silver eyes looking between the other two girls and himself.

“I’m gonna have to get this story later, lover boy. You must be something special to make ole Weiss Cream run off like she’s seen a ghost, and then for people to know who you are because of your family? Weird stuff.”

He winced, even while Ruby simply grinned at him in turn. “Jaune’s just cool, don’t be mean to him, Yang. You started this by catcalling him, right!” The way she leaned forward and put her
dukes up made Jaune smile. Ruby was energetic, and he felt it be infectious.

He hoped they would be good friends.

“You don’t know who he is?” The dark-haired girl perked a brow, and he looked at her, cutting a hand across his throat while grunting. She blinked at him, but the damage had been done.

“No. Should we?” Yang raised a brow at her, and he let loose a sigh. Time to retreat before his first night at Beacon was a total wash.

“I should go find a place to lay down. It was great seeing you girls again, and I’d love to talk to you again later, Miss.” And now he was the one running. Great.

Just great.

+x+x+x+

He found a more abandoned corner than the one the girls had been languishing in, and he’d pulled his Scroll out. Despite himself, his finger scrolled through the contacts until he found the one he was looking for. A soft press of his fingertip, and the connection began to establish.

After a few moments, a head full of blonde hair appeared on the other side of the screen, alongside the shoulders of a reinforced bodysuit that sloped down unto a body that spoke to the good breeding of the Arc children. Over her shoulder, mounted against a bedside table, he spied Crimson, his sister’s beloved mecha shift ranseur with a shotgun carefully constructed into the haft. From the tired look on her face, he knew she wasn’t going to be one for a long conversation.

Though, he knew that she would not have answered at all if it hadn’t been him. “Little brother.” Camillia Arc noted, blue eyes just like his own sleepily regarding him through the Scrolls video feed. “Already bedding down for tomorrow’s Initiation?”

He nodded, “Yeah. Sorry to keep you up, but- well- it isn’t . . . going well.”
“Someone recognized you?” His sister- and mentor, by virtue of being the one who had taught him the most about PHYSICALLY being a Huntsman- asked. He nodded his head.

“I ran into Weiss Schnee.” The snort of annoyance that came from his sister said enough on that matter, “And a girl who knew who our grandfather was.”

“Was she a faunus?” Camillia mused, raking a prosthetic set of fingers through the mess that was her hair, “He’s much more famous amongst the Faunus, after all.”

He blinked, but shook his head. “No, I didn’t see any traits. She was reading, though, so maybe she’s a history buff?”

Camillia snorted once again- she tended to do that when he said something stupid. “Doesn’t mean it wasn’t there. But, it’s not important anyway. You won’t want on a team with anyone who knows you.”

Again, he nodded. “Yeah. I came to Beacon to get away from . . . all that.” He glanced around, making sure that he was still firmly alone before he continued, “How are you? Do you think you’ll be back in Sanus by-”

She cut him off by raising her prosthetic arm- the left one, Camillia had been born a leftie, a sign of a curse on a family amongst Nobility- “Probably not until after the first semester is over. Things are quieting down in Mistral, but the earliest I’d be able to see you is probably in time for the Vytal Festival.”

“Will you come?” He asked, trying desperately to hide the desperation in his voice. It didn’t work, from the way his oldest sister’s hard and disciplined face melted into one of genteel adoration.

“I won’t miss it for the world, sunny. Make us all proud. Get to the semi-finals, and we’ll go celebrate with your team. I need to sleep, though. Grimm hunting tomorrow.” He muted down his glee into a light smile, and nodded with a grateful air.

“Keep some lien in your wallet. I’ll take the whole competition, Cam. Night.” They exchanged faux cheek-kisses and he let the call die as he reclined back against his satchel like it was a pillow.

Despite how worried he’d been about his first day, he found himself drifting off to sleep fairly
easily. He dreamed of younger days, and was at peace.

---

Morning came faster than he cared for. Jaune didn’t count himself a morning person by any means, and that was after training at the “ass crack of dawn” for almost five years.

Sleeping in was a blessing that he rarely got to indulge in, and worse than that, he just couldn’t do it anymore. So, giving up, he got up, snuck into the bathroom to dress and groom himself, and then promptly headed towards where breakfast was set up in the school’s dining hall. Seemingly, he wasn’t the first awake, since a good portion of people were already seated and indulging in heavier breakfasts than he thought was wise in preparation for a day like today.

They’d need the energy, but weighing your stomach down with too much was likely to end in a recanting of his own trip on the Bullhead. A bowl full of yogurt alongside an egg on toast sat more comfortably with him.

Tasted pretty good too, actually. At least he wouldn’t have to worry about terrible food while he was rooming at the Academy. A few more students filtered in- including Weiss, whom moved like a zombie towards the coffee machine- and he decided it was time to go handle business at his assigned rocket locker.

An hour before Initiation, he settled unto the bench in front of his locker and gave a last check over his armored clothing and Crocea Mors, making sure to take a whetstone and a polishing rag to both. Admiring the shine of the blade’s newly treated blade, he smiled fondly as he slid it back into the shield’s sheath function. Moving to stand, he heard a familiar set of voices and glanced up to see Ruby and her sister entering. He offered a wave towards the two which Ruby energetically returned, while Yang’s response was a more muted grin that he barely saw curl her lips.

His gaze started to turn away from the two only to walk right into a brick wall. Well- if brick walls had a lot of -bright red hair-. “Oh!”

Oww. The floor was hard, and his ass was soft.

“Are you okay?” He looked up from the floor, blinking suddenly as he lost track of -what exactly
Well, besides Pyrrha Nikos, four time champion of Mistral’s tournament scene. Holy -shit-. He wasn’t a fan or anything, but damn, you had to admire when the Gods gave you something nice.

Because- well- he was seeing a whole lot of it, right now. “Err- are you . . . okay?” Oops, he was staring. He finally took the hand she’d offered him almost a minute ago and he laughed with nervous energy.

“Ah-hah, sorry. I- ah- I wasn’t watching where I was going. But, if I did, I probably still would’ve been- ah- blinded by . . . well, how beautiful you are.”

Nailed it. The thought was sarcastic, and things only became worse when Weiss peeked around Pyrrha’s side and her whole expression seemed to alight into something he could only categorize as FUCK WHY IS HE HERE?

“Miss Schnee, good morning.” He noted, clearing his throat as he stood with more dominance in his stance. His attention turned away from the Heiress unto the red-headed Spartan, noting the way her face had flushed and she seemed- well- off guard from his words. Wait, did I nail it? PLEASE LET ME HAVE NAILED IT. YES, JAUNE, YES!

“You’re- You’re fine!” Well, that was new. Hearing the redhead stutter was just as darling as when Ruby did it. . . . And that was when he realized that he was still holding the woman’s hand. SHIT, HOW DO I ABORT?

Gently, he lowered his hand from Pyrrha’s and offered her a clumsy smile. “I totally wasn’t. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have started off with flirting with you. Jaune Arc. Short, sweet, rolls off the tongue, ladies love it.”

Well, it seemed it was about that time that Weiss finally stepped in, giving him a dour glare. “Do you know who you’re speaking to?”

He started to reply, but from the way Pyrrha’s face suddenly froze up, he let his gaze narrow. Something doesn’t add up here. “If I did, would it matter?” He- in his opinion- gently steered using his words, “A gentleman introduces himself to a lady.”
The way the redhead’s green eyes took a moment to offer him a cursory wash over his face, he had to wonder if he’d handled that as well as he’d hoped he had. Well. Fuck him running, she knew he was being catty.

Damn it, Weiss. Not that he could blame her, he’d started this fight. Oh well.

Sighing, he let his shoulders slump. “Pyrrha Nikos, four-time Mistral Tournament champion, sponsor for Pumpkin Pete Cereal- which I love by the way.” He leaned in, uttering that part in a totally not-whispering conspiratorial whisper, “- and apparently one of our classmates at Beacon. Which is just- if you don’t mind my crass language- damn cool.”

The plastic, TV-interview smile that settled on Pyrrha’s face made him frown. Ah, so it was as he feared. Damn. Well, there went his good impression. Damnit, hormones. Sighing, he waved a gloved hand as his “noblesse oblige” mask came on. “It’s great, don’t you think? The heiress of the Schnee Dust Company, a celebrity Huntress-trainee, and the scion of the House of Arc. I don’t know about you two, but I’m glad to know that we’re amongst the premiere talents.”

“I think I’d pass on being on a team with you, Sir Arc.” Ah, so Weiss had grown some fangs back since last night. It was nice to see her be more open, however, so he simply offered her a more true smile.

“I don’t blame you, Miss Schnee. After all, you don’t know anything about me, so you’d prefer a known quantity, isn’t that so?” He levered a wink at Pyrrha, and then let himself relax a bit more. “Me? I just have a family to make proud. It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Nikos. If we both make it through Initiation, I’d love to talk sometime.”

He offered her his gloved hand again, and her eyes wandered down to it. Internally, he winced. Shit.

He was about to lower his hand when she took it, a softer smile on her lips. “That would be grand, Jaune.”

Despite himself, his lips stretched into a happy grin, while Weiss’ dour look only intensified. Releasing the handshake, he offered Weiss a mild smile. “Despite my Mom’s fascination with you, Weiss-” She blinked at his usage of her first name, “- I’d love to be friends, as well. There aren’t many people here who could understand what we’ve been through. If you ever feel like it, just give me a word, alright?”
Weiss snorted, but it wasn’t as dismissive as it might have been before. He counted that a victory, and so he excused himself with a bow and made his way out towards the door. Passing by Ruby and Yang, he offered a grin and a waggle of a hand to the two.

“Mornin’, lover boy. You look damn snazzy in that suit.” Yang returned the grin with one of her own, and he patted the breast of his armored jacket.

“Thanks.” Ruby tilted her head at his attire, and he had to laugh as he saw the cogs going spinning in her head.

“Is that Dust-repellent weave?” In return to her question, he nodded. “Woah. That outfit must have cost as much as it took to make Crescent Rose.”

“Maybe.” He admitted, “It was a gift from my oldest sister.”

Ruby grinned an adorable little puppy grin that made him want to pet her head. “How many sisters do you have?”

He paused when the P.A. system rang through with Glynda Goodwitch’s voice and announced Initiation would be starting in ten minutes, he took just the time after the announcement to utter, with a grin, “Seven.”

“SEVEN SISTERS?!” Yep, that never got old.

He didn’t bother to stay for the gobsmacked looks on the sisters’ faces. He had Initiation to pass. He had to make his parents and his sisters proud. Especially Camillia- she hadn’t trained him for five years for nothing.

Or, in her words, “I didn’t kick your ass up all of Sanus and back so you’d take an L, Sunny.”
Jaune Arc couldn’t help but feel that he had spectacularly messed up his chances to make any real friends his first days of Beacon. The fact he arrived alone to the staging area for the Initiation, and that he stood alone at the platform closest to the Headmaster and the Deputy Headmistress.

The only real comfort at hand was the fact that his armored clothes and Crocea Mors wouldn’t let him down. Neither would Camillia’s training.

He hoped, anyway. His self-confidence had always been shaky, and while it had been made better by having his family’s support, it didn’t heal wounds that had existed for a long time.

Only made them more raw when rubbed against.
It . . . wasn’t like Ruby and Yang were avoiding him, were they? He could understand Pyrrha and Weiss, but-

-he felt terribly alone all of a sudden. It made him miss his family, and he’d just talked to Camillia before bed last night.

Maybe he wasn’t cut out for this.

“-You’ll receive your teams today.” He tuned back into the words of Headmaster Ozpin, his lips curling down into a frown of distaste. “The first person you meet eyes with down in the Emerald Forest will be your partner for the rest of your tenure at Beacon.”

Shit. And he’d done his most impressive in alienating any potentially great teammates. Pyrrha or even Weiss would have been ideal, since both could see where he might have come from and they could have bonded over it. Ruby, despite her “bumpkin” status, would have been excellent as well.

Hell, he’d have taken Yang. The only person he had something resembling a pleasant interaction with had been the dark-haired girl with the bow.

He winced at that thought. Only because she’d known his grandfather. That had . . . done more than just put a bad taste in his mouth.

Being compared with his grandfather, a hero amongst both humans and Faunus alike- though more Faunus remembered Absinthe Arc than humans since there had been a great many famous figures on the human side of the Revolution.

Camillia was right. Something didn’t add up about that. For the life of him, he didn’t know what. And so he resolved to stay as far away from her as he could, if only because he knew the girl wouldn’t understand why that would upset him.

“-in the Northmost reach of the forest lay ruins with artifacts inside, the goal of your little test. We will supply you with the delivery of your person, but you’ll come up with your own landing strategy.”
Great. Now he was falling. Not even with grace or style, like Camillia insisted one should always try to exit a mobile Bullhead with. It took him a rotation before he mitigated his spin and got Crocea Mors in his hands. *Okay, just like Cam taught you. Push it all out, and tuck and roll to mitigate the Aura damage.*

He was thankful that he could adjust his trajectory a little bit so he avoided the tree that promised to end that sensible plot, and the sight of the ground coming up faster and faster was met with an instinctive reaction that he was sure would have put a grin on his mother’s face.

The fact he still was sure he’d be bruised as his shoulder hit earth and he tucked himself in, rolling several times to bleed off momentum and keep from pancaking into the grass and dirt, before coming up unto his feet panting and worn.

“Well.” He noted, looking around, “That could have gone way worse. Alright- no Grimm yet, so the first thing we do is orient ourselves, and.”

Just as he was going to check to see where the sun sat in the sky, he heard the growling of creatures he knew not to be gentle forest fauna.

“. . . Pardon my language, but fuck me.” His words were answered with further growling and the arrival of a pair of Ursa that made him wonder where in his life he’d blown up a glass factory for him to have such rotten luck. The sound of gunshots came from nearby as he once again tucked inwards, his shield brought in to guard his body while he drew back Crocea Mors to prepare it for a swing. The furor of combat settling over the suit-clad Arc’s mind as he closed in on one Ursa while the other absent-mindedly flanked to his side. *Swing, follow through. Grimm aren’t like people, remember what Cam said.*
He threw away the clawed arm that tried to crush him beneath the weight of its meaty swing, and his greaves steadied him with their weight as he spun, blocking the second Ursa’s swing while the shining blade’s length caught in the neck of the beast-

-and momentum helped it follow through, severing the head of the creature and leaving him down one enemy. The other had recovered and was already preparing to try and take advantage of his distraction with killing the first. A more sensible Huntsman might have ducked out of the way of the swing, but Jaune had been drilled into the ground by Camillia Arc.

He stepped into the force of the creature’s broad swipe, pushing the rim of his heater shield up against the arm of the creature and then bringing it back across, sending out a resounding thunderclap as the ancient and sturdy make of the shield crushed into the masked creature’s face and sent it stumbling without the aid of its forelegs to balance it.

He brought his other hand to the hilt of the ancestral blade and carved through with a shout of war. As the shade of the evil creature fumed and smoked before crumbling away into dust, he let loose a breath of relief.

“Now!” He noted, throwing his arms out wide. “Orient myself and-”

“So there you are.” *SON OF A BITCH*- He turned at the sound of a familiar voice, and stared into a pair of mild amber eyes, a much more dressed black-haired woman greeting him as he let his arms rest back at his sides.

*This can’t get worse.* He thought, feeling despair flood him for a moment. The exact person he hadn’t wanted to pair up with had apparently sought him purposefully out.

x+x+x+x

“Achoo!” Pyrrha Nikos rubbed her nose, blinking at the sudden onset of a sneeze.

“You okay, P-money?”

“Yes, I’m fine, thank you.”
Letting out a sigh, he sheathed Crocea Mors and settled the blade at his hip once again, noting, “Well, if you’re going to be my partner, can I at least get your name, finally, Miss . . .?”

She gave him a mild look, and he privately wondered just what the woman’s mannerisms were. It was like every question was being seen as a step away from an interrogation, and for the life of him he couldn’t even see why. After a few moments of him standing his ground, she seemed to deflate a bit and nod. “Blake Belladonna.”

He paused, blinking. “Wait.” Things started to make a whole lot of sense suddenly.

The secrecy, knowing his Grandfather by name—well, that and the black hair. Sure, he hadn’t seen the couple’s faces, but it was a simple fact of the matter to know whom had come to his party that year. After all, only one pair had come from Menagerie, and his mother had been very careful to play up the anonymity at the party—keep close tabs on who actually DID arrive.

The sudden defensiveness from her didn’t make it all better. But, at this point, they were stuck together, and—well—if they were going to have a working relationship, he should at least be up front about things.

“As in, the daughter of Ghira and Kali Belladonna? The Chieftan of Menagerie’s daughter? As in, the girl whose mom I danced with two years ago?”

If she’d expected something else, it certainly didn’t show, her face going somewhat limp in expression. “You— you what.”

He had to admit it was cute on her. She looked so serious that it was something of a victory to have one over on her after she’d ambushed him the night before. “Yeah. Your mother came to my birthday party with your father. We had a very nice dance and talked for awhile.” He very purposefully axed the fact that she’d said the girl in front of him would have liked him, however.

He hadn’t yet developed a taste for shoe leather, no matter how he seemed really good at fitting the damn things in his mouth.
“She what?” He couldn’t help but laugh. Well, at least he had something up over his mysterious new partner. It was hard to imagine this cool and collected girl as being related to the Kali Belladonna he’d met that night, though. Not that he’d gotten to know either part of the couple particularly well, but Kali was . . . warm. Motherly. Then again, she’d talked about how her daughter had “chosen another path”. It couldn’t have been the life of a Huntress, since she was here at Beacon now.

A mystery to be unravelled later, when they weren’t in the midst of a Grimm-infested forest. “I’ll tell you about it later, if you want. For now, we have more important things to do.”

And if he was lucky, maybe he could at least salvage a team besides Blake.

“You’re right.” Blake agreed, though her eyes darted to him every so often as they started their trek northward. In the end, he counted that as a win. They were even, in his eyes.

If it would stay that way, he didn’t know. As he stepped through brush and heard more sounds of scuffling, he mused if it was wise to approach and see if they could double up on manpower. His gaze turned towards Blake, noting how she drifted close to him-

-but by no means close enough to do anything more than . . . be nearby. What was with that attitude? She’d sought him out, hadn’t she? Why was she being so off-putting?

“I take it you’d rather head straight to the objective, instead of go help?” He asked, crossing his arms as he studied his partner. The sound of shotgun blasts filled the air, and for a moment he feared his mother had come around and decided Beacon was going to be too dangerous for him.

“I’ll do whatever you want to do.” Blake remarked, a pensive look on her face that only irritated him more. What is -up- with this girl? He wondered, shortly before drawing Crocea Mors and letting his feet start to carry him towards the sounds of battle.

On the bright side, he took only a glance back at her and saw her with her weapon ready, following along like she was used to it her whole life. That only further raised the mystery surrounding the young raven-haired woman, though. What -happened- to you, Blake Belladonna?

They arrived just in time to see Pyrrha and Yang running away from a Deathstalker, Yang shouting enthusiastically, “We can totally take it, Pyr!”
“I’m sorry, Yang, but I don’t think we can!” Well, if Pyrrha Fucking Nikos said it, he would have been inclined to listen, but he had a feeling Yang didn’t have an appreciation for her partner’s battle wisdom. Still, Yang and Pyrrha- what an odd, if quaint, combination.

“You have a gun?” He asked Blake as he turned and skidded his way into a full out sprint perpendicular to the fleeing Huntresses, “Take a pot shot at it’s eye and let’s see if we can redirect it and lose it in the growth.”

[This Will Be The Day]

If he’d looked, he would have seen Blake’s incredulous stare before she let out a grumble and did as asked. The shot didn’t do any damage to the creature, but it did draw it’s attention.

Well, at least that part worked. “Yang! Pyrrha! Slip into the trees and we’ll circle north!” He yelled out to the retreating Huntresses, knowing Camillia would have scolded him for ruining his tactical advantage in favor of saving the two.

The fact she would have used it to kill the Deathstalker and save them regardless was just the difference between a Huntress a decade older than him and Jaune Arc.

“Lover boy?! Well, alright! You sound like you’ve got a plan!” He wasn’t going to ruin her illusion. Pyrrha didn’t vocalize her response, but she took off to the side alongside her partner, so he’d take what he could get.

With the Deathstalker barreling full force towards him and Blake, he cocked his head and shouted back to his partner, “When I brace myself, get ready to kick off!” He warned, waiting for the Deathstalker to finish it’s lunge before he took the moment to drop to a crouch and raise his shield at an angle. Blake seemed to get the overall gist, tucking herself in tightly as she did a graceful somersault which led to her booted feet landing on the “meat” of his shield. With a huff and an exertion of his Aura, he vaulted her up into the treeline before breaking off into a run.

“Catch up with them! We need room to fight that thing, or we need to lose it!”

With the Grimm on his heels, he pushed more of his aura into focus in his legs, letting out a huff with each stronger leap as he craned his head to take in how the creature was advancing after him.
Sadly, it seemed he wasn’t gaining much ground with the creature, even with it having to bat away trees in order to keep pace with him in the foliage. *Shit, this thing is persistent.* As he hooked a hand around a tree limb and hoisted himself up as the Deathstalker knocked into the treeline once again, he bolted upwards and forwards into a clearing, tucking and rolling to maintain momentum as he came up and took note that they weren’t the only people within.

A dark-haired male and a red-haired girl seemed suitably shocked as he took note of Blake, Yang, and Pyrrha heading towards an outcropping of stone ruins. A huge claw crashed into the ground behind him, spattering clumps of dirt and glass against his back while he caught himself back up.

“Move it, move it!” He howled as another pair cleared the treeline, a shout that he didn’t register crossing his ears as he tried to think of how best to deal with the new hanger-on.

Ah, so Weiss and Ruby were with the other two. That made things convenient, at least. He saw a stone bridge leading to a path beyond. Well, using the environment to one’s advantage was a suitable tactic according to his sister and all of those tactical lessons he’d studied.

“Yang!” He called out, digging in his heels as he hit the other end of the bridge and the Deathstalker caught up enough to raise it’s massive glowing stinger- “With me!”

The sound of a loud screech told him that his friends’ team must have brought their own problems with them. Oh well, he couldn’t worry about that, now--

A blur of yellow and brown joined him as he ducked the stab that would have speared him clean through, back-handing his blade back into the soft flesh above the venomous sting. “Hit the bridge supports!” His own shout was only mitigated somewhat by the creature’s hiss of pain.

“What?!” It did sound crazy, he had to admit, but as long as the thing was loitering on the rickety stone bridge-

“DO IT!” He caught in his peripheral view the sight of Yang cocking her gauntlets with a practiced move, and then ducking to the side to send a set of dust shots at the more tore up looking pillars holding the bridge up.

It wasn’t enough damage to send it all careening down below, but it did offset the thing’s balance and make the Deathstalker have to widen it’s stance and hold tight to the edges of the bridge. Sliding
forward on his haunches, he directed his blade towards the softer part of the jaw of the creature, stabbing into flesh and watching as it reared back up, letting him dislodge his blade while a set of bullets began to pour into the creature’s face.

*Oh gods, thank you.* He mentally praised, glad that Blake and Pyrrha at least were keeping up with what was going on. As he hooked himself back unto his feet and began to scramble back towards solid ground--

“Siege the castle!” He blinked at the enthusiastic shout as the red-haired girl from before swung back around while he heard more gunfire in the background. A grenade launcher held in her arms as she delivered a set of pretty pink explosions to the messed up pillar and sent it finally shattering.

As the Grimm began to fall into the abyss, he could only breathe a sigh of relief.

“Jaune!”

*Ruby?*

That was the thought he got out before his Aura registered a hit and he was knocked from his feet, gritting his teeth as he was knocked onto his front and scrambled up and away from where he’d been languishing in the thrill of adrenaline. Spying a set of huge quills having feathered his position, he was glad he only suffered damage from one. Turning his gaze skyward, he noted the addition that Ruby and her friends had brought on. A Nevermore that was frankly about as big as a Bullhead.

“Oh what the fu-”

He turned and hauled ass right behind Yang and the red-headed girl in pink, wishing for a moment that he had something more appropriate than a sword and shield. His mother and most of his sisters would have teased him for that thought. Nonetheless, there wasn’t much he could do beyond follow along with the rest of the group as they tucked in against a set of pillars, finding himself next to Pyrrha while across from them were Blake and Yang- with Ruby alongside the black-haired boy and Weiss with the red-head with the grenade launcher.

Well, at least they had enough of a team to deal with this mess, he hoped. “We’re gonna need to get up closer to it!” He yelled across to the others.
“I think I have this!” Ruby responded, and he nodded.

“Just say what you need!” He liked her confidence—one could rarely go wrong with confidence. That said, however, they had to duck back out of their cover sooner or later. He turned his head and nodded to Pyrrha, who gave him a somewhat staggered look.

“Come on, you can be mad at me for flirting with you later. Let’s kill a Grimm first.” With his piece said, he ducked out of cover and missed Pyrrha’s confused look as he kept pace with the others. A series of gunshots rang out behind him as the creature began to fire its pinioned payload towards them, a few were deflected by his shield while others were left in the dust.

He was going to really need a breather after all this, though. Adrenaline only counted for so much.

[Red Like Roses, Pt. 2]

“Weiss! Ren, Nora—” Ah, so that was the pair’s names—“brace up and let’s get it up against that big building!” He knew he had a good feeling about Ruby. Snickering breathlessly to himself, he chanced a glance back at the rest of the partners.

“We’ll get you an opening! Yang, kick off of us!” He sank to a knee and prepared himself for a repeat of his trick with Blake, turning his gaze towards Pyrrha to see if she understood—

—and feeling a distinct swelling of pleasure as she pressed her back to his and got her own shield in position. It felt good to be able to work with someone, in comparison with feeling alone.

Even if he knew it wouldn’t last when they no longer had a foe to face. Yang vaulted up unto their shields and readied as he pushed his Aura into his legs again and braced to power her up towards the swooping bird creature. “Heave!” He growled out as he and Pyrrha leapt up and sent Yang flying with the blonde girl letting out a hoot.

He raised his shield up to cover his eyes from the sun as he watched Yang land and brace herself against the creature’s open maw, beginning to deliver point-blank rounds into the creature’s throat and sending it careening towards the earth. More gun-shots rang out as a blur of rose-petals and bullets raced over his head and he watched as the immense blade of Ruby’s scythe hooked into the creature’s neck while Yang abandoned her position to fall towards the grass.
“Blake!” He yelled out, knowing that he and Pyrrha weren’t ready to go rescue the blonde. He’d have to trust the black-haired girl to make up for it. Watching Blake gracefully sprint to bleed off Yang’s falling momentum with a series of what could only be some kind of Semblance- what the hell were those? Clones?- he missed Ruby’s victory over the creature entirely.

He didn’t mind missing the show. They’d gotten through that hectic battle with only some exhaustion, it seemed. His attention turned onto the headless corpse as it landed heavily on the building beyond with a triumphant Ruby posing happily with Crescent Rose raised up high.

Unable to help himself, he started to laugh. Next to him, a voice joined and he looked shocked as he saw Pyrrha Nikos, the Invincible Girl, smile through her giggles.

+x+x+x+

The walk back towards the shrine to the North was more relaxed in a larger group. Safety in numbers was a time-honored tactic, and Jaune had to admit that his mood had improved significantly after a few moments to catch his breath and a few meager skirmishes with some Beowulves or Ursae. As they came upon the clearing that showcased a set of pedestals with the “relics” upon them, he was stopped by an outstretched arm.

Following the svelte limb, he raised an eyebrow at Blake as the others walked ahead. “What is it, Blake?”

“You know who I am.” She remarked, and he could only look confused. “That means you know what I am.”

Ah, right. Camillia had been right about that, after all. She’s a Faunus. I feel stupid now. He shook his head, clearing those despondent thoughts. “What about it?”

Her amber gaze narrowed, and he could only wonder what he’d said wrong this time. “Can you . . . not tell anyone?” He blinked.

“That you’re . . . a faunus?” He whispered the last part, trying to reason out why she would be so against letting others know of her heritage. It seemed- well- counterproductive. Then again, as he
thought about it, he could see how that might compare to his own “secret”.

“Yes. Can you keep it a secret?” The serious way she stared at him let him deflate a bit more, shoulders slumping until he eventually nodded.

“Sure. If you want me to. Though, I don’t think anyone will judge you for it. And, even if they did, I wouldn’t let anyone do anything to you.” He would protect her, if need be. Even if they hadn’t exactly got off on the best foot, Jaune was a better man than that.

“I know you would.” She remarked, and if she’d left it there, he might have felt good about it. “-you really are your grandfather’s blood.”

And just like that, the tenderness in the moment was soured and he let his gaze drift away, wondering if she saw the way he tensed up as he brushed past her and heard her fall into step with him. In a haze, he grasped one of the relics at random and turned towards the others, holding it aloft-and noting it was a gold-painted Knight chess-piece.

Ruby and Nora both cradled a Rook piece in gold, and he saw that Yang was settling another Knight into Pyrrha’s hands. With a weary smile, he could at least privately be glad that his friends had all succeeded. He threw the excited little Reaper a thumbs up before his mood dampened again. Now just to get back to the cliffs where it’d all began.

+x+x+x+

The only one to try and engage him in conversation as they went back had been Ruby and Yang. Ruby had been all smiles the way back to the steep incline they’d used to climb, talking animatedly about how well their plans had both worked out. Yang had simply gave him a slap on the back and a big grin, but the less she said, the more he was glad to at least seem friendly with her.

As the partners that had passed Initiation gathered once again in the auditorium, he let himself slump a bit against the upraised stage. He’d definitely be making a call again, feeling dejected and defeated despite his apparent victory.

He’d gotten exactly the kind of person he hadn’t wanted to end up partnered or teamed with. Someone whose expectations and thoughts of his family lineage completely overwhelmed his own
presence- that thought made him terribly sober as the announcements of teams began. CRDL, containing Cardin Winchester- another noteworthy young Huntsman, the son of Vale’s own Councillor Winchester. Two more teams whom he let his thoughts drift away from-

Ozpin’s lips pursed and the words came out, “Ruby Rose, Weiss Schnee, Nora Valkyrie, and Lie Ren, who obtained the White Rook pieces-” Wait, hadn’t those pieces been gold? “- will form team Rainbow, R-W-N-R, led by Ruby Rose!”

Rainbow?! Still, perking up a bit, he applauded for Ruby, who was jumping from foot to foot while next to her Weiss looked dejected. An arm came forth from Nora, giving the white-haired girl a light pat on the shoulder and an enthused grin which seemed to mitigate her sadness somewhat.

“And last, Jaune Arc-” He blinked, perking up again, “- Blake Belladonna, Pyrrha Nikos, and Yang Xiao-Long, who collected the White Knight pieces, will form team Juneberry, J-B-P-Y. . .”

No. This couldn’t be. This couldn’t get worse. His gaze turned, noting the stoic face of Blake as she led the way up onto the stage with him just behind Yang and Pyrrha. “Led by Jaune Arc.”

That . . . that was something at least. Leader of his own team.

Even if the only one on the team he foresaw himself getting along with was Yang, and that was cursory at best.

Beacon was going to be a misery. As three sets of women’s eyes rested on him, he grit his teeth steadily into a smile. “Thank you, Headmaster.”

“Great job, young man.”

Why then, was it that he felt like anything but?

Chapter End Notes

From Shadows, Come (K)night

[Intro]
[Verse 1, Jeff Williams (Jaune)]
Birthed within
Silver platters and fine silks
Just a cage of gold
Content to be crushed

(Casey Williams, Blake)
Stripped of all rights
Just a lesser being
Crushed by cruel ruthless human rule

(Both; [Jaune])
When it started
All we wanted was a chance to live our lives
Now in darkness [Bringing forth the Light]
Taking everything we want and we will rise
We'll rise
We'll rise

(Chorus; [Jaune])
From shadows [Into the light]
We'll descend upon the world [Striving for what's right]
Take back what you stole [I won't stay a prisoner]
From shadows [Into the light]
We'll reclaim our destiny
Set our future free
And we'll rise
And we'll rise
Above the darkness and the shame
Above the torture and the pain [The oppression and the chains]
Above the ridicule and hate [The expectations and the fame]
Above the binding of our fate

[Verse 2, Jaune]
Called unworthy
A puppet on gilded strings

(Blake)
Stupid mutts and
Nothing but pure evil
Primal, bloodshed, that's all that's left to do

(Both; [Jaune])
We're misguided [Feeling lost inside]
Treated us like we're criminals and we should hide [Crushed beneath the heel of society]
Born indicted [Born convicted]
Tired of being pushed around and we will fly
We'll fly
We'll fly

[Chorus] (Both; [Jaune])
From shadows [into the Light]
We'll descend upon the world [Face our destiny]
From shadows [into the Light]
We'll reclaim our destiny [and we will fly]
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

It hurts before it gets better.

And . . .

A Family Arc

Chapter Three

The Bird in the Gilded Cage,

And the Mine

He didn’t know what he expected, but this hadn’t been it. A week passed after Initiation, and the quiet in JPBY’s dorm room was suffocating even still. Against his desires, Yang had spent most of her time with Ruby rather than in their own space. Blake had been distant, though she’d always stayed so close to him that some had come to describe her as a sycophant to him. The shadow to the “Scion of Arc”.

The fact that some of his other classmates had come to know of his importance, of whom he was, could only be attributed to Cardin Winchester’s attempts to make nice with him. That would have been fine-

-if Cardin Winchester wasn’t an insufferable piece of trash who stood against everything the Arc family existed for since his Grandfather’s time keeping the peace for Human and Faunus alike. Jaune didn’t particularly revile racists, but the brunette male seemed to do everything he could to piss him off.

He wouldn’t apologize for his language this time. It was quite literally how it could be described. Picking on faunus team-mates and those under him, he was a bully through and through.

The kind of person who made Jaune want to punch him in the throat. The only thing keeping him from doing so being basic civility.
And Pyrrha . . . he’d thought erroneously that their little connection on the field of battle might have improved things, but the redhead was just as wary and distant as Blake was- though without using him as some kind of shield.

That was a small miracle, at least. They hadn’t spoken more than brief greetings and little partings since classes had begun, and so he’d found the only solace in calls with his mother and sister Camillia. Between the two, he’d only dared to tell Camillia the circumstances at Beacon- whereas with Nevena Arc he’d purely tried to keep everything a secret.

A call just like the one he was on now, in fact, as Camillia held up her prosthetic limb and fine-tuned its responses using a small dust-powered tool. He’d taken to hiding away on the roof of the Academy when he was on the Scroll- lest . . .

Lest he be seen crying, if he was honest. Little manly pride could be broken just by that admission. A leader was meant to be the glue holding a team together, and it seemed for all the world that the person who suffered the most from the arrangement was -him-.

Camillia hated it when he cried, she said as much whenever he did. He couldn’t help that he was so emotional. It had just been his nature since youth.

Even just having her presence, through a Scroll, helped him to ward away the darkest of his thoughts. The loneliness, and his failures ate away at him with each passing night. Ruby was having so much more success than he was, and thus was irrevocably busy because of it. He saw the little Reaper every day at lunch, and she and Weiss seemed to have ironed things out after a rough patch at the start- likely thanks to Nora and Ren’s help since it seemed the two were directly responsible for aiding the Heiress in chilling out a little bit after the initial team assignments.

People gossiped that team JBPY was amongst the strongest in the first year, but no one saw the isolation that was forced upon them. Blake by her refusal to open up, Pyrrha by her mistrust of him, and Yang squirreling away to enjoy her time away from the team that should have been her primary focus to begin with.

Was he being unfair to ask that? Maybe. But, as well as they did in team tactics displays, he steadily began to drag them down.

Why bother trying to direct people who only listened to him because no one else would speak up? Why try to excel when everything he did was only attributed to his placement by birth within the
same bloodline as Absinthe Arc, Roux Arc, or even greater names?

Why do anything?

“You’re miserable, Jaune.” It was rare that his sister used his name. Almost all of his sisters indulged in pet names, or teasing epithets. Blue eyes firm on his face through the view screen as she finally put the tool down and let her hands rest on the desk she’d been sat at when he called. The evening sky was beautiful, and he could only lament how it should have been a perfect night for something more romantic.

Something less . . . fucked up than this.

“You should drop out.” Jaune could only recoil as if struck, horrified.

“This- this is what I’ve wanted for years, Cam, how can you say that-?!”

“Because you look ready to kill yourself.” His sister noted, completely and deadly serious as he realized just how true that was.

He couldn’t hardly drag himself out of bed to go to classes. Even a pleasant interaction with Professor Port, thanking him for a lovely dance at his birthday party two years ago which had led to a bunch of gobsmacked looks amongst his classmates, had only been a drop of water against a barren desert.

He felt no improvements during spars, training didn’t clear his mind. In fact, he’d even had his beloved guitar delivered from home and all he could do was begin to strum and . . . just feel numb.

“You can always re-apply, Jaune. But you can’t do this anymore.” Camillia pulled no punches, not like he ever expected her to. Her love had always been of the “tough” variety, and while he was thankful for just how that had helped him develop as a warrior, he knew without a doubt that she would never say anything that she didn’t firmly believe to be to his benefit.

As his head fell into his hands, he failed to keep his composure and his shoulders shook.
He hated it when she was right.

The shadows of the roof seemed even heavier as he stood and offered Camillia the customary farewell of projected cheek-kisses, and he turned towards the door back down into the dorms.

+x+x+x+

He was unsurprised to find himself arriving to a quiet dorm, the only one still present was Blake, reading from her latest novel. A pair of amber eyes perked over the cover at him, and then promptly returned to the text on the page. He would have put money that if he checked RWNR’s dorm, he’d have found Yang there having a grand time teasing Weiss and Ruby, and getting into arm-wrestling competitions with Nora. Pyrrha, if he had to guess, would be training and exercising until lights out, slipping into the room and into bed long after he’d collapsed unto his own bed.

It was exactly the same as it had been all week. Deciding it was better to confront the issue one person at a time, he cleared his throat. “Blake?” He asked, trying to keep his voice even as the ravenette’s face rose to meet his gaze again. “Do . . . you mind if we talk, real quick?”

“I suppose so. What can I do for you?”

He settled unto the foot of her bed, letting his hands knit together. He hadn’t worn his hunter’s attire to go up to the roof, just his silk pajama pants and a loose tank-top that didn’t appeal the way it could have if it’d stretched against his body.

A shaky breath followed. He tried to think of how to phrase it, how to bring the idea to light. How to pick at the lock of the cage he’d helped build for himself.

“I’m thinking of leaving Beacon.”

Silence reigned in the room.

After a few moments of quiet, his gaze turned towards the dark-haired girl, fearful of what he might find. Disappointment, disgust- his brain was willing to come up with any myriad of things she could have felt that would have made the situation worse.
So that was why he was surprised to see her staring at him, aghast.

“Why?” Finally, she asked, long after his eyes had turned back unto his scarred and trained hands, tears threatening to cloud his vision again.

“Because I’m not happy.”

He didn’t look to see her face scrunch up further in confusion. He had already lost the battle against his own emotions, once again covering his face in shame as he started to sob.

“What? What do you mean? Why are you not happy?” Her voice barely registered on his conscious as he could barely hear himself past the thundering of his own heart and the disgusting taste of salt and mucus as he lost every little bit of grace that had been instilled in him since youth.

His parents would have been disappointed in him for looking so ugly.

He just wanted his mother to hug him and tell him everything would be alright. He’d even take his father’s discomfort with physical affection in that moment.

He’d take anything but this. This weakness, this public display of shame and -hurt-.

“They hate me, Blake.” He shuddered out, breathless.

“Who?” If he’d looked, he would have seen the Faunus’ confusion growing into outright concern. Might have been able to read her mind and see her wonder whom had been treating the “vaunted son of Arc” badly enough that he would arrive and cry to her.

The blonde-haired warrior who she had . . .

*Been using to keep herself safe.*
“All of you.” He uttered, and he could hear the stagger in her breathing, even if he couldn’t muster the courage to look at her. Couldn’t see the way she curled her legs up in defense, her bow flattening with the ears beneath pinning back against her head.

“What? Don’t be ridiculous, Jaune, I don’t hate you at all.”

And he began to laugh. Not a sound of joy, but the rushing air escaping a broken heart. “No. You don’t even know who I am.”

He was breathless as he finally looked at her, seeing the way she looked like a beast about to pounce on a predator it knew it couldn’t beat. “You’re . . . Jaune Arc.” She noted, softly, as if not understanding.

“Aren’t I just?” He said, feeling numbness wash over him as his mind shut down to save itself the self-inflicted pain. He started to stand, and felt his knees begin to buckle.

He didn’t even have the strength to stand on his own two feet just then. So, rather than save himself or fall back unto her bed, he simply let himself sink to the floor on his ass.

“You’re not making sense.” Blake accused, and in that moment, he didn’t care.

He reflexively tried to laugh again, but he choked on air. He put his hands out and tried to push himself up unto his legs-

-and stumbled and just laid flat against the cool floor of the dorm room instead. For a moment, the defeat made him want to just stay there. Damn the comfort of a bed, or of pretending.

Of his pride, his senses- damn it all.

x+x+x+x

“I’m not him.” He uttered, finally, quietly hoping that Blake would just kill him and get it over with. Or maybe Pyrrha. Someone to put him out of this funk.
“You’re not who?” Blake asked after what felt like minutes and his shoulders stopped shaking while he rested his face against the floor, luxuriating in the comfort of the cool wood floor soothing his heated face.

“Absinthe Arc. Or Roux Arc. Or, hell, even Nevena Arc. I’m not just the name Arc, Blake.” He spat into the floor.

“Y-you’re not.” She agreed. Up on her bed, Blake marked her book and sat it on her bedside table, slipping from the safety of her “sanctuary” to look down on the man looking . . .

Like he had given up. And for a moment, Blake wondered if his words were true. For that heartbeat, she felt like she had done this.

This was her fault in some way.

“Jaune . . . come on, get up off the floor. What’s the matter?” A bleary blue eye opened, and he looked at her hand as she offered it down to him. A woman in a yukata, and a man looking like a wreck waiting to explode.

There was no nobility in this “Jaune Arc”. Just a young man who had been defeated and killed.

There was no cheeky grin, no quiet confidence in his ability hard-earned. Only a teenager.

Quietly, his arm reached out to her, and she pulled him from the floor, letting out a soft little grunt as his weight shifted against her and she had to wrap her arms around him just to keep him from bowling them -both- over onto her bed.

He stank of tears, one didn’t need an enhanced sense of smell to be able to tell.

It was disappointing to see the Scion of Arc like this. It made her wonder just what had brought her to choose him to shadow and choose as her partner during Initiation-
and that was when it hit her the hardest. The discomfort when his name was said, the way he steadily grew more and more distant as Pyrrha hid away from him, as Yang stayed away from the team. As girls flocked to him and team CDNL played up friendly actions towards him to earn displays of public favor.

The exact same thing she’d been doing since the start.

He’d run away from her when she’d brought up his ancestry, and his attempts to grow close to her- to open up- had been rebuffed. Her wariness had taught him that she couldn’t be trusted-

-in fact, it’d taught him that she couldn’t be trusted at all. It explained everything about his reaction to her being his partner.

She’d become the very thing she hated most- the only difference being that he wasn’t a Faunus, and it wasn’t racism.

Or, at least, it hadn’t been initially.

In a way, it was the same ignorance that helped separate the two peoples. And, for a skip of her heart, she didn’t begrudge him when he began to sob again and cry into her shoulder. He was so heavy against her, and so tall-

-but he felt so very fragile right then, in her arms. Like someone needed to protect him, rather than the way many viewed him- especially she herself had believed.

She hadn’t built this partnership out of trust, only out of necessity. To use him as a guard against suspicion, against attention.

Adam would have been damn proud of her, and that thought alone made her disgusted with herself.

His weight against her went dead, and she realized his sobs had tapered off into heaving sighs of unconsciousness. She couldn’t maneuver him herself, but-
The door into their dorm bedroom opened then, showcasing another blonde who looked on the scene with a startled expression, before smearing into a grin. “Wow, Blake, I didn’t know you liked him that much.”

It was out of courtesy to how serious the situation was that she didn’t immediately throw him to the floor and try to disabuse Yang of the notion. “Yang, he’s heavy, please help.” She uttered instead. She was thankful when the brutish brawler’s teasing expression melted away in favor of more of that shocked face. She kept him upright long enough for the blonde to come over and hook one of his limp arms over her shoulder in kind, and together the two women helped push him to collapse unto his bed rather than in the middle of the floor once again.

“What’s going on, Blake?” Yang finally asked, a pair of serious purple eyes settled on her, and she took a deep breath.

Did she dare? Could she? Perhaps it was the ONLY way she could, in fact.

“Let’s . . . go out into the common. I need some tea if we’re gonna talk about this.”

+xxx+x+

“So talk. What happened?” Yang started as soon as Blake had finished brewing a single cup of tea from Menagerie, longing for the comfort of something familiar after a sudden dose of reality outside of what she’d already experienced.

“Jaune . . .” She trailed off, growing even more unsure of herself as the seconds ticked by. Yang’s steadily more unimpressed expression wasn’t helping matters.

It took a steadying breath. “Jaune thinks we hate him.”

Yang looked confused again, and Blake couldn’t really blame her. Yang didn’t know, nor see, what she now knew and had just seen. “What, that’s crazy. He’s a pretty cool dude.”

And it was in that moment, Blake knew what she had to say- even though she hated the thought of putting the focus on herself. “Then why are you always in RWRN’s dorm?”
Yang flinched as if slapped, even while her lips pulled back into a snarl. “Because Ruby’s my sister, and-”

“She’s right across the hall.” Blake finished for her, taking a moment to nurse a sip from her cup of tea. “None of us . . . know anything about each other, Yang.”

Not that she was blameless in that. But, at least with Jaune’s problem, she could alleviate the issue without bringing to the fore her own issues. Blake didn’t see herself as a busybody, but this was an issue that would end poorly.

Especially if Jaune truly was serious about leaving Beacon over it. She had no reason to think he wasn’t, either.

She had -every reason- to believe he -was- serious about it.

She saw Yang’s temper flaring like a flame, and she could only mentally sigh. “What, and that’s my fault?”

“No.” Blake admitted, readily. “But Pyrrha is your partner.”

Once again, the blonde’s face melted into a mask of confusion. “I haven’t had any problems with her-”

“She’s never with us when it’s not time for class. None of us really . . . act like a team.” Even Blake could admit that. She would have talked about how Pyrrha straight out refused to talk to Jaune if she could help it, but that would have been even more hypocritical of her than she already had been.

“I’m not her mom.” Yang uttered, and Blake wished it wasn’t going to be such a fight. For a moment, she wanted to scratch her cat-ears just to alleviate some of the stress building up in her chest, but she denied herself the comfort.

“You’re not.” Blake agreed once again, “But it wouldn’t hurt if we . . . tried to get them to get along.”
Yang’s gaze settled on her again, and as that anger melted away, the blonde woman’s face slowly started to morph into an expression of paranoia that Blake had seen in the mirror far too many times. “What happened, really?”

Biting her lip, Blake dropped the bomb, “Jaune wants to leave Beacon.”

She wondered if she’d looked so upset. If she was honest with herself, she’d dare to say she hadn’t. Yang -cared-, even if Jaune was just an acquaintance at best to her. Blake hadn’t started to care even a sliver until it’d become obvious just how . . .

Broken . . .

Their team leader was on the inside. It made her wonder just what kind of life he’d led to feel so defeated just because things weren’t going swimmingly.

Or was it more than that, and his attempts to reach out to them had been the thing to break him?

“Because he thinks we -hate- him?”

“I don’t know.” Blake admitted, “But that’s what he was talking about when he was crying in the bedroom.”

“Wait, hold up. Loverboy was -crying-?”

“I think he’s been crying for a long time,” The ravenette mused, realizing that her tea had long since begun to grow cold. Disgusted, she pushed the cup away from her and let her gaze settle onto the table surface. She couldn’t outright -say- she’d seen the tear trails on his cheeks when he’d come into the darkened bedroom, but she might as well do so.

“Jaune Arc? Grins, flirts, seems in control and capable, crying?” Yang looked as incredulous as anyone else who knew the blonde male might have felt. Blake wasn’t even that empathetic, she knew. She hadn’t even taken the time to study his mannerisms, only to satisfy herself with the fact he was strong enough to stand between those and any who might find out her secret.
She hadn’t even trusted him with her secret, really. He’d already known, and he hadn’t cared. To him, she was “Blake”, the daughter of a woman he’d danced with. A faunus, when he hadn’t cared at all about that fact.

She expected it, due to his lineage, but she couldn’t help but feel in that moment that she’d failed as a “freedom fighter” by doing so.

Her parents would have been disappointed with her- and not just because Kali Belladonna must have liked him just fine to have told him about her.

“Yang,” She cut in, mustering a whole lot more courage than she admittedly had ever felt before, “I know none of us have really paid him much mind, but he . . . he’s miserable.”

Blake could tell, now. Even without having been told, the signs were obvious.

“Why?” Yang asked, and Blake wished she knew. It would make it so much easier to get it all over with so she could just go back to what she’d been doing.

“Because . . .” She trailed off, deciding that at least he’d told her part of the problem, “Because he doesn’t want to be Jaune Arc.” She put as much emphasis on his last name as possible.

“See, I never did get the story behind that. Is Jaune really such a big deal?” Yang asked, settling back down again as she moved over to the fridge and grabbed a can of strawberry soda, settling back into her seat while Blake tried to decide if she was about to step past a divide that Jaune had purposefully built with Yang and Ruby.

Her first instinct was to let the conversation die, but . . . that would only lead to more pain later on.

Pain now, or pain later. It was a losing battle.

“From the time of the King of Vale, the name of Arc has been held by a line of great warriors. They’re one of the few remaining Noble Houses in Sanus. His grandfather, Absinthe Arc, was known to Faunus as “The Knight of the Revolution” because he was a neutral third party during the Rights Revolution. He protected countless Faunus and just as many Humans who didn’t want to participate in that bloody war.”
She paused to take a breath, trying to decide where else to go with what she knew about the family’s history. It wasn’t as much as someone like Weiss or Jaune himself could go into—heraldry was a big deal for those kinds of people, after all—but her own parents had been little, hearing stories about him.

Faunus didn’t have many HUMAN heroes. Absinthe Arc was one of a handful, and he was easy to remember because people (including her) ate up the very fact that he’d been everything she’d expected Jaune to be. A protector of Faunus kind.

There’d been many who had considered the potential to become an Arc mistress from what she understood of the stories that had all insisted that he had been handsome, and it was only because the Lady Arc of the time had kept a firm leash on him that it was possible he hadn’t collected a very happy harem of Faunus women.

Seeing Jaune for the first time had given her some understanding of that thought. Jaune was a great many things, but unattractive did not register that list. If she’d had to pick a human purely based on appearance, he would not be a disappointment.

She wished she could say she knew enough about him to say more than that. It felt disingenuous, if she was honest with herself—which she didn’t want to be, so she pushed that thought way far in the back of her mind.

“Is that really that impressive?” Yang wondered, and Blake could only smile in amusement. It was a feeling she felt Jaune would have appreciated—if he wasn’t unconscious in the other room from hysterics.

“It is. Jaune’s pedigree basically makes him untouchable in social circles, if he wanted to be.” She eyeballed her cold cup of tea, and lamented that she’d let it get that way. She needed it, though, so she finished the liquid.

“Well... why be a Huntsman?” Blake blinked, Yang had brought up a... very good question, actually.

Jaune seemed to hate being compared to his family, but—

Wait, could it be? Was it... so simple, and yet at the same time, so complex?
“. . . Because he wants to prove himself.” Blake whispered, and from the way Yang blinked, she knew she’d been heard. “Because he -doesn’t want to be Jaune Arc -.” She reiterated.

Yang shook her head, and Blake could only agree with the confused look on the other woman’s face. “You’re losing me, Blake.”

“How would you feel if everyone around you only ever saw you as Yang Xiao Long, and never got to know you?” Blake steamed on, having finally gotten some fuel in her metaphorical engine. Amber eyes studied her team-mate. “If no matter what you did, it was just “Well, that’s to be expected”. If nothing you ever did mattered, because you didn’t matter? Only your name, or who you were related to.”

Yang squinted, before muttering softly, “That sounds . . . kind of shitty, honestly.”

Blake nodded again, agreeing. But she’d run dry of courage, and her need to flee was aided by a yawn. “Hopefully he’ll feel better in the morning.” She noted, standing from the table. As Yang was infected with a yawn of her own, the two women retired to their beds.

Despite herself, Blake took a look towards Jaune, still sprawled out and vulnerable on his bed, and slipped into her own. Wondering if, perhaps, she should at least try to be more present with her partner.

Half an hour after Yang and Blake fell asleep, Pyrrha slipped into the room, exhausted, and changed into her pajamas just in time to curl up under the blankets and pass out.

+*+*+*+

Morning came too soon for Jaune, and instead of feeling emotionally miserable, he felt physically miserable. He’d sweated all over his covers and pillow during the night, and so he’d awoken feeling clammy and- well- disgusting. As he sat up from bed, brain foggy on the events of the night before, he noted that it seemed the only one still in bed was Pyrrha, from the fact Yang and Blake were missing from the bedroom.
Checking the clock, he winced as he saw that they had little more than fifteen minutes until their first class of the day would start. And, being a gentleman, he knew he was going to be late today. Standing, he made his way over to the Champion’s bed and gently shook her shoulder. “Pyrrha. Pyrrha. Wake up. We’re gonna be late for class.”

The adorable little grunt and groan that came from the redhead only lightened his lips a bit. “Come on, Pyrrha. If you don’t get up, I will overlook all the chivalry my mom beat me over the head with and go shower first. And then you won’t get to have one, and will have to go to your classes with messed up hair.”

A bleary green eye opened to regard him, and he could only offer a placid smile in return. “Ten minutes to shower and dress, five to get to class. I think you can beat that record.”

Though she said nothing, he felt that at least she’d listened to him as she crawled out of bed and quickly made her way towards the dorm’s bath. Going over to his own dresser, he pulled his uniform out alongside a package of scented wipes, cleaning himself as much as he could without the promise of warm water. Finishing his grooming, he dressed and made his way to wait in the commons for her to finish so they could walk to class together. Yang and Blake must have went to breakfast to not be there, so he could only lament that he’d have an empty stomach until they broke for lunch in another two or three hours.

Oh well, at least their first period was History with Oobleck.

The tones of his Scroll made him draw the electronic from his pocket, eyes widening slightly as he saw the contact on display. Gently flicking the accept call button, he let the video feed cut in.

“Hey, Mom.”

After the call had completed, Jaune felt a mixture of emotions. Though, thankfully, he had something to focus on. He’d have to inform his team- and probably Ruby’s as well. Ruby was his friend, after all.

As Pyrrha finally stepped out of the bathroom, pulling on her shoes with a hurried expression, Jaune called out to her, standing next to the door. “Pyrrha, hey- I’m sorry, but after class, can we have a team-talk?”

For a moment, it seemed like she would brush past him- as silent as ever- but as her green eyes
settled on him, she seemed to stutter for a moment before softly, her lips broke open-

“Okay.”

-the first words they’d spoken to one another since the day of Initiation.

He’d take what he could get.

As they rushed to class, he just hoped Blake and Yang would be easier to convince.

Oobleck’s class was usually a pleasure to sit through for Jaune. Even if the man’s lectures inevitably required a recording device and a slow function to try and get the entirety of it rather than just tidbits between the start and finish of the high-octane blazing trail of words. Today, however, Jaune was distracted.

And from the way the rest of his team was staring at him, it was obvious on his face. Thankfully, they all had to attempt to keep pace with the motor mouth Doctor. Today’s curriculum, ironically, was the Faunus Rights Revolution, which made Jaune feel a little bit more placid about it all.

He’d learned a lot about Faunus as a result of his family’s attachment to their social history, but it was strange to hear the difference between a tenured professor and his personal tutors.

As class finished, he turned his gaze towards the rest of his team and noted, “I already asked Pyrrha, but- we need to have a team meeting real quick before lunch, okay?”

The look on Yang and Blake’s faces were mirror images of one another almost, both looked disturbed- scared even. Though why, he couldn’t even say.

Nonetheless, he led them along back towards the dorms, using his Scroll to unlock the door before moving to settle down at the table in the dining portion of their room. “So-”
“You can’t leave Beacon, Jaune!” Yang cut him off, slamming her palms into the table-top and startling him. For a few moments, he was speechless and unsure, until his thoughts drifted back to last night and he looked at Blake.

The black-haired girl looked much more skittish than she normally did, and the fact that Pyrrha next to her looked confused and alarmed said that there’d been only one thing that could have happened.

Blake had told Yang. He winced at that, feeling a sharp pang in his heart.

“That’s-”

“What does she mean?” Pyrrha spoke for the first time in a long time, leaving him uncomfortable under her suddenly much more firm gaze. He’d- he’d just wanted to tell them- but . . .

Well, now he had to address the elephant in the room. No matter how he didn’t want to, the ball had been thrown into his court.

“You told Yang, huh.” He said, letting his head hang for a moment as he tried to process this new influx of information.

“I . . . she came in when you passed out last night, Jaune. I had to tell her something.” Blake noted, looking ready to bolt even though he didn’t personally see it. He missed the concern, the fear on the secretive Faunus’ face.

“I- I see.” He admitted.

“What does Yang mean, that you can’t leave Beacon?” Pyrrha continued, moving in to stand by Yang’s side as the blonde stared down at him. While her presence in his peripheral vision was showcased, he didn’t see the way the redhead’s green eyes were fixated on him for the first time since they’d talked with Weiss as a witness.

“I was having a bad night.” Jaune tried to downplay it, “My- My sister, I was talking to her on the roof, and . . . she made a lot of sense.”
“Lover boy, you can’t just try to curveball this.” His fellow blonde hissed, fingers knitting into fists atop the table as she leaned down over him. It felt like an interrogation all of a sudden, and the fact that Yang reminded him so much of Jade made him want to clam up and hide away again.

He loved his sister dearly, but Jade loved playing around with his head as much as she loved being his sister. The rest had always been teasing, affectionate, but Jade had always made him remember that he had to be true to himself and what he wanted.

She hadn’t been the example Camillia had set, but she was a strong and proud woman whom everyone looked up to.

Taking a steadying breath that only partially worked, he brought his hands up together on the table, letting his hands knit together and his knuckles tighten. “I came to Beacon to become a Huntsman,” He admitted, “Like my parents, like my sister. More than that, I wanted to be someone. Someone worthy of the Arc name. But- most of all-”

He shook with a sob, trying desperately to hold it in. “I just wanted to be Jaune. I didn’t want to have to question every person getting close to me, for everyone to say “as expected of the son of Arc”.”

A hand settled on his entwined fingers, and- shocked- he looked up to see a pair of green eyes beading and glistening in the light.

Shuddering and quaking while he drew in a lungful of air, he nearly whispered his next words, “I just wanted to be -worth something.- I wanted to be a hero, someone who brought hope to people.”

It was a complex, but simple motivation. Something Camillia had insisted would only bring him pain, and he was beginning to understand that cynical point of view.

His gaze went from Pyrrha, to Yang, then to Blake, as he uttered, “My family have made me who I am today, but . . . I wanted people to like me -for me-.” He sighed, and finally managed to reach the numb stage of emotions. That place of perfect, devastated nirvana that coincided with the application of his mask.

“. . . I’m sorry. I didn’t want to show any of you this ugly side of me-”
He was surprised when he was pulled from his seat, and crushed in a hug. He could only feel the tears get squished out of him as he looked at Pyrrha past a mane of golden blonde hair.

“What the -fuck-, Jaune? Why would it matter who your parents are, or how great your name is? I only know -you-, and you’ve been a cool guy since we met. Sure, we haven’t been the best of friends or talked much, but Ruby thinks you’re awesome.” Yang’s words cut deep into him, and he felt his arms go limp at his sides.

What was he supposed to do? He hadn’t been taught how to deal with -being consoled- of all things, let alone by his busty team-mate. Part of him wanted to make light of the situation to ease his discomfort, but he found his throat suddenly so -damn dry.-

He choked, and it wasn’t because Yang was crushing him in her grip.

“I- I wasn’t . . . going to leave Beacon, ladies.” He admitted, deciding that, for now, it was better to try and change the subject.

“. . . What were you going to talk to us about, then, Jaune?” Blake asked, raising a brow as she watched the strong-armed blonde slowly release their leader, until she was the only one not basically standing within arm’s reach of him. A part of the Faunus made her inch forward a bit more towards the vulnerable male.

“A-ah… well- Mom is coming to visit. She’ll- she’ll be here a little before dinner, so I was hoping that-”

Almost in sequence, all three of his team-mates blinked. “Your mother?” Pyrrha asked, curious.

He nodded, “She wanted to see how I was doing, and since I- since I told her that I’d been made leader of my team, and that I was . . . making friends, she wanted to come see for herself. So, she’s on a Bullhead right now. She’ll be here within the next four hours, as long as nothing happens to delay her flight-”

Yang’s serious face melted away into a look of pleased- if unsteady- humor. “And you wanted her to meet all of your friends, huh? Getting brave, aren’t you, lover boy? Usually you date a girl first before you introduce her to Mom.”
Despite himself, Jaune flushed— which helped lift his mood more than he’d care to admit. Yang was a good friend. He’d been right to think so before, and it only made him treasure the other blonde on his team.

“Ah . . . I- wouldn’t say that around her, if I were you.”

The heavy atmosphere in Team JBPY’s dorm lightened somewhat, and— for the first time since they’d become a team— they talked.

It wasn’t the kind of camaraderie he’d have liked, but it was better than the stifling discomfort that it had been.

“Let’s- let’s go to lunch before we miss our chance. I need to tell Ruby and Team RWNR, too.” He noted, overall gaining an agreement as they left the dorm and headed towards lunch. Half of their lunch had been “wasted” on his admission, but they could make do.

They found RWNR sat at their usual table, and after gathering plates themselves, they joined the table and Jaune sat across from Ruby, offering her a smile. “You okay, Jaune?” The red-tipped girl asked, looking a bit uncomfortable. “You got-” She gestured at her own cheeks, and he had to nod in return.

“Yeah, sorry. Um- so, I hope you guys don’t have plans tonight, because my Mom is coming to visit tonight and she’d love to meet my friends-”

His words were cut off by the loud crash of a plastic tray against table as everyone’s attention was turned towards Weiss, whom was staring, startled, at him. “Lady Arc is COMING HERE? ” The Schnee heiress hissed out, looking like a cornered rat surrounded by cats—cats with guns.

“Oh cool! Mama Arc is coming to see her baby boy!” Nora yelled with delight, grinning at Ruby, “Can we meet her, Ruby? Come on, it’ll be awesome!”

From the way Weiss’ face twisted to resemble someone who’d sucked on a particularly sour
lemon, he got the feeling she didn’t agree. Nonetheless, his attention went back onto Ruby, who was grinning from ear to ear.

“This will be great! I bet your mom is the coolest, Jaune!”

Despite himself, Jaune smiled and nodded. “She is. You’ll love her, Ruby. And so will you guys. Trust me. Weiss has already met her.”

Said white-haired girl choked on air, rapidly having to take a drink of whatever tea-like concoction she’d had with her lunch to clear her throat-

“- but she’s the greatest.”

“Total mama’s boy.” Yang noted with a grin, shovelling food into her mouth to make up for lost time. Blake gave the fisticuffs fanatic a decidedly cool eyebrow-lift, while Pyrrha simply giggled softly.

“That’s a compliment, in my opinion.” Jaune noted, not at all incensed.

With the alert out, Jaune felt better than he had in awhile. Everything seemed so much richer, so much -better- with that weight- no matter how small- off of his shoulders.

He felt like he had just been looking at the situation from the wrong angle. His team was rough around the edges, but maybe-

-just maybe, they’d all be friends.

+x+x+x+

She hummed as she perused the sheaf of papers, admiring what little could be unearthed about the names Jaune had spoken about over their few conversations since he’d settled in at Beacon. The easiest to get information about had been Pyrrha Nikos due to her admitted fame, and after that had-of course- been Weiss Schnee. A surprising third, however, had been Jaune’s newfound partner.
Blake Belladonna, how utterly quaint that he’d ended up partnered with the daughter of the married woman he’d danced with at his fifteenth birthday. Nevena, for all her thoughts at first that Jaune and Weiss’ chemistry on the dance floor would translate into romance, was much more pleased with the new array of potential laid in front of her.

One in particular, however, caught her eye far more than any other. The profile was scant, but just her Signal records were telling.

As she looked at a school ID, silver eyes gleefully staring back at her, Nevena Arc smiled and tucked the papers into her purse as the aircraft’s radio sparked to life and informed of the imminent arrival to Beacon Academy. Reaching up to make sure her wide-brimmed hat stayed fixed to her head, she stood and brushed down the golden yellow skirts of her summer dress, then checked that L’Belle d’Révolution was snug and ready to be loaded from its shoulder holster.

She had daughter-in-laws to meet, after all. Orange painted lips curled up with a warm, motherly smile. *I’m so proud of you, my little sun ray.*
Chapter Four

The Beauty of the Rebellion

Jaune’s mood had heightened considerably since the morning. Sure, it was a stopgap measure at best, but he felt like his team was actually coming out of their shells a little bit. While he wasn’t thrilled that Blake had shared his moment of weakness with the rest of the team, he . . .

He’d forgive her. It’d worked out in their favor. He’d try to be a proper partner to her once again, as well. First, however, they had to deal with a much more pre-eminent threat.

His mother was here in Beacon, and that meant he had to stop fussing over his appearance and meet her before she wound her way all up across the campus and proceeded to alert everyone within the school to her presence.

Nevena Arc did not do metaphorical stealth missions. Thankfully, since classes were over, he could put on his armored suit once again, having fussed with his tie for several minutes until the tone of his scroll had alerted him to his mother’s imminent touchdown.

It would not have been a lie to say that he’d raced out of the dormitories like a Behemoth was on his heels.
It was more that he was running -at- one, if he was honest. Nonetheless, as he’d dashed out of JBPY’s dorm, Yang’s voice had called out after him, “Woah! Wait for us, lover boy!”

“You can keep up with me just fine!” He hollered back, not even bothering to keep his voice down as he descended the staircase back down to the main level. After all, that was probably all the warning Team RWNR was going to get, either.

The longer Nevena Arc was left alone, the more of a mess he’d have to clean up after she left. If there was anything left of him -to- clean it up, anyway. He loved his mother to death, but she was a consummate schemer- especially when it came to her son.

As he hit the broadway of the Academy, he saw her relatively easily. After all, only his mother could look so ostentatious and yet fashionable in something so simple as a summer dress and a floppy hat that did nothing to tame the regal waves of blonde that had been given to each of her children.

In comparison with his rush, she seemed almost leisurely as she let her heels announce each carefully planned step, and he slowed his gait as he came within what someone else might have called shooting distance. He saw the way her lips perked up in rich orange as he offered her a gentle smile that spoke volumes of how he felt to see her.

The sound of rushing footsteps behind him made him pause, turning to see that Yang had been right on his heels, while Blake and Pyrrha were a bit more leisurely in catching up. Though, the two were overtaken by a much more excited Ruby and Nora. Ren seemed to be taking up the rear, though he wasn’t at all surprised to not see Weiss.

If she thought she could hide from his mother, however, he wished her the best of luck. He wouldn’t throw her under the bus, however. He still wanted to be her friend.

The soft jangle of the buckle holding in her sawed off shotgun in its shoulder holster brought his attention back forward unto his mother as she stepped within his personal space and settled her hands in front of her hips, knitted together.

His happy smile turned into a playful grin as he bowed low just like he had with Weiss before twice now, enunciating clearly, “Lady Arc.”

“Sir Arc.” Her rich, honeyed voice came closer and he stood straight just in time for her arms to
wrap around him, and he melted into a hug with the woman who had birthed him- ignoring her headwear’s choice to cover his face while he embraced her.

Being a head taller than her was a fuss when she dressed up.

A couple of snickers and a muted little “D’aww” followed, but he ignored it in favor of feeling her calloused and scarred hand squeezing at his nape. “Hello, my little sun ray.”

Finally, after what felt like minutes of something he’d missed desperately- something that would have made the day more bearable before he’d seen a rather severe upswing he could only attribute to his own chaotic feelings- they separated and she stepped to stand beside him as he gestured with a gloved hand to her as her green eyes lurked over each of the gathered trainees.

“Everyone, this is Nevena Arc. Lady of the House of Arc, and my mother.” He noted, announcing her as regally as possible without being impersonal, and then letting his grin shape how his words came out next, “Mom, this is my team, Team Juneberry. My partner, Blake Belladonna-”

“Hello, Lady Arc.” Blake bowed her head, amber eyes studiously on his mother’s face.

He moved his hand from Blake unto Yang, the closer between herself and Pyrrha, “Yang Xiao Long-”

“How ya doin’, Mama Arc?” Yang’s ever present and gleeful grin was wholly in place. He didn’t have to look to know that his mother had an amused smile on her face at such a casual greeting and nickname.

And then gestured to the redhead as she came up to stand next to her own partner, “And her partner, Pyrrha Nikos.”

The amazonian redhead bowed at the waist in Mistrali fashion, “Lady Arc. Welcome to Beacon.”

Moving his gaze- and the example hand- towards their sister team, he started with the gleeful face of the silver-eyed girl who was looking -pointedly- at the holstered weapon at his mother’s armpit. “And these are my friends in Team Rainbow, starting with my friend Ruby Rose-”

Ruby hopped on one foot to the other, throwing up an energetic wave, “Hey hey!”
His hand swept over to Nora, whom was just as enthused as Ruby, though Nora was looking ready to spring like a wound up toy rather than just being outright full of pep, “Nora Valkyrie—”

“The Queen meets the Queen, Mama Arc!” Her outburst earned a raised brow from his mother, Blake, and Pyrrha, while the other members of the group simply snickered- or in the case of Ren, sighed with a “what can you do?” smile. Ren was the next put in the path of his gesturing hand.

“Lie Ren- who goes by Ren- Nora’s partner. Not present is—”

He was stopped as Nevena raised a hand, palm facing outwards. Knowing the gesture well, he let his gloved hands settle in at his hips as his mother’s eyes gleamed under the brim of her hat. “Little Weiss Schnee, of course. She must be nervous after she so rudely declined our invitation two years ago.”

Ruby blinked, turning her gaze unto him and he could only shrug. “Oh, that’s right, you said something about that. . . Uh- Miss Arc Ma’am-!”

“Just Nevena, or Mama, is fine, little Ruby.” His mother’s benign smile warmed his heart. It was nice to see her getting along with his friends.

“Oh- uh- Nevena-! Did you really try to get Weiss and Jaune betro- petro- uh, married?”

“Oh, sweetheart-” His mother’s lips slipped open into pearly white, perfectly even teeth, “- I did not try anything. I simply offered the prize of a courtship agreement to the girl who had the most dances with my son at the Masquerade we held for his fifteenth birthday, and Miss Schnee got two dances from my little Jaune. But, she was terribly rude and didn’t even respond to our gracious invitation to return to the Maison d’Arc.”

Despite how many sets of eyes settled on him, he could only blink as a good portion of the group regarded him with a queer look. He returned a curious brow at them, as if waiting for one of them to actually voice a question. Ruby was the first to pick back up, though.

“Nevena! Is that a sawn off Chevalier model dust-cartridge shotgun?” Ruby closed in to his mother, almost flitting about like a little hummingbird as she tried to study the weapon from all angles. His gaze broke away from the two as he looked towards his own team in comparison, trying to judge their reactions to his mother.
“It is, aren’t you a knowledgeable young lady, Miss Rose!” His eyes flitted first to Blake’s face, seeing the way she watched the ongoings with a strangely homesick look on her face, making him remember that she likely hadn’t seen her parents in years. For a moment, he wanted to say something about that, but he knew it wasn’t the time.

Later, though? He might try to tackle his luck at getting her to give the Belladonnas a call. Just a little nudge.

He owed it to Kali for making his birthday a much more pleasant party.

His attention turned back unto his mother and Ruby just in time to see his mother’s nails rake through the black and red of his friend’s pixie cut, almost petting the small girl. *Well, that’s a thing.* He thought to himself, before letting his eyes move onto Yang- who was advancing towards the woman and her sister with a gleeful grin- then onto Pyrrha who looked a bit caught off guard.

Stepping forth to stand next to the redhead, he leaned over slightly and uttered under his breath, “Go on. It’d make me really happy if you got along with my mom.” He held up his hands, pressed together at the palms and finger-tips. “A favor from you to me.” He appeased.

For a moment, the redhead’s green eyes studied him in turn, before she finally nodded and moved in closer to the blonde woman while he let his hands settle on his hips. Nora pounced in after Ruby, and that left him and Ren alone to watch the women speak and mingle.

“I can see where you get your looks from.” Ren noted, and Jaune could only flush, running a gloved hand up the nape of his neck and into his own golden locks.

“Thanks. Eight blondes, a lot of blue eyes, and a few greens. The genes are strong.” He laughed right afterwards, but decided to sober up a bit and let his gaze trail unto the pink-eyed Mistralian.

“I didn’t figure Weiss would come,” He admitted, “But I kind of hoped. Maybe someday we’ll get to be friends.”

“She’ll warm up eventually. She just needs time.” Ren patted his shoulder, and Jaune could only smile in return. He could see that Weiss was in good hands, and that only improved his mood more.
“Thanks, Ren. For being her friend.”

“No problem, Jaune. Everyone needs people in their corner, you know.”

He agreed, whole-heartedly. Having no one to back you up had been part of what had started to slowly destroy him.

Right now, though? He was going to be just fine. He heard the soft clack-clack of his heels against the walk as he closed back in on the group.

“Come on, Mom. I want to show you the dorms.”

“Oh, that’s right. You sleep with all three of your team-mates, don’t you?” Nevena Arc’s - blisteringly bright- smile was as innocent in appearance as could be while his own face -ignited- in red. And from the few gasps that accompanied it, he knew his mother’s teasing had hit the mark dead-center.

*Damn it, Mom.*

+x+x+x+

Yang just had to go and make it worse, too. Nevena’s little careful usage of innuendo leading to a flood of playful puns and teasing remarks that made him wish the floor would open up and swallow him whole by the time they reached the cross-section of JBPY and RWNR’s dorms, being that they were across from one another.

Thankfully, before he could die of embarrassment, his mother had gotten a particular look on her face that he knew wasn’t going to end well for someone, those calculating green eyes settled on Team Rainbow’s door. “Ruby, dear.” The red-tipped girl startled to attention, silver orbs looking like a set of big puppy-dog eyes at the woman who had been so genial and kind to her- and indulged in her love of guns and weapons tech.

To say that Ruby was firmly wrapped around Nevena Arc’s finger would not have been uncalled for. Jaune mentally apologized.
“If you would be a dear, while I have a great deal of forgiveness and patience, if you could convince your partner to come out of her dorm and greet me, I would repay you with some Sable Breton.”

Ruby blinked, looking confused, “Sabba-wha?”

“Cookies, dear. Butter cookies, to be specific.”

Bribery always worked, he swore. Especially when one had a sweet tooth like Ruby did. He apologized mentally a second time. Ren and Nora didn’t even have a chance to intervene before Ruby had swiped her Scroll and lunged into the dorm room. Muffled shouting had followed, and within a minute, she returned into the hallway with a flustered- but put together- Weiss Schnee.

A flustered and put together Weiss Schnee staring into the smiling face of Nevena Arc.

He apologized profusely in his head.

“Ah- L-Lady Arc.” Weiss noted, pinching the hem of her skirts and curtseying with practiced grace. “What a wonderful surprise, for you to visit. If- If I’d known you were coming, I would have made a procession of a more suitable kind for you-”

“Miss Schnee.” The transformation from warm, motherly tone to ennobled chill was immediate, even while the rest of the group- save him- squirmed with discomfort at the rapid new look at another part of his beloved mother’s personality. “You know very well that the only thing more uncouth than a woman who does not return a host’s kindness is a woman who lies. Now-”

A wave of blonde hair leaned in, and he bowed his head. Yep, this was going to happen, too late for him to stop it-

“- I am disappointed in you. You and my little sun ray looked so elegant and beautiful on that dance floor, and I was sure you would see the wonderful life you could have with him. Be thankful that I am a gracious woman, and I will give you another chance.”

*Oh, wow. I kind of expected Mom to go off on her.* Jaune had to admit that was a pleasant
surprise— which must have been a thought shared by Weiss, since she looked suitably ambushed as well.

And just as fast as the mood had turned serious, Nevena clapped her hands a few times curtly, smile once again in place. “Now! How about we see Team Rainbow’s room first, that way they can get back to what they were doing while I impose on my son and his team? What do you say, Miss Schnee? Ruby? Mister Ren, and Miss Nora?”

He crossed his arms as the Team bundled in together, and— despite Weiss’ panicked look— led the way into their dorm. While it wasn’t much different from JBPY’s own, the bedroom was . . .

A display, to be honest. “Are those bunk beds.” Jaune couldn’t -not- point it out.

“They are.” Ruby noted, as proud as could be. Frankly, he was impressed with her ingenuity. Dangerous, sure, but- well- it’d lasted over a week without falling from the ropes suspending both “top” beds, so he could only say that “it wasn’t stupid if it worked”. “Weiss was super happy when I got them set up!”

Weiss, looking indignant, squeaked out a “I did not!” Though absolutely no one in the group looked convinced. Even Jaune had an inkling that, if Weiss had hated it in even the slightest of fashions, it wouldn’t have gone through. Gently, he hazarded a pat on the white-haired girl’s shoulder and a mild grin.

“It’s perfect. Could probably be a little more stable, though.” Ruby’s huff alerted him to how she felt about his opinion on her engineering skills, but he simply shrugged in response to that AND Weiss’ narrowed gaze. He’d tried, damn it.

“Only the twins ever did seem to want anything but single beds,” His mother remarked, tapping a finger against her chin idly as she studied Team Rainbow’s sleeping arrangements. “Well, and Saphron- but that was just before she went off to marry that Atlesian woman.”

Weiss blinked, looking suitably surprised by that fact. For a moment, her gaze went to him after studying his mother and, for the first time since their little play-by-play in the auditorium, she uttered under her breath, “One of your sisters is-?”

He cut her off, nodding. “She married . . . four years ago, I think? Terra is a nice girl, if a bit mouth-y. Saph balances her out pretty well. I have a little nephew, you want to see a picture-?”
Nevena darted between the two, her smile stretching wider. “Now now, you two. It’s good to see you getting along, but little Adrian is not the topic of the night!”

Jaune snickered, but nodded his head, mouthing to Weiss, “Later.”

“Now, I’ve seen Rainbow’s dorm. Will any of you be joining us in my son’s dormitory, or shall I bid you all adieu?”

Ruby threw up a hand, though Weiss gracefully decided to use study as an excuse to remain in the dorm- though Jaune liked to think that she looked a little more comfortable about dealing with his mother- while Nora and Ren admitted to a prior engagement.

From the way Nora darted into the kitchen, he had to presume it had something to do with food. What in particular, he would hazard a guess towards pancakes. Nora was the self-proclaimed Pancake Eating Queen, after all.

Nonetheless, he offered the three a goodbye and led the remainder of the group into JBPY’s dorm, “Are you thirsty or hungry, Mom? I can put on some tea, coffee, or anything else you like.” He moved into the kitchenette of the dorm, preparing a kettle. “Of course, if any of you girls would like something, I’m a fair hand in the kitchen.”

He hadn’t even had a chance yet to cook for his team. He’d have to fix that soon.

“Tea will be fine, sweetheart. You know how I prefer mine.” He nodded in return, pulling a bottle of honey from the cupboard and beginning to fill the kettle from a jug of purified water.

He’d have to replace that later, it was nearly empty. It seemed Blake preferred tea, as well. Yang was more of a soda girl, not that it surprised him much.

He couldn’t get a handle on anything about Pyrrha- at least until today. He’d do his best to learn how she liked things so he could cater to her, as well.

“Pyrrha? Blake? Ruby?”
“Hey, what about me, lover boy?” Yang remarked, shooting a smarmy grin first at his mother as she settled into a chair and then towards him. Trying to keep the flush from his ears, he pulled a strawberry soda- the last, it seemed- out and slid it over the counter to her. Yeah, grocery shopping would be on the weekend itinerary.

“I already know what you want.”

“Tea. . . Please, Jaune.” Blake noted, cautiously settling into a chair near his mother, while Pyrrha nodded along and he pulled out four cups from the tea-set he’d bought.

“Milk- uh- please?” Ruby noted, seeming a bit more nervous now that she was the guest alongside his mother. He could only offer her an amused little grin as he pulled a more full glass from the cupboard and filled it with milk while the water was boiling in the kettle, offering the glass to Ruby.

“I’ll have to go shopping this weekend,” He noted, a somewhat lank smile on his face as he looked over his team and then Ruby and his mother. “Any of you want to accompany me? I think I’ll go Friday after classes.”

He tried not to notice the way Nevena took careful notice of his offer, green eyes meandering across the features of each girl while both waited for a response. He did not want to encourage it, but the thought was immediate in his mind and- well- it would have been a good time to get to know his team better after the failures at team bonding he’d arranged before his little breakdown.

“Ruby and I can come along, right, Rubes?” Yang noted, offering an exchange of gazes with her sister, which was ended with a blink- but a nod from the younger girl. Smiling, he nodded in turn.

“I would appreciate it-” He was going to say more, but he was cut off by the shrill cry of the kettle, and he carefully pulled it from the flame and began to arrange the tea leaves in the bottom of the cups- as well as a fair portion of honey for his mother’s cup. “Honey, Blake? Pyrrha?”

“Please.” Pyrrha remarked, placidly. There was still stiffness between them, but he looked forward to the day when they could just be genial and friendly. He prepared the Champion’s cup and then carefully brought the tray with the cups over to place each cup in front of their respective owners. He then pulled out the chair between Pyrrha and his mother and settled into it, Blake across from him with Yang at her side while Nevena and Ruby sat at the ends of the table across from one another.
He watched as his mother picked up her cup and nursed a sip from it, and he did the same. Blake took a few moments, but inevitably followed, while Pyrrha seemed content to let the cup steam for the moment. Ruby and Yang had already finished their drinks by then, and he would wait until they asked for something else before he’d do for them.

It was part of civility to only help when asked, as well.

“So, um-” Ruby spoke up, and the rest of the eyes in the room wandered to her, making her hide away a bit in her cloak, “- why- why did you come to visit anyway, Nevena? Just to see Jaune?”

“That’s often all the reason a parent needs to see their children, Ruby dear.” Nevena noted, settling her teacup down and offering the silver-eyed young warrior a smile. “But-” She leaned back a bit in her chair, an impish smile on painted lips. “- if you’re that curious, I can tell you.”

Blake perked up, as did Ruby. Yang wasn’t quite as obviously interested as those two, and Pyrrha was paying more than cursory attention at the least. Jaune winced, settling back into his chair as he knew explicitly what was about to happen.

“I was worried about him.” Nevena admitted, and Jaune could only blink. He had expected talk of vetting the girls, but instead . . . she’d- she’d been worried about him? He’d done all he could to - not- worry her--

Oh. Oh, damn, he was bad at keeping secrets.

He slumped even further into his chair as Nevena’s soft smile warped a bit with the worry over someone only a mother could contain. “You girls have only known Jaune for a little over a week now, but I raised him. He can talk up the road and down about how great Beacon is, how he’s got such an amazing team and friends- but when he doesn’t gush, it’s obvious that he is holding back for fear of upsetting me.”

His eyes wandered into his lap, and he felt a deathly chill in his chest at the awareness that he’d failed to keep his mother from thinking he had lied to her.

No. KNOWING he was lying to her. Blake stiffened in her seat, while the other three girls seemed a bit more confused. A hand reached out, gently covering his gloved knuckles with fingers adorned with gold and jewels save for the unassuming gold wedding band.
“My little sun ray has been working himself to the bones for five years for this, you know. Some people would insist that the training we- his father, sister, and I- heaped on him would more likely count as torture to some. Especially when done by family. My Jaune is strong physically, but he’s tender- untested.”

To have it put on the table again, he felt discomfort wind its way through his body and freeze him like a brick of ice.

“I wanted to find him a good girl before he left, but all of his options were either too old, or they didn’t just didn’t have the -spark-. Sad, really. I had high hopes for Miss Schnee, but.”

Her motherly smile turned sly, and she took a sip from her cup while the information processed through the group. Jaune was at least back in the realm of the known, his mother’s insistence on finding him a suitable marriage candidate, but he wished she wasn’t going to lay the cards on the table.

He should have known better. Arcs -always- played hardball in cards.

“It seems the family charm exists in him after all. I was worried it might have been just that he was too young- or that women just couldn’t stand him for all the effort I had put into teaching him to be good to women, but it seems it just needed some space to flourish.”

Gods, could his chair just become a Grimm and eat him, already?

He swore, for all his lessons in etiquette and conversation with courtesans, none of it ever prepared him for what madness would come from his family’s lips.

Then again, perhaps he’d been -taught- to fall prey to such things constantly? Damn it, Mom.

He couldn’t meet the face of any of his teammates- or Ruby. Gods, his face was on -fire- wasn’t it? Someone get an extinguisher.

The stifling silence wasn’t helping his nerves any, either. He didn’t dare look up, for fear of seeing all the things he could dream of and imagine happening to him in the negative. Becoming a
laughing stock to his team, Ruby hating him for flirting with her-

Finally, when it grew too much, he dared to raise his head, first spying his mother’s amused stare before turning around the table.

Shock and confusion warred on the other women’s features, and he could only be thankful that at least his paranoia was unwarranted. Getting slapped in the face with the awareness of his mother’s intent seemed to be more important.

“Wait- uh-” Ruby was always the one to steam forward, and he could only admire that kind of ability when it was something he lacked inherently. Second guessing everything was one of his flaws, he knew. “Are you- are you saying that-”

“That, amongst you, I’d hope he’d find a wife. Or, even better, several.” Nevena noted, making her message clear and blade-like. Nevena Arc never played around. Teased, yes, but she (along with most of their family, with him being a rare exception when it came to his own personal feelings) vaunted honesty and forthrightness as a stolid virtue.

Blake spoke up finally, face partially flushed and with a look that he was sure some would have paid to experience the sheer schadenfreude. “Several?”

“Of course. He’s noble by birth, and part of the limitations on marriages is being able to take care of one’s spouse. A big family needs a lot of care, you know. It was absolutely mad trying to raise eight children while my husband was always off on missions- even if we never struggled for anything.”

Jaune could see the logic, though he knew logic had little to do with it. And no, he wouldn’t take that sitting down. “You just want a lot of grandkids, Mom.” He remarked, dryly.

“Guilty.” Nevena Arc -smiled.-

“But wait- isn’t that- well- kind of messed up?” Ruby continued, while Yang and Pyrrha started to come out of their own self-imposed comas.

“Why so? Do you think Jaune would play with women’s hearts and treat them anything less than the Queens he would love dearly?” Nevena tilted her head, tapping orange-painted nails against the
“Er- no-” Ruby glanced at him, and both of them flushed.

“Good. Because I didn’t raise him to be that way, and if he did such a thing, I’d be very 
**disappointed.**” The implied threat was unnecessary, but effective all the same. He swallowed 
thickly past a sudden wave of nausea.

“But-” Yang finally got herself involved, and frankly he was glad to have something to focus on 
then the instinctive fear of his mother. “- wouldn’t that, I don’t know, screw up your family line or 
whatever?”

Jaune winced as Nevena began to laugh, eyes glimmering with amusement. “I knew I liked you 
two.” Gods, he forgot how easygoing his mother was, even when she was being -far too 
overprotective.- “I’ll let you in on a little secret, girls. I wasn’t of noble birth, and Roux- that’s his 
father, by the way, before you go asking- married me regardless of how upset it made his mother. 
All I want for any of my children is to be happy. And, I can tell you that marrying his father and 
raising eight children made me one of the happiest women in the world.”

Pyrrha finally spoke up, and his gaze shifted to her as she looked uncomfortable. “What does that 
mean, Lady Arc?” When it seemed clear she hadn’t fully phrased her thought, she amended, “That 
you hope your son finds . . . love here?”

He knew in that moment that, if it was on offer, his mother would have been nursing a glass of 
liquor. That smug smile on her face was often accompanied by a glass of whiskey- her favorite. 
“That, as of now, I’m happy to consider you all potential daughter-in-laws. Though, I must say, 
Jaune-”

Attention returned onto him, and he was glad his silence had at least bought him -that- much time. 
“- You’re surrounded by quite an array. Of course, little Ruby would be my preference, but I can tell 
you’re opening up to them all in your own way.”

He flushed again, wondering how long it would be before his brain short-circuited from a lack of 
blood flowing to it. Blake spoke up and saved him from stuttering his way through words, though. 
“Don’t you think it’s better to let him pick who he wants to be with? What if he doesn’t even like 
any of us?”
Nevena gave Blake a dour look for a moment, before a smirk that reminded him that he -was- this woman’s son slipped across those painted lips. “Jaune ran away from countless marriage meetings. Until Miss Schnee, he never approached women- admittedly because he knew I’d see his interest and try to make good on it.”

“Like you’re doing now.” Jaune muttered so quietly he was sure it could have been misconstrued as a breath, but the way his mother’s smirk only widened said he ought to just keep his thoughts internal.

“But, he’s on a team with three capable and beautiful Huntresses- one of whom he knows the parents of, even if only a little- and he’s friends with another. While I’d like to see little Miss Schnee grow up a bit before we reconsider her position, I still happen to think she and my little sun ray would be very happy together.”

Ruby finally came out of her stupor, wide open silver eyes only matched by her hands gripping the edge of the table. “I-I’m your favorite?!”

Nevena laughed gleefully at the girl’s response. “You are!”

“Why?” Yang noted, looking worried and curious all at the same time.

“Because, she reminds me of myself when I was younger. Well, if I’d been less of a party animal. After all, I married Roux for love, and- no offense to the rest of you girls- but I get the vibe that you have a great deal of love in you, little Ruby Rose.”

Ruby’s face was nearly as red as her cloak, and Jaune couldn’t blame her.

What was his mother -doing-?

Clapping her hands and resuming a more matronly smile, Nevena noted pleasantly, “Well, regardless. I have a hotel to check into, and it’s getting late. I have some business in the city that I have to take care of as an aside to visiting my lovely son, but it’s been such a wonderful time meeting all of you. You’re all welcome- including your team, Ruby- to come visit us at Maison d’Arc sometime, so I hope you’ll indulge me at some point. I know that you won’t get a break from the Academy until after the Vytal Festival, but I assure you that we have more than enough room, considering three of my daughters don’t come home much anymore.”
Standing, Jaune mirrored his mother as he smiled a bit more shakily than he had earlier in the day. “I- I’ll walk you to the Bullhead, Mom.”

And hopefully evade the avalanche of his friends all ganging up on him after being hit with a shockwave known as Nevena Arc.
Chapter Five

A Family Arc

Chapter Five

Women

He felt like he was coming back to a firing squad as he split off from saying his farewell to his mother as she stepped onto a new Bullhead. Even if they all just laughed it off, he knew the thought would fester in their minds and color their interactions going forward.

Damn it, Mom.

Damn. It. Mom.

He could only feel thankful he had the time it took to get back from the broadway to the Dormitories to think through how to mitigate this- well- unmitigated disaster. What was worse? The possibility that this would sever the fragile bond he’d started to develop with his team, or the potential for it all to blow up so supremely that he’d be -all alone completely- in Beacon’s halls?

Damn it, Mom.

The fated arrival was sooner than he’d have liked, as he pulled his Scroll from his pocket and swiped it. The door unlocked and he slipped it open with as much bravado as he could muster, stepping into the living quarters once again.

[Vol. 1 EP 13 Score: Nope!]

He was surprised to find only Blake and Yang waiting within. Well, not surprised so much as . . . disappointed, maybe? It was hard to define. Something between relief and disappointment, for sure.

“I’m back.” He announced as he closed the door, noting how Blake and Yang looked up from a
conversation they seemed to be having on their lonesome. “I’m guessing Ruby went back to her dorm, but where’s Pyrrha?”

The wince on Yang’s face said more than he’d have liked to admit reading into. She started to open her mouth, but he just held up a hand. “Nevermind. It’ll figure itself out later. Let me get a drink first.”

Tea wasn’t going to do the job, so he slid a few of the remaining groceries out of the way and pulled free a personal-sized bottle of fruit smoothie. Was it underhanded to hide it away from his team-mates? Maybe. But it was -his- damn it. “Do you girls want something?” A pair of soft denials met him, and he nodded his head as he stepped away.

As he unscrewed the lid, refastened it to shake it, and then settled at the table across from the two girls, he took a deep breath as he looked over how their gazes were firmly fixed on him. “Alright. So. That happened.” Smooth, Jaune, smooth. He took a drink while watching Blake and Yang’s faces. This was not going to go well, no matter how much he was going to try anyway. He’d made that exact promise this morning, and Arcs did not go back on their word.

Even if it sucked.

“It did.” Blake agreed, pausing before continuing, “I take it from the fact you’re sitting down with us for this, you know we need to talk about this?”

He reached up to rub at his nape, letting loose another sigh. The tightness in his chest and the slump in his shoulders was felt, and he struggled for a moment to come up with how to respond even while his blue eyes watched every motion of the two women who’d -stayed-. He knew how Ruby would react, so he didn’t blame her. He’d hoped Pyrrha would have at least stayed around so he could -try- to talk to her, but . . .

He’d just have to fight that battle later, probably.

“I promised myself earlier that I’d start trying to connect with everybody better. I know I tried before, but- well- maybe I didn’t try hard enough, you know? Thanks again, Blake. I know you helped get us all over the . . . bump, really.”

Yang broke into the conversation, a grin- if a shaky one- on her lips. “Blake’s the glue that keeps this team together, for sure.”
Jaune’s lips curled up slightly at that. “Yeah. I have to agree. You’re the best.”

Blake looked as mystified as she had when his mother had unleashed the proverbial Beowulf on them, so he had to wonder for a moment just what kind of life she’d lived to be so -shocked- at being praised. Or was it more that she didn’t think she ought to be the one who kept their team from falling apart? It was a lot of pressure, after all.

“I promise to help you pick up the slack, Blake.” He said, immediately after having that thought. “You’re my partner. Ah- but- er- let’s get back on topic.”

Blake nodded, looking like she appreciated the chance to wheedle her way out of being the focus for the two blondes’ attentions. “Yeah. That’d be appreciated.” Clearing her throat, Jaune settled his hands on the table once again while he tried to sit back up in his seat, having noticed he’d steadily started to slouch.

“Er, so, I’m going to admit straight out that I don’t know what to say.” He mused. “Because I’m not sure if you two will be mad at me, or don’t care, or-”

“Jaune.” Blake interrupted him, and from the way her amber eyes pointedly fixed on his face, he understood that she was trying to showcase her own sincerity. “We’re not mad at you. Not even Weiss or Pyrrha are, I don’t think.”

Yang shrugged when Blake’s gaze sat on her.

“So your mom wants you to find a wife- and is a little . . .” Blake winced, but he waved a hand to show there were no hard feelings, “Eccentric- about it isn’t your fault. You could have -warned- us about it, but I don’t think you had that on your mind at the time, did you?” When he shook his head, she moved on, “I get how it is, having parents that are involved in your life a bit too much, but you just wanted us to meet her, right?”

He nodded, “Yeah. My family is great. It’s a lot of pressure, but I wouldn’t trade it for anything. Mom, Dad, Camillia- they all helped make me someone who could get IN to Beacon, after all. And all of my other sisters are awesome, too, I hope one day you get to meet them all.”

“That . . . must be nice.” Yang murmured, and his attention turned onto her. Seeing her look suddenly a bit more glum made him wince. It was rare to see the blonde woman more than at her
absolute utmost, and so he knew whatever was going through her head had to be of a heavier bent.

“I know I’m probably not the closest friend you have,” He hazarded, “But if you want to talk, Yang, I did already promise to be a better team-mate.”

A quick glance at Blake saw her looking at Yang with a similarly curious expression, before he focused once again on the face holding those pretty lavender eyes. “My family is great,” Yang began, and he settled in to listen as best he could. “You’ve met Rubes. She’s the best little sister I could ask for, and our Dad is awesome- but . . . well…”

He got the feeling her issue had to deal with her own mother. He wasn’t going to stretch Yang’s arm about it, though. “Trouble back home?” He asked.

“Not really.” Yang waved a hand, “Sorry- maybe later. I’d rather be cool Big Sis Yang.”

Jaune smiled softly, “Sure. Whenever you want to talk, though, we’re here, right, Blake?”

Blake squinted a bit, but nodded with a sigh. So it was just that she wasn’t good at dealing with emotions? Or was it that she truly -was- the quiet type? She didn’t -seem- all that quiet from what he’d seen of her, but he had to admit that maybe it was just his own view of her.

“Thanks.” Yang noted, leaning on the table with her elbows while she plastered on a grin that looked like it fit her face, but Jaune felt to be a little brittle. “So, have you thought about it at all? What your Mom said.”

Ugh. Well, it was better than swapping sob stories, he supposed. “I- er-” And then Blake’s eyes were on him again, too. “Not- really? I mean, we’re a bit young to be thinking about marriage, no matter what Mom says. Sure, I’ve thought “Hey, that girl is cute” or “Wow, she’s beautiful”, but-”

“Oh-ho, now I hear some material, lover boy!”

x+x+x+x
Ruby wasn’t sure what to feel as she slipped back into her team’s dorm after Jaune had left to escort his mother back to the Bullheads, having watched as Pyrrha had stood shortly after, excusing herself, and leaving for what she could only presume to be another late night training session.

Pyrrha must have become the best purely because of how hard she worked herself into the ground, Ruby would swear. “Is she gone?” Weiss asked, startling the little Reaper as she turned from closing the door.

“SHEESH, WEISS! Don’t scare me like that!” Taking the time to catch her breath from the sudden spooking, she settled her fists on her hips as she regarded the white-haired girl, looking anxious in the doorway. “You mean Jaune’s mom? Yeah, he just walked her to the Bullheads not too long ago.”

With the way the Heiress relaxed almost as if a deflating balloon, Ruby could only blink, “Weiss, she’s super cool. How can you be scared of her? Besides, she seems to like you a lot!”

Weiss scoffed, muttering, “She likes something about me, for sure.” Ruby raised a brow in response, proceeded to cross her arms, and then - glared - (not pouted, never pouted) at her partner. “What?” The shocked look on the Atlesian girl’s face only persisted as Ruby employed the patented “disapproving sister” stare.

“Weiss, I’m your partner. She seems really nice, and- sure- she said some weird stuff, but it makes you and Jaune make a lot more sense now.”

“Nothing about me and Jaune Arc needs to make sense.” Ruby blinked at Weiss’ hard enunciation of Jaune’s last name, curious.

“Do you . . . really not like Jaune that much, Weiss?” Ruby felt saddened by that. Jaune was, after all, her first friend. He’d- he’d even called her - cute -. Ruby had always been compared to Yang throughout their time together, and Yang had- well- she’d bloomed young. Ruby?

Ruby was a puppy. Just “Yang’s kid sister”. She’d never been flirted with, and while she- of course- knew about sex and the like . . .

She’d never had someone say anything like that. Sure, it wasn’t quite as amazing as being called “sexy” or “hot” like she’d heard Yang whispered about, but . . .
To Ruby, Jaune’s playfulness meant a lot. She wasn’t “Ruby, Yang’s kid sister” but “Ruby, a cute girl who is my friend.”

That made Jaune awful damn special in Ruby’s world. The fact that she liked his mom was only cursory to that in size.

“It’s not that I don’t like him,” Weiss admitted after a few moments of shuffling and looking—well—stricken, “I know he’s your friend, but—there’s—”

“Weiss, what is it? We’re -all- your friends, so -tell me-.” Ruby moved her hands form her hips, yoinking Weiss’ in turn and holding them. Silver eyes gazed into ice blue, and Ruby put her best foot forward in trying to be the bestest-bestie-to-ever-best-a-bestie.

For a moment, it seemed like Weiss would rather disengage, but she grumbled a bit. “Eh? What was that?” Ruby blinked.

“He’s- just another noble who wants me for my money.” Weiss stated, her shoulders slumping while she stared at the floor. Ruby blinked, wondering where that thought had even formed in the girl’s head. Hadn’t she gone to his party? For that matter, why was -money- important? Sure, it bought ammo, and cookies, and—

Okay maybe Money was kind of important.

“But his mom is the one who wants you two to get married.” She noted.

“Voraciously so.” Weiss agreed, shuddering.

“And, feel free to correct me if I’m wrong, but- uh- Weiss, isn’t Jaune -kind of a big deal-?”

“He’s the heir to a noble house that goes as far back as the King of Vale. He’s kind of a big deal, yes.” Weiss’ sardonic sense of humor was back, which made Ruby grin.

“Then, what’s the big deal -with you-?” Ruby let go of Weiss’ hands, beginning to rock from side to side while she decided what to do with that information. It’d taken asking -Weiss- to get that info?
Really? If she’d known she could have asked her in the first place, she WOULD HAVE. Now Ruby felt silly.

“He’s-” Weiss started, frowning as she realized that Ruby would just discredit that same insistence with the ease that often came in the form of a popped-P “Nope!” Ruby -loved- doing that. She blamed Uncle Qrow. “He’s- he’s a -guy-.”

Ruby blinked again, wondering just where this conversation was going. “So if he was a girl, you’d be fine with-”

“NO!” Weiss shouted, and Ruby privately hoped Nora and Ren weren’t trying to sleep before the sun had fully gone down. “It’s- augh- why don’t you just -get this-?!“ The little reaper could only break into giggles, amused at seeing her partner’s reaction.

“Because I don’t know what your problem with Jaune is!” She noted, funneling a little bit of Yang’s teasing nature, “He’s a cool guy, Weiss. He’s trying real hard to be friends with everyone, he may not be the best in the class, but he always tries hard at everything. Not an ounce of give in that body!” That nice body, if she was honest. Co-ed showers were -awesome- thank you very much.

No, Ruby hadn’t snuck a peek or two. It was only fair since he’d called her cute!

“I- I know.” Weiss muttered, looking despondent for a moment. “He’s been nothing but polite to me, even when I’ve said some things I really should not have.” Shaking her head, the Heiress settled her hands on her hips and turned to slip into a chair at the dining table.

Ruby had enough of sitting for the night, so she paced in the kitchen while getting herself a package of store-bought cookies- “Oh, that’s right. She promised me cookies… I guess she’ll have them sent? Oh, maybe she’ll make -Jaune- make them for me!” Ruby whispered to herself, a gleeful grin on her face as she had that thought.

Yes. Nevena Arc was -awesome-.

“What are you muttering about?” Weiss asked, a delicate brow raised when Ruby turned to look at her friend and partner while she poured a glass of milk for herself. Creme-filled weren’t her favorite, but they were just fine packaged. Store bought chocolate cookies? Eugh. Home made, fresh from the oven only please!
“Nevena promised me cookies to get you.” “Traitor!” “So I was wondering how she’d get them to me.”

“Probably by having them delivered. Well, unless she was planning on having Jaune make them for you.” Ruby smiled at the thought, pleased to see Weiss had come to a similar conclusion.

“Can Jaune bake?”

“He’s your friend, wouldn’t you know? . . . Wait, you just tricked me, didn’t you!”

“Well, yeah, after all, you’re the one who was offered to be married to him. So, you had to have done some research or something on him, didn’t you?” Ruby noted, dunking her first cookie in her milk as she sat down at the table across from the Heiress, sliding the glass and the package of cookies between them. “Cookie?”

Weiss, with a disgusted growl, took one and dunked it before chewing it like an angry little puppy.

“There was . . . a profile made, yes.” The white-haired girl admitted after a few moments, “In case he was suitable.”

Ruby winced, looking conflicted. That didn’t sound anything like “In case I liked him”, and even RUBY knew that was not the right criteria for a relationship, let alone marriage.

“A-and?” Ruby wished she didn’t feel a tightness in her chest at that. Weiss was her friend- her bestie- and she didn’t like the idea of . . . well- her finding a man because it was “suitable”.

Even if it was Jaune, whom she knew would be a good boyfriend. A good boy friend! A friend who is a boy! AGH! WHY IS THIS COMPLICATED?

“He was . . . acceptable to my father.” Weiss groused, and Ruby frowned once again. Her own inner turmoil lost in the face of a more serious topic.
“What about you?”

“That-” Weiss looked shocked for a moment, then seemed to realize that she was talking to Ruby again. “... I don't know. I went to his birthday Masquerade because it was something I could -do- and not be -Weiss Schnee-, and . . . well-”

“You danced with him, right?” Ruby remembered that much from Nevena’s words.

“I did.” Weiss agreed, “He’s a very good dancer. I had fun.” She promptly slapped her hands over her mouth, looking stricken.

Ruby grinned. It was so nice to see Weiss having gotten more casual over the week since she’d been saddled on the team. Ren and Nora had helped -a lot- to bring the icy shell of her partner down. Under the caustic and defensive girl was a surprisingly sarcastic and good-humored girl, someone that Ruby -liked-.

“I think you should lighten up on him a bit.” Ruby noted, dunking another cookie before swallowing it whole with practiced ease. “Besides, you’re not the only one in his mom’s sights now, y’know?”

Weiss blinked, looking confused. “What? What do you mean?”

Ruby felt like grinning, so she did. She wasn’t sure why, but it felt right. “I’m her favorite.”

Weiss looked shocked again, and so Ruby returned to indulging in her cookies and milk before bedtime.

Suck it, Yang!

+x+x+x+

Jaune wasn’t having a good time of it. Yang wasn’t going to let up, and he knew it. Plus, he’d already swore to try and be a better team-mate- including being more forthright.
Even when it sucked, Jaune. Even when it sucked. Damn the Arc Word.

“Yang, are you -really- sure you want to know?” Jaune tried to keep a straight face, but he knew it wasn’t near as good as his poker face was. Dealing with pretty girls was never as easy as playing cards. Cards? Easy. Pretty girls? Not easy.

Yang’s teasing grin melted a bit, a moment of weakness that even -he- noticed, and his eyes swapped over to Blake whom had been sitting in relative silence since the barrage of playful ribbing had started. She’d probably tried to excuse herself a time or two, but . . .

Why -had- she stayed? Was she . . .

Was she -curious-?

“Sure.” Yang bulldozed ahead, and he saw her lips curl back up more properly again. So, that was one of the secrets behind their blonde team-mate. She had issues too, she just hid them better than HE did, at least. “Who catches your fancy, lover boy?”

“How do you want the list, or do you want me to break it down?” Noble, straightforward, always smiling--

Do not freak out, Jaune Arc. DO NOT. FREAK OUT.

“Break it down for me.” IS SHE CALLING MY BLUFF? She probably was, when Jaune thought about it, but frankly HE WISHED SHE WASN’T! The fact that he could nearly feel a drop of sweat on his forehead made him fully aware Yang and Blake were probably seeing him freeze up like an animal in a gun’s sight, too.

Okay.” Jaune took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. When all else failed, just use the training and instinct gathered from discussions. Don’t think too hard, just -say what you feel--

“Well, Ruby was my first friend here. She’s bubbly, and adorable. Even though I don’t know as much about weapons as she does, her enthusiasm is really catchy.” He noted Yang’s tightening face, as well as her widening eyes. Well, I guess I called her bluff, too- “-and I would be lying if I said I
didn’t think she’d make a great girlfriend. Mom was right, she has a lot of love in her.”

“Well, that’s cute of you, lover boy-” He held up a hand, knowing she would start teasing him and he’d lose his train of thought.

“Wait. If you stop me now, I’m not gonna be able to continue.” He took a deep breath again, and focused-

-right on Yang’s face in turn. “Yang, you’re- well, you’re beautiful-” He watched as her face flushed, lips drawing in tight and eyes widening more than they had when he’d talked about Ruby, “-You’re so amazing. You get along with almost everyone, you have this big . . . I don’t know, -fire- inside of you that just -warms- people up. I wish I was half as good as you at making friends. You’re so admirable.”

From the shocked look on the blonde’s face, he seemed to have successfully waylaid her teasing, and- against his better judgment- he turned his gaze unto Blake just in time to see her freeze up like a spotlight had been shown on her.

“Blake . . . First things first, I’m sorry. I thought that you only saw me for my family name, and because of that, I” He swallowed past a sudden case of dry mouth, “I haven’t been fair to you at all. I did something to you that I did to Pyrrha, too, which is why she’s still mad at me. I’m lucky that you even talk to me, but-” He took a steadying breath once again, “You're- well- you’re gorgeous. I want to look into your eyes sometimes just because of how pretty they are, and-” He flushed, “It’s-well- you’re mesmerizing. You make everything look so graceful.”

Oh gods, he was running at the mouth, wasn’t he? Yes, Blake was bright red, and he wasn’t sure if she’d actually heard anything he’d said. A look at Yang showed a startlingly shy reaction as well, her face turning away from his while she brought a hand up to cup her cheek, pointedly not looking at him when he swore she’d been looking at him before.

“Pyrrha is- well- I don’t know her that well, but she’s . . . she’s like this warrior goddess. I wish she’d even give me the time of day, but I know she may not ever after I screwed up as bad as I did when we first met. I can only hope one day she’ll forgive me.” That allowed him to return to Remnant a little bit, so he was privately thankful for the chance to breathe and come down from the embarrassed high.

“Weiss is- well- when we danced together it was great. She was so nervous, but she was just -there in the moment- with me. I got lost in her, and every movement we made together was just . . . right, you know? I know she probably puts up with a lot of stupid guys who want her money, and
I’m sure that’s probably -part- of why she’s so nervous about me and Mom, but . . . I think Mom is right, and there was . . . something between us.”

Please let him not have tasted shoe leather there. Please.

He chanced a glance over at the two girls sitting across from him again, then belatedly realized he hadn’t taken as much of his smoothie as he’d have liked. While Blake and Yang recovered, he sipped at the slightly-too-warm drink.

He wasn’t wasting his smoothie. Plus it was an excuse to let the silence drift. Totally not nervous.

. . . The silence was stretching on too long for him again. Oh Gods.

Blake seemed to recover from her stupor first, and gently stood up from the table. “I- think I need to lie down for a bit.”

“Okay.” Jaune winced, hoping that he hadn’t just irreparably broken the little goodwill he’d earned with Blake. His attention turned onto Yang, who was still staring fixedly at the wall nearby while her cheeks burned bright pink.

“I’m- gonna go find Pyrrha.” She broke away, going to stand, and Jaune could only let his head hang. “But-” He blinked, gaze turning up unto the blonde woman again. “... Thanks, lover boy. You are something special. Hit the showers, it’s been a long day.” With that said, she slipped out of the door and left him alone.

Though, despite himself, Jaune didn’t feel as alone. Maybe honesty -was- the best policy. So, taking Yang’s advice, he moved towards the bathroom and took a shower before bedding down for the night.

If he was lucky, the world would be a more placid place when he awoke.
Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Yang is subtle, Ruby isn’t. Jaune tries to connect, and in some ways, it works. Also, porn! Ruby is a filthy girl!

(The notes at the end of the chapter is In Bloom, Camillia Arc's theme.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Family Arc

[This Will Be the Day]

Chapter Six

Vale by Day, Rose by Night

Thankfully, things calmed back down- though Yang seemed a bit more leery of him since the night before. Thankfully, they had combat class to distract themselves from most everything at the time. Jaune finally got his chance to go up for a spar, though unfortunately he was paired up against Weiss.

That had gone poorly. Well, not quite -poorly-. Frankly, it had been a fun fight, but- well-

Weiss did not play around. He knew that, now. Thankfully, he’d made a decent showing before getting- well- thrown about because of whatever freaky blue lasers she summoned from her glyphs.

Damned range advantages. He couldn’t bare to go get a firearm of some kind to make up for that weakness, but he was -damned tempted- now.

Nonetheless, Pyrrha had faced off against Cardin Winchester and proceeded to give him a thrashing that Jaune did not- he repeated, did not- feel vindicated by. Not an ounce. Not even a sliver.
He did not smile when she sent him sprawling ass over head. He did not.

As Pyrrha came back up to their seating section, he offered her a high-five, and was only mildly disappointed when she looked at him and then stepped past to sit back down next to Yang.

He’d keep trying, regardless. Turning to Blake and the rest, he noted, “Going grocery shopping tonight. Can you girls put a list together of things you all might want or need, and I’ll take care of them while I’m there?”

Blake nodded, Yang throwing up a grin while Pyrrha seemed content to stare as the next two contestants arrived in the ring. “Don’t forget Rubes and I are coming with you, lover boy.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it, Yang. I’ll bring a little extra money so we can eat out. I’ll cook tomorrow, so if any of you want something special for dinner, let me know.”

Blake squinted at him, before noting, “Fish.”

“Salmon and wrapped veggies with wine?” He questioned, letting his mind run through the memorized recipe as if he’d learned it yesterday.

“Sounds good.” Blake noted, while Yang shrugged her shoulders. Pyrrha mimicked the motion, and he counted it as good enough.

+x+x+x+

Tucking his tie in, he called out as they prepared to go out. “Yang! You ready to go out?”

“Gimme a minute, lover boy.” He heard coming from the bathroom, and shook his head in response. A knock at the door had him turning to go open it to admit Ruby, who looked like her usual self—though he . . .
Is that perfume? He blinked, smelling Rosewater and cherries.

“Hi, Ruby. Yang is still getting ready. You want something to drink before we head out?”

The red-tipped girl gave him a shy grin, but shook her head. “No. Uh- you said we were going to get something while we were out, right? Do you have any ideas?”

Jaune, sensing a set up, shook his head. “I thought we’d just pick something we saw. You have a request?”

“Actually- uh- yeah. There’s a comfort food place near this Dust store I saw the other day-” Why did he feel like there was a story waiting there? “- and it’s pretty good.”

“Sure. Sounds great, then.”

As Ruby beamed, Yang settled out of the bathroom, looking as she usually did in her combat gear, though he saw a bit of a tint of pink to her lips and a light dusting of purple just above her eyelids. Okay, something is up. “You look great, Yang. Ready to go?”

Yang nodded, a grin startlingly similar to Ruby’s on her face, “Sure. You gonna be okay on the Bullhead?”

“Yeah. I have meds, and there’s a lot less to be nervous about this time.” He dug in a pocket of his suit, pulling free a metal tin filled with motion sickness pills.

“Then, let’s go.”

+x+x+x+

The trip to Vale was thankfully vomit-free, though the medicine didn’t help as much as he’d have wanted it to. Ruby had been kind- and he’d appreciated her for being willing to comfort him by rubbing the little naked flesh existing between his collar and his jaw.

People seemed to think rubbing the back was wise, but that made people want to vacate their
stomach more than anything else. Regardless, it settled back out by the time they were on firm ground once again, though Yang’s teasing about riding Bumblebee around had made him wonder if that was safe-

Especially with there being three of them, though she’d insisted that the bike was more than big enough to handle the three. He preferred that they walked and talked more, anyway.

He needed to get to know the sisters better, it was true. Even ignoring his mother’s “playful interference” in his love life, Yang was on his team, and Ruby was his friend.

He didn’t know enough about the two.

Damn him if he knew where to start in fixing that, though. The few looks of envy he got by walking around with two pretty girls were amusing, even if he couldn’t have corrected anyone on the fact that were just friends at best.

“So, where do you two come from?” It was awkward, but it was a step forward, in his opinion. Yang blinked, and Ruby latched onto the topic with a grin.

“A little island west of Vale, it’s called Patch.” The silver-eyed girl noted, seeming happy to just enjoy a leisurely day after classes with her sister and friend- or at least, Jaune liked to think she did.

“I’m guessing it’s a lot more rustic than Vale?” He looked between the two girls, seeing both nod in similar fashion. “Ansel is- well- it’s mostly dominated by-” He paused, feeling a sudden wash of negativity throughout him.

“Jaune?” Ruby paused, while Yang raised a brow at him. “You- are you okay?”

“Ah- yeah-” He didn’t want to talk about it. He’d started to, but . . . “Sorry- I- uh- To be honest, I don’t-”

His eyes closed. The world faded out of colors and sight, and just that deep welling in his chest of the fact he was causing himself pain again ate at him for a moment. “I’m sorry. Can you- uh- can you tell me more about you girls? Maybe I’m not good with talking about home right now.”
His eyes opened once again to see the two girls giving him looks—Yang’s one of caution, while Ruby wore her care on her sleeve like a new winter coat. He tried to smile, but even he knew it felt brittle. “Troubles at home?” Yang parroted at him, and he felt like she was being smarmy—but even in that instant, he knew she hadn’t done it on purpose. That was purely his own heart and brain telling him that the world was out to get him. “With my family, no. But—well—Ansel is insular. Lots of . . . old blood, and thus a lot of what matters to them.” He offered a wry look to Ruby. “Sorry, Ruby. You weren’t around for it. I’ll tell you later, okay? Let’s try to have a good time tonight.”

“We will, Jaune, I promise.” Strangely, Ruby’s confidence was back in full force, and he could only feel it was infectious. Though the somewhat strange look on Yang’s face was harder to place.

“How about we get lunch first?” He hazarded, “I got hungry suddenly.”

“Sure. Come on, Yang, Jaune! Follow me!” She started to trot off, and the two blondes could only look at one another with a shrug before taking off at a jog after the excitable little scythe-wielder.

“I know she’s always this excitable, but does she have a Sugar-Powered Engine for a heart?” Yang snorted, but it was followed by a few notes of a giggle.

“Maybe.”

+x+x+x+

The sleepy little restaurant that Ruby brought them to was, as she’d said, a comfort food place. Strangely, Jaune could say with a fair bit of legitimacy that the menu confused the actual hell out of him.

Fried chicken? Extreme doses of carbs? Things drenched in gravy?

He could only shake his head, if nothing else enjoying the simple acoustic guitar music that played through the radio in the place. They’d settled on a table after Ruby and Yang had had a particularly heated whispered conversation about a booth, sat an equidistant amount of space from one another while he perused the offerings—Ruby and Yang already ready to order from the way they were
grinning at his confused look.

Damn it, it was not his fault that he was raised in a more strict household. Four-hundred carbs in one meal piece?! FRYING chicken?! His mother would have screamed, and Camillia would have looked disgusted. Diet went along with everything—especially after he’d become a Huntsman.

He didn’t develop those muscles just from killing himself training, he’d insist.

Nonetheless, he found a grilled steak dinner that he happily ordered and promised to do an extra round of training that night to make up for. If he was feeling particularly insane later, he might even try to encourage Pyrrha to work out her frustrations on him.

Hey, it worked for Camillia. Why not her? And, compared to his sister, he had at least a moderate feeling Pyrrha wouldn’t -kill him-.

Ruby’s beatific smile as he finished ordering, and proceeded to nurse an unsweetened tea made him return it with a soft grin. “See, just wait. This place is great if you’re feeling homesick.”

I don’t know about that. Jaune mused, but he had to admit it had a pleasant little atmosphere. It wasn’t “high class” enough for it to remind him of home, but frankly that was a good thing after his thoughts earlier.

He wanted to be as far away from thoughts about Ansel as possible. As he’d said, it had nothing at all to do with his family—except for the people who surrounded them. The supplicants, the grins that hid knives and ransom notes. Before he’d convinced his parents to give him a chance to live his dream, he’d been coddled and squirreled away.

He was, after all, the Heir of the House of Arc. He’d been raised to become a . . . well- to put it unkindly- he’d been raised to become a trophy husband. It’d taken quite a lot of grief for him to be allowed the freedoms he’d gained since he was prepubescent.

And a lot of fighting on the part of himself, and his sisters. Foremost amongst them Camillia, Jade, and Peri.

He blinked when he heard Yang speak, but missed what she said. His gaze turned onto her face and he admired the way her lips glistened a little bit more under the light as a result of an application of make-up. He’d said it before, but he wondered idly if she’d taken his words to heart a little bit and
felt a bit more confident in herself.

That was just him feeling too egotistical, surely. “I’m sorry, Yang, I was lost in thought. What did you say?”

Yang raised an amused brow, but seemed willing to look past his faux pas. “Just saying you should probably look around. You have quite a few jealous stares comin’ your way, lover boy.” Teasing him again? He could only loosen his lips into a smile as his eyes rolled, before a chuckle slipped free.

They were good friends, but anyone being jealous of him? Envious of things he was graced by birth with, maybe, but earned by his own hand?

Jaune hadn’t done that for himself yet.

He didn’t even bother looking, knowing Yang was just being playful. So, in return, he was as well. “Let them look.” He put careful effort into using facial expression training to lid his eyes, staring at Yang through his lashes and steadying his grin. He put all of his focus onto -gazing- at the blonde girl in the way that the courtesans had always insisted made a girl likely to quake if they held any interest in you at all. It sadly had the chance of seeming a bit creepy, though, if they didn’t. Not that Jaune remembered that at the time. “I’m the one who gets to have dinner with some of the prettiest Huntresses in Remnant.”

He lightened his gaze, sweeping his blue eyes away just in time to miss how Yang and Ruby reacted as he lifted his glass and took a sip from the drink within. It was all practiced, all honed and taught by women who rivaled his friends in beauty- but didn’t have the same . . .

What word could he even use? They just didn’t compare. They were more beautiful, they had higher pedigrees, but-

They weren’t-

“J-Jaune-” Ruby’s soft little whisper dragged him out of his musing, and he blinked as he looked at the little Reaper again, taking note of her flushed state and her widened silver eyes. Sweeping his gaze from her towards Yang, her blonde sister wasn’t in a much better state.

Oops?
Thankfully, before he could grow self-conscious of allowing himself to slip into that easy aristocratic flair, their dinner arrived and he could only breathe a sigh of relief as he let out a soft “Bon Appétit.” Yang seeming willing to tuck into her food in order to stave off her own embarrassment, while Ruby was more mute in fixing her hunger.

And he missed the way those silver eyes had stayed fixed on him for the longest time. Even Yang did.

It could be forgiven, after all. Both blondes had a lot on their minds.

++++

Conversation had come back around after food had started to dwindle away, settling on more mundane things like the day’s spars and the annoyance of having a test already in Oobleck’s class—which he personally didn’t understand, actually enjoying the man’s classes.

He offered to help them both study, since the Faunus Rights Revolution was a subject he knew fairly well, and both had hemmed and hawed about it- giving him more the impression that they were more irritated at having to do school work rather than something “more fun”.

That had made him laugh, to be honest. It was- well- it was so normal that he could only admire it. For all his attempts to say he wanted to be just “Jaune Arc” and not “Jaune Arc ”, he could admit that he had very little clue how to just -be- himself.

Jaune had paid, and left a little bit more of a tip than he ought to have. But- well- he’d call it a celebration. Yang at least was opening up to him, even if Ruby was just as friendly as she usually was.

Next had been the actual event of the night, a trip to the market where he’d had a bulk of groceries ordered with some aid from a list made by Blake- since Pyrrha had only offered miniscule input, and Yang had insisted she’d be along with him. Satisfied with the fact that it would all be delivered in the morning, he’d turned to the girls.

“Well, shall we do something else, or make our way back to Beacon?”
Yang rolled her shoulders with a hum, “As much as it’d be fun to hit a club or something, not with Ruby around.” She reached out, ruffling Ruby’s hair to earn a pout from the dark-haired sister, while her purple eyes turned onto his face in turn with a gleam that didn’t fit her usual grin. “Let’s go back to Beacon, alright, Lover boy?”

“Sure.”

Just another popped pill and some hope that he’d deal with the trip a little better as he got more experienced in the damned flying machines of doom.

+x+x+x+

As they slipped back into the dormitory proper, Ruby put away her Scroll, smiling beatifically, "Jaune, you want to come hang out in my room for a bit? It'll be a blast!"

Raising a brow, Jaune glanced at Yang, who gave him a somewhat wry look before smacking his bicep. "Go on. You haven't gotten to hang out much with Rubes since the year started. I'll go train with Pyrrha or maybe Blake will want to do something."

Offering the blonde a happy grin, he nodded. "Sure. Thanks, Yang." With her part said, he watched as the blonde woman's hips cocked with each step as she sauntered off. Huh. That was . . . More noticeable than usual. Right after, his gaze turned onto Ruby, smiling at her half-pout half-grin.

"We're gonna have a good time, Jaune."

As she led him into RWNR's dorm, he took mild note of how the place seemed relatively empty, likely the other members were out doing something as well since it was the weekend.

He certainly could see Weiss going out to shop or entertain herself with something beyond studying. Jaune wouldn't blame her. Ren and Nora would get dragged along by Nora's own whims and enthusiasm.

As his attention turned back unto Ruby, he noticed the happy smile she graced him with, and despite how he should have been used to her expressions, he found himself blushing. "Ruby, you're staring."
"Yup!" Complete with a Ruby Rose brand popped P, the silver-eyed girl took his hand- startling him by knitting their fingers together- and walked with him towards the bedroom. "Come on, Jaune."

Trusting her was easy, Ruby was his friend after all. He was shy at her holding hands with him in such an intimate fashion, but he presumed that Ruby's intentions were innocent.

RNWR's bedroom was just as he remembered it, save for the exception of a ratty looking set of covers on the floor that he puzzled at alongside a little black plastic bag. As his blue eyes moved to settle onto Ruby, her other hand grasped his and she rotated to stand in front of him, stepping backwards into the room and leading him towards the pile of covers.

"Sorry, bunk beds aren't great for this. But, this way, we won't have to clean up the mess." Her smile lightened out into a soft little smirk as she carefully kicked her boots off towards the foot of her and Weiss' beds. The loss of the boost to her height strangely made Jaune feel like she was taller on her stocking-clad feet than on the combat boots she wore with her black and red outfit.

Suddenly, Jaune felt like he was in trouble. Something that had been eating at him since Ruby's arrival-

Ruby leaned up and in, her hands bringing his gloved ones up to her cheeks as she captured his lips and promptly made all rational thought cease. His hands stayed on her cheeks while her's ducked inwards to grasp the knot of his tie and lead him down to the ground above her.

He would have liked to say that his mind was going kilometers a second, but the truth was that he might as well have been struck dumb by the kiss. A soft, pleasant little hum coming from Ruby's throat before her tongue tested the waters against his lips, prying them open as he thoughtlessly close his lips right after her tongue.

The invading muscle tickled in his mouth and reflexively made him suckle on it, only heightening the seeming pleasure of the young woman underneath him, as her hands moved away from his collar and into his hair, rifling smooth and calloused digits through the blonde locks that declared him an Arc. One of her stocking clad legs curled outwards and then cocked up, trapping his hip and bringing him tighter to her body as some of his weight fell down unto her, the soft little "Oof" that came from the dark-haired girl the first thing to truly register since she'd initiated the lip-lock.

The soft scent of rosewater and cherries filled his nose as silver eyes looked up at him, her
multicolored hair fanned out underneath her against the off-white of the covers. Jaune's breathing was quick and he realized something that would have otherwise alarmed him.

He was turned on. Contrary to his given reactions to the girls—most of his fantasies admittedly being about Pyrrha or Weiss up until his mother had put... Ideas... in his head—Ruby had always seemed youthful and innocent.

And now Jaune knew that wasn't the case. The glimmer in silver eyes as she tucked herself up against his cheek, the breathy little whisper that had that same Ruby Rose tone of gleeful energy, but—"Let's feel good together, Jaune."

It was not the erotic kind of come ons he'd been coached about by his tutors, but that little series of words made his pants far too tight, and his mind wander.

Why did he not remember that— for all Ruby was two years his junior—she was a very driven and passionate girl? That this kind of thing could be—expected from her—?

He was such an idiot sometimes.

His hands moved from balancing himself to letting him lean down, teeth raking against the exposed flesh of her neck and pulling free a soft little mewl that made him want more. She husked his name into his ear and he wanted more.

Her arms came up and peeled off his jacket, tossing it aside with a weighty thump thanks to the reinforcement plates, the vest and shirt were discarded right after she yanked open his tie. Exposed from the waist up, Ruby's eyes gleefully roamed his defined muscles and her lips curled outwards in a soft kiss to the air. "Way better up close." She whispered.

He flushed at her words, understanding innately what she meant by such a thing. Though, he couldn't help but feel a pleasant little flutter in his heart at such a thought— that Ruby —enjoyed— looking at him like this.

It was amazing what little things could do to your ego. “You’re... wearing too much clothing.” He noted, a bit shyly, though she nodded in return. He shifted off of her, and she tugged at his belt, showcasing that she thought so too. Obediently shucking his greave-like boots and then shucking his pants and the boxer-briefs beneath, he laid down next to where Ruby was fussing with her cloak and corset-skirt, then the top that had been beneath it until she was left only in a set of simple black
lingerie and her stockings.

On her lips was a smile he’d have thought would fit more on Yang’s face, but the more that was revealed to him, the more he began to think that maybe he’d misjudged the girl who had been his first friend outside of the family.

“Do I look “cute” now, Jaune?” She asked, and for a moment, his brain went into high gear, trying to analyze and direct him through that thought, before he remembered something important-

When he overthought things, he tended to screw up. So, instead, he took a deep breath and just let his emotions speak. “Ruby, you’re- you’re sexy.” Damn it, still stuttered.

What? He was being honest! Besides, it’s not like he could deny it when he was laying there with a hard-on in front of a nearly naked girl.

Ruby’s playful smile melted a bit, a soft flush coming across her face while she let her hands rest on his shoulders and she straddled him, the soft fabric of her panties brushing against and pinning his length down against his own blonde curls and pelvis. “Thanks, Jaune. You’re the best.” She noted, before flushing a bit darker, “Er- and Weiss. You’re both my besties.”

He couldn’t help but laugh softly at that. He’d been getting mesmerized by this seductress that had suddenly replaced the cute, dorky little Ruby Rose that he enjoyed spending time with so much, but it was clear this was just another facet to her personality. She leaned down, leaving him seeing into her bra to firm bubblegum pink nipples as she pulled the bag closer to them and pulled a string of condoms free with a more muted smile.

He could only puzzle at this girl- to be so prepared. Hopeful? No, she’d planned this from the start, hadn’t she? As soon as she’d gotten awareness of spending Friday evening with him, she’d thought this up. That was the kind of “schemer” Ruby Rose was.

It was . . . interesting to be the prey to her usual plan of attack, instead of the Grimm or her sparring partners. Not bad, necessarily, but certainly scary.

“How many of these do you think we can go through?” Ruby played with the string of foil-wrapped packages, fussing with them as if she would tear half off- or a quarter- then only one. Her eyes were alight with intent as he felt himself pulse beneath her.
Gods, who taught little Ruby Rose this kind of stuff?

She seemed to settle on just grabbing two for the moment, tearing open one and fumbling for a moment with the slippery rubber as she went to shift back down onto his thighs and encase him in it. The sudden touch to his manhood made Jaune squirm a bit, making Ruby giggle.

“Hold still. This is already difficult for a first-timer.” Well, he hadn’t thought Ruby to have experience, but it was strange for him to think that a girl could have enough sense to just know how to deal with this.

He had to guess it was “research”. Sure, plenty of people talked about watching porn and reading erotica, but he’d had- well-

-way too many female relatives, servants, and elsewise to risk something like that being in or around his room. It’d only been recently that he’d been alone that he could begin to indulge in his own sense of intimacy.

As he’d thought, Pyrrha and Weiss had been the first to feature into his fantasies, but steadily the others had started to worm their way in. Yang with her delicious body, sculpted with muscle and yet soft in the ways that inspired lustful thoughts in men- including even himself when he was trying his damnedst to be her friend. Blake with her svelte, beautiful form that would perhaps one day be as elegant and curvaceous as her mother. Even cute little Ruby, who had- well- some of the nicest legs he’d seen beyond Pyrrha herself.

Feeling those same legs sheathed in soft fabric wrapped around his thighs was . . . well- the whole situation was erotic.

Finally, Ruby’s fingers peeled the contraceptive tight around his base, and tilted her head a bit as she raked a nail up the pulsing length, making him let out a ragged gasp. “I gotta say-” She started, leaning forward again and letting him brush against her tummy, “Seeing a real one face to face is so much more wild than the videos. You’re gonna make me feel good, right, Jaune? That’s what a good friend does.”

He nodded, frankly willing to agree to -anything- in that moment with how wound up he was. “Ruby-”

“Yeah, Jaune?”
“Is- it okay if I touch you?”

“Sure, silly! Why wouldn’t it be?”

He had to squint at that. Ruby’s thoughts on all of this were quite odd—though perhaps that was just the difference between him and someone like her. Ruby was a girl who thought in simple, easy terms. The world wasn’t quite shades of gray, just “right and wrong”. Not that there was anything wrong with that, but she definitely wasn’t the type to get hung up on moral conundrums—

—or the difference between a lover and a friend, it seemed. They were both forms of like, so he could understand in a certain way. He was sure they’d have to have a talk about what this all meant at some point, though. NOT when they were trying to be intimate, however. That way would lay disaster.

His head and his -other head- were in agreement, there. His hands slipped up her knees, leading to a soft and airy little giggle as his fingers brushed over her sides and then inwards to- with a glance at her face to make sure she didn’t suddenly realize that maybe this was a mistake- her breasts by slipping under her bra. Pushing the restraint out of the way, his fingers brushed against her hardened nipples and admired the soft texture of her growing breast.

“Jaune…” Her voice came out clearly, but with a certain hazy quality to it that only made him more aware of what they were doing. An embarrassed flush settled on his face as he palmed her whole breast in each hand, and then let his gaze rest upon her face again. The gentle panting coming from between her lips, and the way her eyes glowed with a hungry expression showcased that his touch wasn’t unwelcome at all.

One of her own hands wrapped around his shielded length, and he let his eyes close as she carefully fiddled him towards the gusset of her panties, pulling them to the side and letting him feel her heat as she poised him. “Nice, deep breath-” She uttered, and he had to wonder if she was talking to herself--

--and then she pushed herself down over him, and he had to admit that he should have obeyed the advice regardless. The sudden tightness and heat knocked the air from his lungs in a huff as his hands shifted from her breasts to her hips, holding tight as his eyes startled open just in time to see Ruby’s face scrunch up in a focused expression as she slipped him inside to the hilt.

“Oh, that feels funny-” Ruby remarked softly, and he had to agree in a certain way. Feeling her
clamping down on him was- well- it was MUCH more intense than his self-pleasuring exploration- even through the condom.

With his hands cupping her hips, he could only hold on as Ruby shifted and let out a few sounds of mixed pleasure as she got him fully situated and left him feeling more than a little warm from his neck down as he felt his body flood with a new sensation. Finally, she seemed to be satisfied with his “fit” and began to raise her hips, tongue cutely sticking out of her lips as she drew him out almost to the tip- and then landed back into his lap with a loud **fwap** as her rump and thighs slapped against his own hips.

“O-ooh-” Ruby groaned out, and he wished he had the air to make more noise than a strangled gasp. She rose up again, and he had the time to draw in a breath before she began to buck and roll her hips against his own in turn, and his hands slipped up her sides- drawing another breathy giggle from the apparently ticklish girl- to run his fingers into her hair and draw her down to where he could kiss her again as she balanced on her knees and palms.

The soft, tender taste of cherry lip-gloss mingled with the scent of her perfume and the undertone of mecha shift grease and sweat made him aware of how -real- all of this was. That he was having sex with Ruby- well, more like she was riding him like a prized horse, if he was honest.

With the fullness of their intimacy, he moved his hands to cup her ass through the fabric of her panties and got himself settled as he began to thrust up into her in kind, huffs and puffs coming from between them before they would re-engage in that hungering kiss.

Soon enough, he could take no more, and he gripped her cheeks tightly as he flooded the condom inside of her, gasping and grunting with each time he expelled while Ruby just ground against him to her own rising pleasure.

Even as he felt the sensitivity pangs of post orgasmic bliss, she bounced his length around inside of her until she could draw her own quaking joy from within herself, crashing fully against him and clenching his semi-softened member within her hard enough that he could swear he was growing hard again just because of his blood flow being trapped within. His hands running up her back as he groaned out her name, trying desperately not to use his nails even though he felt his fingers go numb from the effort.

Wasn’t that usually the cliche for the man?

After a few moments of the two of them drawing free heavy breaths to try and get themselves back in order, Ruby let loose a soft giggle and reached over, grasping up the second condom wrapper as her head raised with a pleasant little smile on her wet lips and a smoldering light in her eyes.
“One~”

Jaune swallowed.

+x+x+x+

By the time he slipped into his team’s dormitory again, he had to admit that he probably stank a great deal. From the fact Yang and Blake were hanging around in the dining room again, he had to admire the fact that they hadn’t gone hunting him down after he’d spent almost a whole hour with Ruby.

He’d fussed at Ruby about her team coming back at one point, but she’d giggled and simply told him that she’d asked for the bedroom alone for about that long. He’d like to know how she’d gotten Weiss to agree to that, since he figured Ren and Nora were altogether more likely to go along with the request simply because it wouldn’t bother them.

“What the hell, lover boy? You look like you fought a wildcat.” Yang noted, looking more than a little surprised as she took in his- admittedly less cultured- appearance.

This was about the point when Jaune realized that, shit, maybe he should have cleaned up better. “Ruby plays rough.” He admitted.

Yang’s admonished look was darling, and he had to admit that it helped things make a lot of sense when she nodded. “Ah- yeah- that happens sometimes.” Though, from the quirked brow and the wide-eyed look Blake gave him that she wasn’t as fooled. He shook his head, hoping to at least avoid it for the moment.

“Speaking of, I smell like a wreck, and I’m still wearing the same clothes I’ve been in all day. I’m going to get a shower, and change into my pajamas. Back in a minute.” He started to shuffle into the bedroom to gather his things, when Blake’s voice called out to him.

“Don’t forget that Monday is the trip to Forever Fall, Jaune.” He blinked, craning his head as he tried to remember, and then nodded in return before offering a thankful smile over his shoulder at the secretive-Faunus.
“I had. Thanks a lot, Blake. I’ll make dinner tomorrow when the groceries get here.” He once again started to step into the bedroom, before pausing and leaning back around into the kitchen, “Oh, and if you girls ever have any requests, just let me know. Mom didn’t pay for the best culinary tutors in Sanus for nothing.”

Nor did his family train him to deal with the bruises that had developed from a surprisingly rough Huntress-in-training. It was a good thing shower time was sacred in Team JBPY’s dorm, otherwise someone would have a lot of questions about how many marks were decorating his body.

For his “friend”, Ruby didn’t use kid gloves. And he hadn’t even had a real chance to ask her what it had meant, either, with Ruby getting a warning text from Weiss that she was on her way back which had meant him getting hastily dressed and pushed out the door.

He’d have to talk to her tomorrow about it.

. . . Damn if he didn’t feel like a million Lien, though.

Chapter End Notes

In Bloom
Camillia Arc’s Theme (Casey Lee Williams)

(Intro)
I thought you were everything,
Listened to your every-
Word,
Dreamed of being like the heroes,
In the days of yore-

(Verse)
How could I be so stupid?
Believing every lie-
A fantasy that’s bound to be-
Torn down every time!

(Pre-Chorus)
I’m not a seed to spread-
Upon this flower bed-
I’m a person, too-
Not burdened by your view-
I’m a bloodflower-
In Bloom-

(Chorus)
Blooming red,
Scattered dead,
The haunting wails of-
All that’s left-
Fill my dreams-
And won’t you believe-
The things I’ve seen-
Won’t leave me be-

(Verse 2)
I caught wind of the truth-
The beating heart within the darkness-
At the hands of all our enemies-
I felt so cold and heartless-
A little ray of sunshine-
Was all that gave me light-
And even then I threw myself-
Threw myself into the night-

(Pre-chorus 2)
The Crimson Camellia
Fluttering softly- sweetly-
Through the breeze-
As the sun wilts down-
It all will drown-
In shadows darkening
My hopes completely.

(Chorus)
Blooming Red,
The Scattered Dead,
Haunting Wails,
Of what is left,
Fill my Dreams,
Now do you-
Believe?

(Outro)
And now-
Do you-
Believe?
Chapter Seven

Chapter Summary

The first step to reconciliation is a little bit of forgiveness. And Yang is never that subtle. Ruby, though? Ruby is a weirdo.

(The end notes of this chapter is Jade Arc's theme, "I'm To Blame".)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Family Arc

[This Will Be The Day]

Chapter Seven

The Princess, and the Forest Where Forgiveness Began

Despite his desire to get an answer out of Ruby, she’d acted pretty much the same as she always had when he tried to get her to have a serious conversation- though Weiss seemed to be giving him newly strange looks.

The weekend went like that- with the only major development being that the girls had apparently enjoyed his cooking on Saturday. Even Pyrrha had gracefully cleaned her plate, and- beyond his wildest dreams- thanked him and said it was good.

That sounded a lot darker than he meant it to, but hey- the issue between him and Pyrrha wouldn’t be fixed with something as simple as dinner and an apology- otherwise it would be fixed.

He’d continue to take what he could get. One day, they’d be proper friends, and all of this would have just been rough seas beneath the bridge.

Jaune was an optimist at heart.
The day of the class trip to Forever Fall came, and he found himself loaded up unto a Bullhead once again, nursing another air sickness pill while he settled in next to Blake while Yang and Pyrrha were nearby adjacent. Hoping to keep his thoughts from the movement of the aircraft, he turned his gaze to his partner as they flew over the city of Vale and towards the designated drop zone for the forest of red and Grimm.

“I’ve seen photographs of Forever Fall, but I admit this is the first time seeing it in person.” He mused to the Faunus, her amber eyes darting at him before she turned her gaze back forward with a mild noise.

“I’ve seen it once before, and it wasn’t quite the time to appreciate anything beautiful.” He got the feeling that there was something more that she could say, but he didn’t pry. Blake would come out with what she wanted to share, when she wanted to share. While he and Yang spoke the most out of their time, he at least got the feeling that Blake was opening up to him- even if she wasn’t yet at the “personal conversations and lasting eye contact” stage.

“Well, hopefully this little gathering trip will give us some time to appreciate it.” He noted, wishing he had something else he felt he could talk about with the dark-haired woman, but- well- he was scared of broaching some dangerous subject that might see them cold to one another again.

He’d just gotten most of the team to spend time with him! He could hardly be blamed for playing it safe.

Blake’s eyes turned towards him again, and he raised a brow at her silently, as she let her eyes close and then a sigh brush past her lips. “You danced with my mom, to be honest I forgot about it because of Initiation, but-”

“La Résistance d’Chevalier Faunus, correct?” Blake mused, surprising him and leaving him shocked for a moment- before he remembered the fact he’d learned about her, and let himself shake his head to clear it of sudden cobwebs.
“Yeah.” Blake’s sudden, curious little frown caught his attention, but he let it go. “Anyway- she talked about your father, what Menagerie was like, and how she was happy to be invited- though she was a little curious how that happened.”

“Why -were- my mother and father invited to your fifteenth birthday, Jaune?” Blake mused, finally actively turning her full gaze unto him and-

-well, he got lost in her eyes again. Those glittering pools of golden amber always made him scared to stare too long. Blake’s eyes were beautiful, their gentle slits that implied her heritage even though most overlooked it since she hid her trait so “well”.

“Well, Weiss and her parents were invited too, though only Jacques Schnee showed up.” He mused, before moving on, “From what I understand from Mom, my family knew your parents had a daughter my age, though where Mom got that information, I don’t know.”

Blake blinked, before slowly reclining back in her seat, looking -shocked.- “Blake? Are you okay?”

“I- I’ll be fine, Jaune.” She didn’t -look- fine, but she settled down after a few moments, so he was willing to dismiss it when the Bullhead landed and they all had to crowd back out into the clearing amidst the red trees of Forever Fall.

+x+x+x+

As they settled into the trees, his head turned to listen to Professor Goodwitch’s instructions. "Split into your teams. We will need a jar each per person to fulfill Professor Peach’s needs. If you happen upon Grimm or something else, rendezvous back here at the landing zone if you cannot handle it yourselves.”

Jaune felt that was just a bit ominous, but he was sure it just seemed that way. Nonetheless, he turned his gaze towards where the rest of JBPY and RWNR were seemingly discussing something, though what he’d missed.

"Splitting up. Who is going with-“
Before he could even finish, Yang had thrust Pyrrha at arms length towards him, and declared loudly, "Taking Blake for girl talk!"

Befuddled- and not alone since Pyrrha was looking more than a little confused by the suddenness- he watched as the blonde aldragged the ravenette along with a couple of jars off into the flora. Ruby offered him a smile and a wave while RWNR broke off into pairs of Ruby and Nora and Weiss and Ren.

His gaze turned onto Pyrrha, and he understood. Yang was . . . A good friend, if a bit too rash. The redhead's face was impassive.

Welp, this was gonna suck.

As he offered her a Jar, he noted, softly, "I... think it's time we talked, Pyrrha."

As her green eyes settled on him, he wished he could say she looked ready to meet him halfway, but . . .

That would have been lying.

They traipsed off into the undergrowth, searching for an appropriate tree to tap for the sap that Professor Peach wanted to use for study, with Jaune mentally going through what he could actually say at this point. Frankly, he wasn't sure. If Pyrrha had opened up about what about him bothered her, he could address it. He had suspicions, but . . .

"I'm sorry, Pyrrha." He turned his head as he walked, using his peripheral vision to keep from walking into a tree while minding Pyrrha's facial expression. "I must have really upset you by my flirting when we first met- I- I did it on refl-"

It was the first time he actually saw her confusion on her face, making him pause and turn to regard her as she stared at him in turn. "Jaune, it's never been about you flirting with me." She sounded annoyed more than anything else, and he had to admit that the sound of Pyrrha Nikos mad was NOT something he wanted to endure.

"Then, please tell me what I did wrong so I can fix it. We're on a team together, Pyrrha. All I can ask for is to at least be friends with everyone. I'm making progress with Yang and Blake, but-"
Pyrrha's eyes darted off to the side, an uncomfortable look on her face that could barely be described in poetics. It was the kind of raw, forceful emotion that told him Pyrrha was normally a girl prone to smiles and good moods.

And he was causing her this feeling. That-well-it didn't help his poor self esteem.

His words died in his throat.

After several moments of uncomfortable silence, Pyrrha began to murmur, "You and Weiss want the same thing."

He blinked, confounded. To be Pyrrha's friend? Weiss did pick fairly good friends from how well she did in Team RWNR-

"To be your friend?" He finally uttered, unsure of how else to address that statement.

"You just want The Invincible Girl-" His heart skipped a beat, and he missed the rest of what she said.

Pyrrha -did have the same issue he did.- For her, celebrity, for him, nobility.

That had been why he wanted to be friends with her in the first place, having someone to lean on and just be "normal."

"Pyrrha-"

"Catch this, Nikos!!" His gaze sharpened as the world entered a shade of adrenaline-enhanced miasma. He recognized that voice immediately, and that put him right on the edge to notice what was happening.

Cardin Winchester wanted revenge. Crocea Mors expanded into it's shield form as he adjusted it unto his arm and ducked in against Pyrrha, guarding the upper halves of their bodies on one side
while pulling the athlete in against his body for the other.

It was a calculated, instinctively trained response. When one could not have attacked from the front or back, the only remaining options were the sides or a vertical assault. Cardinal's voice came from the right of him so he'd had to spin to get his shield in place in time.

But, as the sound of glass shattering and the wet splot of something smearing across his shield announced, his reflexes were still good without having been beaten nearly to death by his sister in the past month.

"Arc!?!" His shield lowered and he stared over the rim of it's tip as his arm- keeping a now blushing Pyrrha trapped tight against him- started to draw the blade.

"You think this is funny, Winchester-!?!"

It seemed when it rained, it poured, as his gaze turned upon the armored brunette and his blue eyes widened.

Because beyond the man was a Ursa Major trampling towards them, past Cardin and his cronies.

"Cardin, move-!!"

xxxxx

"Did you hear screaming just now?" Ruby looked towards Nora, who was gleefully guzzling an extra bottle of the sap from the tree with what seemed to be no repercussions. Don't they usually treat that stuff to make it into syrup? The gothic little Reaper wondered, before remembering that they had something more important to do.

As she drew Crescent Rose free, she took stock of the rest of the two sister teams being nearby one another-

-and then the fact of whom was not with them. "Jaune!"
Ruby didn't want that scream to have been Jaune. As she darted off in the direction of the noise, the rest packed up to follow after.

"Arc!" Cardin hollered as the Ursa Major was joined by a pair of smaller Ursae, and he had to admit that it was bad to be caught on the opposing foot.

Normally, Camillia had taught him to always plan, strategize, and prepare the battlefield—especially against human opponents—but right now he had to keep himself from being overwhelmed by all three of the creatures focusing almost exclusively on him.

Was it something to do with that sap that was clinging to his shield? Not the time to think about it, he ducked a swing from the Major and brought his sword around to cut into the meat of it's hind leg while Cardin poised himself, looking startled by the sudden appearance of the Grimm.

Pyrrha rotated into his peripheral vision and—with finesse born of years of training likely as hardcore as his own—leapt up to deliver her own sword's stab right into the soft part of one of the Minor's jaws, rending the flesh and sending the creature stumbling while she recovered into a defensive stance.

It was amazing how graceful she made fighting seem. Pyrrha Nikos danced with Death, not other people.

The Major reared back forward and he brought his shield up and then lined the tip of Crocea Mors through the fluting of the shield's design, using it to steady the thrust as he pushed through and sank it to the guard in the creature—

The other Minor started to close in at his side, and he threw his weight forward and yanked with the spin of his hips, shredding the blade out of the shadow creature and sending it crumbling with a yowl of pain. The Minor's clawed paw came rushing towards him and he brought his shield back around—

Just in time for Pyrrha's spear to impale itself in the smaller Ursa's head. As the Major began to crumble away into Dust, he looked around the battlefield and felt his focus drain away.
All that remained were the three teens, and Jaune could finally focus his attention on the Male who had launched the jar at his team-mate.

Just as the rest of his team arrived, alongside members of team RWNR, he was already feeling the anger overtake him.

"What the fuck is your problem, Winchester?!"

He knew it was unsightly, that it would reflect poorly on him, that he shouldn't care about Pyrrha because of how she'd treated him--

But he was Jaune Arc.

Jaune Arc was -pissed-. Enraged enough to forget the very fact that his team, and his friend’s team, were watching as he metaphorically loomed over the brunette man. “Just one loss against Pyrrha and your idea of revenge is to hurl a glass jar at her? What if you’d hit her head? Do you think Professor Goodwitch would have accepted an excuse when you brained a fellow student?!”

He watched as Cardin’s mouth opened to respond, but- suddenly- he was jarred backwards. Jerking his head back, he stared into green eyes as Pyrrha’s lips split softly and he was struck by her light words. “Jaune. That’s enough.”

For a moment, he fumed. That was enough? She- she could have been-

“I’m okay.” And with those two words, everything left him and he felt numb down to the core. His shoulders slumped and the rest of him untensed, his eyes turning towards Cardin- his team-mates having abandoned him in the midst of the Ursa attack- and he only had a few moments to see the stricken look on the Huntsman-trainee’s face before Pyrrha’s gloved hand drew him back again.

“Let’s go.” She noted, and he stepped back towards the group. Overall, he couldn’t meet anyone else’s eyes. His temper was rare, it was true- but . . .

For anyone on JBPY, or RWNR? He’d do much worse than shout at them. Arc’s kept after their own.

Pyrrha moved to a tree to tap it, and he did the same not too far away. Despite the silence, it didn’t
feel oppressive or worrying. It just felt . . . like a distance that would one day be crossed.

“Thank you.”

“ . . . I’d do it anytime, Pyrrha.”

x+x+x+x

By the time they’d finished gathering their jars of sap and returned to the landing zone, Jaune had managed to psyche himself back into a normal mindset. It had taken some time, but- well- having made a little progress with Pyrrha- even if he’d meant to do so with words rather than in the midst of a scuffle- truly did help improve his mood.

It was unfortunate that Pyrrha thought him focused on her status as a celebrity and tournament champion. Sure, he had seen her fights before, and she -was- very much a laudable fighter- he just wanted to make friends. They were on the same team.

Did she . . . think he was truly that superficial? Did he -appear- that superficial?

No. She was just used to dealing with people who were. She couldn’t be blamed for that, and so he’d just keep trying. Jaune Arc wasn’t a quitter.

As they settled into the Bullhead again, he found himself surprisingly sat next to Yang this time, with Blake and Pyrrha nearby. The blonde girl was staring at him, and- well- frankly he didn’t notice it until just a few seconds ago even though he should have.

“Everything okay, Yang?” He asked, reclining back against his seat- frankly amazed that he wasn’t feeling queasy. Perhaps it was just the remnants of adrenaline, battle-haze, and those embers of raw and pure anger keeping his stomach from doing acrobatics.

He wasn’t sure he’d prefer to feel that way all the time just to avoid throwing up in a Bullhead, though.

Yang startled, and he blinked as she looked away for a moment, before finally taking a breath and
letting her gaze settle onto his face again. It was strange for her to take such a serious- but altogether strangely demure- expression. He was so used to the playful, teasing Yang that- well-

-the way she looked at him worried him.

“Just- amazed at you, Jaune.” And she wasn’t even calling him lover boy. What was going on?

“What. Cardin?” He wondered. “I’ve wanted nothing more than to punch the guy in the throat since he basically announced to the school who I was. I wasn’t going to be a brute about it until he-”

“Got Pyrrha involved, yeah.” Yang noted, reaching over to lightly smack her knuckles against his shoulder, making him grin with amusement. “I just didn’t think you could get mad.”

“You’ve not known me that long, Yang.” Jaune admitted, grin softening down into a much more somber smile.

“No.” Yang agreed, “But-” She struggled for a few moments, and he could only watch as her expression morphed and changed with every breath she took, seemingly trying to get something out-

-though what, he wasn’t sure.

“. . . But- I want to. Know you, I mean-” Yang murmured, and he could only blink.

“I’m an open book, Yang-” He tried to say, but was cut off right after-

“No- No, Jaune. I mean- I want… to get to know you.” Purple eyes settled on his face, and despite himself, he began to flush. No. There’s no way. He wasn’t willing to believe it.

“You-”

“Yeah- if you . . . don’t hate it-?”
“What, why would I- no, Yang. If- if you want to go on a date, that- that’d be awesome. I’ll make you feel like a princess, I promise. Arc’s word.” He couldn’t help the elation in his heart, or the way Yang’s expression softened and she smiled affected him.

He was learning so much about his friends the longer he spent with them. And he could only hope that it would continue that way for a long time. “I’m sure you will, lover boy. How about we have another friday trip?”

“Just you and I?” Jaune confirmed, and Yang nodded.

It only occurred to him after Yang had started to smile and he’d felt a pleasant burn in his own chest that what he’d done with Ruby might have been an issue.

That was when panic had ensued.

He needed to talk to Ruby.

x+x+x+x+x

As one might expect, hunting down Ruby and getting her alone had been a lot more of a hassle than it ought to have been. The girl was such a bundle of energy that the only time he knew perfectly well where she was, was when he couldn’t get her alone so he could ask her about-

-well, them. Finally, a few hours after they returned from the trip to Forever Fall, he gave up and just outright sent a call to Ruby’s scroll, asking her to meet him out in the promenade.

And so there he was, waiting beneath one of the large pillars that held up the structure along the massive fountains that- for some reason- Beacon had.

He could only puzzle at the plumbing costs for the school- wait, this wasn’t the time to think about that.

Right, waiting for Ruby-
“Jaune!” He blinked. Think of the Rose, and she shall bloom. She flashed over to him in a blur of rose petals and he could only feel curious about how she could so put up with using her own Semblance so often. Granted, his own Semblance still either laid dormant- or didn’t exist at all.

No matter how Camillia, or his parents had tried to get him to discover it. He’d taken more beatings near-to-death for that particular reason alone.

High stress situations, his ass.

“He reached up, running his gloved hand through the curls at his nape once again, the nervous tic always done automatically and without his own input. “So,” He started, watching as the silver-eyed girl’s body bounced from foot to foot, looking impatient.

“What’s up, Jaune? You said you wanted to talk-”

“I- I do!” He couldn’t help the way his nerves made him stutter. Really, how was he supposed to just come out with this? It was ludicrous, at best. “Ruby- I- . . . what was the other day?”

Ruby blinked, and he flushed, trying to think of how he could make it obvious without damn near biting his own tongue off-

“Jaune . . . what do you mean? Are you mad?” His face skewed up in confusion. Mad? At her for -that-? Why would he-

“You mean am I still mad at Cardin?” He asked, trying to figure out what it was that she was aiming for.

“Yeah- after all, that was . . . the first time I’ve seen you get angry, actually. It was kind of scary.” Ruby admitted, and he felt bad for having lost his temper as he watched her lips quiver a bit.

“No- Ruby- that’s- that’s not it at all. Ugh- I- well . . . on the Bullhead back-” Gods, how could he tell the girl he lost his virginity to that her sister had asked him on a date, and he’d said yes? This was the thing of terrible afternoon soap operas that the Twins loved to make fun of.
Oh gods, was that his life, now?

He was half-tempted to give a look around for a camera crew.

“Jaune, you’re my friend, what is it?”

Jaune snorted, a tinge of frustration making it’s way up his spine. “That’s- that’s part of it, Ruby. We- we had sex, did it not-”

Ruby blinked, then her expression of confusion melted into an easy smile. “Oh, that’s- okay, I understand now.” She did? Wait, she did?!

“Enlighten me, because I’m lost and scared, Ruby.”

The fact that Ruby giggled at him helped lift his spirits a bit, but he couldn’t help but feel that this conversation was even weirder than he’d expected it to be. “I just wanted us to feel good together, silly. You’re my best friend- er, my best male friend. Sure, you’re hot and all, but I just want to be friends, y’know?”

He wasn’t sure if he should feel insulted or not. Frankly, it was so Ruby that he couldn’t really find it in himself to be mad. Just . . . confused. “So, it doesn’t change anything? We’re not . . . going out, or anything?”

Ruby nodded, “Don’t be silly. I like you a lot, Jaune, but I’m not really ready to date, you know?” But you’re ready to have sex? REALLY ready, in fact . . . “Not that- I- you know- don’t think you’re awesome and stuff- you are- but-” She started to blabber, and he decided it was better to cut it off and just let the truth get out there.

Okay. I’m still confused, but at least I know where we stand. Uh- Ruby, Yang asked me on a date and I said yes-”

Despite how he half-expected the silver-eyed girl to get upset, she seemed to beam, grinning wide. “Ah! That’s awesome! Yang deserves to have a good boyfriend.”
Ruby Rose will never make sense to me. He thought, utterly mystified by how the young Reaper could think it was just fine to have sex with her best friend and consider it just business as usual. The sad thing was, he knew it made sense in Ruby’s head, and so he could only accept how eccentric his friend was.

Besides, they -had- had a good time, and Jaune would remember it fondly. Technically, a little stress relief had been just what the doctor ordered.

Even if the doctor probably would have insisted he stopped if he saw all the marks before his Aura had healed them.

“Well- if you’re- not gonna be upset, I guess- okay.”

Ruby grinned, “Why would I be mad? You’ll treat her right, we couldn’t be friends if you wouldn’t be nice to Yang too, right?”

Jaune snickered, unable to help but imagine what happened to the poor schmucks who treated Yang Xiao-Long “poorly.” He imagined most ended up in a shallow grave- or at least buried in a wall from the force of one of her punches.

“She’s on my team, and she’s my friend. She’ll be my Princess for a night, I promise, Rubes.”

Ruby, satisfied, nodded her head. “Yang’d like that. She’s kind of a softie under all that grit and badass big sister stuff.” Jaune could see it, to be honest- even if he couldn’t really fathom Yang Xiao Long in a girly dress.

Ah well, there was a first time for everything. Reaching out to ruffle Ruby’s hair, he offered her a smile. “Thanks, Rubes. Sorry to be hung up about it.”

“It’s fine, Jaune.” Ruby shook her head, looking happy just to spend time with him.

+x+x+x+
Weiss stared blankly at the page of her homework, annoyed beyond reason that her brain was so focused on other things that she couldn’t work on her paper for Professor Mulberry’s assignment on Dust cartridges and maintaining proper barrel specifications.

The topic wasn’t the most gripping of things, she could admit, but- normally it would be simple to do three easy pages on something she could have written in her sleep, but-

The day’s happenings had stayed with her since they’d arrived in the clearing to see Jaune standing up for Pyrrha, looking so incensed that for a moment she could tell she wasn’t alone in thinking that Jaune was one word away from drawing his sword again and hacking into the Councilor’s son.

Certainly, Weiss knew innately that Jaune wasn’t -quite- like the noblemen she’d met before, at least in that he came from a family that was already well-known to have stepped away from decorum once.

Nevena Arc was not scary because she was born a noblewoman, Nevena Arc was scary because she -made herself into one.- Unlike with her own father, Roux and Nevena Arc were well known to be in love, and Nevena’s moods were commonly easily attributed to the status of her children.

In comparison, her mother had become a drunk under the strain of her failing marriage, and her father . . .

Well, if she’d fancied marrying Jaune, Jacques would only have approved because it looked good on paper- after making the blonde sign a pre-nup and sign over his name as Arc to Schnee.

That thought alone made part of her want to commit to the act only to choose to take the Arc name purposefully. Weiss was, indeed, that vindictive.

Weiss had never hated Jaune, but she could admit that she was more than a little scared of what he could be. Another man so conceited and clever that she’d wind up like her mother.

Ruby had . . . put a hole in her defenses, she could admit it- if only to herself.

But, thinking back to the actions today, Weiss could piece together what had happened before they’d all arrived and come upon the three standing over Grimm dust floating away into the breeze.
Cardin Winchester tended to be a one-trick pony, after all. And the glass shards and sap still stuck to Jaune’s shield had given at least a cursory idea of what had happened.

It made perfect sense that Jaune, raised in a family as close-knit and tightly disciplined as the Arcs, would only ever get angry for his friends- even if she knew that Pyrrha talked with -her- more than she talked with Jaune Arc.

It was admirable, and Weiss hated herself for admitting that Ruby had been right.

She ought to try and get along with him, especially after he’d done his level best to take their duel in Goodwitch’s class seriously. It had been a good fight, even if he’d had the disadvantage from the start.

He had to close in to range with her, she did not. She had ranged abilities, and knew well that he focused purely on up close and personal combat.

So she hadn’t bothered at all to get close to him. She wasn’t going to be blinded by pride in a duel. Weiss herself was a luxuriously trained duelist- she’d even had time spent with her sister, Winter, who was considered one of Atlas’ premiere Huntresses.

Even knowing that his own sister, Camillia Arc, had trained him only further inclined her to believe that duels did not suit him. Where Roux Arc won battles against Grimm, and mostly Grimm, through a powerful Aura and rigorous training, and Nevena Arc was a powerhouse who could focus her Aura into her fists to land blows as devastating as any club or mace- alongside wielding a somewhat outdated but still -very effective- brand of dust-chambered shotgun . . .

Camillia Arc was, what one might call, a blackguard. More specifically, she was an expert in Guerilla Warfare, and from what research Weiss had been handed about the Arc family by the SDC’s security corps, the oldest Arc sister hadn’t had a fair fight since she’d participated in the Vytal Festival as an independent on Beacon’s side back when Winter herself had been a student at Atlas.

The only reason Weiss felt that didn’t end up being relevant is that the two never faced one another.

To see that her little brother, and protege, was wholly so noble and refined could only be attributed to his mother’s teachings, she supposed.
But . . . something about that fact ate at her. Five years spent under the thumb of a Huntress whom she’d learned had a disturbing predilection towards preferring human targets, and tactics that would have been called extreme-

It painted an odd picture. One that made her continue to be just a little bit wary of a boy she might have loved if she hadn’t grown up so distant from others.

Closing her notebook, she sighed as she stood and went into the kitchen to get a frozen treat. She’d feel better after something to soothe her nerves.

Chapter End Notes

I'm To Blame
Jade Arc's Theme (Adrienne Cowan)

( Intro)
When I was young,
All there ever was,
Was the dream.
The test of myself and-
The gambler's plea.

(Verse)
I found you there in the darkness,
Cast aside after they broke your heart,
In my kindness,
I gave you a piece of my own-
And more than that-

(Chorus)
I'm to blame,
I gave you what you wanted-
And you took it from me-
The words I put on your lips-
The gun I put in your hand-
Everything that you did-
Now belongs to me.

(Refrain)
I'm to blame-
I'm to blame-
Everything you've done now belongs to me-
I'm to blame-
I'm to blame-
And now I don't have the strength to bring you-
Back to the light.

(Chorus)
I'm to blame,
I gave you what you wanted-
And you took it from me-
The words I put on your lips-
The gun I put in your hand-
Everything that you did-
Now belongs to me.

(Outro)
And now she's the one who has to take the pain.
Even though I'm to blame.
Chapter Eight

Chapter Summary

Jaune and Yang go on a date. Jaune and Blake sit down and have a talk.

(The end note is Nevena Arc’s theme, Glittering Gold)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN: You might as well queue up Dan + Shay’s Speechless for when Yang opens the door.

A Family Arc

Chapter Eight

A Yellow Rose Blooms Too

Classes that week were filled with a new brand of anxiety for Jaune. Despite his teachings in etiquette and courtship rituals, it didn’t help how nervous he got around- well- one of the prettiest girls in the school.

And Beacon was -filled- with attractive women, he’d swear. Hell, even most of the men were good looking and fit. If he’d “swung that way” he would have lauded the Academy for being a buffet of both genders.

Nonetheless, as Friday finally arrived and he found himself borrowing RWNR’s bathroom to change- under Yang’s insistence and Ruby’s scrutinizing eye- he studied himself in the mirror. His hair carefully parted and groomed to a fine golden sheen, the light application of concealer to hide the lines that a lack of sleep had delivered unto him overnight, and the clothes that lacked a jacket due to the fact it was- well- still rife with summer heat in Vale.

He was a gentleman, not a sweat doll.
As he went to zip back up the bag dedicated to his “formal suit” he spied a glossy black, and from the bag, he pulled forth a familiar mask. A smile washed across his face, while at the door, Ruby blinked.

“A mask?”

From around the corner, Weiss leaned in- a bowl of mixed fruit and yogurt in her hands- and paused with a gasp. He offered her a smile, and put it back into the bag.

Ruby seemed to get the implication, and simply shook her head with a smile. “You look great, Jaune. You’re gonna knock her bee’s knees off.”

“Thank you, Ruby. Weiss. We have a dinner reservation to keep, so I’ll get out of your hair. Thanks for letting me get dressed in here. Here’s hoping Yang is ready.”

Ruby’s smile melted into a much more anxious grin, while Weiss rolled her eyes. Weiss hadn’t talked an extensive amount with Yang, but even she knew that it was a woman’s prerogative to take as long as they wanted in grooming themselves. But that was also why Jaune had probably allocated an extra hour to get down from the Bullhead and to the restaurant by cab.

“Do your best, Jaune.” Weiss remarked, stepping back out of sight.

+x+x+x+

As he knocked on the door to his own team’s dorm room- an ironic if not amusing act- he stepped back and gave himself a last second check. He hadn’t been able to bring flowers- mostly due to the fact it would have been a hard thing to do to go down to Vale for flowers, come back, dress, and hope they hadn’t gotten tousled by then- but he felt that he could offer them to her later in a less “traditional” manner.

Yang probably didn’t understand the nature of flower language like he and Weiss might, so he felt it was better to be a bit less subtle when it came to that. He’d go through with the date and then decide how he felt about it. That felt safe.

It’d put less pressure on Yang, too. Or, at least, he hoped it would.
The door to their door opened, and his gaze moved from himself-

And his breath froze in his chest.

He’d been joking about the idea of Yang in a dress, but seeing her in one didn’t quite do the humor he’d felt at the time justice. Once again, her face was gently touched with make-up, soft rings of purple adorning her lids and the outline of her brow while a more firm glossy pink colored her lips like bubblegum. That wild mane of blonde was tucked up into a high ponytail that exposed her neck, the line of her jaw, and her ears.

It should be noted, from what Jaune was aware, revealing such parts of the body was meant to be a display of mixed eroticism and trust. The nape and neck were- after all- places animals tried carefully to keep hidden or protected, so exposing oneself like that was a display all it’s own. Perhaps humans had forgotten, but Faunus culture still held true to a few of those instinctual drives- and even common fashion was shaped by one’s desires and affections.

Yang’s dress was a much more overt display in her thoughts, though. It was a deep orange at one end that faded into a more demure yellow, bringing to his mind the flames that sparkled and came into existence when she used her Semblance.

She’d only used it against him rarely in spars, but every time made itself a firm memory. He and Yang had a much more fun time against one another, since they were both close range combatants when they were in their element, so he actively gave her a challenge until she’d use her Semblance or he’d make a misstep and she’d capitalize.

He was not a sore loser- he was amongst some of the premiere Huntresses in their year. He’d only had a sanctioned spar with Weiss and Russel Thrush so far, but he had practiced against his entire team by this point. Pyrrha beat him by virtue of her finesse and sheer experience, while he and Blake exchanged blows and held a very tight win-to-loss ratio.

Yang? Yang had to work to win against him, and for him, that was damn near singing praises, since she was easily regarded as the second strongest Huntress in their class. He always had more fun fighting the wildcat Blonde to the last inches of their Aura than he did being picked apart by Pyrrha, though.

Finally, he swallowed thickly past the sudden wave of nerves, and- a bit more breathlessly than he would have liked- murmured, “Hello Yang. You- look great.”
The flush that came from deep in her neck up to her eyes made him smile. It was like seeing a whole new side to the blonde whom he’d been made the leader of. Her stance wasn’t even the same confident wide-legged readiness for action she always wore. The little gold stilettos she wore with her dress brought in more tightly together while her hands knitted into the fabric of her knee-length wide-billowing skirt. “Thanks. You look good, too. Handsome.”

He could only smile as he offered her an arm, and she took it with a soft little laugh.

This was going to be great.

“I have dinner reservations for us.” He babbled a bit, “Then, we can go dancing like you wanted to.”

Yang grew a grin much more close to what he’d expect of her, though despite himself he couldn’t help but notice how his view of her was being shaped by this just as much as his time with her as a team-mate. “Sounds like a plan, lady-killer. Gonna make me feel like a “Princess”, huh?”

He nodded in turn. “For tonight, you might as well be Princess of Remnant. I promise, Yang. I want you to feel like this is the best first date you’ve ever been on.”

A blonde brow raised, and Yang’s grin muted a bit more into a more demure smile. “Best first date?”

Jaune offered her a wry, easy smile. “If I make you happy, I’ll make every one the best date. Arc Word.”

Yang laughed, bringing her other hand around to smack against his shoulder. “You’re such a charmer when you want to be.”

“If you say so.” He was a wreck of nerves, if he was honest.

That didn’t stop him from looking forward to time spent with his team-mate and- at least for tonight- girlfriend.
They talked lightly as they made their way down the broadway to the Bullhead docks, Yang telling him about life in Patch and then how she came to be a Huntress, while he teased her with some of the less boring facets of nobility—very careful not to talk too much about things that would lead into more dour thoughts.

Part of the experience of a date was, after all, making it good for the other party. He’d been drilled on that countless times before he’d even started training to be a Huntsman. Every girl deserved their Prince Charming, according to Nevena Arc.

He’d had the good sense to take the air sickness pill a little earlier in hopes it would help him through the Bullhead ride, but frankly—Yang’s presence and his ability to focus on her helped more than the medicine probably did.

If nothing else, he felt safe with Yang around. And that was besides the butterflies metaphorically eating his insides alive as Yang tentatively put her hand in his, and he squeezed her’s in return. Calloused and scarred fingers tight against her own.

As they touched down, he rose and Yang did so after an extra second of fixing the skirt of her dress. They stepped out back onto solid ground, and Jaune could only internally crow victory that he hadn’t screwed up so far.

Build confidence and momentum, keep your head up high, and always put your best foot forward. The advice came easily, a tidbit from Jade that had helped him more than he would have liked to admit. Jade always was gifted at speaking to anyone and everyone, he’d never seen her stumble. She was so well-liked and so regarded that it was easy to forget that this was the sister who teased and tormented him, in favor of remembering the girl who made friends as easily as breathing and was so driven and outspoken that he swore she’d give a speech and people would be swayed by her.

His eyes scanned for their cab, and he noted they were a few minutes early. So, his face turned towards his date, and he noted Yang’s lavender eyes settled on him in turn, a pleasant little smile on her face that—well—

It made his heart flutter. Gods, Yang was beautiful. And she was here with -him-.

He felt -so damn good- right then. The time out with her and Ruby had been fun, even if it wasn’t overly involved, but tonight the focus was all on her- and hers would be on him. That thought brought his nerves back to the forefront, but he stamped it down with a purpose.
Nervous Jaune Arc made mistakes. Mistakes he couldn’t afford to make on his very first date with THE Yang Xiao Long. “We still have a few minutes until our ride arrives,” He told her, earning an amused grin from the blonde girl, he led her over to a bench to wait. “So, since we’re away from the watchful eyes of our friends, I want to ask you a question, Yang.”

A blonde brow raised, and the girl crossed one leg over the other as they sat. “Shoot, Jaune.”

“Did... “ He tried to think of how to phrase it, “You’re fine with this, aren’t you? You know, I’ll have to tell Mom eventually, and she’ll be saying we’ll be married in no time, right?” It was better to address the elephant in the room before it could ruin their relationship, in his opinion. He loved his mother to death, and Yang at least knew about her, so he wanted to be clear and concise when it was often part of the thing that he struggled the most with the girls.

He wanted to impress them. He wanted them to feel the same way he did about all of them. Sure, up until this point, that had been in order to be friends, but Yang had -asked him out-. If nothing else, that implied that she had designs on a romantic attachment with him beyond just being good friends and battle-buddies.

Jaune’s self worth fluctuated at the best of times.

Yang put on that serious face that he knew always came when she needed to be, and he was always privately glad that, beneath the joking and pun-delivering Yang Xiao Long, there was a laudable young woman that he felt truly did remind him of his mother. Some people would make jokes about that, but he could go for FAR worse than someone who reminded him of the driven, personable, and competent Lady Arc.

“Jaune. You’re my team leader. Sure, we had a rough start-” He agreed with that, mentally, “-but you’re also a good guy. Sure, I had a lot of friends at Signal, and a good amount of guys who wanted to see the ole Xiao Long charm themselves-” Her hands raised up near her chin, a grin slipping onto her face once again as she playfully gave a few muted little fake punches, “-but you make me feel good. Besides, I know you look at me, but I also know you don’t just like the look of me. Ruby adores you, and even Pyrrha is starting to come around- even if she’s still cold- so I know you’re at least a good enough guy to put on something frilly and girly like this.”

Her hands gestured at her body wreathed in that lovely dress, and he could only smile in return. He wasn’t bombastic to Yang, but he didn’t feel he needed to be. He just needed a chance, and that she was willing to give that to him? That meant a whole lot on it’s own.
Yang Xiao Long could have her pick, and she’d picked -him- to go on a date with.

“You look amazing.” He said, “Whether you’re in your combat gear or not.” He let his tongue ghost around his lips, wetting them for a moment while he dragged up the courage to continue, “But you make me feel very special to see you like this.”

Yang laughed, and- as the cab pulled up and he stood- he heard her just as he felt her hand snake unto his wrist and then down to bring their hands together again, “You better. So where are we going, lover boy?”

As he indulged in the feeling of affection that came with holding hands with a pretty girl, he offered her a smile before they went to climb into the cab, “Doremi, it’s a nice restaurant over by the Hotel Vale. Not quite five star, but I thought you’d like someplace a little more casual. Plus, it’s a short walk to a dance club we can actually get in.”

For some reason, Yang laughed at that, and he decided to just let that story come when it wanted to.

The ride was easy and a bit longer than he expected it to be due to some traffic, but he slipped the payment to the driver alongside a small tip, and they stepped right on out into the afternoon air of uptown Vale in front of a restaurant that- while it may not have been the premiere kind of place he felt Weiss and her family would have required, it was a place rife with good reviews- one of which being his own mother who had insisted it was a “good place for a romantic rendezvous.”

He knew he’d been getting led along by that, but he trusted his family to take care of him, especially in this.

Nevena Arc, after all, wanted him to succeed.

As he offered Yang an arm again and he led her into the restaurant, a maître d’hôtel took note of his appearance and he gave his name and their reservation for two. Yang must have been surprised, because she took in the appearance of the restaurant that must have been much more fancy than she’d expected from him on a first date. As he led her along behind the waiter who was brought forth to serve them, he ignored the customers around them while he saw Yang studying everyone out of his own peripheral vision.

He hoped that didn’t make the wrong impression, but he’d been thoroughly honest in saying he’d
treat her like a Princess- HIS Princess- tonight.

The table wasn’t the cliche candlelit bistro that was often saw in movies, but it was better in his opinion. He didn’t want to be seen as cliche or traditional, he wanted to be seen as sincere and enthused. Posh restaurants were good for making impressions, but it wasn’t his job to make an impression tonight- just make Yang feel like she’d had a good time.

Frankly, an easier thing to do. He ordered a light wine as an aperitif, while Yang went a little more muted with grapefruit juice. Alcohol wasn’t something to be indulged in- even though they were fully legal to do so both by age and by their status as Hunters-in-training- because she probably wanted to keep herself muted as well.

She’d talked enough about her love of Strawberry Sunrises for even him to have gotten the gist that she liked fruity cocktails. He categorized that for later, when they weren’t on a more formal date.

As they waited for their drinks to return and to order, he watched Yang go through the menu, looking a bit more undecided than when they’d been in Ruby’s comfort food restaurant. He didn’t even bother looking- this kind of place was something he was more comfortable with. He distracted her by settling a hand on one of hers holding up the menu. “If you can’t pick something, I can pick something for you. Don’t rush, though. We have all night.”

Yang offered him a slightly more uneasy grin over the menu, and he settled back to enjoy the companionable silence while she picked something and the waiter returned. She settled the menu back down and slid it to the edge of the table while he ordered a chicken and vegetable dish that he knew wouldn’t sit poorly with him after a night of more energetic dancing, while she settled for a steak.

Frankly, he didn’t blame her for a heavier order. Yang seemed to burn through calories like an explosion, from what he’d seen of her eating and snacking habits.

The fact he knew explicitly that she loved spending time in the school’s gym only made him more aware of how hard Yang worked to keep a body as hard and yet effeminate as her’s was. Part of looking attractive was having an attractive mindset, it was true. He understood that implicitly from Camillia and Nevena’s insistence on his diet and workout regimens.

Even before he’d been training to be a Huntsman, he’d been expected to keep trim. It was easy to be fat and comfortable, it was hard to pack abdominal muscles and look fresh out of a modelling catalogue.
At least if he failed as a Huntsman- unlikely- he had a back up. That thought made him smile, even though it was easy to smile in Yang’s presence as it was. As they were left alone again, he scented the wine and took a sip before letting his gaze settle unto his date again. Yang was slowly losing her nerves, her lavender gaze on him again even while he could tell that she wanted to talk about something.

He could understand that need to carefully and purposefully judge the conversational topics. They were learning about one another as more than friends tonight, so it was not as easy as just starting with any other topic.

“You asked me if I was fine with this,” Yang began, and he leaned in a bit on his elbows to pay full attention to her, “But, I have to ask- how seriously are you taking your mom about all this?”

It shocked him, he would admit, to hear her ask that question. Sure, it was a heavy topic for a date, but it wasn’t unwarranted. That said, he also saw where Yang was going with it. “About just finding a wife, or?”

Yang corrected, noting he was asking for clarification, “I know how you see us all, since you outright told us- smooth move there, by the way, lover boy-” He winced, but grinned nonetheless. Sure, he was lucky it hadn’t rubbed the girls the wrong way, but- well- honesty had been the best policy so far, “But- well- I admit it’s a little weird to hear a guy’s mom encouraging him to go hunting for girls.”

He winced again. Yikes. That was a dangerous minefield, even he could see that. “Mom is eccentric, it’s kind of what happens in noble culture. She wasn’t born into it, but she worked really hard to be Lady Arc, instead of just “that woman Roux Arc married”. She took all of our tutoring and the like more seriously than most of . . .” He had to admit he had to adjust his words so as not to come across as scathing, “Other . . . noble children.”

Yang noticed nonetheless, from the way her lips curled down a bit. Eager to not address that part of his childhood, he continued, “But- well- I grew up with a different understanding of love than most. For my mom, love is everything. For my dad, he was taught that marriage was about politics and power, and he denied that to elope with my mother.”

His blonde companion’s slight frown turned back into an amused grin. “Your dad sounds like a good guy.”
“He is.” Jaune agreed, readily, “Stiff, kind of emotionally distant, but I couldn’t ask for a better dad.” Yang’s arched brow made him decide it was fine to go on a bit more. “Dad isn’t the “hug and comfort” type, but he supported me when my family started to take me seriously about being a Huntsman. He’s always been proud of me, and he’d be just as happy regardless- because Mom would be happy, too. Mom . . .”

He couldn’t help the laugh that threatened to bloom from his chest, so he just went ahead and let it out as he swept his eyes back unto Yang’s face with a pleased air. “Mom really wants me to be happy. And, she wasn’t wrong. Polygamous marriage is a bit outdated by most standards, but it’s something that has precedent in our society. As long as I love them, Mom would just be thrilled at how many grandkids she’d get to spoil. And you can bet my sisters would be the most thrilled Aunts.”

“And?” Yang mused, and he knew that they were entering the part of the conversation that would very likely make or break this date- as much as he wished it wasn’t before they’d even had dinner. “What do you think?”

Jaune was silent for a moment, nursing another sip from his wine to buy time for his brain to work through it. Honesty was the only thing that’d worked well for him so far, so- “I wanted to be friends with all of you first, I admit,” He began, trying to slowly gather momentum again, “But Mom put ideas in my head. I’d be lying to you if I said I wouldn’t be thrilled. But, first and foremost, I’d want to make sure anyone who became my girlfriend or more was the happiest woman- or women- on Remnant.”

His gaze turned back unto Yang, and he started to pay attention fully to her expression once again. This was the metaphorical moment of truth. He’d admitted that he wouldn’t be against his mother’s ideas, and now it was the question of if Yang would appreciate that, or not.

Regardless, he still planned to make sure she had a good time, but he’d understand if that broke their chance at being a couple. It’d hurt, but at least he could see it being a more amicable split than anything else.

He watched as Yang’s expression changed over and over for a minute, steadily making him more nervous until finally she spoke. “I think I need time.” She noted, and that made him feel at least relieved. It wasn’t a positive response, but it also wasn’t a negative one. Needing time was damn near a good response since it meant he wasn’t being beaten to death or thrown out of the date he’d worked hard to make happen.

“Take all the time you want, Yang. For tonight, let’s just let this be about us, okay? No one else.”
He was thankful that she settled down a bit at that, and with their food arriving shortly after, he was glad to have the distraction to give them a little time to smooth back out the tempo of the date so they could return to a more positive vibe. He teased her a bit about lamenting the lack of spiciness and heat with her steak, and she smarmily replied about how his own dish might as well have fed a girl watching her weight.

Despite himself, the taunting and teasing made him smile again.

As they settled through dinner with more meager small talk- though he did learn that Yang had an affection for animals that he could appreciate, even talking about her and Ruby’s dog back home in patch- he got a bit more relaxed as it became time to pay the bill and head down towards the club he’d scouted out over the week.

Jaune Arc did not play games about dates. EVERYONE in his family saw to that, not just his mother.

As they boosted their way through the early evening crowd, Yang talked to him about his music preferences, and he had to admit some amusement that she called his dancing lessons “girlish”. He teased her in turn about modern dancing being more akin to clothed sex- which had made her blush and then prompted a grin and a laugh from him in turn.

As they pushed into the club, Yang went over to the bar first and he joined her there, a bit more comfortable from the fact she ordered one of her requisite Strawberry Sunrises while he mirrored her, honestly curious what she saw in the drink.

It was- well- startlingly sweet and not very harsh. A perfectly girly cocktail, if he had to judge it. The fact she expressly asked for a paper umbrella with it only made him grin at her. It was such a strange, Yang thing to ask that he could only see it as darling.

They were a bit more dressed up than most of the people on the dance floor, but he didn’t see an issue with that. Yang dragging him near the center of the mass of undulating bodies and then offering him a playful grin before she got into the rhythm of the bass-heavy music that he didn’t quite like so much as he could dance to.

At first they were a more respectable distance from one another, her lavender eyes settled on him underneath the pulsing lights that changed colors with each other movement of the synthesized instruments, and then steadily they got closer as the beats grew more intense and soon he had an arm around her while she flushed at the close contact. It wasn’t the symbolic, purposeful dancing he was used to in ballrooms and state dinners, but it meant everything to him that Yang was having a good
Even if she seemed adorably demure for a moment before she shifted up closer to him and he felt the soft flesh of her breasts through her bra and the dress up against his chest- the stilettos she wore helping to bridge the height gap between them.

Jaune privately thought he’d never be so happy to be tall again. He was still a hormonal teenage guy, after all.

Her hips bumped against his, and he was glad the lights helped hide his own blush as his hand caught in the small of her back and his other hand stayed in with the rhythm, letting them cruise through the motions while Yang’s grin grew in response to the moment he stuttered in the movements to that club music tempo.

What’d she expect him to do, just automatically respond to it?! Even seeing her new girlish side, he knew deep inside that Yang was still Yang- a tease.

As the pulse in the club grew quicker, she turned and his hands hooked forward unto her hips, holding on as she jostled against him and he- well- he had a reaction, for sure. After the song petered out, she shifted away from him and he could see a soft sheen of sweat beginning to cover her.

He felt just as hot, if he was honest, so he was happy that she gestured back towards the bar and he nodded, following along with her away from under the pounding sound system that made it impossible to hear one another- or anything, really.

She was giggling when they got to the bar, and her laughter made him feel just as good inside. This was nice. Yang knew how to have fun, but it was obvious she was aware of him. She was just a little shy, even though he was sure normally she’d be so much more active and a full on powerhouse.

She wasn’t uncomfortable with him- and the more time he spent with her, the more comfortable he felt -with her-. That grinding had done things to his libido, he could be honest, but he also knew that she wasn’t aiming to get him riled up so much as- well- making him aware that she knew how he’d respond to her body.

He felt Yang Xiao Long didn’t need an ego boost.
As they settled unto stools, he turned his attention onto her and she grinned, “Hot under the collar, lover boy?”

He only shook his head, unable to push the grin plastered onto his face away. “It’s just you.” He insisted, knowing it was cheesy, but meaning every word.

Her smile was like lightning dust.

“What time is it?” She asked, and he fished out his scroll to check, blinking at the fact it was already damn near eight- when the Bullheads would stop running within the hour.

“Time for us to go, I think.” He said, surprised by how sad that made him. He was . . .

He was -having fun- with Yang Xiao Long. Sure, he expected they’d have a good date, but he didn’t think they’d -literally- wile away all of the day together.

The fact they had hit him a lot harder than he thought it would. His grin smoothed out into a fond smile as he offered her a hand, and when she took it with a light smile of her own, he walked back out into the warm night air of Vale, he squeezed on her hand and-

-felt pretty darn nice when she squeezed back.

He called a cab to get them back to the airship dock going back up towards Beacon on time, and he enjoyed the comfortable silence that filled the ride both back to the ship and then up to the school proper again.

It was only when they got within vision of the dormitories that his nerves began to play up again, and he could only think, privately Did I do well? How do you end a date when you’re not separating, but going into the same dorm? W-will she want to kiss? Is-

Her hand squeezed his again as they stepped unto the staircase, and he could only look at her, noting the way her face was a pleasant, easygoing smile which lit up her pretty purple eyes.

Despite himself, those worries melted away. As they stopped in front of the hall between JBPY
and RWNR’s dorm doors, he turned wholly towards her and saw that he must not have been alone in feeling nervous, because Yang’s eyes were darting between him and their dorm’s door.

In the words of his sister Jade, it was time to just go for it and hope things worked out. He leaned in, but only half-way, letting his eyes close.

Hands softer than his own came up and cupped his cheeks as a soft, feather-light kiss tickled against his own lips, and was gone after a few seconds of contact. “This was nice, Jaune.” Yang noted, softly. “I- I’d like to do it again.”

Speechless for a moment, Jaune felt the way his cheeks ached as his lips split so wide that he swore that his jaw cracked. “Me too, Yang.”

She must have liked how dumb he looked just then, because another giggle came free from the blonde woman’s throat as she delivered a gentle little jab to his chest, and said, “I need to get out of these heels and this dress. Why don’t you go report to Ruby, give me a minute to change and talk to Blake, and then come back?”

It was a damn good bit of advice, in his opinion. He slid his Scroll into the reader and unlocked the door for her, and then waited for her to disappear into the door with a soft smile back to him, before-

“HELL YEAH!” He threw his fists up in -gods damned victory-, causing the door behind him to open and Ruby Rose to poke her head out with a blink.

“Guessing it went well.”

+x+x+x+

He didn’t so much give Ruby a recap as just agreed with her. He’d borrowed RWNR’s bathroom again to check his appearance while the entirety of the team poked at him about his date with the golden-blonde girl- even Weiss was a little bit playful about the grin that just wouldn’t leave his lips.

He was glad Ruby and Weiss had made such good friends, and he promised himself that Ren and Nora were owed some real rewards for that. After a few minutes of teasing and general cajoling, he knew he had to make a return to his own dorm, so he wished them all a good night and made the trip
across the hall.

Spotting Blake leaned up against the bedroom door, he felt a private thrill of amusement as she raised a brow at him and murmured, “Hell yeah?”

His grin came right back onto his lips, and he shrugged. “Suit me.”

Shaking her head, and sending raven locks splaying this way and that, she went to sit down at the dining table and he saw it for what it was, a request to talk. He glanced at the door to the bathroom, seeing it closed, and figured Yang must have been in there. Dressing down for bed would have to wait, it seemed.

Settling into a chair across from Blake, he let his eyes settle unto the Faunus, and saw the way her bow flicked so minutely. “Yang looked happy.” She noted, and he would have called it conspiratorial if she wasn’t so blase about it.

“I hope so.” Jaune responded, feeling his elation calm down to a cool fiery warmth in his chest. “We had a good time.”

Blake smiled softly, and he had to admit that Blake had a -very nice- smile. “I’m glad, she was worried about this since Forever Fall.”

That caused him pause, making him realize that “girl talk” had likely revolved around him, or at least partially around him. He wasn’t going to ask about it, though. It was a sacred rite that meant “No boys allowed”.

“I was worried,” He admitted, consigning himself to being honest with his partner, “She brought up what my mom said, and I thought for a little bit she might walk out or cut me off.”

Blake winced in sympathy, and he was glad to have such a good partner. “That kind of thing would definitely make or break a relationship. What’d she say?”

He shook his head, “She needed time.”
Blake raised a brow, “That’s . . . quite mature, actually.”

“I learned a lot about Yang tonight.” He admitted. “She and Ruby have a dog-” Blake’s hiss made him chuckle more than he would have cared to admit, and the dour look she gave him made him raise his arms in surrender, “-she’s not as rough and tumble as she tries to act- and she looks damn good in a dress.”

Blake simmered down, but she nodded her head. “She does. She dragged me and Pyrrha out shopping on Wednesday.”

Huh. Well, that explained where his team went that day. He’d had a suspicion since they’d come back with bags, but- well- he was a guy. Even if he had a clue, he knew it was a man’s duty to be surprised when the girls went clothes shopping.

Learned that one right from his dad.

“Thank you, then. You three are getting along?” He had to ask, after all, he didn’t have the benefit of knowing how the girls dealt with being around one another without him around. They certainly seemed in tune without him around to jostle Pyrrha’s emotions, but he didn’t want to presume.

“Yang is easy to get along with, Pyrrha as well, save for when it comes to you.” He understood that, even if it still hurt a little. Pyrrha had been a bit more open with him, but he still wouldn’t call them “friends” by any margin. It would take time, though. “Yang suggested we go out tomorrow, just the girls.” She brought up, and he could only nod.

“That sounds like a good time. You should see about inviting RWNR, too. Me and Ren can take a little time to bond, too.”

Blake looked a bit in askance at the idea of having the entirety of the two team’s girls together, but he didn’t personally feel it would go wrong. Maybe a bit -wild-, but . . .

Surely Weiss, Pyrrha, and Blake could corral the other three? Maybe that was too optimistic? “I’m sure Yang will like that. Will you be okay here in Beacon with just Ren for company?”

He nodded his head, “Perfectly. I’m sure Yang wanted some time to get away from me to sort
everything out, and what better way to build up some camaraderie than to go out and have a good
time?”

Blake didn’t look so sure, but he couldn’t blame her. She wasn’t quite the extroverted, “go out
together” type, even he knew that. Well, he said that, but he was pretty sure he knew the most about
Blake inside of their circle. “You’ll be fine, Blake. Just remember, assert yourself if you get
uncomfortable. Weiss and Pyrrha will back you up, I’m sure.”

The idea of Weiss Schnee backing her up must have been amusing, because Blake’s face cracked
into a smirk, and he could only grin in return to her. “That’s easy for you to say.”

“You’re a strong woman, Blake. If anyone can handle having fun, you can.”

“You’re trying to put your claws in me.” She noted, and for a moment he feared she was serious,
before he saw that her smirk hadn’t quite vanished, and he snickered.

“Rowr.” He noted, lamely batting a set of flexed fingers as if they were claws. Despite how lame
it was, the fact she smiled made him happy. As the bathroom door opened and admitted Yang in her
pyjamas, he stood from the table. “I’m gonna get a shower, you two. If I take too long and you end
up in bed, good night.”

As he slipped into the bedroom to grab his own pyjamas, he felt that today had been a good day.
As Yang slipped into the room after him and gave him a light smile, he returned it before moving to
go get clean and bed down for the night.

A boy’s night in sounded grand.

Chapter End Notes

Glittering Gold
Nevena Arc’s Theme (Sandy Lee Casey)

(Intro)
My world used to be,
Myself,
The one,
The only,
Nothing better than,
A night full of burning-
Passions and-
Gunpowder.

(Verse 1)
Then I met you,
The red to my yellow,
The very sunset blazing in me out of control.

(Pre-Chorus)
You helped me make this possible,
The impossible,
The supernatural,
This glittering gold-
Empire that we made-
Brought the shine into my life-
And ended all the loneliness-
The devils inside.

(Chorus)
Like glittering gold,
The jewels, the ending of that long road,
The fighting, the hurting, the dying,
Nothing ever stood the test,
Until you came and took the rest,
Like the shimmering stars in the sky,
I'll be with you until I die,
And our little birds,
Spread their wings-
Spread their wings, and fly.

(Verse 2)
We made a glittering gold-
House we filled with hopes and dreams-
Too big or small to just be-
Pushed between-
The bars and the pits-
That we should have stumbled into-
We both grew wings, and
The opposition crumbled.

(Pre-Chorus)
You helped me make this possible,
The impossible,
The supernatural,
This glittering gold-
Empire that we made-
Brought the shine into my life-
And ended all the loneliness-
The devils inside.

(Chorus)
Like glittering gold,
The jewels, the ending of that long road,
The fighting, the hurting, the dying,
Nothing ever stood the test,
Until you came and took the rest,
Like the shimmering stars in the sky,
I'll be with you until I die,
And our little birds,
Spread their wings-
Spread their wings, and fly.

(Outro)
Like the shimmering stars in the sky,
I'll be with you until I die,
We'll leave this world together,
Nothing lasts forever,
Save for the words you said to me,
On that fateful day,
We made a vow,
That would never bow,
We made a nest,
And that love stood the test-
Of time.
Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

The girls bond. The guys bond. It's all one big, happy, fluffy, "friends" fest.

A Family Arc

[This Will Be the Day]

Chapter Nine

Bonds

As he awoke from the morning haze, Jaune reached over unto his bedside table and looked at the time on his Scroll, noting first that it was a little after nine-thirty, and that he had missed two messages from his mother while he was at the club with Yang- and after all of the fuss after they’d gotten back to the dorm.

“Well.  Shit.” Not eloquent, but worthy of the vulgarity, it was.  As he sat up and looked to see the status of his team-mates, he noted that he was the only one in the room still.  “Mhn, they must all be at breakfast or something. This is the first time I’ve slept in, in awhile.” He thought privately it was because he’d been so tired after such a good time out, and that brought a soft smile to his face.  “Let’s clean up a bit then I can call Mom.”

Standing to move to the bathroom, he noted that the girls all must be in the cafeteria, since it seemed the dorm was empty.  A little bit of alone time wasn’t a bad thing, though. He needed to parse through last night and also handle this phone call to his mother who would likely be more than a little worried about him not responding to her in a timely manner.

Settling into his morning routine, he began to hum a song.

+x+x+x+
“This is gonna be the best day ever!” Ruby remarked with a grin, clapping her hands together while the table was filled to the brim with the girls of Teams RWNR and JBPY. Although her enthusiasm was shared by most, Blake seemed to look a bit more wary.

“Just- remember we need to be in one piece after this is all over, Ruby.” Blake murmured, getting a queer look from the little Rose, before she added, “Listen, this group includes Yang and Nora-”

“Hey!” “Hey!!”

“- and that alone is a recipe for us causing an international incident.” Not including her own past as a White Fang member, but- well- Blake felt she could appropriately keep a low profile. Her friends? Nooooot so much.

“Ah, come on, Blake. We have only a week or two left in the semester anyway. After this weekend, we’ll be stuck doing a bunch of tests and boring crap!” Yang grinned, throwing up a high five towards Nora, who received it with an equally energetic face. “Might as well have a Yang while we can!”

Weiss’ dejected sigh was overruled by a few pairs of rolling eyes.

Blake moved on, noting, “I’m not saying we can’t have a good time-” Even though internally she was. Why couldn’t they just -stay in- and have a good time? She wanted to read another chapter of the new Ninjas of Love series, “-I’m just saying maybe we shouldn’t, I don’t know, trash a bar? Foil a dust robbery? Ride Ursae? Any of this sounding familiar?”

Yang, Ruby, and Nora had the good grace to look scolded, while Weiss snickered. Pyrrha even had a small smile on her face. “Blake is right,” The Amazon agreed, “Moderation is important when it comes to a large group like this. If one of us goes and gets involved in something, it’ll drag the rest of us in. And I don’t know about you girls, but I don’t feel like explaining to Ren and Jaune why they had to bail us out of jail.”

“Oh my Gods, you said HIS NAME.” Ruby uttered, clearly teasing from the goofily wide grin that adorned her face. The redhead had the decency to pout- because Ruby refused to accept that cute face as being a scowl.

“I’m- I’m not rude!”
“Anyway-” Yang broke in, hands on top of the table. She’d been working too hard with Pyrrha to help get the redhead and their team leader at least on talking terms. It’d worked so far, and she wasn’t going to risk that for some teasing.

Yet, anyway.

“That’s fine. I don’t think we can get up to anything TOO wild. But, Ruby’s right, this is gonna be awesome. Girl’s Night! We should pick two or three things, and then whoever’s things don’t get picked gets to pick next time, how about that?” The blonde looked around the table, taking in the thoughtful faces of her friends and teammates, before grinning. “That looks like an agreement to me. So, let’s go around and put them forth, then to a vote! Me first!”

+x+x+x+

Finishing towelling off his hair, Jaune pulled on his lounging wear- a cotton robe and his pajamas beneath- and let the towel wrap around his shoulders as he hefted his Scroll and then carefully set it into the dock on the screen in JBPY’s living quarters. Selecting his mother’s number, he moved to settle into the couch in front of the screen, finishing drying his hair. After a few moments, the call connected and the video feed showed.

Not just his mother was there, but so was his father, both seemingly finishing up brunch of some kind since his mother’s plate was empty while his father was more steadily working his way through what seemed to be a small pile of medallion sausages. “Jaune, sweetie! I was worried when you didn’t message me back last night!” Oh boy, he was in for a scolding. Pre-emptive strike?

Pre-emptive strike.

“I’m sorry, Mom. I was . . . out with one of the girls.” Eyes narrowing, lips quirking up, hands suddenly coming together in front of her? Check. Double check. I have made my life for the next five minutes interesting, but Mom won’t scold me about not calling her back.

His vision moved from his mother’s part of the video call unto his father, who was letting those “strong” blue eyes settle onto him in turn while he continued to eat unabated. He had his father’s attention as well, but he wasn’t going to engage in the conversation just yet. Jaune understood perfectly that Nevena Arc was going to handle this- at least until Roux felt that Nevena was losing sight of what they were doing, anyway.
Like just then, when his mother cooed and took a napkin to her husband’s cheeks, uttering cutesily at how messy an eater he was. Yes. His utterly badass, terrifying mother . . . was a lovey-dovey schoolgirl when it came to her husband.

To be fair, Roux Arc wasn’t much better, but he was just better at not doing it in front of the kids. **Ugh-** “Should I call back later?” Jaune asked, hoping against hope- wrongly- that he’d be given a stay of execution.

“Oh no, Jaune dear-” And just like that, his mother’s attention was back on him. “You can’t just say that and NOT give Mommy -all- the details. Now,” She turned away from her husband, leaning in towards the video feed with a positively **vicious** toothed smile that showed the difference in the pearl white of her teeth and the rich fiery orange that decorated her lips, “**Spill.**”

He swallowed, thickly. No, he wasn’t scared of his mother. Why would anyone think that? It wasn’t like she was a retired Huntress who could still probably whip him around the entirety of Sanus- and that was before she actually pulled *L’Belle d’Revolution* out of its holster.

“Yang asked me out on a date when we took the class trip to Forever Fall,” Brusque, specifics first. Details later. This was an interrogation, and he knew the rules with Nevena Arc. It was just another facet of their Mother-Son relationship. “We went out yesterday, I took her to dinner at *Doremi-*” He saw the way his mother’s lips curled up slightly more, eyes twinkling even through the video feed of the Scroll, “- and then to a dance club a few blocks away. We danced for several hours and had a drink or two, and then came back to Beacon’s dorms, where we kissed and then the date was over.”

His eyes slipped from Nevena Arc’s contemplative look over to his father’s face, noting how the man had finished his brunch and was gently offering the plate and silverware to a passing attendant- a familiar dark-skinned brunette. Ah, so she was doing well, still. Camillia would be happy.

“Well, it seems like you had a good time with her. Do you think you will date again?” Nevena’s voice brought his attention back onto his mother, and he schooled his features back into a small smile at the thought of another date with Yang.

“Yeah. I think we will.” He paused, musing over whether he should admit what he thought next, but- well- he honestly needed the advice. “Mom- I- this is going to be weird-”

“Just come out with it, dear.” He wasn’t sure she’d be saying that in a minute.
“Ruby and I had sex.” Roux Arc’s hands settled on the table and he leaned back a bit in his chair through the video feed, while Nevena’s right hand came up to her lips to cover them- but not quickly enough where he didn’t see a smile on her lips.

“Oh my- and?” Damn it, Mom.

“It- she just wants to stay as friends, but I admit it- well- it kind of changed . . . how I look at her.” Jaune admitted, trying to remind himself desperately that he -wanted his parent’s advice- and that this wasn’t -too embarrassing- to ask for it.

It was, but damn it, he was an Arc!

“That’s normal.” Nevena noted, glancing towards her husband, “Though, so fast? I didn’t think she’d be so bold-” Jaune’s eyes narrowed, his mother’s voice had dropped to a whisper, but the receiver on the Scroll had still caught that last little tidbit.

“Mom?”

“Yes, sweetheart?” A gleaming, beautiful smile that told him that his mother was hiding something.

“What did you tell Ruby?”

He watched as her expression blanked a bit, looking confused, before she gave forth a giggle which brought a worried look from his father that Jaune was fairly sure he was mirroring just then. What the hell was going on?

“Oh, Jaune, don’t be silly, my little sunbeam. I didn’t tell her anything, but you do remember how I said that she was very like me, right?”

It took Jaune a second to register that thought, partially because his gaze moved to his father’s face-
-his father’s **blushing** face.

“UGH! MOM!!” He covered his face with his hands, utterly aggrieved. “WHY?!”

“Oh, sweetheart, you know we had to do it to have EIGHT children-”

“RIGHT AFTER YOU MET?!”

“Well, I was a hard drinking party girl, your father was a stiff dick-”

“AAHHHHHH--!!!!!”

+x+x+x+

“Did someone hear a girl screaming?” Pyrrha leaned back towards Beacon’s dormitory building as the group of girls made their way towards the Bullhead docks.

“Not our problem!” Yang noted, merrily.

+x+x+x+x+

“Jaune, are you okay?” Ren stepped into JBPY’s dorm after the screaming stopped, looking more than a little worried for his fellow man. When he saw that the blonde haired male was bashing his head against the- thankfully cushioned- back of their couch, he could only presume.

“Mom?”

“Mom.”

“Want to talk about it?”
“Not really, no. Are you ready for Dude’s Day In?”

“You got it. What first?”

“Breakfast, I just woke up. How long have you been up?”

“Since six. Nora was too excited to sleep an extra two hours, so I trained for a little time and then came back around eight. Would you like me to cook for you?”

“How about you just join me in the kitchen. How do you feel about omelettes?” Jaune queried, trying his absolute best to push the mental image of his parents shagging out of his head as he moved into the kitchenette and began to pull free the necessary ingredients.

“That sounds excellent. You want me to cut vegetables?”

“I would love you.”

“Hopefully not the same way you do Ruby.”

Jaune’s stricken look made Ren smile with a shrug. Pouting, and damn him for even mentally admitting that, he threatened the dark-haired male with an egg. “I think I’ll pass on getting Nora mad at me for sleeping with her boyfriend.”

Ren, contrary to what he expected, could only laugh. “I didn’t think I was your type, Jaune.”

Was- WAS HE BLUSHING? NO! He was NOT blushing because of Lie Ren! NO!

Ren smirked, even as he settled into the space Jaune had designated to chop vegetables, minding his own long pajama pants and the thin tank-top that draped a bit too much.

“I never expected you to be the teasing type, Ren.” Jaune admitted, shaking his head as he began
to carefully beat eggs and mix milk and butter for their breakfast together.

“It takes a special kind. Besides, you don’t see me with Nora that often. When she’s not being as wild, she has a very adorable blush.”

The blonde could only snicker. “I can see that. She seems the type.”

+x+x+x+

The first matter of the day for the girls was a shopping spree, courtesy of an enthused Yang, Weiss, and even Pyrrha. Though why the Amazon was excited, the rest of the group couldn’t say. Blake, however, was at least mildly more interested in time spent in a mall than Yang’s suggestion of a club.

Weiss had won the first take with the shopping spree, insisting it would be “mellow, and the only trouble they could get into was financial trouble.” Even Blake could agree with that assessment, so it had won out over Yang’s option. Next to win had been Nora’s suggestion of an Arcade, strangely championed by Weiss as well as Ruby. Blake had never actively had contact with video games and the like, so she’d abstained- giving Nora the win on the second activity of the day.

Blake had stolen the third spot herself, knowing the group wouldn’t want to go to a bookstore, she’d suggested the meal of the day at a Mistralian restaurant that- of course- had a special going for all-you-can-eat Sushi. Ruby had pouted about losing her chance to go to a kart race track- a suggestion that only started to make sense when Blake started to remember Ruby’s fascination with mechanics and love for the smell of mechashift grease- and Pyrrha had sided herself wholly with Blake’s idea.

It seemed the redhead was her sister in craving seafood. Though perhaps it was just because Pyrrha herself was Mistralian. Blake didn’t know particularly why, but she wasn’t going to question Pyrrha over it when it got her what she wanted.

Blake just had to wonder what Pyrrha would pick on their next girl’s night out. She privately hoped it wasn’t some fighting venue- after all, one had to really love that kind of thing to be -so- prominent in it. That, or her family had pushed her into it, and Pyrrha refused to talk about her family at any amount of length- unlike Jaune who could at least occasionally be a bit more forward even about the parts that he didn’t like about being an Arc.
Granted, he was being more forward in general. Wait, why was she thinking about Jaune now? They were supposed to be getting away from the boys- not that she understood why, since only Ruby and Yang had done anything yet about Jaune.

Sure, she’d had some thoughts, but- well- she’d let them to the wayside for now.

“Hey, Rubes, do you think Jaune would like this top?” Blake’s attention was drawn from where she was overlooking a startlingly cute- yes, even she could admit it- Mistralian dress that resembled a somewhat modernized kimono. Yang was holding up a deep red silken shirt that had that interesting shadowed effect that made her truly appreciate the kind of effort that went into women’s clothes against men’s clothes.

She also noted how damn low that neckline plunged.

Ruby whistled at it, silver eyes wide. “Uh- you sure you want him to see you in that? Because-”

Yang grinned in response, and simply tucked it under an arm. That was all the blonde male was brought up on the trip, and they all resumed perusing through the aisles. Blake eventually ended up in a section with Weiss, looking through skirts. The Heiress gave her a mild look, before pulling a ruffled piece and offering it to her without a word. Blake raised a brow and looked it over, before noting that it was- indeed- a nice looking skirt. Probably one that would go well with a button-up blouse of some kind.

“Why?” Blake asked, despite her senses telling her NOT to engage with the Heiress- even if so far they’d been fairly decent to one another.

“You have that-” Weiss noted, tugging at the length of a deep purple button up she’d picked up on the stray thought it’d look nice for a night out with friends, “-and it goes with that. Call it fashion advice.”

Blake’s raised brow levelled out a bit, and she simply shook her head, unable to help a small smile. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

+x+x+x+
“Ren, do you mind if I pick your brain for a bit?” Jaune questioned, taking the moment to help the pink-highlighted male clean his nails and then carefully apply a layer of nail strengthener to them. Seven sisters had given him plenty of practice in being damn near a nail technician, and even he could admit to some enjoyment of wearing polish now and then.

Not when he wore his gloves, of course, that way led to cracked and splintered nails. The downside to strong leather meant to protect one’s hands.

“About Ruby, I take it?” Ren noted, watching Jaune’s actions with an almost meditative glaze over his eyes. Jaune had to admire that ability to be so tranquil and focused. He’d heard a lot about Mistrali focus techniques, but they were- well- not something practiced so much in Sanus.

“Yeah.” Adjusting Ren’s hand around so he could move on to the other male’s thumb-nail, the blonde tilted his head a bit as he readjusted the grip on the swab so that he could more thoroughly apply the solution to the dark-haired man’s nail. “You obviously know what happened, so does Weiss apparently, so . . .”

“It’s not normal in your part of the culture to have unattached sex, is it?” Ren asked, and he could only nod in turn. “In Mistral, that’s not the case. In fact, marriage is a bit more rare in some parts of our mingled societies. We take relationships seriously, don’t get me wrong, but a relationship can even be between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman. Close confidants can be intimate with one another without shame. In fact, in a period not so long ago, it was almost normal to sleep with your closest friends alongside your spouse.”

Jaune could only reel back a bit, staring incredulously at the dark-haired male’s calm face before he moved to take Ren’s other hand. As he began to spread the clear solution over the Mistrali male’s forefinger-nail, he decided his thoughts were in order enough, “Well, it’s not that so much that I wasn’t really prepared for it. And- even though Ruby says she wants to just be friends . . .”

“You can’t look at her as just a friend anymore.” Ren noted. Jaune was beginning to understand just how it was that this man and Nora had managed to calm Weiss Schnee of all people down. He was just so damn level-headed that even Jaune had to admit everything he said just made sense.

Taking his time in clearing the next two fingers on his friend’s hand, he mused, “Is it wrong of me?”
“Of course it isn’t.” Ren noted, pink eyes trailing over the translucent brush as it applied the solution to his pinky nail and then his hands were moved around so Jaune could coat his thumb as well. “You gave your virginities to one another, and she was your friend before that. Now you have a new layer of intimacy that makes you lean more towards viewing her in a new light, even if Ruby is.” Ren paused, letting his hands rest level atop the tabletop while Jaune covered the strengthening solution and then slid it across the table to rest between Ren’s fingers.

“- a bit odd, even by what I understand. At least, from what she told me.” Jaune raised a brow, but simply shrugged with a smile.

Blake had to admit that the arcade was a strangely fun place- or maybe she was just being swept up in the cheer of Nora and Ruby having a good time. Yang seemed able to enjoy herself regardless of situation, and Pyrrha was more indulgent than anything else as she played a rail-shooter game with Ruby that both- well- excelled at.

So much for that High Score.

Blake discovered a more direct love in the form of something more simplistic- skeeball. Sure, hand-eye coordination was the main thing you needed, and thus it just- well-

-there was something therapeutic about sinking the wooden balls into the hundred-point holes one after one. It was strange. Dumb, but fun.

The fact that by the time they left, Blake had collected the most of the prize tickets out of the group- with Nora being a firm second by only like five- made her feel a strange sense of pride.

Was this what it was like to have a competitive streak? Pyrrha made a whole lot more sense all of a sudden.

Jaune personally thought having his hair brushed was extremely therapeutic. The fact that Ren’s fingers, long since dried and now with a shade of pink fitting his eyes and his single-dyed streak coating the nails, had just the right length and pressure to soothe the few knots that remained in his
own gold locks just made it all the better.

He’d done this countless times for his sisters, but it was a treat to be on the receiving end for once. After Ren had returned the favor and his own nails were covered in the strengthening solution and then a shade of deep blue just like his eyes, Ren had insisted on tending to his hair while they waited for the clock to tick over to closer to lunch-time before they began the day’s true endeavor.

Creme-filled cornets. The girls would hate them, but he was sure they’d get over it after they’d had one. Baking was a guilty pleasure amidst the Arc household, since the tastes within it were so diverse.

After the slightly heavy philosophical discussion, it was nice to just relax. No girls around to muddle his head, and just the company of another man to- well-

Relax.

It was nice.

+x+x+x+

As the girls finally settled in for an early dinner at the restaurant Blake had pointed out, it was strange to the Faunus that she’d enjoyed the day out. Certainly, she’d considered herself fairly equal amongst the two teams, but it was the first time she’d actually taken the time to interact with them outside of school functions. Sure, Ruby and Yang were sisters, and the rest of the girls were more social than her, but-

Well, Blake had fun. That wasn’t something she did all that often. She enjoyed reading books, indulging in fantasy and escaping from reality, but she’d -had fun-. She’d even been smiling.

Smiling! Blake Belladonna couldn’t remember the last time she’d outright smiled at something.

The sushi was good, as well. She’d taken a tray full of tuna rolls and a bowl of rice, while the other girls all had varying platters of their own. Weiss had curiously ordered a jar of Mistralian Sake that Pyrrha had given her a strange look over, but so far they’d all tried it.
Amusingly, the only one who seemed to like the exceedingly bitter rice wine was Ruby, who was nursing through it like a champ. Even Yang was looking worried at -that- prospect.

Well, if nothing else, Blake could chalk this up as a success. Even if they had to drag a drunk Ruby Rose back to their dorms. The bonus to that was that Weiss and Nora would have to deal with her instead.

“We should get back soon.” She noted when everyone had finished eating and the worst of Ruby’s reaction seemed to be a dreamy look in her eyes, a bright red flush on her face, and being much more prone to adorable little giggles.

Thankfully, Nora alone was plenty able to carry the tipsy Rose back to the Bullhead docks, and by the time they’d arrived on Beacon’s grounds, the scythe-wielder was able to walk under her own power again, even if she was skipping like a terrible movie character.

By the time the group of women had arrived back unto the floor of their dorms, the smell hit Blake first- but it was followed shortly after by the rest of them.

“Do you smell chocolate?” Weiss raised a brow.

“I... Think I do?” Pyrrha looked just as confused. As she stopped in front of the intersection between their dorms, the girls all shared curious looks as the scent of chocolate and baked goods poured forth from JBPY’s room.

Blake would appropriately call it piling- as the girls did indeed pile in- as they all slid into her team’s dorm quarters after Pyrrha unlocked it, eyes first drawn towards the plate covered in chocolate cornets on the table-

- and then promptly much more attracted to the sight of the two shirtless men lounging on the couch in front of the television while a benign period drama played on it. Even the Faunus mentally had to admit there was- well-

- a certain loveliness to the sight of seeing her Team Leader and Nora’s “totally not together together” friend so comfortable in their half-nudity, both finishing a treat each. Her eyes watched as Ren’s attention shifted from the show to Jaune, blinking pink eyes as a set of pink-painted nails raked across the blonde’s defined pectorals, coming away with a small ruff of chocolate cream. “You had some there.”
“Oh, thanks.” Jaune noted, looking down at himself before giving his male friend a light smile. “Oh- you-” He pushed a hand out, a blue-painted nail accompanying the thumb that tickled the dark-haired male’s lips to come away with a swirl of dark brown richness before he cleared it with his own lips. “Mn- had a little there.”

Blake wished she could tear her eyes away from the sight, but- well- she couldn’t. When both men’s eyes settled on the arrival of the women, Jaune offered a happy smile.

“Hey girls! There’s cornets on the table. They’re only a little cool, if you want to-”

A soft little whumphth drew everyone’s attention as they turned to see Ruby trying to scramble towards the chocolate-filled pastries, not quite as coordinated with her still tipsy state.

“... Alright then.”
Chapter Ten

Chapter Summary

A long overdue talk between the Sisters "Rose" and Jaune, and Jaune feels brave. Blake has to start confronting her own feelings and thoughts.

(The End note has Knightshade’s first theme together, the lyrical version of La Résistance d’Chevalier Faunus; The in-universe version of the song is a leitmotif with a more classical music feel.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Family Arc

[This Will Be The Day]

Chapter Ten

Fiery Gold, Nightshade, and the Color of a Rose’s Heart

Yang lamented the fact the next two weeks would be filled with tests and exams, and Jaune could only agree. Even though his blonde girlfriend had taken to sitting to his left- their usual placement at seats being him on the outside with Blake next to him with Yang on her other side and Pyrrha on the side furthest from him- and sneaking her hand into his when they weren’t busy with classwork, Jaune could admit that exams weren’t quite what he’d imagined when he’d planned to enroll in Beacon either.

Even his enjoyment of Professor Oobleck’s history class was tested, since his own private schooling mattered a lot less when it came to standardized tests amongst the four Huntsman schools. Open-ended tests and the like gave him freedom to enjoy schoolwork more, but this was-

-well, if he was honest, it was boring. The only light amongst it was that Glynda Goodwitch’s Combat Class didn’t have exams. He was put up against Ruby this time, and he had to admit that their clash in class had been actually enjoyable as opposed to facing her partner.

Ruby had a ranged option, but she also couldn’t use it as effectively since the arena didn’t allow
her to dart around the way free-combat tended to. And he got to enjoy being within her reach and having an actual advantage over someone for once. He wouldn’t say he won handily, but he’d won.

Ruby had pouted, and then proceeded to remind him that he still owed her cookies his mother had promised her. It reminded him of the tipsy girl muscling her way through most of the plate of cornets before the other girls had managed to steal in and get some for themselves.

That was a precious memory, even if Yang had sworn him into helping her keep the little reaper from getting too affectionate with liquor from then on.

He wasn’t sure why that was so bad, but he had understood from his girlfriend’s panicked look that it was something he needed to take seriously- so he had.

He found it just a little bit hypocritical, though, with Yang’s love of Strawberry Sunrises.

Nonetheless, the Monday after their weekend of bonding saw all of both teams slumped in JBPY’s living quarters, Ruby and Nora freely admitting that they’d left a whirlwind of a mess that meant their own dorm wasn’t suitable for what Weiss called “Ink Detox” with a wry roll of her eyes.

Jaune had claimed the couch, sprawled out on it with Yang atop him and Ruby atop Yang in a monument to post-exam-headache. Ren and Nora were leaned up against the foot of the couch, the dark-haired male looking tired and the normally energetic redhead damn near asleep against his shoulder. Blake and Weiss were crashed out on the only single chair in JBPY’s dorm room, back to back with their legs dangling over the sides, while Pyrrha was at the dining table with her head in her arms.

A collective groan rang out from the gathered students, and no one argued.

+x+x+x+

Tuesday was a little better, at least. The bulk of both team’s classes happened on the three days of the week instead of the two, so there was a little less outright crashing out after the day’s exams and the various reports that had needed to be turned in. The real surprise of the day had come in the form of a message on his Scroll after classes had cleared out, a quick check had seen it to be from Ruby.

*Can you bring Yang and meet me in our dorm? Weiss is training with Ren and Nora.*
He wondered idly what Ruby could need to talk to them both about- and then his brain promptly exploded. *OH.* That- that was actually kind of important. In the rush of dating **Yang Xiao Long**, he’d forgotten all about it.

**SHIT.**

Well, better to address it all now rather than have it explode later. He moved from his position in JBPY’s dorm room couch to knock on the bathroom door where Yang had disappeared after classes- probably to clean up after a day of teen issues that didn’t appeal to her fiery nature. “Hey, Yang?”

“What is it, lover boy?” Came muffled through the door.

“Ruby wants to talk to us when you’re done in there.”

“Okay!” With his message delivered, he pulled out his Scroll once again and alerted Ruby to their impending arrival. *Well. If this goes badly, at least I’ll have earned it.* It was strange to feel so confident in such fatalism, but- well- part of him thought that things had been going too well so far.

When Yang finally came free from the solitude of feminine care, he stood back up and gave her a grin- which she returned. “Can I hold your hand?” He asked, offering her his own hand, which she gave a somewhat confused look before wrapping her fingers around his.

“Sure, Jaune, you don’t even have to ask, you know?”

“Yeah, I just- yeah, I just might have an idea what Ruby wants to talk about.”

“Aah- yeah, you’re dating her sister, after all. That makes sense.” Yang mused, and he felt that wasn’t -wrong- for sure.

“Sorry. Nerves.”

Nonetheless, they stepped out of JBPY’s dorm and then went to knock on RWNR’s door, a few
seconds later, Ruby opening it with a somewhat anxious grin on her cute features. “Heeey- uh- come on in.” She stepped aside, and Jaune got a view into what the girl dressed like when she wasn’t in her uniform or her combat attire, Ruby wearing a light and airy white blouse and a set of red shorts.

Huh, why was Ruby always so cute? Damn it. Oh well, it made him feel bad for still being in his uniform- though at least Yang was, as well.

Yang was a bit more immediate in her movements than he was, so he had to step up a bit more to keep up with the blonde as she moved into RWNR’s dorm and settled towards their own couch. Jaune took a moment to look around the dorm, noting that they must have cleaned the dorm after they came back- or Ruby had done so before texting him- since he didn’t see the godawful disaster Nora and Ruby had insisted had been there.

Well, that or they’d lied. But- well- if they had he didn’t mind. It had been nice for them all to languish in the suffering of classes.

Fuck exams.

As Yang pulled him down onto the couch by their entwined hands, he saw Ruby smile fondly at them before her face became wracked with nerves again as she settled into RWNR’s sole chair and drew her knees up against her chest, letting him see that she was only wearing a set of Beowulf-print socks on her feet.

Who decided it was a good idea to make clothes and things with designs like that? It felt strangely light-hearted for having such heavy subject matter. Then again, maybe that was the appeal of those gaudy T-shirts with the offensive slogans and the like.

Jaune would probably never understand, but that was fine. He was distracting himself again.

Gods, his nerves were on full display right now.

“So- uh-” Well, at least Ruby could be relied on to punch on through, “It’s- it’s awesome that you two are dating! My best friend and my best sister-”

“Only sister.” Yang noted, a strangely amused lilt entering her easy grin.
“Right! My beautiful, strong, super great super strong super sister.” Ruby continued, and Jaune’s attention moved from Ruby’s nervous gushing towards Yang’s strangely comfortable expression. Maybe this was just how the two were without him around? At this point, even he was aware that Ruby was stalling for time- and maybe even trying to butter Yang up.

“Sis,” Ah, so Yang definitely saw it, too, “Just come on out and tell us. What’s up?”

Ruby curled in a bit more tightly to herself, and against his better senses, he wanted to go help her. Turning his head and offering a shy smile to Yang, he let go of her hand and gently stood, Ruby’s eyes following him for a moment while he moved over beside the chair and grasped the scythe-wielder’s shoulder to give it a light squeeze.

“This is the right thing, Rubes.” He said, hoping like crazy his voice was stronger than he was sure it was.

She offered him a light grin, and he stepped away as silver eyes settled onto lilac once again, and- with a little extra courage- Ruby began.

“So, uh-” Ruby’s fingers fiddled with one another, plucking at her nails and holding eye-contact with her sister to an uncomfortable degree. Watching her like this made him understand just how Yang had grown up so protectively-minded. “When- when Mama Arc came, I kind of- I-”

His attention shifted from Ruby to Yang. He didn’t want to sit back down next to her yet on the off-chance that things would go wrong, and- besides that- this was a moment between the sisters. He was sure that Ruby had wanted him here for support, but he didn’t think his input was quite yet welcome in the confession.

“- I slept with Jaune.” Ruby dropped the bomb, and he felt his chest tighten. His shoulders tensing, and the breath that had been ready to come before froze in his throat. “I- I wanted to, and everything! He’s a great guy, and he’s my best friend- I don’t want to be- like- his girlfriend or anything-sorry Jaune-but yeah, I kind of-” Ruby started to run at the mouth, a high-class Dust engine having nothing on the speed she began to pick up as she spoke while both of them looked directly at Yang.

His blonde girlfriend whose face had frozen in a rictus of confusion and alarm. His blonde girlfriend who may not be his girlfriend in the span of the next few seconds. He felt himself turning steadily blue as the silence dragged on and he was too absolutely terrified to risk even bringing
attention to himself for the moment while Yang seemingly processed this new bit of information.

What hit her harder? That her sister was no longer a virgin? That it’d been with her now boyfriend? That Ruby, tender little Rubes, had-

Yang’s eyes settled on him, and he let out that breath stifling in his chest. He wouldn’t look away. If this broke them, if this ended it all, he’d face it like a man. Even if it sucked.

“Why?” He felt that was a fair question, even if he didn’t rightly know himself. Even he knew Yang wouldn’t buy that, though- the truth could be hard to swallow. He winced as he saw that, for a moment, those beautiful lavender eyes that he’d started to grow used to looking into were just like his and Ruby’s must be in this moment.

Scared, unsure, glistening with tears threatening to spill. Ready to narrow, ready to rage, waiting for something to set her off.

One of the prettiest girls in school, his first girlfriend. The blonde who reminded him of his fun-loving mother, and was still Yang Xiao Long. A fun, strikingly demure young woman who he hoped he could build a future together with, one day.

This was the test. This was what would make or break those thoughts. He could take the blame, he could let her hate him. He could never let Ruby shoulder anything that would hurt the sisters.

“Because Ruby wanted to, and- if you asked- I wouldn’t do it again.” Ruby’s breath stifled a bit at that, and he understood. Ruby wanted it again, but Ruby was his friend- Yang was his girlfriend. He’d hate how that might affect Ruby, but he knew that Yang wouldn’t want to hurt her sister just the same as neither of them wanted to hurt Yang.

Red started to bleed into the purple, and he let his eyes close as he took a steadying breath. Please, if she has to be mad. Let her be mad at me. Please, I love them all too much to-

Against his expectation of being sent flying out of RWNR’s dorm window, a soft and shaky little breath came free that made his eyes open and regard the way Yang slumped on the couch a bit. “Did you, Ruby?” She asked, and he knew if Ruby wanted an out- even if it was a painful one- she could just say anything but the truth.
He knew Ruby too well, though. Ruby believed in goodness, and Truth was one of those great qualities that made her a wonderful person, but also made her terribly easy to hurt. Camillia entered his thoughts then, smirking and pleased with him when he’d told her how he ached and hurt the first few times they sparred after his Aura had been unlocked.

It was a strangely comforting mental image, despite how someone else might have seen it as terrifying.

“Yeah.” Ruby admitted, and his attention was drawn away from Yang for a moment to take in the scared- because there was no other emotion that fit little Ruby Rose as she said that one, damning word- seated stance of the girl with the red highlights.

“Why?” That question again, and probably the only one that could keep circulating in Yang’s head, though at least now the red had bled back out of her eyes and the blonde woman looked more - shocked- than anything else, not that he blamed her.

He’d been hit just as hard in the gut, though there’d been a lot less going on when he and Ruby had stopped being virgins together.

All of the girls were so special, all of them appealed to him in so many ways. Even with Pyrrha opening up to him a bit more, he was finding himself reminded of just why he’d been stricken dumb just being in her presence.

And if Yang wanted that to stop, he would. Arc Word, he would. He’d look at her, and only her, for the rest of his life. Jaune Arc could make that promise.

Would Yang make him do so? He couldn’t tell when right now, there seemed to almost be a silent conversation going on between the silver-eyed girl and her sister. Two girls he adored, albeit in different ways. A girl who struggled with her insecurities and dorky nature just like he did, but was so vibrant, full of life, and **good** . Someone whom he could connect with and understand, but also look up to.

And the girl who showed the strongest of faces to the world outside, but he had personally looked upon the unsure and demure girl who perhaps just wanted someone to be there- to stay with her. The girl who struggled and rose above. The girl who smiled and flirted, and then blushed when he pushed back.
The girls who made his heart flutter in different ways. Exciting, amazing ways. He could go on for years about all of the people in their teams, and he would if he was asked.

Jaune felt it was only fair that everyone, even Nora and Ren, whom he respected for their strong relationship and wonderful personalities, deserved to know just how special and amazing they were to him.

“I wanted to feel good with him.” Ruby’s words finally broke him out of his daze. His attention moving from Yang’s stare to Ruby’s thoughtful, still scared, expression. “He made me feel so special. Yang- you’ve- you’ve always been the pretty one. The beautiful one. The sexy one. Jaune made me feel like that. I- I don’t think I want to date right now, we have too much going on, but- I wanted him to look at me the way people have always looked at you.”

Even Jaune was shocked by that. His eyes moving from sister to sister over and over, until his blue eyes settled on Yang and her own expression which broke in a mixture of hurt and clarity. “Ruby…”

Ruby smiled, and his fists clenched. So much made sense just then. She’d told him as much when they’d first met, but he’d understated it in his own head. Ruby was -envious- of her sister. Not quite outright jealous, but she wanted to know that same feeling.

And he’d given that to her. He’d made her feel special- made her feel wanted and desired.

“I was super happy when you two started dating,” Ruby admitted, “I thought- you know- that it’d mean you’d found someone who made you feel special the way Mom and Dad must have felt, right?”

The way Yang recoiled made him wonder what the Rose / Xiao Long family struggles must have been, but it wasn’t something to be addressed now.

Yang’s eyes turned onto him, and he slipped around to stand next to her again, offering a hand to her, for her to hold. Shakily, he wasn’t sure she’d take it-

-but after a moment, she did. And, despite himself, he thought things were going to be alright.

“Ruby.” Yang’s voice was firm and strong after a moment, and he could only admire the way the
other blonde could steamroll through life with such fire. She and Ruby were cut from the same cloth, to be sure. Gently, he pulled Yang up from the couch even while she gave him a perplexed look. He led her over to Ruby’s seat, and reached out a hand to the little Reaper in turn.

Ruby’s scared eyes looked up at him, and he flitted his eyes towards his hand, insisting. She took it, and he pulled her up in turn, before bringing the two sisters together.

When they hugged, and he could indulge in a deep sense of relief, Jaune could only thank the Gods that the world was still a place that could be filled with light and hope.

He smiled. It would be a long talk, but it was a talk they could have. It was something they could make work.

After a few moments, the hug separated and he saw tears at the corners of Ruby’s sterling silver eyes, and a lackadaisy grin that contrasted her own growing red in Yang’s, his smile asserted itself more firmly.

“I love you, Yang.”

“I love you too, Rubes. Even if you totally should have told me you banged lover boy.”

Ruby’s flustered little squeak was adorable.

+x+x+x+

He’d left Yang and Ruby to talk things out for now, feeling like he’d done his part. Yang had asked where he was going, and he’d been honest.

There was a promise still to keep. One that involved Blake. Yang had given him a screwed up look at that, but he’d insisted it had nothing to do with anything like what they’d just talked about.

“I promised I’d try to get her to call her parents.”
The sisters had both given one another looks at that, and he’d been dismissed with a pair of understanding nods.

The world was a kind place in that it was always easy to find Blake. She was either in the dorm room with a book, or in the library tucked away in a corner. Finding her lazing in the sun-spot her bed had been set up in with a copy of *Ninjas of Love* in her hands, he privately wondered if she ever realized just how truly catty she could appear to be.

“Hey, Blake,” It felt a little bit too similar to a time not so long ago, but at least this time it was him confronting her rather than him confronting himself with her as a sounding board.

Amber eyes perked over the rim of her book, and her bow flicked a bit because he paid more attention to it than others likely did. “Yes?”

“Can I talk to you for a bit?” Even though he was saying it, he moved to pull his jacket from his body alongside the tie from the uniform and threw them both onto his bed before settling unto the foot of her bed. He wasn’t going to be denied this, even if Blake probably wouldn’t immediately leap against him.

“I suppose. What do you need?”

He took a deep breath, and steeled himself for what would likely be the second uncomfortable discussion of the day. But, the memory of Ruby and Yang hugging gave him more strength than he dared admit to.

“Have you thought about calling your parents?” He just came out with it, better to just press the attack while he had the courage to do so, than flounder and end up leaving it all out.

His attention turned wholly onto Blake then. Once again, he saw her start to scrunch up defensively, like a creature confronted with a predator, though this time it was easier to discern the subtleties in her posture and face. She wasn’t freaked out, so much as taken by surprise by his words.

“Do-you think I should?” Blake asked, and the tension and uncertainty in her voice told him he wasn’t going to be struggling as hard with this discussion, unlike the one he’d had to have with Ruby and Yang.
He nodded, “They’re worried about you. I don’t know what’s going on with you, but even I can see that from what little time I spent with your mom. And there’s no way your dad isn’t worried about his baby girl.” Perhaps that was Jaune putting his own father’s expressions on Ghira Belladonna, but he did get the feeling that Ghira cared deeply about Blake.

The fact that he watched as she put her bookmark in her page and set the book aside told him that he wasn’t alone in that thought. He wondered how long it’d been eating at Blake, and he had to imagine it must have been since she’d left home.

He knew that just coming to Beacon had made him think more and more about his family—especially his parents, Camillia, and Jade. Even Peri, the twins, and the others crossed his mind more often than he could say.

He’d have to call one of them tonight.

“I-” Blake caught herself, amber eyes darting away from him and making him aware of how she must have purposefully opened her posture back up from the way she shifted her legs together and bent them at the knees. “I- . . . yeah, maybe.” Blake admitted, and he could only smile.

“If you need someone to be there for you, I can.” He meant every word, and he hoped his sincerity reached Blake.

From the way her lips curled slightly— not into outright smiling, but more akin to a comforted line. “I’ll think about it, Jaune. Thank you for caring, though.”

He shook his head, “You’re my partner, Blake. And you’ve done so much for both our team, and Ruby’s. You may not think it, but you’re a great woman. And, I know my family would go crazy if I didn’t keep in touch, even if I’m gone.”

Blake’s shoulders and chest rose and slumped in a sigh. He was willing to let it sit there for now. He was feeling brave, not pushy. “Yeah. I guess.”

“I know, Blake.” He said with finality, moving to stand from the bed, and offer her a grin in turn. “By the way, Ruby told Yang.”

Blake seemed appreciative of the chance to change the subject, and her posture and reaction
reflected that, becoming more naturally open rather than defensively and forcefully so. “And? Are you and Yang going to be okay?”

“I think so.” Jaune admitted. “I kind of came here to make good on you, and left them alone to hug it out.”

Blake blinked, “Was that wise?”

“The smartest I’ve probably ever been.” Jaune admitted with a set of nails raking through his hair. “I was just going to stick my foot in my mouth at some point, and make a mess of it all.”

Blake snorted, and this time, she nearly did smile. “You have a bad habit of that.”

He grinned in return, “I have expensive, tasteful shoes.” He agreed.

The Faunus rolled her eyes, but picked her book back up again. “As you say, Sir Arc.” His title was said with a playful lilt that made his heart pump despite the way it would have otherwise made his chest contort, and so he offered the dark-haired woman a mocking salute as he moved to go back into JBPY’s living room as his Scroll toned out.

As he pulled it out and opened it, his eyes widened.

*Can we have the dorm tomorrow, alone?*

Yang.

Chapter End Notes

La Résistance d’Chevalier Faunus
Knightshade Theme 1 (Casey Lee Williams / Jeff Williams)

(Intro; Jeff Williams (Jaune))
We built these bonds of trust-
Taking the beaten path down,
The very edge of this-
Battlefield of blood and battle lust,
The same fight,
Our ancestors died for.

(Verse 1; Casey Lee Williams (Blake))
We suffered and we died,
For every right,
For every slight-
Standing here on the precipice-
Of the place where people better than us,
Failed.

(Verse 2; Jaune & [Blake])
We touched hands [We opened up,]
Our eyes met [I let my guard down,]
Heat rushed through me [I let you drown]
And [And]-
Somewhere inside [Somewhere inside]-
Something changed.

(Chorus; Both)
We were blinded,
We were hurt on the inside,
I fell in love with an ideal,
I made a promise,
And-
Gave myself to what started to feel real.

(Verse 3; Blake [Jaune])
I let you protect me,
I took advantage-
And I gave you the blame [I’d take it for you-]
I gave you my hopes [I’d raise them for you]
You gave me the light [I pulled you from the shadows]

(Refrain; Jaune [Blake] ((Both)) )
I put my guard up,
I let you push me down,
I gave you my love [I’d take it from you,]
I betrayed you with my trust [I’d forgive you everytime,]
I gave you my word-
((And we started a new revolution))

(Chorus; Both)
We were blinded,
We were hurt on the inside,
I fell in love with an ideal,
I made a promise,
And-
Gave myself to what started to feel real.

(Post-Chorus; Both)
We gave ourselves to what felt real,
Free from the shadows and the cage,
Stepping forward onto the world’s stage,
I gave of you and you took of me-
And we made a world together.

(Chorus; Both)
We were blinded,
We were hurt on the inside,
I fell in love with an ideal,
I made a promise,
And-
Gave myself to what started to feel real.

(Outro; Both)
I let my trust rely on you-
I let my feelings deify you,
And we made-
A whole new revolution together.
Chapter Eleven

Chapter Summary

Affirming feelings, making something strong out of something fragile, a bit of romance and some lost in a trance. And Blake's fears come true- will she trust her team and her friends in -this- world?

(The end note for this chapter is Dragonslayer Theme 1: Arm & Arm)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN: Remember, kids. Don’t open a condom wrapper with your teeth. That way can lay condom failure.

A Family Arc

[This Will Be The Day]

Chapter Eleven

Dragons

They’d split duties, Yang asking Pyrrha and he asking Blake. It’d been easier than he would have liked to admit, since Blake had given him an understanding look and promptly said that she’d leave her Scroll on in case something happened. Apparently, from a light talk with Ruby at lunch, Weiss and Blake had agreed to go out shopping for something after school that day. He didn’t know what Pyrrha had planned to do, but he wished her a good time just like the two monochrome huntresses.

Gods, there were his nerves again. He couldn’t focus on any of the exams that day, and from the way Yang had fidgeted in her seat, casting glances at him that even he’d caught, it wasn’t any better for her.

It implied a lot, and Jaune wasn’t sure if it was fair of his body to react with a great deal of hope for what she might want that night. She’d been touchy, and they’d shared a few chaste kisses since their date, but . . .
He would be an actual full-blown moron to not be turned on by her.

It was hard to feel more wracked with nerves than he did standing in front of his own dorm room door, his hands holding the frame while he used his arms to support his suddenly boneless body.

He’d had no warning about Ruby, it was true, but now that he was aware of what could potentially lay beyond? His throat was dry, his chest hurt, his muscles all felt too tense.

His imagination was going wild. Jumping between the worst prospects- getting beaten into a pulp after she’d changed her mind- and the best- her waiting for him, wanting to be intimate finally after a week of playing footsies.

It was moving fast, for sure, but they were young and in a dangerous profession. It was something Camillia had even commented on, once. That Huntsman tended to start families young- especially if they planned to die in the line of duty.

That sounded dark, but he understood innately that his parents’, and Camillia’s, scars and faraway expressions had always implied that it wasn’t a life for those without the spine to lose and die.

Gods, why was he depressing himself with these thoughts when it was very likely that beyond the door was his blonde girlfriend? Just as nervous as he was?

Damn, he was embarrassing.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, he swiped his Scroll across the reader, grasped the handle- trying to ignore the static shock that clung to the brass knob- and stepped into JBPY’s dorm room.

The living space was empty, and from the open door, he saw no one in the bathroom. A hitch in his breath unnerved him more than he’d have liked to admit as he readied to raise his voice, “Yang?” He called out, stepping towards the bedroom door.
“I’m-” Her voice came free from beyond the door, and he bit down on a sudden sense of nerves that were nearly as bad as when he’d had to stand there and see how Ruby and Yang’s talk would go. “I’m- ah- in the bedroom.”

A pause followed, “Lover boy.”

She -was- as nervous as him. That made him feel better, at least. And since she was in there, it wasn’t likely that she was going to tear his head from his neck.

Even though he could clearly picture it in his head.

Not doing the best job on his libido right now, if he was being honest. Still, as he moved to the door and gently pushed it open, he could only hope he’d find something sensible inside instead of a war waiting to happen.

It was only the second time Yang Xiao Long left him breathless.

It wasn’t even anything special- truly- just a red silken shirt that had a neckline that plunged so low it would have showed the front of her bra-

-if she’d been wearing one.

Well, that was part of it, anyway. Yang knew what she was working with, he was pretty sure. Because the way she was shyly sat on his bed, legs curled back inwards at her sides while her hands fuzzed with the hem of the shirt, his height made it perfect to get a good solid look down the stark red fabric and see that there wasn’t much of anything else Yang -was- wearing.

Praise the Gods, he was looking upon whatever passed for the good afterlife on Remnant.

Blonde waves raking down her shoulders, an uncharacteristically demure look on the woman’s face while he was busy trying to remember how the process of breathing worked. The soft touch of pink to her lips that made him, well, remember their kiss at the end of their date.

It inspired a certain breed of much nastier thoughts as well, considering the tone of the room.
wasn’t inclined towards light-hearted conversation, either.

“You going to stand there and stare-” Yang licked her lips, obviously more to wet them than to inspire the thoughts that they -did- inspire in him, “Or are you going to let me see what’s going on under those clothes?”

[Vol 1. EP. 13, “Nope!”]

He could point out how she’d seen him half-naked before, but it would have been suicidally stupid of him to do so. Instead, he plastered a grin on his face that he couldn’t say was as confident as he wanted it to be, and reached up to fuss with his tie and jacket, tossing them at the bottom of his bed while he crossed the room.

As he drew in closer, Yang’s gaze never moved from him, and his was only shrouded away from hers for as long as it took to pull off his vest and the button-up beneath. Undressed down to his pants, kicking his shoes off alongside his clothes, he hoped she liked what she saw.

Didn’t mind the scars, the marks of someone who had worked way too hard to be where he was. Every single one worried him when those lavender eyes slipped away from his face down to trace the lines of his muscles, and he knew some were more prominent than others.

The slash across his side up near the bottom of his pectoral, a wound he’d earned sparring with Camillia one time. Crimson had tasted his blood plenty of times before, but that had been the largest wound she’d ever given him. His Aura had broken, and he was out of it for the day and until his Aura was fully recharged.

The distortion of his flesh near the top of his left hip-bone, a fight against his first Alpha Beowulf.

The off-white of a starburst scar near his sternum, earned just before he’d killed another person the first time. A younger bandit who had thoughtlessly got himself embroiled in a fight with Camillia Arc and her little brother, her student.

All of them had stories, he could remember most all of them.

Was he hideous to her? Marred, broken? For a moment, the heat of the moment drained from him and he could only feel cold, crushing self-hatred wash over his shoulders as he slipped onto the bed
with Yang.

Her hand came forward, curling into the hem of his pants past his belt, grasping and pulling him closer. He shuffled on his knees until she was laying beneath him, and he could only stare into her eyes once again.

“I want you to make me a promise, Jaune.” Her serious face was on again, and he could only nod, showing her he was listening, even if he was trying to banish that chill in his bones in favor of the warmth of the sun that lay beneath him.

“If we do this- if I’m with you- I don’t want to worry that you’ll leave me. That you’ll vanish one day.” It was an odd request, but he had a feeling it was a serious issue with Yang- especially for her to bring it up now of all times. Resting on his hands and knees above her, he could only study her face. The soft little grimace that said she was nervous, just the same as him. The rise and fall of her breast with each breath.

The goosebumps, the uncertain and scared look in her eyes that made him want to hold her more than anything. And so he did, moving one arm to keep himself stable as he hooked an arm trained to be powerful enough- to be strong enough- around her waist and drew him up against his chest.

“Yang. For every moment that you’ll have me, every second, every day, every year-” He had to stop himself from rambling, damn nerves, “I’ll be with you. No matter what. And I won’t say that just because you’re the most beautiful woman in the world right now, I’ll say that because- even if this doesn’t work- you’re my friend. I’ll stay by your side. On my honor as Jaune Arc, Arc’s Word.”

He didn’t need to see her face to feel her quake against him, and his arm squeezed more tightly around her. It was all so real, all so there as he knew that every word he’d said was the truth.

It would hurt him if she didn’t love him back, but he would be there, regardless. Because that was what this had to be. This trepidation, this weightless feeling that made him worry that she would see his scars and run.

That he wasn’t worth her.

It was an ugly, pointless voice that picked at him, even though he knew it was his own nasty thoughts seeking to ruin a moment that he wanted to live in right then.
It had to be love. That was the only thing that made sense—nothing else could.

Her arms came up around him, and those negative, ugly thoughts washed away in her warmth. In the heat of Yang Xiao Long, in the soft pulse of her heart beating just below his. Together, they felt so vulnerable, and he knew that it wouldn’t take much to ruin this moment and break them both.

It scared him to think of just how little it could take to ruin people. Especially someone he’d thought was as strong as Yang Xiao Long. She pulled away from him slightly, and he let it happen while he could see her face again.

Purple eyes misty with something more than just uncertainty, he could feel the whirl of emotions high in her because he felt them too.

That need to prove to her that he was just as good as his word. That she’d never have to be scared of him not coming back to her, if he could help it. His own fears and pains quieted in her presence.

He leaned down, and as she started to lean up to him in turn, his eyes closed. It wasn’t a perfect, cinema-esque kiss, but it felt right. The brush of lips, a little bit too rough on the initial meeting, before they found a rhythm they could dance to within each other.

Unlike with Ruby, who had been the aggressor, he found himself chasing after the demure blonde’s actions. Her arms locked around his nape, and his tongue tickled out against her lips in turn.

The shaking of her arms on him alerted him to how it affected him, the soft rustle of covers and sheets beneath her told him she was moving. A leg came up and tensed against his side, before a foot hooked against his rear. A tense little whimper came free against his lips as he brought her spine up until she was pressed against him again.

Everything right now was more intense. He heard her every breath, felt her every movement. He hoped the feelings that were crashing inside of him were out of control in her as well.

It’d been one date, it was true. But— it was so damn easy to fall in love. Some people did it just off one glance.

Maybe it wouldn’t work. But Jaune would try.
“Um- ah-” Her lips let out such pleasant little sounds as he broke the kiss, a strand of saliva trailing between them messily. Her eyes lidded, the glistening of her lips more intense when he’d tasted the gentle strawberry flavor of her gloss.

He could hardly stand to see the way she looked at him. Caught between scared, and eager. Knowing he felt the same, he could only duck in once again and press his teeth against the flesh of her collar-bone. “Ah-!” Marking her there with a press of his teeth and a suck.

“Jaune-” She whispered out, and hearing his name on her lips was like the gods damned cry of victory. Yes, that was what he wanted. Her to feel good, to know how she made him feel. How damned special she was. How much he could barely stand to not be near her. How lucky he was to be on a team with her.

“Yang.” He husked, far more breathlessly than he’d thought he would. The way her eyes closed and a shiver worked it’s way from her neck all the way down to where the red shirt had split open and showcased the curl of one hip and the fullness of one breast, it made him want to attack. It made him want her so bad he hurt.

She let out a ragged little gasp as his lips descended, and he scooted down the bed until he could have what he wanted. Her deeply pink nipple brought between his lips and teased with the tip of his tongue, dragging forth a jolt from Yang and being accompanied by a mewl that set his soul on fire.

He shifted off to her side, lips firmly clamped around the tip of the captured tit while he let his arms rest from keeping himself upright. Pulling her in against him with the arm that would have otherwise been pinned under his own weight while the other came forward to open the neckline of that red shirt and pull her other breast free. The heft of it resting against his cheek while soft little whines came from the blonde woman each time his tongue tickled across the bud of her bust.

A set of nails raked through his hair, and he had to admire that sensation, and the way it made him want to purr. Ruby had done that when she’d encouraged him to try giving her oral affection, and it was an addictive feeling that he could grow very fond of.

That thought spurred him on. Giving her other breast a tender, marking kiss on the meat of it before he slid downwards to lay more gently bruising nips along the trim and muscled stomach that
spoke to how hard Yang worked to keep a fit figure.

Something that she was obviously so proud of, but right now nervous about, from the way her voice wormed into his ears, “Jaune, what are you-”

Giving her pleasure, what else could he do then? Help her to relax. A tangle of soft blonde curls greeted him when he got to where he could push up the hem of the shirt over her hips, exposing the taut lines of her pubic bone and the beginnings of her powerful thighs. The dense muscle of each leg she showed off so purposefully with her brusque combat gear now only for him to enjoy.

The redness of her sex, the glistening sight and the effeminate musk that spoke to her readiness- if not her eagerness. The flow of blood under soft skin, even as his tongue was once again made to bring new sounds- new music- of her delight.

It trilled against the hooded pearl that stood out so prominently, earning him an actual moan- Yang! Moaning! Because of him!- before he dipped the muscle and pushed it inside of her sex with a careful movement that made her thighs lock around his head. “OH!”

He’d been taught to play many instruments, but he was beginning to think that his favorite was a woman’s body. None of them gave him the same pleasure, the same expression of his soul- of his emotions. He just didn’t have the passion, he supposed.

Yang shifted from beside him, probably not comfortable with their sidelong position, and rolled atop him to straddle his face. That suited him just fine, giving him freedom to indulge in her while his hands came up to cup the taut and muscled cheeks of her ass while his tongue delved within and made her hands shakily grasp onto locks of golden blonde hair. “OH!” She cried out again, and he aimed at that spot that had made her quake- “NNN!” He’d try to remember that.

He drank deep in her scent, the intensity of her arousal mingling with the soft scent of tea that was contained in her body wash. Her hair always smelled strongly of strawberries and tropical fruit, it was a scent he could categorize just like the other girls. One of the benefits of living with them- if he ever needed to shop for them, he’d know what they liked, at least.

“Jaune- I- nn-” Oh?

His tongue pulled free from her, a whimper rising from Yang’s throat just before she startled against him when the tip of his muscle lathed against her clit, making her back arch. “AH!” Another
light little rub- “NNN!!!” Then another- “C-c-”

One of his arms moved around her thigh, bending his head back against the bed as his first and second digit- as gently as he could- rubbed over the pearl of her pleasure, his tongue moving from the sensitive thing to slip into her nectar-rich sex again as she clamped down with undulating vibrations.

Yang was -not- quiet. “NNNNGGGHKKKK------” He thanked the Gods that the dorms were mostly soundproofed. Otherwise, people might think someone was being murdered.

He nursed her gently through an orgasm as her thighs squeezed and released his head, making him worry a time or two if she might pop it like a grape because of rebel muscles, before finally she came down from a high he’d only learned the feeling of not so long ago.

Panting breathlessly, Yang let loose a giggle that made his lips quirk into a grin. “Wow.” She uttered, dumbly, and he could only feel a certain breed of pleasure at that.

“Liked that?” He asked as she moved a leg from around his head, letting him crane his neck a little bit to lighten up the forming crick in it. Another breathless little giggle answered him as she laid back, and he could only slide his way up next to her again to look at her face and the awe that coated it.

“I gotta say, lover boy- that nickname isn’t so sarcastic now.” His brows knitted together, an amused smirk on his features.

“And here I thought it stopped being that way when we went on a date.” Her eyes darted over to his face again, and she brought a hand out to grasp his chin and bring him in for a kiss. This one was less fueled by passion, instead lingering between the realm of fragile like glass, but growing stronger by the moment.

As they broke away from one another, Yang’s smile was pleasant to his eyes. “Main event?” She asked, and he nodded in return. She rolled off of the bed and he watched her move with a confused stare, the shirt still in complete disarray while the muscles of her legs flexed in time with the sway of Yang’s extremely grabbable ass. She gave a somewhat shy smile over her shoulder as she settled at her own night-table next to her bed, digging in it for a moment before pulling a roll of condom packages from it, moving back towards his bed again afterwards. “If you ever tell anyone I got condoms from Ruby, I will hurt you.” She noted, and he raised his hands in surrender.

More impressed there were any left. But that thought stayed firmly locked in his head. He damn
As he shifted his hips, unbuckling his pants and kicking them and his boxer-briefs off with a little bit of struggle while Yang moved back unto the bed, he asked, “Would you like to be on top, or do you want me to?” The blonde woman’s bemused expression didn’t tell him much, but when she reached out to grasp his positively -shining- with precum length, he had to admit that was a lot more clear an answer.

He’d had a feeling Yang was a top. Surprisingly demure or not, she seemed to love activity too much to lay back and just take a pounding. Words got lost in the air as her hand shyly gave his length a few pumps, making him hiss through clenched teeth. His eyes watching as Yang caught the corner of the foil wrapper in her teeth and used her one free hand to tear it open, adjusting her grip on the thing to let the rubber within slip out into her fingers while she tossed the torn wrapper elsewhere. If he wasn’t- well- so damn turned on, he might have lamented her throwing trash on the floor.

Right then? She could set fire to the world and he wouldn’t give a damn as long as she put that condom on and made him feel like a show stallion should.

The feeling of her fingers tenderly, falteringly, spreading the thin membrane down his already leaking length made him shiver and let loose a soft gasp. His eyes looking upon Yang’s concentrating features as she watched the way the rubber unrolled down his length until it was snugly fitted at his base, just shy of the trimmed bit of blonde. With that accomplished, a wry grin came onto her lips, and he reached out softly to tickle his fingers up one of her thighs- making her shiver.

“You sure?” He asked her, one last time before they went too far for this to be called anything but a flight of fancy.

For a moment, she didn’t look so. But then, she nodded and moved to straddle him. “I’ve had a lot of time to think about it,” She admitted, “It’s not normal, by any stretch, but . . . I like you, Jaune. We’re moving fast, but we’re young- let’s be a little crazy.” Leaning down, she pressed a soft kiss to his lips, and he luxuriated in the taste of that strawberry gloss again, one hand coming up to GENTLY rake through her blonde locks, because he knew specifically how she felt about her hair.

“If I- if you like them, too, then- I have a little bit…” She whispered the next part, and his eyes turned onto her face as she hung over him there, able to feel the way her own heat was radiating against his sheathed length stuck up against her pubic mound. “I-”
As she struggled to keep going, his hand shifted around from her hair, softly cupping her cheek. She leaned her head gently into the motion, and he melted a little on the inside at the affectionate gesture. “You can tell me, Yang. I won’t judge you. We’re in this together.”

For a few moments, he wasn’t sure she’d continue, even though their bodies undulated gently together—not yet making love, but keeping each other primed. “...Our team is filled with beautiful girls.” Finally, she whispered, and his eyes widened. Not because he was judging her, but damn that wasn’t what he expected. Not even remotely. Stunned silent for a moment, it was darling when Yang’s head tucked in against his chest and one of her hands tucked into a fist to smack into his shoulder.

“What’s that dumb look on your face?” She grunted out, and he could only let loose a soft snicker.

“Well, pardon me for hearing that one of the hottest women I’ll ever have the pleasure to meet, let alone make love with, is interested in other women. Kind of a shock to the system.” And it was. Then again, it made some of his observations make a whole lot more sense. Yang certainly liked men, it was true, but she’d not been particularly shy about her playfulness with Blake and Pyrrha, either.

Well, Ruby was an insatiable porn-loving pervert, and her sister was bisexual with a fondness for their team-mate’s bodies. The shit you didn’t expect about your friends.

“You’re lucky you’re so cute.” Yang noted, and he could only agree. He was a damned lucky guy. His hands came up, gently cradling her cheeks again and bringing her up for another tender little kiss that he intensified by letting his tongue ghost across her lips before she granted it access and the duel began.

His attention focused on the kiss, but was distracted as the weight on his hips shifted off long enough for him to feel her knuckles brush his stomach, then take hold of him. It took her a few attempts to line him up, but soon enough he sank inside of her warm heat and—apparently—Yang took it a little too suddenly since she let loose a soft little mewl of mixed pain and some small fulfillment, breaking the kiss. “S-shiiit- I only hope you’re big, Jaune.”

He couldn’t say. He was big enough, for sure, but he understood that she was expressing the discomfort he was causing her in that moment, not trying to boost his ego. “Take your time.” He chided her gently, brushing locks of blonde out of her face while she got used to the feeling of having him deep inside to the root. Between the two, Ruby was tighter— but Yang was... HOT. Not quite uncomfortably so, but she definitely had a much higher temperature in comparison with Ruby—which was a strangely appealing sensation.
She nodded her head in response to his words, eyes closed tight for a moment while she acclimated. His finger-tips slid down her cheeks and then across her neck- making her quake- before they lightly took her breasts in his palms, beginning to massage them in small circles while letting his forefinger and middle-fingers squeeze her nipples between his digits, intent on distracting her and bringing a bit of extra pleasure to their coupling. The soft sounds of ragged little breaths told him he was at least doing that job.

“Fuck, it’s so intense.” Yang uttered, and he had to agree. With Ruby, it had been a whirlwind neither could escape from. He hadn’t had time to worry about his body, she hadn’t said anything if she -had- noticed, and with Yang, he’d felt and sensed -everything- and -all too much- at the same time. So hyper-aware of one another that it was completely different.

Finally, after drawing free a few more soft sighs and pleasant little grunts with his hands, Yang began to move. The first unsteady roll of her hips making him squish about inside of her and making his face tense up as she squeezed and made him figure out the other important difference between Yang and her sister.

Yang had muscle control. Oh boy. This was going to be a quick ride the first time. “Oh? Did you like that?” She taunted him using his earlier words, and he wondered if she truly was that vindictive.

“I’m- nn- with Yang Xiao Long. This is a dream come true, sunshine.” He teased her a bit in return, spotting the way her cheeks flushed softly before she tucked her legs in tighter against his sides and laid her palms steady against his chest.

*Uh oh.* He may have bitten off more than he could chew.

**Fwup!** The next movement was announced loudly with Yang’s thighs and ass clapping loudly against his hips, **Thwap!** followed by another. “Hah- aah- aah- Jaune-!” One of his hands moved from her jiggling bust to grasp her hips, steadying her motions before the new intensity dislodged him from inside of her. Practised they were not, but Yang certainly showcased that same power and enthusiasm in the bedroom as she did in the sparring ring.

Here was hoping she wouldn’t leave him covered in bruises as bad as Ruby had. At least this time he’d not have to bother hiding them? Even though Yang had only apparently ignored the goings on out of her own mental sanctity- everyone else had known, apparently.

Man, he and Ruby were bad at keeping secrets.
The soft flesh of her hip was slightly wet with sweat, and his fingers tightened a bit on the handle there as the bed started to rock gently in the frame, the rough little squeak accompanying the sounds of their meeting bodies.

The increasing intensity, the race to the finish- “Gnn--”

“Aah-”

“Yang-”

“J-Jaune-”

All of it, the hurt and the ache, the longing and the hunger, all of it was fed by their needs. Her need, her desire to have someone stay by her side. To accept her for who she was, to acknowledge her growing feelings. His growing affection for her, his willingness to do anything for her- for any of them- and his refusal to allow them to think less than that.

It was an affirmation that they would go forward together. Lovemaking was sweet symbolism like that, and the fact alone that Jaune was thinking about that said everything about how he was trying to hold out desperately to bring her to orgasm again before he exploded.

It wasn’t working. “Yang- I-”

“Aah-nnn-hhnn-a- Jaune--!!”

Both hands grasped her hips, even as she continued to roll and pound her hips down into his. The condom entrenching his length flooding and growing distended within her, the feel of her clenching down on him and squeezing out a few extra little movements before she collapsed atop him, shuddering and quaking while her arms wrapped around him and -squeezed-. 

Oh gods, he was privately thankful he had Aura, because he was -feeling it strain under her arm strength just then.- A Yang Xiao Long orgasm was no joke, apparently.
His arms came up weakly around her in turn as sensation flooded back- beyond the strain of aura against aura, anyway- and they were left in a pile of bodies together. Just the insensate nature of two young lovers who had done something insensible together for the very first time.

It was a nice feeling, he would admit, and he hoped it was a feeling they would enjoy for years to come. His palm raked along the swell of her back muscles, and then squeezed her in his arms, one of his hands entrenching in her hair while the other cupped above the swell of her rump. “Yang?” He uttered, softly, unsure.

“Yeah . . ?”

“I think I love you.”

As a soft, gentle little sob broke her grace and she cradled herself into him, he held onto her all the tighter as his mind raced. It was too quick, he should be more careful- but . . .

He was going to give it a shot. And if Yang was fine with it, he’d welcome any of the others into trying to build love together.

A soft memory of white ran across his mind, and he let his eyes close for a moment while they cuddled. “Don’t leave me.” She reiterated, and he nodded his head.

“Not if I can ever help it. Arc word.”

“And you totally don’t get to watch while I give Blake a Yang.” THAT made him stutter, but she followed it with a laugh and he could only appreciate just how special a girl Yang Xiao Long was. He wasn’t even sure if she was joking or not just because that was how she was.

“Rude.” He noted, unable to help the smile on his face. As she pulled away from him with a smirk, he leaned up to press another kiss to her lips, and they indulged in being together and naked. They still had a little time before their team-mates would be back, after all.

+x+x+x+
“I have to say, it’s odd for us to do anything together.” Weiss Schnee noted as Blake was sat across from the Heiress at a little cafe where the news played nearby. The Faunus-in-secret nursing a cup of tea while the Heiress had a cup of sugary coffee in front of her. Both women had a bundle each of bags next to them.

“I wanted some advice,” Blake admitted, which led to Weiss’ snow white brow raising- the eye with the scar. Privately, Blake felt bad about that mark that stood out so strongly from the girl’s otherwise pretty face. She always wondered where she’d gotten it when it entered her mind.

“Oh? About?” Blake could at least appreciate Weiss’ candidness. After their first meeting, she could admit that it was a lot more pleasant to spend time around the Heiress since she’d been partnered with Ruby and made team-mates with Ren and Nora. It seemed a little casual friendship and support was really all it took to bring the girl out of her shell and make her- well-

-less of a bitch, if Blake was brutally honest. She still didn’t -trust- the heiress, but to be fair she hadn’t exactly trusted anyone outside of Jaune at this point, but she liked her well enough that today’s shopping trip had been pleasant, if not as fun as the Girl’s Night.

Slumping back in her seat a bit, nursing the last dregs of her tea, Blake broke up the moment before continuing, “Jaune.” She admitted, watching as Weiss rolled her eyes but nonetheless seemed a bit more receptive than she had been before. “I” She glanced to the side, realizing just how damn hard it was to be open with your thoughts, it had always been an issue for her. She’d been so much more passionate, so much more innocent once upon a time. Going to the protests when she was but a kitten, and now she could barely open up about even the smallest facets of herself.

“I imagine-” Weiss began, sipping her coffee with a nonchalant look on her face, though Blake noted how her eyes glimmered softly in comparison with how they were usually a more genteel frosty blue, “- that what the Lady Arc said to all of you has been on your mind since.” When Blake raised an eyebrow, Weiss shrugged, “Ruby told me.”

That made sense. She was thinking that already, anyway.

“That- is part of it, yes, but not in particular what I was wanting advice on.” Blake noted, and she heard Weiss let out a sigh of relief.

“Oh, thank the Gods, because I don’t think I can handle another girl coming to me for sex advice…” That made Blake blink.
“RUBY?” She asked, about as incredulous as could be. Sure, she’d known what Ruby had done- it had been obvious as hell to everyone except Yang, whom had seemed perfectly willing to delude herself in order to protect her mental image of her cute little sister.

“The girl has it a little bad.” Weiss admitted, setting her coffee cup back down and looking about before waving a waitress over, ordering another cup for the both of them. As the table was cleared, the Heiress mused, “She insists that she just wants to be friends with him, but- well- friends don’t do what she wants to do with him. And when they “hang out”-” Blake privately was amused at Weiss literally using her fingers to do air quotes. It was such a shamelessly juvenile gesture that it brought a smile to her face, “- they might as well be as comfortable as an old couple together. Ren and Nora don’t pay it any mind, but it’s irritating to see her dance around the subject.”

Blake’s brow perked, sensing a metaphorical weak spot. “Why?” From the way Weiss recoiled, she realized the girl had begun ranting a bit. She raised a hand to wave, “You’ve not exactly been on the best terms with Jaune since we started the school year-”

“What, compared to- I don’t know- Pyrrha?” Weiss uttered, and for a moment Blake was the one caught stupefied.

Because Weiss Schnee had just *growled.* “I admit, she’s still a bit . . . off about him. She’s getting better.” Not as fast as most would like, she agreed, but at least they were able to have a civil discussion now. The fact that alone made Jaune happy was . . . kind of sad, really.

Weiss’ stormy look passed away, and she looked stricken for having given it in the first place, quickly schooling her features back into a more placid and regal appearance. “Anyway- let’s not get distracted. What were you needing advice for, then?”

“He wants me to call my parents.” Weiss blinked, tilting her head in confusion. “I haven’t . . . talked to them in a long time.” The Heiress’ eyes narrowed, and then a look of recognition washed across her face.

“You’re -that- Blake Belladonna.” Weiss uttered, actively looking pleased with herself, while Blake felt a momentary sting of panic- but then noticed how the fencer seemed anything but ready to be shocked at her. “Something about you has been bothering me all year, and now I know what! Hah! What a good day this is.”

. . . Weiss was really an odd girl because of her team. “You’re- not upset?” Blake asked, tilting her head.
“Well,” The white-haired girl flipped her long ponytail with a hand as their new cups arrived and she waited for the heat to simmer away from her coffee before she hefted it again to nurse a sip, “It makes me wonder why you’re hiding yourself away like that, but that means Jaune already knew, as well- probably since Initiation. After all, his family is . . .”

Blake nodded, “From the Revolution—”

Weiss blinked, raising a brow. “It’s more than just that. Don’t you know?”

Blake winced, not liking the idea that Weiss knew something that she hadn’t even told Jaune— even though she knew she should have at this point. As Weiss noticed the response, the heiress’ lips closed into a thin line.

“Ah, so you do. But he doesn’t know.” The Faunus nodded her head, picking up her own cup of tea to soothe her suddenly fraying nerves.

“It’s- a bit of an open secret.” There was a good reason the name of Arc was still a name uttered in Faunus circles, even besides Absinthe Arc. A more immediate reason had come forward some eight or so years ago.

It had been part of how she’d gotten involved in the White Fang as well. There was no way she could tell Jaune anything about that, though. Even just admitting to having been one formerly was one thing, knowing he and their friends would likely get over it at some point-

-but to know that . . .

“Still, what advice would you have me give? You don’t have the issues with family I do, so I’d say just call them.” Weiss noted, at least able to be candid about it all. Blake’s ears pinned back in her bow, but she acknowledged the fact of the matter.

Weiss Schnee was damn near her friend, and nothing like the rest of the SDC. In a way, being friends with her was already a step in the right direction. If Weiss got to understand the plight of Faunus- not that she didn’t already seem rather against the ugly parts of her father’s business- she’d help make it all better.
It was a similar thought to what had plagued her about Jaune recently. He was handsome, and trustworthy. There was plenty about him to be liked, and Blake could admit that even if love didn’t bloom between them- and she had reason to believe it might- she could deal with a loveless marriage if it meant her overall goal was completed.

Her feelings about Jaune weren’t as muddled as Ruby or Yang’s were. Blake, however, was a cautious woman and she knew if she leapt in-

-she would go in at the deep end. Blake Belladonna did not play games, not with her heart. Not anymore. Not after Adam Taurus.

“It’s- there’s a lot in the past that . . .” Blake sighed, even as she saw Weiss perk a brow at her. Her attention drifted away for a moment, before the news filled the silence and Blake’s attention was drawn, only to freeze- with Weiss’ attention being brought along as well.

“Video footage of White Fang terrorists in the midst of committing Dust Robberies have caused the raising of insurance and shipping costs, much speculation has been-”

As Weiss’ eyes turned back onto her, Blake knew something was wrong. More than that, she also knew she couldn’t do this on her own.

And, sadly, there was only one other person she trusted around her.

I have to talk to Jaune.

Chapter End Notes

Arm & Arm
Dragonslayer Theme 1 (Jeff Williams & Adrienne Cowan)

(Intro; Adrienne (Yang))
Abandonment,
Makes the hardest out of the softest,
Trust,
Makes the strongest out of the weakest,
Hurt,
Makes the most out of the least.

(Verse 1; Jeff (Jaune))
Words,
Empower the weak and flood from the strong,
Strength,
Built up by the scared and lauded by the arrogant,
Beauty,
In all the world when I’m with you.

(Pre-Chorus; Both)
Arms,
Bringing me in tight,
Legs,
Carrying me to you.

(Chorus; Yang [Jaune] ((Both)) )
Arm in Arm
Taking the tried and true [Testing the waters and making my way to you,]
Stand up strong [And breaking the chains all the way through-]
A story in glittering gold [Told on repeat-]
Until I find my way-
(Back to you.))

(Post-Chorus; Both)
Arm in arm,
We make our stand,
A little fire,
To temper the band,
The music rushes,
The pulse beat pumping,
As we stand,
Arm in arm,
And make our way back to you.

(Chorus; Yang [Jaune] ((Both)) )
Arm in Arm
Taking the tried and true [Testing the waters and making my way to you,]
Stand up strong [And breaking the chains all the way through-]
A story in glittering gold [Told on repeat-]
Until I find my way-
(Back to you.))

(Outro; Both)
Arm in arm,
We make our stand,
A little fire,
To temper the band,
The music rushes,
The pulse beat pumping,
As we stand,
Arm in arm,
And make our way back to you.
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Summary

Blake's dilemma finally arrives, and Weiss has a deep think.

No end note song today. The next one will be during the next Ruby bit (Approximately four chapters or so from now), which will be- of course- the Lancaster Theme.

A Family Arc

[This Will Be The Day]

Chapter Twelve

Do You Trust The Killer or The Terrorist?

Spooning in bed was nice, but didn’t last as long as he’d privately hoped it would. His Scroll gave out a tone and he had to slip from Yang’s arms- to a soft little whine- to dig his pants up from the floor to grab it. Though, right as he sat on the bedside, her mussed blonde head pressed into the small of his back and he chuckled softly. “Don’t go,” She murmured, and he reached a hand back to run his palm along the line of her shoulder and bicep.

“Not going anywhere yet, sunshine. Just got a message.” Speaking of which, he used his free hand to rotate and open the electronic, noting the sender. Blake? He carefully maneuvered to where he could read the text, and promptly grew worried.

I need your help, will tell you when we get back. Bullhead in thirty. That gave them just enough time to shower and then get his covers and sheets into the laundry. “Blake is on her way back,” Jaune warned, only for Yang- likely dozing a bit- to murmur in return.

“Let her join.” Despite himself, he blushed. He knew she was still riding an emotional high and also half-asleep, but damn it that was- well- it was an appealing thought, for sure!

“I think that’s the line I have to draw, Yang- besides, her message sounds urgent. Not- like-
“Being attacked by Grimm” urgent, but some kind of it.” His words seemed to at least be steadily waking his girlfriend up, her slowly pulling her way up against him with a yawn while he could indulge in the sight of her naked body as the covers- which did in fact reek- fell away.

Yes, ma’am. He mentally noted.

“Why when we finally get some time alone?” Yang uttered, and he understood. At least the world had the kindness to let them get through things before something came up. That was one thing. Leaning over, he pecked her lips with his own, and enjoyed the way she squished his arm in against her breast.

“I’m going to have to remember that you’re like a kitten after a nap.” He teased her, and earned a soft smack to his pectoral for it. That didn’t stop his grin any.

“You watch it, lover boy. Playing with fire will get you burned.”

“Playing with you gets you hot.” Yes, he might have been feeling confident. TOO confident, really, but he had earned a little of it. “But, really, we should get cleaned up and everything before Blake bolts in here and sees something she's not ready for.”

Yang let out another yawn, glancing at the floor-length mirror as she stood from the bed and looked at the time on his Scroll before moving to get herself some clothes. “The timing is good anyway. Pyrrha said she’d come back here soon, too.”

Oof- they HAD been playing with fire, it seemed. “You go ahead and get the shower first, I’ll get my bedding in the wash.”

A set of sleepy- but much more aware- purple eyes turned towards him with a wry smirk. “Not gonna go for one together?” Unable to hide the way he immediately flushed, he could only take a deep breath to try to banish it down.

“I would- ah- love nothing more. But, we’ll . . .”

“Yeah, yeah, loverboy. Can’t have the whole dorm smell of Yang.” Well, at least she was good natured about it. As she gathered a towel and clothes, he stood and pulled on a pair of his lounging pants before bundling his covers and uniform up before taking it to the little section dedicated to their
own personal— if not very large— laundry. Dragging sex-smell bedding down to the big public laundromat? Not happening.

After that, he had a good feeling that Yang would take a little while in the shower, and they hadn’t exactly had dinner— perhaps Pyrrha and Blake hadn’t either— so he dug in the fridge and pulled something for a relatively quick and easy dinner that he could have Yang finish if need be.

Baked chicken and tuna fillets it was. Nothing but oven time after a little prep. By the time he’d slipped the tray with its carefully segregated meats into the oven, Yang came free from the bathroom pulling a brush lightly through her hair. “Bathroom’s your’s, lover boy.” She noted, and he offered her a nod.

“I’ve got a timer set on this, but I know you have to be hungry— and Pyrrha and Blake might be as well. Just pull it out, toast buns or bread, put what you like on it. I’ll be back out in fifteen.”

And hopefully, as he gathered his Huntsman attire, he wouldn’t need Crocea Mors for what Blake needed help with. But since she’d yet to ask him for anything and she had asked him specifically instead of the entire team . . ?

He felt it was better to be ready.

+x+x+x+

By the time he got back out of the shower and dressed again, he stepped out into the living quarters of the Dorm while he fitted his tie, noting that Blake and Pyrrha had arrived back and had already made their way through food alongside Yang. He took a glance at the clock and winced when he saw that his shower had taken twenty minutes as opposed to fifteen.

Well, he’d wanted to be thorough, after all.

“Lookin’ good again, Lover boy. But it’s getting to be evening time, should you be pulling on your combat suit?” Yang noted, pointing a finger at him around a can of strawberry soda, and he simply turned his eyes unto Blake with a shrug.

“Call it a hunch. Anyway, Blake, what’s the emergency?” From the look of startled surprise on Blake’s face, he presumed that he’d guessed right.
She’d meant to only involve him, but- well- he wasn’t going to let that sit. Yang wouldn’t sit by while they got in trouble, and neither would Pyrrha. And that was just within their own team.

Ruby? Ruby would be after them as fast as she heard the word “trouble”.

Blake stared at him hard for a moment, and he settled his arms at his hips. He wasn’t going to engage the faunus in a staring contest- he knew at least that much about their culture- but he certainly wasn’t going to back down either. This wasn’t a dominance test, this was about her showing her trust in her team.

In him, Yang, and Pyrrha.

“Blake.” He softened his stance, attempting to mediate rather than outright strong-arm her. “We’ve been a team for a few months now. I’m glad you trust me, but it’s time we start working together. Pyrrha and I are getting over our issues-”

“Somewhat.” The red-head agreed.

“- and I already said I was going to do my best to keep you safe. You know what’s safer than having one person at your back? Several. And, trust me, we were just going to make everyone else mad when they had to track our asses down.”

He had to be thankful that the bathroom was near the door to the dorm itself, leaving Blake’s only real chance to escape through him or to leap out of one of the windows. Now, while he could see her rushing him, he didn’t see her risking full force throwing herself through a window.

“It’s-” Blake’s amber eyes moved away from his face and she stared at the empty plate in front of her, he took a moment to make sure she wasn’t going to make a break for it before moving to make a plate for himself while she worked up her courage. “It’s complicated- I don’t want to-”

Jaune paused as he finished constructing a pair of baked chicken sandwiches, looking over his shoulder at the Faunus. “Blake. You want my help, and I’m telling you my help at least has Yang and Pyrrha with us. I can tell you that there’s no way if we go off that Ruby won’t catch on and follow us at some point. We’re just heading off an unknown by putting it forth.” Having said his piece, he pulled a bottle of flavored water from the fridge and moved to settle into the chair across from Blake and beside Pyrrha- Yang sat at the end of the table.
He watched as Blake’s face contorted, and she looked in a panic between the other girls and then him. Letting loose a sigh, he knew this was truly hard for her—even if he didn’t know exactly why.

“Blake, it’s— it’s time you trusted someone again. I don’t know what happened, but you haven’t even let—me— in yet, and I’m probably the one you’ve let know as much about you as anyone else.” He could only hope the plea in his voice was something she was willing to hear. His attention dragged towards Yang and Pyrrha for a moment, all but imploring them to speak up as well.

Yang looked at a loss for something to say, and Pyrrha wasn’t much better, so he could only wince a bit and turn his gaze back unto the Faunus. Watching Blake’s face move through the most amount of emotions he’d seen on the normally mild woman’s face, he let his shoulders slump and took a deep breath. He raised a hand and pointed a finger-gun at Yang, who shrugged in turn when he glanced at her before putting his focus on Blake again. “Blake.”

When those eyes that mesmerized him every time he looked at him settled on him, he began. “I promised to keep a secret for you, and now, instead, I’m going to do what needs to be done—” He watched as her face went full on towards panic, but he held up a calming hand, “By my honor as an Arc, upon the very Word of my name, I, Jaune Arc, will do all I can to aid you in whatever troubles come forth for you, so long as you will not face them alone, Blake Belladonna. You have friends and allies who will help you if only you will let them.”

He could only hope she’d see it for what it was. His promise to do everything he could right by her. His very soul on the line. That is what these girls and RWNR meant to him. Friends or more. Jaune Arc would never sit idly by while he could actively work to make the world a better place.

All he could do was watch as Blake processed it, now fully willing to stare her down, enforcing his navy blue on her rich amber. He could see the way her bow tilted a bit under the strain of her ears, and he wished she would take it off and just be herself.

Ugh, he'd just finished baring his soul to Yang and here he was putting more strain on himself. He was hopeless, wasn't he? Oh well, he wouldn't be Jaune Arc otherwise.

Quietly, Blake reached up...

And in that moment, Jaune could only smile. A hand cupped the fluff of one side of her bow and began to unwind it, a scared- but hopeful- look on Blake's face as it finally was pulled away and revealed fuzzy little ears.
His attention moved to Yang and Pyrrha, gauging their reactions. Yang was easy, since only a few moments after the reveal did the blonde utter, almost under her breath, "Holy shit, she can get cuter."

Pyrrha was a bit more down to earth, looking at him before asking, "You knew?"

He nodded. "I met her Mother and Father at my birthday, where I met Weiss. Plus, she knew things about my family that are more commonly known by Faunus nowadays."

Pyrrha raised a brow, and as his gaze settled over her, he saw Yang seem a little more nonchalant about it. So, she'd probably told Yang a bit more than he'd thought she had.

Blake sunk a bit in her chair, and he offered her a sideline smile before he explained to Pyrrha, "My family is a noble house since the days of the King of Vale. My grandfather was Absinthe Arc."

"Camillia Arc. A solo licensed Huntress who took part in the Vytal Festival eight years ago and lost in the semifinals in the singles competition. Since then famous for waging guerilla warfare on the Bandit tribes native to Anima." Blake pointed out, making Jaune raise a brow at her while she offered a shrug in turn. After a light glance at Pyrrha to show that she didn't quite get the importance, he moved on.

"Camillia was my mentor. My father and mother took part in my training, but Camillia spent the most into making me the Huntsman I am today."

Blake's eyes narrowed and her ears pinned back against her head, now able to be seen wholly. "And Jade Arc?"

He could only look on in confusion to his partner. "What about Jade? She's not a Huntress." Blake shook her head, and he let that thought slide into points to address later.

"Either way. You have us supporting you, so now the question is how do we tell Rainbow, and
then what do we do?"

Blake frowned, "The Fang shouldn't be so focused on Dust. Something is wrong. But, that gives us something to work with." She grimaced, and he understood why, "-but we have to ask Weiss for help."

Jaune understood a little bit of that trepidation, though he felt Weiss wouldn't go terribly off in the sense of what they'd have to do anyway.

"If it comes down to it, leave Weiss to me." Jaun noted, knitting his hands together atop the table. "But, Blake-" He let his gaze turn unto the dark-haired Faunus again, making sure her eyes were on him before he continued, "We're not waging a war on the White Fang or these robbers, that's not our job. Understand? We help the city and Beacon to see the issue, but if we go trying to be vigilantes, we're liable to be expelled. And we've all worked too hard for that, okay?"

He watched her face morph again, though she was quicker to resign herself, nodding while her ears folded back up into their proper positions. "Alright. As long as it's not personal."

That made him raise an eyebrow, and he glanced at Pyrrha and Yang, seeing them in understandably tense positions at that. "Blake, you have to tell us." When the Faunus started looking ready to bolt again, he held up his hands, surprised by just how skittish the girl could be when pushed into a corner, "Not right now, but if it becomes relevant, you know you won't be able to just say it and get away with it. The White Fang are a big deal, but we're still just students."

He watched as Blake slumped, and Yang shook her head in his peripheral vision. "I never really believed you were raised to be one of those big pompous types, lover boy, but it's wild to see you talk like one- and believe you."

He grinned nervously, reaching back to rake his hand through the hair at his nape. "Yeah, you girls are all used to me shoving my feet in my mouth. I promise that only happens because I'm surrounded by people I want to impress."

Pyrrha leaned back in her seat, looking a bit more nonchalant while Yang shifted over a seat, giving Blake a light tap in the bicep with her knuckles. "Or bed down, am I right, Blake? Ay? Ey? Ay?"

"Damn it, Yang." He uttered quietly, unable to help the stark flush on his features. Not to
mention missing the one that tickled across Pyrrha’s cheeks as well. “We need to talk to Team RWNR. Both to get some back up, and to use Weiss’ connections, because- if I guessed what your idea was-” He turned his blue gaze unto Blake again, “- you think the next big SDC shipment will be hit, right? That’s pretty logical.”

Blake’s nod was followed by her reaching up to begin tying her bow again, Yang offering a quiet little “But I wanted to pet them-” which earned a strange look from the Faunus before she spoke, “The best kind of ambush you can lay is one you’ve thoroughly prepared for. And if we have the location, the only thing we won’t be able to control is the enemy, since we won’t have enough information.”

Jaune didn’t mentally agree with that thought, but he understood where Blake was coming from with that level of pragmatism. The -real- pain for him would be casualties and property damage.

Always the most unpleasant parts of the kind of battles his sister loved waging, and in turn, had taught him the most about in fighting other people save in one-on-one. Camillia Arc was not a duelist by nature, so this was much more in his element than the spars he’d had to put up with so far.

Frankly, the cold and unfeeling sensation of manufactured desire to kill was an old friend that hadn’t visited in awhile at this point. Perhaps it was wrong to justify that via Blake’s concerns, but . . .

His scars itched. He had to remind himself to be Jaune Arc, friend and lover, and not Jaune Arc, the protege of Camillia Arc. A woman who, unlike her heroic parents, had grown to revel in bloodshed.

Who’d taught him to kill in the quickest and most efficient manner possible, in order to both protect himself as well as others- and to fulfill the same desire that fueled Camillia’s preference for hunting humans and Faunus more than Grimm.

“Jaune?” Three different voices drew him out of the mire of his own head, having to shake his head to clear it of the sudden fog that had consumed him before he offered his team a pleasant, gentle little smile.

“Sorry. Yang, can you please call Ruby and ask Team Rainbow to come in here while I eat? I’m starved.”
For Weiss Schnee, things were best when they made logical sense. Certainly, it was preferable when the sense to be made was to her benefit, but she understood that the world was a chaotic and unforgiving place. She’d had many examples of that throughout her life, but the most prominent thanks to her time spent at Beacon had been, in fact, a flight of fancy.

A chance to leave the walls of Atlas, to make a public appearance at a noble function, even if it was as a result of a young man’s birthday.

That was the first night she felt it. The strange, unrelenting spark that had haunted her since. Only fueled and guttered in equal measure by the invitation to consider a courtship with the young man from his family, and the response that her father had mused on.

She was going to be a Huntress, she’d never had time to consider something as untoward as a political marriage, no matter how she felt about it. Her feelings had never mattered, after all. Only what she had to do in order to step out from under the shoe of the oppressor.

None of that had ever mattered.

Her time at Beacon had been startlingly pleasant, despite a rocky beginning. Ruby Rose was a suitably fair partner, and even her annoyance at having Jaune Arc present had muted down to a pleasant distance that made it easier to forget what such a simple little whisper of a fairy’s wings might imply. Ren and Nora were both excellent friends, and cared less about the SDC’s doings than her’s. Nora never proclaimed how great her name was, only how “awesome” it was to have “Cool fencer girl Weiss”. Ren was extremely level-headed and sensible, and yet prone to the occasional sly smile and easy-going attitude that said that he and Nora had both lived lives that made them appreciate the small things more than grandiose gestures.

She’d even begun to become friends with Jaune’s team, which had been a pleasant turn-around, since she’d initially wanted to be partners with Pyrrha in order to capitalize on the girl’s admitted talent in order to assure herself a vaunted top position with the esteemed Beacon academy. She’d learned how flawed that thought process had been through Jaune himself, though Weiss didn’t personally see Pyrrha’s . . . continuing issue with the blonde man.

Perhaps she was a bit biased, however? If it hadn’t been for the potential marriage, Jaune would have been an excellent second option, since he was well trained, fully equipped to function as the partner of Weiss Schnee, but they seemed forever destined to pick and flinch from one another. No matter how they had connected that one night. How his eyes lingered on her, and made her wonder
if she’d been wrong.

Yang Xiao Long being Ruby’s sister had always been an odd conundrum to her. The fact that the other blonde would choose to date Jaune Arc after being introduced to Nevena Arc was- well-frankly surprising. She understood Ruby’s infatuation easily- even if Ruby herself seemed content to lie to herself about it being a skin-deep attraction- but the white-haired girl had to admit that, if nothing else, both seemed to enjoy the almost playful, juvenile bits of sneaking looks at one another, stealing little bits of affection.

It was normal. Something Weiss lamented. How nice it must be.

Jaune’s partner, the once mysterious Blake Belladonna had been the last puzzle piece that Weiss Schnee had needed to have a firm grasp of the world around her once again. Certainly, it was startling that a White Fang operative- even the daughter of the former head themself, even though Ghira Belladonna had been more of a politician than a “terrorist group leader” like nowadays people would say about Sienna Khan- could be so close to her, but Blake had ample opportunity to have made a move if she wanted to.

And it was more telling that she sought the comfort of Jaune Arc, the protection of the Arc name. A more learned person- or at least one with more attention on the White Fang in particular- would have known what kind of message that conveyed.

After all, Jaune’s very own sister, Jade, had sunk a substantial amount of wealth into creating the new White Fang, even though she’d done so ostensibly under the ideals of Ghira Belladonna’s reign. Weiss could not say whether she believed one story over the other, but either way, it painted an odd picture that Blake would come to the safety of the metaphorical arms of Jaune Arc.

Ironic, even. Telling, if she was more vicious.

Nevena Arc’s plots just seemed to work out without her presence to bolster them, and Weiss could only comfort herself with how insensible that particular part of her world was. Her partner was infatuated with her first friend, her partner’s sister had made a leap of faith and found herself at the deep end of the pool, and now she could see the convenience- the outright unreasonably coincidental fact that Blake Belladonna had ended up Jaune Arc’s team-mate.

Anyone else would have thought she’d be enraged by being so close to a former member of a group that had caused her family grief and horror, but she knew Blake well enough by this point to know that Blake had grew up with her parent’s views- but an understandably youthful mindset that things wouldn’t change just with soft words.
Even Weiss agreed, that wasn’t wrong.

But now that Blake had tried the violent form and seen it fail, she’d latched onto a more subtle, more telling form of rights advancement for Faunus.

Marrying up. Even if she was just one of many wives, even if she and Jaune never loved one another- and Weiss was not a fool. Blake Belladonna did get a slightly faraway look sometimes when she let her gaze settle on her partner while no one was “watching”- her position as one of the Ladies Arc would allow her to build political power for a more cold Revolution.

That was not even to imagine the fact of the matter of if Blake bore the first child to Jaune, and thus the House Arc had a Faunus heir. The first Faunus noble line ever officially conceived rather than passed down through cultural traditions the Faunus protected a bit more meaningfully than could be said to be appropriate.

Why, then, as her fingers trailed across soft and cool white, did she feel so lost? As her Scroll played a soft little tittering chord, she pulled it from the jacket pocket of her bolero and noted the strange coincidence, simply typing a short response before putting it away again.

She was still Weiss Schnee, and that was all that mattered.
Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Summary

Blake makes an appeal, Jaune makes a promise- and plans to keep one he already made.
Weiss gives Blake a lecture.

(The End Note is White Knight's first theme: You, My Wings)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Family Arc

Chapter Thirteen

Intention and the Blade

It seemed his worries that he would get dragged into something that very night- and thus cause absolute havoc on the group’s exams that next day- were unfounded. Privately thankful, they’d settled into RWNR’s dorm room in comparison with how most of their “big double-team meetings” had been held in JBPY’s dorms so far. Weiss had been the focus, since Jaune personally couldn’t see Ren and Nora leaving the two to run off, and Ruby would jump if she heard the word “adventure”.

Not that he blamed her at all, it was a notion ingrained into them both. They were both creatures driven by their desire to do good and make a difference. Ruby was more proactive about it at this stage in her life, but that also was just Ruby’s own personality.

Jaune was muted in comparison, and he was fine with that. He had the scars and the memories to mitigate the knee-jerk reaction to help.

Camillia had helped disabuse him of that notion in all of her warnings of the darker side of their profession, after all.

“It’s your team.” Weiss remarked, and he could only shrug in return at the white-haired girl’s admittedly casual dismissal of the facts. She wasn’t wrong, even if he felt there was more she wasn’t saying.
“Yes, but you’re all our friends.” Jaune remarked, “It’s only right that we tell you. And, besides, if Ruby gets dragged in, I know you’ll help her. So, will you help US, too, Weiss?”

For a moment, he watched the play of emotions across her face, wondering what had hidden away under that white mask she’d worn when they’d danced so long ago.

His gaze went towards Blake, checking to see how the Faunus girl was reacting to all of this. She hadn’t revealed herself the same way, but it was obvious that the only ones potentially unaware of her were Ruby, Ren, and Nora- and they’d find out eventually in their own time.

He was still protecting her secret in spirit, even if not in letter.

Underhanded? Maybe. But it was the best he could do under the circumstances, at least as far as he saw. It was a trait picked up from his mother, and didn’t -that- make him feel a bit more amused at her interference in his love life.

Nevena Arc -would- think that siccing a group of girls on him would be “for his own good”. He’d never been mad about it, but it still had a decidedly laughable air to it- until it had started to work, anyway.

Then it was just befuddling.

Weiss sat back in her chair, JBPY having taken up station at their sister team’s dining table- save for him, anyway. He’d chosen to stand. Part of him thought this was a formality at best, but most formalities had to be observed regardless of how stupid they truly were.

Yet another nugget of “Nevena Arc Wisdom”, even if she hadn’t put it that way. It was more akin to, “Yes, Jaune. You have to wear the tie, so that you look like a proper gentleman. Yes, they are stupid accessories more likely to get you choked, but that doesn’t mean anything.”

He was getting distracted again.

His gaze returned unto Weiss’ face rather than focusing on his own memories, watching while her lips curled this way and that, and then her eyes closed with a sigh. “You already know how the
Schnees have been affected by Sienna Khan’s White Fang. The fact that they’re attacking Schnee Dust shipments doesn’t make this any easier.”

He shook his head, glancing towards Blake once again, seeing her start to tense up. Reaching out, he gently squeezed her shoulder, making her shift her attention unto him. With his intervention, he could only hope Blake would move forward with her intellect, rather than misguided passion.

“Then you’re helping yourself, too.” The faunus finally noted, “After all, we can stop the thefts if we find out what’s got them stockpiling it.”

“Besides for them to do some wide-scale terrorist attack?” Weiss noted with a dour look on her face, and Jaune sadly couldn’t argue against that. It was the most logical conclusion, and even he couldn’t defend Blake from that particular thought.

The fact that the amber-eyed girl let her gaze drift down into her lap said that she couldn’t really argue against it, either. The organization her parents had built for Faunus rights was, by this point, little more than a shadow of what it was. An extremist military group that was more about Faunus supremacy than equality.

Not all of it could even be blamed on Sienna Khan, either. From what he’d understood, she’d still been of a somewhat moderate stance when she’d taken over control of the Fang from Ghira Belladonna when he’d stepped down in favor of being Chieftain of Menagerie. Something else had changed, though what, he hadn’t known.

“Weiss . . .” He murmured, letting his gloved hands settle on his hips while the Heiress gave him a cool look in return. He shook his head in turn, “This is important to Blake. It’s important to you, too.”

The Heiress sighed again, looking caught between her thoughts and her emotions. His gaze drifted over to Ruby, Ren, and Nora while they were stuck. Nora was always up for busting skulls, so it was easy to see that she’d go along with whatever Ruby and Weiss decided- and therein lay Ren’s loyalty, as well. Ruby would do whatever Weiss asked because the Heiress was her friend- but she was conflicted over a desire to help her friends and it showed on her complicated expression.

“It should be important to you, Jaune Arc.” Weiss said, her gaze steadying on his own face and making him blink.
“It is. You and Blake are important to me- and I made Blake a promise I plan to keep. If I had to do it alone, I would, but- well- I know all of you would have gotten upset at us if we just ran off. So- this way- everyone knows what’s going on.”

Yang squinted, and he knew already what she would say, even if it made him feel nice to know she’d support him, even now. “If you think you’re gonna get to run off with the kitty, Jaune, you can guess again. Before I know it, she’ll be callin’ you Daddy Arc.”

He choked on air, slamming his fist into his chest to try and force his pipes back into the right alignment. Here he’d thought Yang would more purposefully support him, rather than use it as an excuse to tease him and Blake.

He didn’t know what he’d been thinking, and from the fact Blake had looked stricken herself, Yang’s words weren’t lost on her. In fact, the only one who seemed unsurprised was Weiss herself.

The heiress was unflappable today, which was surprising all on it’s own. Well, he was reacting enough for the rest of them, for sure.

“I- I wouldn’t do that to you, Yang.” Blake noted, and Yang simply grinned in return.

“Suuuure. Anyway- no way in hell I’m gonna let you two do this alone. And if I go, Pyrrha either goes with, or she says she won’t, but then she comes anyway.”

“Hey.” Pyrrha noted, a light pout on her features.

He shrugged in return. It was enough, in his opinion. Better JBPY working together than nominally being “on the same team”. “If you don’t want to be involved, all we need is the SDC’s next shipments, then we’ll have way more to go on than if we just started picking out shipping manifests and the like- and it’d take us too long to get our hands on those without . . . alternative procurement methods.”

He meant stealing them, but the rest of them didn’t need to know that Jaune put that option above anything else. After all, expediency was important in this case.

Weiss’ attention once again came onto him, and he stood up straighter, noting that her expression had become much more serious than it had already been. “And, what will you do? If it isn’t as
simple as letting the authorities know, and letting them handle it?”

The memory flashed through his head, a young bandit—perhaps as old as he had been, maybe a bit older—shocked as Crocea Mors dug into his abdomen and then the way the light had left his eyes as the messy disemboweling had earned him a scar and the admonishment of his sister afterwards.

His lips thinned into a line, and that ugly, comfortable feeling of not himself settled into place.

“I’ll protect those dear to me.” It was the most diplomatic way to put it, and from the way Weiss’ eyes fell, she understood the implications. He didn’t let his eyes cut away from the girl, but he had a feeling that no one else did.

His scars itched.

It was a feeling that didn’t go away, sadly. It made him feel, in a suitable word, sober. Distant. Faraway. Detached. So many descriptors described that ugly feeling that enveloped him when he got ready to kill. It followed him as they separated and he ended up alone in JBPY’s bathroom, looking at himself in the mirror.

Camillia had called it a survival instinct, a man’s strongest one, in many ways. In comparison, it was something she had always lacked. He wasn’t innocent of his sister’s own distorted sense of empathy.

She’d been a happier girl once upon a time, but perhaps it’d been the Vytal festival when he was still a child that had changed her. When she’d be knocked out of the semifinals by a Haven native, even though she’d been itching for a chance to pit herself against the premiere Huntress of that year—Winter Schnee.

Both had been taken out at that stage, and Camillia Arc had not taken it well. He didn’t know what measure she held against Winter Schnee, but it was an entertaining thought that he would have married the woman’s younger sister if their mother had ever had her way.

It was easier to think of the past-

Arms encircled him, and he could only blink as the world around him returned to colors and sounds. Yang’s softness and hardness in equal measure immediately sensed despite the way he
tensed up in her arms. “You okay?” Her voice drifted into his consciousness, and he turned a smile down towards lavender eyes.

“No.” He admitted, but continued, “But thanks, Yang.” He wrapped an arm around her in turn and squeezed, getting a soft little “Oof” from her as he used more strength than he perhaps ought to.

“You want to talk about it?” She asked, and he imagined somewhere in his heart he did, but he couldn’t find it within himself to color his girlfriend’s perception of him with such an ugly thought.

That he was a killer, that killing people was almost as easy as killing Grimm when he was in the right mindset. That his sister had trained him thoroughly in how to disable and- if not kill- seriously maim opponents the way she luxuriated in doing.

Camillia Arc was his mentor, his big sister. The woman he revered above all else when it came to his career as a Huntsman.

She just wanted him to be safe.

“No really.” He admitted, “I kind of like being your dorky boyfriend.” When she gave him a queer look, he could only shrug his shoulders.

“You know you can talk to me- to us- right?” She asked, and he felt a little bit of hurt tingle in her voice, which made his other arm come up and complete the circle of holding one another. Blake had taken the information from Weiss and gone off to try and figure out which of the three incoming shipments were likely to be hit- in his opinion, all of them would be the smartest- while Pyrrha had settled out for a spar with Nora to defuse the anxiousness.

He understood all-too-well that feeling. Even now, when his regular senses were returning in favor of that battle-crazed mindset that had been imbued in him by the sister who had unlocked his aura-

“For it is in battle that we are made whole.”

“I know, Yang. Trust me,” He asked her, but he knew deep within that it wasn’t fair of him to ask her to do that when he couldn’t trust himself in that moment. Though, it had the agreeable result of her nodding and looking more comfortable with him.
“Through struggle, we become the arbitrators of death and life-”

As her arms held onto him, he could only take a deep breath and feel the coiling warmth of his own Aura shielding him. The gift given unto him by his own very nature.

“Delivering justice and doom upon the innocent and the guilty alike,”

The condemnation of a path he chose to walk when he was still young. A noble sentiment that burned in his heart, but did not do so in his beloved sister.

“-I release your soul, and by the boiling blood in warriors’ veins, ravage thee.”

Blake didn’t see herself spending so much time with the Heiress of the Schnee Dust Company when they first met, and yet here they were again, alone together. Though, this time, it was pouring over the shipping records and noting down addresses and- at least for Blake- correlating the other robberies and trying to discover which one was most sensible to be attacked, since all three were suitably large shipments, but they all had different levels of security.

And the more she looked, the more it seemed the North Docks made the most sense- since they had an easy escape route by the sea if things went awry, and it also had the least amount of security since- well- one couldn’t defend a sea route without just outright quarantining the whole section.

The SDC was wealthy, but to do that would be just too much money to waste on one Dust shipment.

She took a piece of paper and noted it all down, sliding the folder Weiss had brought the info in back towards the snow-haired woman as she let out a breath of relief. She’d thought she’d lose sleep over all of this mess, but . . .

Jaune really was a good friend- and an even better protector, even if she wished he would have just indulged her in a flight of stupid fancy and went alone with her to help.
Though Yang’s playful comment colored that idea now, and she couldn’t help but flush. Damn it, Yang.

Weiss’ raised brow made her forcibly calm her rushing blood. “That was a sudden change of tone,” The heiress remarked, and Blake could agree. “I take it you’re able to relax now?”

Blake nodded in turn. “Thank you, Weiss. I know you don’t have any reason to trust me, but this means the world to me.”

Weiss returned her nod, sliding the folder under her entwining hands, “I would imagine it does,” her voice was lowered- even though they were in a far-flung corner of the library where Blake insisted people didn’t often come. “This is attached to something your parents had a large hand in. Something that you took part in- until you came here.”

Blake flinched. She knew that Weiss knew, but that didn’t stop the knee-jerk desire to haul ass when called on it. She truly was lucky that Weiss seemed to truly be the austere girl she portrayed to the world, rather than a more flighty and easily mistrustful girl.

From what Jaune had said, she had a lot to owe her team in that regard. Blake was privately thankful they weren’t on a team together, it “being Jaune’s problem” allowed them both to move things past where she was sure the breach of trust would have made being on a team together difficult. It didn’t perfectly keep it from being a blow, but Blake could appreciate that, if nothing else, Weiss was willing to hear her out.

Even if she wasn’t looking forward to the questions when they came.

“What?” Speaking of which, she got a feeling the interrogation was about to start. “What are your intentions towards Jaune?”

... what?

Blake hadn’t heard that right, there was no way.

“What?” Suitably surprised, confused- embarrassed.
Weiss’ intent stare said something that Blake wasn’t sure she processed. The snow-haired woman was thinking of something she either hadn’t contemplated, or that she wasn’t quite yet ready to talk about. But at this point, she was- as they said- trapped.

She couldn’t just run out on her team, and Weiss had stuck her neck out- even if it was the barest of inches. “You should know, as the daughter of the Chieftain of Menagerie and the former head of the White Fang, how it looks when you two are on a team together- and even more so that you purposefully partnered with him.”

Blake was stunned. Weiss had put far more thought into this than even she had. To Blake, he’d been “safe”. There’d be no way for someone from the vaunted Faunus-friendly House of Arc to end up being a racist, someone who would judge and ridicule her for her race.

If they’d had the ability, Blake was sure Weiss would have punctuated herself with a sip of tea- she had that mental image quite easily, even though she knew Weiss seemed to love coffee more than tea.

“From the look on your face, I can presume you don’t.”

Blake shook her head. This was all foreign to her, and at best, it would only make sense when explained. Blake had been a “freedom fighter” for longer than anything else, and so the only part of the subtleties of politics she understood was all colored by a heavy set of goggles that had “Racism” neatly printed on the side.

She’d been learning that lesson pretty hard lately. Finally, she answered Weiss’ statement with a shake of her head.

“Of course you don’t.” Weiss sighed, and for the life of her, Blake could only attribute that sudden sassiness to a sense that she’d just ruined her expectations. How was that her fault? She’d been a part of the White Fang since she was little-! She didn’t live in Weiss’- or Jaune’s- social circles.

“Allow me to spell it out for you, then, Miss Belladonna.” Blake’s eyes widened at the suddenly more formal tone of address, watching as Weiss’ entire sense of self-shifted- before her very eyes. Rather than the loose, semi-comfortable sitting position, Weiss’ legs kicked up one over the other and her hands laced together in her lap, her back straightened completely and her face was stuck fast in staring- at her in turn. Her animal instincts screamed that she was being challenged, and Blake had
“You are the daughter of Ghira Belladonna, the former head of the White Fang—when they were more a peaceable organization, and now the Chieftain of Menagerie—a place that one day very well may become a fifth Kingdom. He is Jaune Arc, of Sanus’ own House of Arc, one of the oldest surviving noble houses. His family is well known to be supporters of the Faunus at least since the Revolution, which his grandfather, Absinthe Arc, refused to participate in because it was counter to the peaceful resolution he stood for before the fighting broke out. He took a stand against both sides, and opened Ansel and the surrounding areas as a neutral zone where he took in refugees from the war—both Faunus and Human alike—and was enough of a force modifier that only more extreme elements of both sides dared to try and involve him.”

Weiss paused, and Blake nodded her head. This was what she understood, so far.

“He’s the Heir to the Arc name, meaning any children he fathers will inherit the House eventually—”

Blake blinked, “But what about his sisters?”

Weiss shrugged, “Only one of them has a child so far, and she married out of the family, so . . . I can only presume that’s the reason he’s the chosen Heir? I’m afraid I don’t know how his House selects the Heir—whether it’s by merit or by simply being the oldest living male—is unknown. I imagine it’s at least partially based on potential to further the family line, though—but we are talking about Roux and Nevena Arc, and they already denied tradition once—”

Blake broke in again, “Because his father married a commoner, his mother?” Another nod was the answer, before the snow-haired woman continued.

“Anyway—let’s say that you marry him, take the Arc name, and have a child. That child will one day be the Heir—and then the Lord or Lady of the House Arc. A Faunus. A -Faunus of noble blood tied back to the King of Vale himself, whether by lineage or by service.” Even though Weiss’ stressing of the thought was unnecessary, Blake appreciated that she was trying to keep her up to date with this impromptu lecture.

“It would be like a declaration of war against inequality. That child would be like someone who put the moon back together to Faunuskind. A flag to rally behind, a future leader of a noble house, perhaps even Menagerie, and a new breed of the White Fang. A political powerhouse.”

Blake suddenly realized that she’d tensed up throughout Weiss’ speech, becoming hypersensitive
to the words that the white-haired girl had put out into the ether. Sure, she’d had thoughts about Jaune as a romantic interest, but . . .

Weiss had put more thought into it than -she- had. For a moment, her widened eyes truly took in the stance of Weiss in her own “courtly” mode, as Jaune had insisted on as an epithet for when he regressed back upon instincts and training ingrained in him since youth.

“Weiss…” Blake noted, hoping her voice sounded as utterly astounded as she felt, “You’ve-you’ve thought about this more than I have.”

That simple statement knocked Weiss out of her austere air, her face lighting up with emotion and her eyes shooting wide while a shade of pink settled on her features. “W-what?! You didn’t even think that far? Children are a perfectly natural thing to contemplate in a relationship, you know?!”

The Faunus was further shocked. Why was Weiss being so defensive all of a sudden?

“I’ll have you know, it’s the first thing people in our society think of! Children are important, after all!” Blake blinked.

+x+x+x+

When Blake had approached them with the knowledge that the most likely shipment to be hit was the next night, Jaune could only lament that it wasn’t on the weekend instead. It looked like Friday’s exams were going to be hell for a completely different reason, but at least he felt his scores weren’t as important as this.

At least after next week, they’d be free from classes for a week, he’d already planned a trip back to Ansel for the week to spend time with his family before the second semester started- and from what he’d heard from Glynda Goodwitch and the others, preparations for the Vytal Festival.

Camillia’s words came back to him again, and he could only luxuriate in the hidden message she’d parsed to him through the simplest of means. *Do better than I did, and I will reward you.*

He could only shake his head. “No, Cam. I’ll do better than that. I’ll take the whole damn tournament for you. Arc Word.” He made that promise to himself as he finished dressing down for bed in the bathroom.
He’d need his rest for exams and then an assault against White Fang terrorists.

Chapter End Notes

You, My Wings
White Knight Theme 1 (Casey Lee Williams (Weiss), Jeff Williams) (Inspired by: This Life is Mine)

(Intro)
I pick up the shards,
The person reflected,
No longer the same.

(Verse 1)
As I bleed onto the edge,
I feel that the truth-
Is truly what sets me free.
The day that we met-
I wanted you to see-
All that I am-
All we could ever be-
But I let my chains-
The test-
Confine and control me.

(Pre-Chorus)
I was but a fairy in the snow,
While you stood-
The presence of Death-
The beast stalking the beauty-
In all it's temerity-
Why was it ever that I left?

(Chorus)
We shared a moment-
Fragile like the ice above the ocean-
A cage so cold-
That you and I had helped to harden-
The songbird and the peacock-
Until we came together-
And flew forever-
From the pain and the burdens-

(Verse 2)
Our struggles and our pain-
The feeling of flying through the rain-
With every beat of my wings,
I find myself flying back to you-
Was this what they meant-
When they said that love was a punishment?
That being too far away-
Would only make the day-
So sad-
and-
Gray?

(Chorus 2)
I was but a fairy in the snow,
You the beast on his patrol-
The story of the Snow White Princess,
and the Man doomed to Fall?
The heartache and the pain-
That comes to claim us all-
You, My Wings, I will-
Fin-all-y-
Call.

(Solo)
Call-

(Outro)
With every beat of my wings,
I find myself flying back to you-
Was this what they meant-
When they said that love was a punishment?
That being too far away-
Would only make the day-
So sad-
and-
Gray?
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Summary

The Docks Incident. Blake's confession.

AN: If you want some music to enjoy the Docks bit with, go look up Yakuza 0’s OST: Reign.

A Family Arc

[This Will Be the Day]

Chapter Fourteen

Trust You, Trust Me

Against his better judgment, exams that day had been the last thing on his mind as he sat in class. His mind had been working, planning, preparing.

If he could help it, he wanted there to be no risk to his friends, to his team. Shouldering this burden of Blake's meant that wasn’t possible, but he could do his best to mitigate the damages at the very least. Camillia would insist that wasn’t good enough, that he should push harder-

-but Jaune wasn’t Camillia. Camillia was gifted, more willing to sacrifice and hurt others than he was. It was one thing to kill out of necessity, but Jaune . . . he-

-he didn’t think he enjoyed it.

As he showered and changed into his combat suit- as entertaining as that idea continued to be-Jaune took a moment after finishing his personal grooming to lean against the countertop in JBPY’s dorm bath, staring at his own reflection for a moment.

The memories came to him, and he let himself slump a bit against the counter as they filled his
head. The young bandit- his very first kill. Things had changed after that, Camillia had taken his training against other humans more seriously-

She’d taken him into the wilds of Sanus again, this time with a purpose towards finding one of the bandit tribes of the continent. No one would miss those types- no one cared.

They were scum, not even worth the breath they stole from others, or at least, that had been Camillia’s consolation.

It’d been startling to see the change that had washed through Camillia’s body when they’d come upon an ambush troop along the road, both blondes having pulled back when his sister had perked and stole into the tree-line, Crimson clutched in one arm and the shotgun-part of the weapon carefully directed up into the air while the blades of the bat-like spear-tip swung towards the dirt-her “casual threat” stance, as he’d come to privately call it.

A showcase that she didn’t feel threatened, only ready.

The disturbing sounds washed over him as the memories played through his head. Camillia candidly planting the blade in one Aura-less man’s neck before wrenching it free with a gout of blood beginning to pool across the man’s neck, “Never directly-” She’d noted, “Then you just get stuck-” The man’s companion turned, ready to raise a shout of alarm as his sister’s arm had adjusted on the haft of her weapon- “Angle inwards, then wrench to open the exit wound.” KRAKOW-

The shotgun half of her weapon bucked, her grip loosened enough on the spear’s length that it slid through her palm and her hand caught it just above where the secondary trigger for the weapon was as she let the weapon spin by its own momentum until she had the haft caught up against her back and braced, pointing the barrel of the weapon at the third man who had just begun to pull his sword-

KA-CHUNK-THOOM-

And promptly had the meat of his shoulder and throat gain a hole in it that smoldered with Fire dust remnants, while his sister pirouetted and brought the weapon around to crush through the man’s ribs with the spiky blade for slicing and slashing, bowling him around and into the fourth-sending the last man bowling over and knocked to the ground, breathless.
Then, her eyes had settled on him, and he saw that Camillia Arc’s face was covered in a soft, easy smile that was nothing like when she looked at him normally.

She’d gestured him over, bringing her weapon back around and gripping it at the primary trigger for the weapon’s gun-half, as he was made to stand over the last member of the highwaymen.

He’d been wrong, he’d thought it was a man, but when he’d gotten close, he’d seen the curve of breasts beginning to bud under her shirt, and he’d heard his sister’s soft, encouraging words.

“Do it.”

It was the perfect recollection, his sister barely touched by the blood of those she’d eviscerated and murdered in what seemed to be fleeting nanoseconds. Her long blonde hair awash in the rays of the sun and washing against the deep red of her bodysuit, reinforced with Dust-resistant plates over her vitals, making her look like a Goddess of Death and War as Crimson hung in one hand, the barrel of the shotgun in the weapon’s haft pointed towards the prone and rousing bandit woman-no, she was still a girl. Older than him, perhaps, but likely fifteen while he was simply thirteen coming on fourteen.

“Do it, Jaune.” Her words were soft, and the smile on her face bloomed beautifully as he trudged over towards the prone girl, his sword feeling heavier and heavier in his hands as he stood over her.

Her hair had been a soft shade of red, and her eyes, when they opened to regard him in a panic, had been a soft green that reminded him of Peri’s dresses.

“Nice and cleanly, in through the throat- at an angle- then wrench-”

**SHUNK-**

**KRA-SHNK-**

**Gghglu-ghghl-**
He’d watched as the light left her eyes, strength draining from her body faster than blood pooled free from the gaping wound he’d delivered unto her. The cold had washed over him for the first time, his hands had shaken with the effort of bringing the family sword back up—

And all the while, Camillia Arc had smiled.

“Jaune.” He quaked, his attention moving from the metaphorical puddle of sweat that had collected on the countertop beneath his head and unto Pyrrha, standing in the dorm with an aggrieved look on her face.

“Are- are you okay?”

No. No, he wasn’t. For a moment, Pyrrha’s eyes turned dark and blood blossomed forth from her breast- the lovely and full size he’d dreamed about before he’d started to see all of the girls he was coming to know so to be so lovely. All of her skin paling and a look of horror stricken on her features.

Her hands grasped his shoulders and shook, and he felt boneless for a moment as his head rolled and he looked into vivid emerald green. “Jaune. We’re here. Wake up. What’s wrong?”

He took a deep breath, and tried to school himself back into Jaune Arc, and found it harder than he’d like to admit- and he didn’t want to admit it at all. “Bad memory.” He said, it was all he could really get out through a throat suddenly filled with bile. The red-head gave him a look that said she would fight for more if she had to, but he shook his head in turn. “Maybe- after all this. We- have a lot to do.”

No matter how he wanted to be closer to the girls, it wasn’t something he wanted to share with anyone- let alone with women he’d fantasized making life with-

--instead of making death. As Pyrrha left the bathroom with an uncomfortable look over her shoulder, he closed the door and promptly gave up the battle against his stomach acid into the toilet.

A wash of his mouth later, he stepped back out into the dorm commons, spying the rest of his team readied up, with Blake being the most obviously anxious. "Alright." He wished he felt more confident and less . . . cool, draped back on the edge of that raw sensation that made it easier for him to deal with. "We have an hour to prepare, Rainbow is going to set up soon, too."
He shouldn’t have been surprised. By the time they arrived, the evening mist that had rolled in from the gulf gave a dramatic backdrop to their little operation. It was fitting- perhaps even prophetic in a way. It reminded him of one of the books Peri loved when she was younger, a detective thriller about a murderer who killed prostitutes in a particular section of a fantastical place.

It was strange to him-

Shnnk-krraa-

Grr-rrahahggh-

-that he was the one delivering such judgments now. There was something comforting about the fact that he couldn’t see the face of the person whose throat he’d crushed in a gurgle with the blade of Crocea Mors jamming in at an angle and wrenching free in a spray of viscera. The arming sword wasn’t an ideal weapon for such brands of attack, but it’s even balance and finely honed blade made carving into most anything easier than it ought to have been.

Camillia would have been proud of him, he could comfort himself with that. As the body slumped, hands grasping for the gaping maw that bubbled with air and rich red blood, his greave kicked the man- probably late twenties, if he guessed right- over onto his side. He stooped down and gingerly hefted the rifle into his free hand, studying it idly as his gaze turned back upwards to where Blake and Ruby were keeping watch over the docks now filled with the masked thieves.

Doing it for her. Doing it for her. Doing it for her. The mantra repeated as he kept his footsteps light, the heaviness of his armored boots making it ironically easier to step lightly as long as he was on solid ground and not something that would cause noise. The rifle was tucked in against his side in case it was needed. His gloves would leave no traces- the benefits of hard leather that left only an imprint of gripping rather than one’s finger-trails.

He peeked around the corner of a container, musing on the soft little drip drip of the two who had their lives claimed so far that evening. For sentries, they were untrained- and likely wholly untrained anyway. Just grunts, given decent guns and expected to be a competent set of eyes and ears.

I wonder how Yang is doing. His mind drifted, seeing yet another hooded Faunus slumped over a container with his mask crushed in and his face a wreck of blood and bruises. The soft rise and fall
of his chest said he was unconscious, not dead.

_Do it._ The voice told him, and Crocea Mors came back, his other hand bracing it by the bottom of the hilt-

-before sinking the blade into the soft tissue above the man’s sternum and below the throat, severing his airway and digging into his spinal cord. The skull was too thick, and the heart a target too uncertain. Everyone’s hearts lay in different places. The quickest and cleanest way to kill was often through the vulnerable nature of the neck.

_His teeth, softly marking the blonde woman there-

_Ruby’s soft little gasp as his lips pressed in at the curve of her nape-

He let his eyes close as he pushed away the pleasant memories. No, now wasn’t the time. The next White Fang member he stumbled upon was a young woman, more on alert than the two he’d killed- and likely the one Yang had left to his own tender mercy.

_They’d kill his friends. They’d hurt the women he loved- Perhaps they already had._

Her head swivelled, and he gingerly slipped up atop the cargo container, sliding along the top of the Schnee-marked steel container using his shoulders and arms since his boots would have made an excess amount of noise. A blue eye studied as she made to walk away from where he lay in wait, and he slipped over the corner of the container and lowered himself with an aura-infused arm before touching down and timing his steps with her’s as he carefully slid the ancestral blade back into its sheath-

She choked, and he recognized the grunt and the subsequent strangled whimper for what it was as he violently brought the rifle he’d procured around and slammed the rail of it’s slide up into her jaw and then hooked his free arm forward under her armpit and-

_Wrenched-

_Until-
She-

Stopped-

Struggling.

Realistically, he could have just used his arms, but that would have put him at a disadvantage had she managed to do something like try to jam her own gun into his arm—though he doubted any of these White Fang had the wherewithal— or the Aura— to do more than struggle when confronted with a Huntsman’s strength.

Bullets were bullets, however, and that was why he’d made sure to break her neck along with the arm holding the gun’s handle and trigger. Quietly, he let her slump bonelessly to the floor, and he patted down his jacket and straightened his tie.

An Arc must always look their best. His mother’s words flitted through his head as he noted that he’d completed his own cursory sweep of the perimeter. RWNR and JBPY had been assigned in different quadrants, with Blake’s faunus senses and Ruby’s sniper rifle making for the best firing support if it was necessary.

Jaune didn’t think it would be— but he couldn’t help but worry nonetheless. He stepped over another body and drew Crocea Mors again, noting he would have to clean and polish it again. A trip with the whetstone wouldn’t hurt, either.

His gaze went up towards the girls on overwatch again, and he was startled to note that neither was there. And from the raising of voices nearby, it seemed that things had stopped going according to plan while he’d been drifting through his own headspace.

Oh well.

Rather than continue out on the outskirts, he stepped in towards the sounds, pace a bit more leisurely than probably was deserved, but no cries for help had been raised yet, and so he could only obey his sister’s teachings.

Approach with caution, prepare for the engagement, use every dirty trick they won’t expect, and make sure that they aren’t around to hold a grudge.
The sword felt so heavy in his hand again, and that familiar weight kept him grounded as his pace picked up into a lope as he came upon the sight of Ruby and Blake engaged with a man in white with red hair. For a moment, his instinct was to rush in and help the two girls, but instead he evened out his breathing—

-tucked the sword’s handle in against his pit-

-lined up the rifle with the man’s head-

-and watched as he started to make a retreat, fending off both of the Huntresses with a flair that Jaune would have lauded otherwise. Using a weapon he couldn’t fully discern from the range he was at, he watched as the first sound of a gun of some caliber went off and a burst of explosive fire tore a container from a cable keeping it secured above the dock floor, sending it crashing down and splitting Ruby and Blake away from one another.

Breathe. Focus. Adjust for the target-

-he ducked to the side as gunfire strafed the yard, up above, the engines of a pair of aircraft buzzing as more masked men and women ducked out of the planes to join in. His attention turned as more gunfire filled the air, spying Yang and Pyrrha moving to engage from another corner of the container-filled shipyard. He couldn’t do anything to the planes, but-

Thwwwooom-

His eyes widened as a startling green light flashed through the air and tore away an engine each from the flying machines, his eyesight brought unto the origin point to spy a familiar redhead and an unfamiliar one—alongside Ren was Nora and another redhead wearing white and green.

Huh, perhaps that was the “Penny” Ruby had mentioned meeting? Weiss had been rather strange about the encounter, but he hadn’t had the time or the presence of mind to question any of it.

Lasers was a cool fucking Semblance, though.

His attention turned back unto the metaphorical main event, watching as the red-headed man made
his way towards a waiting bullhead while Ruby and Blake ducked behind shipping containers while a larger group of White Fang members put down suppressing fire—only to be delivered unto unconsciousness by Yang’s interruption and Ruby’s own team-mates getting involved.

He could have even swore he heard a curse of “Schnee-!” At least Weiss was involving herself, though by this point perhaps it was unnecessary. As a pair of bullheads flew off into the night, he stooped down over a crumpled terrorist and ran his bloodied blade over their jacket, cleaning it before standing—

Crakk-

“Jaune!?” His gaze turned from the collapsed throat of the terrorist as sensation flooded back into his body, awareness of the sight he must have portrayed to his friends.

To the people he’d wanted to keep this part of himself secret from. He winced, emotions flooding back into him as he noted that any attempts by the others to round up the unconscious men and women had been waylaid by his snuffing of yet another life.

The sum total of the night? Five. A shame—

—no, he couldn’t let that comfortable blanket drape over him again. There wasn’t an eye amongst his friends that wasn’t on him in that moment. Of them all, Ruby, Pyrrha, and Yang’s stricken looks stood out the most. He could see, even at this distance, Blake’s ears pinning back in her bow, while Nora and Ren looked . . . shocked, but accepting.

He understood that they’d had to struggle to survive from what he’d heard about their time before Beacon, but that thought saddened him. He didn’t bother putting on a smile, didn’t regress into learned noble manners. He simply bowed his head and noted, “I’ll call the police, all of you finish rounding them up. Good job.”

It was a retreat, but one he felt was necessary.

As he stepped past the corpses and back out towards the entry gate of the dock, he pulled the Scroll from his pocket and began to dial. Behind him, the ginger sound of heeled boots announced that he’d been followed.
His gaze turned over his shoulder, and he saw a face that had been very familiar today. As the call went through and he watched Pyrrha’s green eyes drift over the slumped form of the man he’d finished off that Yang had left unconscious, he began, “Yes, ma’am. I’m calling to report a thwarted robbery by the White Fang at the Northern Docks, berth number eight.” He paused while the operator asked for identification and other details, offering what he was- legally- required to before hanging up as he was informed of the short time before the arrival of Vale’s police force.

As he slipped the electronic device into his pocket once again, Jaune mused on what a pretty night it was- perfect for a stroll, a kiss, a confession. All kinds of wonderful things that should have happened instead of a quiet, subdued little rampage that had showcased the ugliest side of him.

His blue eyes settled onto Pyrrha again, and he watched as her pretty lips parted. “Jaune . . .”

He smiled, a brittle and faraway feeling in his chest. “I’m awake, Pyrrha.” It wasn’t a particularly funny joke, but it was better than anything else. From the pained look that crossed her features, he knew it still wouldn’t change what she’d seen.

What she knew he could do.

For a moment, he wanted the comfort of Camillia’s praise, of telling him how cleanly he’d committed to every strike, to every movement.

Instead, all he could feel was the chill settling back over his bones as sirens filled the air, and the knowledge that once again, he was going to have to deal with what he’d done.

His eyes closed, and the world became the pressure on his shoulders. If he had felt more poetic in that moment, he could have described it as the sensation of bars keeping his wings closed in tight against him.

Jaune had never felt so much like a canary in a cage.

Camillia had always dealt with frontier justice more than suburban or even metropolitan legal systems, but even then he could understand her distaste for red tape. All of them had to give statements, and that had meant explaining what they were doing at the Docks without outright admitting they’d gone hunting for the thieves.
Harder than you’d think to do, considering it was the truth.

Thankfully, as Beacon students, there was some leeway to be said for hearing the sound of gunshots. And the police didn’t necessarily need to know that they’d all but neutered the White Fang BEFORE said gunshots “alerted them to the presence of danger.”

It was still vigilantism, but it was understandable vigilantism as opposed to “we are going to be in so much trouble” vigilantism.

As the night dragged on and they were finally free to go from questioning, he watched as the group formed ranks and he could only languish in the way his feet dragged behind the rest. Yang and Blake were talking, Ruby was wishing Penny a good night, Pyrrha Ren and Nora were quiet together, and Weiss . . .

Weiss had given him a soft look, and then shook her head, moving to catch up with Ruby.

As Blake stared incredulously at Yang for a moment, he missed what led to the hug that the blonde pulled the secretive Faunus into, but his head was on heavier subjects as they all made their way towards the last bullhead of the night.

Exams tomorrow would suck ass, and that was the thing that comforted him on the trip back to Beacon.

+x+x+x+

No matter how he expected it, the return of that stiffness—no, it was wrong to say it had returned—it had worsened. Now, even Ruby was a bit more gentle with how she acted around him. Pyrrha was distant again, but more out of a sense of worry than before when she’d felt cold to him. Yang wasn’t dismissive, but he could tell she had a lot on her mind even without having been -told so- by the blonde.

At least she’d given him that awareness. She wasn’t leaving him out to dry, but . . .

He understood. Finding out that your boyfriend was a murderer was kind of—well— heavy. Heavier than even the fact that he was considering his mother’s words about having multiple wives.
Yeah, that was pretty damn heavy, Jaune had to admit. As he’d found himself once again on the
dormitory roof, staring at his Scroll, his finger hovered over the call button . . .

And then fell to his side, tucking the device into his pocket once again. He couldn’t tell anyone-
even Camillia. Camillia would laud him for doing what was necessary, but she never understood the
difference between them. He didn’t know what had changed his sister to become so accepting, so
adoring even, of violence, but it had fundamentally changed her from an open and loving sibling to a
creature that still loved him-

-but had also helped make him into the Huntsman he is today. Certainly, he didn’t have the
license or the accreditation of Beacon yet to give himself that title, but Camillia had insisted that he
was well-worthy of the title by the time she’d seen him off for his birthday. The Masquerade that
had been the start of all this anxiousness.

Things would settle down, he had that on good faith, but it would never be the same. He’d been
Jaune Arc, the somewhat goofy and sometimes emotional leader of Team JBPY, who struggled
against ranged opponents in duels and jibed and smiled his way through interactions with those
outside of his friend group.

Now they all knew who he was almost down to the core. There were no more secrets to be had
from Jaune Arc to the girls and Ren. Just explanations and discovering the extent to which he was
different from them.

As people, as Huntsmen. Would they worry he would lose control of himself one day when they
 sparred? The same way he had time and time again, even though he’d known innately from the start
that Professor Goodwitch would never have let him go that far- and opponents with active Aura
were much harder to take down than those who inevitably fell to the fast and hard, maiming strikes
that Camillia had drilled into his body like walking as a babe.

He contented himself with the thought that, regardless of the outcome, now they could only like or
dislike him based on his own merits and demerits. That was . . . a strangely freeing sensation that
built in his chest.

Which is why he was shocked when a soft warmth pressed in against his hand, and his eyes darted
from the afternoon skyline to see Blake, a gentle look on her face.

“Jaune,” His focus came unto her again, and those amber eyes of her’s drew him in and held him
in sway, “If . . . you’re fine with it- I-”

He blinked as she seemed to work to continue, “-I asked Yang,” She clarified, and he could only wonder what she’d have asked---

And then his eyes widened, right before she kissed him, wrapping her arms around him and pulling him in against her smaller body.
Jaune and Blake sexings. Pyrrha opens up about what she’s learned. Blake finally talks to Kali and Ghira once again, and makes a very profound declaration- even if Jaune doesn’t quite get it.

A Family Arc

[Time To Say Goodbye]

Chapter Fifteen

The Gentle Shadow of the Moon, The Maiden in Waiting

Jaune’s head spun. To be honest, he’d been stuck fast in his head until she’d showed up- and then she’d shattered that little mirror he’d been holding up against himself.

Perhaps that had been part of her purpose- comforting him when no one else felt they could. He could only speculate, and that alone made him aware of his nerves coming up again. He always started to overanalyze everything when he felt nervous.

Blake’s lips were softer and more full than Yang’s or Ruby’s, which was a curious sensation- and she was just a little bit shorter than Yang even with her heeled boots on.

Her arms around his middle squeezed, and he squeezed in turn reflexively, finally pulling away from the kiss as those eyes he drowned in so easily looked over his face- and he must have looked truly silly because one of Blake’s rare smiles came over her.

“Blake?” He asked, softly, blown away and scared in equal measure. One of her hands came up, lightly brushing across his jawline before her fingers cupped the curl of his chin. “What . . ?”
She shook her head, reaching up with her free hand to unfurl her ribbon and tuck it into the pocket of her shorts. The sight of her feline ears perking and cocking this way and that showcased that her own feelings were a turmoil all their own. “You don’t get to ask that. Not after what you did for me. For us. Blame Weiss.”

He wasn’t sure what he could blame Weiss for, but perhaps he might thank her, depending on what was going on. Granted, he was still kind of in shock.

How could he expect any of this? He never could, that was the simple answer. Jaune Arc always foresaw him having to put all the effort into building a relationship- that it would take years of struggle and heartache until he found someone who would love him- love him for HIM, at least.

Her other hand came up, and both of her hands were slightly cool against his cheeks- or perhaps his blush just made his face feel too hot in comparison. “I like you, Jaune. A lot, actually.” She noted, and he could only stare as she spoke, “I admit, at first I just thought you were . . . safe. That you were one of the humans here I could trust to protect me for being a Faunus, but-”

She cleared her throat, taking a steadying breath and then those eyes opened again as he watched her face become more serious. “You were weak-” He winced, “-but you stepped in. You stepped up and showed who you are. You are Jaune Arc, not just any other guy. I- Jaune, you have to understand . . .”

Her hands fell from his cheeks and they wrapped around to squeeze against his back again as she buried her face in against his chest through the fabric of his uniform. “I made mistakes, I did things I’m not proud of, either. I know how you feel- and that’s another part of what makes me . . .”

Against his better judgment, his arms wrapped around her in turn and one set of fingers found its way through long raven hair. Her hands clenched in against his spine, and then splayed out, resting against the broadness of his back before she squeezed him in her arms again. “I want you to be the one. I’m sorry if that scares you-”

And it did, it was a lot of pressure, but he also could understand that thought process. He’d thought the same about Yang already, and so he could only accept the burden that put on the both of them. “-but you’re . . . You feel so right. And I know there’s so much about me you don’t know, but I want to change that. I want us both to know everything about each other- I want to fall in love- I want it to be real.”

Blake didn’t go soft, it seemed. He couldn’t blame her, though. Just from the way she acted, he got the feeling that she only went in full-tilt- same as Ruby in a sense. Though, Blake had a maturity
that Ruby lacked— not that anyone would blame the Rose for being both younger and probably not as “worldly” as Blake herself surely was, to be able to admit to her own faults.

Though, that reminded him— and it gave him something else to focus on than the admittedly sudden reveal of her feelings. He gently held her at arms length, her eyes worrying and he realized that he hadn’t said anything in return yet.

Whoops, yeah, that could look bad. “You asked Yang?” He reiterated, earning a soft little nod from his partner which gave him a moment to process this.

His partner, his Faunus partner, was saying that she wanted to be with him. Wanted him to be the last person in her life— the soulmate everyone hunted for in a romantic sense— but not all met.

It was only the fact that he knew Blake particularly enjoyed romance novels that he could reconcile such a . . . girlish thing with his otherwise mysterious friend. Not that he didn’t think she wasn’t sincere— just that it was . . .

Cute. Yes. Blake Belladonna was cute.

“I—” He wet his lips, throat dry again. The ache in his chest choking him for a moment while his eyes misted— her features blurring a bit as the weight on his back lightened just a little bit. Dark thoughts of being abandoned drifted away in favor of the new shock, and he could only try to puzzle through his own feelings. Of course Blake was magnificent, and they’d become friends since the first struggles . . .

He didn’t think he was good enough, if he was honest. But to say that would insult Blake’s heartfelt words. Was it really so bad, if Yang had given the okay, and he could admit to himself that the idea made him feel light? Like he was building up something greater than he could dream of on his own?

“I’d— like that, Blake.” He uttered, and another rare Blake Belladonna smile lit up her face, and he couldn’t help but feel it grow on his own face before he leaned in and they shared another soft kiss— this one more tender and fragile than the one she’d given to him.

It lingered, hands touching each other in a steadily increasing, rising heat. “Jaune—” His name being said in such a burning voice lit a fire in him that had been smoldering and building slowly. A match taken to the fuel-soaked tinders of his body and heart.
Her fingers tickled his senses as they slid into his hair, his own unsure of where to wander so they simply journeyed openly. The fabric of her blazer doing nothing to prevent him from wanting beneath- wanting nothing more than to feel her against him in turn.

It was a biological drive- a need. To feel close with the one who inspired such emotions in you. The body telling you to procreate, to advance your genes. Nothing serious-

-but that always felt like such a lie. Even sex with Ruby, who had insisted it wasn’t changing anything about them as friends, had felt like a bundle of emotions and sensations rather than just a drive to mate.

The kiss intensified, no longer just gentle presses of lips against lips, with Blake’s tongue shyly tickling against his lip before he allowed it between his teeth, his own pink muscle tensing against hers and then winding together in an embrace like the one they were now locked in.

Exploring one another, learning secrets kept away behind closed doors, though here they were, on the roof of the dorms. Exposed if anyone cared to look, but he found himself forgetting the world around them as she pushed his blazer from his shoulders and then raked her nails across the collar of his shirt. It made him shudder and shake, even as his hands finally got a sense of where they belonged.

She stripped him down, and so he stripped her in turn. The ribbon at her neck loosened, and then her own blazer unbuttoned and pushed from her body, clothes ending up crumpled on the roof beneath them while questing hands discovered altogether new feelings between them. Blake’s breasts were seemingly the most sensitive part of her, since even just a light caress through her bra and shirt was enough to make her press in tighter against him. A mewl of his name turned him into a beast.

There was no need for foreplay this time, even though he’d later say he should have done it anyway. The mood was too right, and they were both too high on one another. They barely arranged their blazers and vests as padding against the cool stone of the roof before they were entwined together. Her arms holding strong against his back, a leg curled around his thigh while he slid inside of her with a grunt at the sudden heat. There was no tensing, no discomfort on her face as he found himself stuck fast to the root in no time. Amber eyes like liquid gold staring up into his face as full lips parted and whispered words that would have scared him if he’d been in his right mind.

“Breed me.”
Instead, those dirty, animalistic words only made him fully aware of just what it was they were doing. Just what he wanted to do to her- and how her acceptance of those thoughts made him ache.

His hands planted, his knees braced, and he moved. The feeling of her clinging to him, the port of storm in the hurricane of a new and blossoming love. His name sang from her lips like a siren’s call that drew him to die on the rocks of her body.

The height of their emotions made it impossible for him to last, and she cradled him as two minutes was the best he could last within her, beginning to spill and flood her with a warmth that earned a deep, satisfied groan from her. The easy, pleased little smile on her face said that, even if he hadn’t drawn a climax from her yet, she would have been satisfied with this.

But he wouldn’t be. As he recovered from his first expenditure, he lowered his head and captured one of her overly sensitive nipples between his lips, a little gasp brought forth from his newest lover as he began to tend to her in turn.

“Jaune- you don’t-” She hissed, and he shook his head in turn, laying soft kisses and little marking nips across the flesh of her sternum and bust as he felt her tighten up further around him while he laid within her, spent but willing to grow strong again.

For her, for any of them, he’d do it. Everything he could, even things he knew he couldn’t- he would try. That was what love was- willingness to sacrifice and struggle for another. He and Blake had struggled together for longer than even they perhaps knew, and so it was only deserving that they struggled together like this, too.

In sync, out of sync, touching and feeling only things meant to be shared with one another. His hands steadied himself again as he grew rigid once again, the oversensitivity of his own orgasm finally fading into the background long after he’d marked her thoroughly from her throat to her breasts. Both of her legs wrapped around him as he began to knock at the deepest part of her depths once again, and he could only admire the way her muscles flexed and tensed with each time her body was wracked with shaking when his groin would mash against hers and he’d draw out in a way that ground her clit.

Ruby and Yang had taught him well.

“Jaune- I’m-” She warned, breathlessly, as he finally found the rhythm and depth she seemed to love most. Her nails raked into his back and left small fissures of red that he could feel the sting of,
and her teeth came free-

-and sank into the meat of his shoulder as she came, screaming against his flesh as she marked him as her own in turn. Marks he’d wear proudly, if painfully.

In that moment, coming down from the bliss of intimacy, they stared once again into one another’s eyes, and Jaune couldn’t find it in him to let the moment end.

So he didn’t. Blake let out a whimper as he began again, and was not quiet again until after he’d expended himself within her one more time.

He’d fret later, but Blake would assure him- gently- that she was on the pill for her own frequently painful periods and thus there was no worry about something they both weren’t quite ready for.

That didn’t stop him from dreaming about it. A little blonde haired kitten who would call Blake her Mama, and he her Daddy.

It was a thought that put him at peace, and banished the dark worries that had plagued him all night.

+x+x+x+

By the time they returned to the dorm, it had truly settled into night-time, and he discovered Yang and Pyrrha enjoying what seemed to be a news broadcast of their “adventure” out to the docks. Thankfully, they’d managed to miss the reporters that would inevitably cover the event. They were credited as “Huntsmen on the scene”, and he was sure most of them were thankful for that.

Fame was nice- but having one’s name plastered all over the TV for foiling a White Fang operation- even an ostensible one- would have painted a target on them all.

Yang looked up from the TV with a grin, nursing a glass of warm milk from the looks of it, while Pyrrha was a bit more subdued as she seemed to be almost dozing up against her partner. “At least this time it was an actual wildcat.” Yang noted, and despite himself, he flushed from his ears all the way down to damn near his heart.
Gods, his girlfriend was so embarrassing. But he wouldn’t have her any other way. It was so much better than the uncomfortable silence that had pervaded the group since they’d come back from the Docks.

A side-ways glance told him that Blake wasn’t much better, her ears even out in the open to showcase how they pinned back while her cheeks were lit up in a bright pink. In their rush to vacate the roof before someone happened upon them, she’d forgot to tie them back away-

-and privately, he didn’t want her to return to hiding away behind that bow. Even if it added to her “cute” appeal, he preferred her like this.

Offering Blake a gentle smile, he leaned over to press a soft little kiss to the corner of her mouth, then moved towards the two girls on the couch. Yang’s eyes followed him until he was stood behind the couch but above her, and he leaned down, offering a much more languid embrace of his lips against hers, earning him a startled look as he pulled away after a few moments.

“Thank you, Yang. You’re the best girlfriend ever.” He teased, feeling a strange new high flood his senses. The sight of his blonde girlfriend’s face lighting up in a blush made him feel good, and as her eyes went elsewhere, Pyrrha’s sleepy eyes in turn closing and- likely- trying to ignore the way her own face lit with a look he couldn’t describe.

“Don’t say that yet, lover boy,” Yang mused, “But, I talked with Pyrrha and Rubes. We’re kidnapping my partner to take her with us to Patch for the semester break. You gonna be okay with just Blake, Weiss, Ren, and Nora for company?”

He raised a brow, “I’d planned on going back to Ansel myself-” Before he could finish, Blake’s voice broke in-

“Can I . . . come with you?” It was a surprise all it’s own, and he saw Yang’s head turn towards the Faunus even before he did. Though, deep inside, he felt a strange warmth tickle at his heart as he grinned.

“Sure. Mom did invite you all, and the ride back and forth will be better with someone. Just try not to mind how wild the house is with my sisters, and parents around, okay?”

Blake’s nod was mitigated by the quick glance towards the bathroom door, before she slipped inside of it and he was left alone with the two other members of their team. His gaze turned unto
Yang once again, and he could only grin at Pyrrha’s dozing face.

“Have a good time with the girls, Yang. Next time, I’ll have to go with you and meet your Dad.”

Yang seemed pleased by that, and nodded. “Sure. Just try not to mind if Dad tries to murder you for sleeping with his baby girls, right?”

He spluttered, and the easygoing grin on the brawler’s face only made him shake his head. She was a real character. Pyrrha’s flush showcased that she was at least aware enough that she understood the discussion, though he wasn’t particularly going to bother her about it- not after earlier.

“You’re all amazing.” He remarked, not an ounce of deceit in his tone. Yang nodded in turn, and flipped the screen off as the news broke into other stories for the night.

“Damn right, Jaune. Don’t forget it. Now- I’m pretty sure all of us are bushed, and deserve to get to sleep in a bit.”

He’d never agreed to something so fast in his life.

+x+x+x+

As morning blossomed in the form of the sun raking across his senses, Jaune found himself waking up early once again- even though the rest of the group had obeyed Yang’s thought process on the matter of sleeping in. As he sat up in bed and stretched, he slipped from the comfort of his covers, gathered a change of clothes, and made for the bathroom.

He had a plan today- even if it was just for one thing. Blake needed to call her parents- was it fair of him to leverage their new relationship in order to get her to agree? No. But- well-

It needed to happen. Especially now, when Blake needed all the support she could get- especially if she was tagging along for his short stint home. Nevena Arc alone would pester and cajole until his partner agreed to some things she really ought to save for a more familial discussion.

First, though, his morning routine. Shower, hair, teeth, a study in the mirror, dressing. Then,
breakfast could be started. He was feeling peckish and drained, so he thought that he would indulge his team in a full on display of his culinary prowess.

No, he wasn’t spoiling his girlfriends and friend. Not in any shape, or form.

Thick hunks of sausage medallions were laid to crisp and cook on one skillet while another was prepared for eggs and toast to run together with butter to make a breakfast that harbored far too much fat and protein in comparison with his usual fare.

But they’d earned it, in his opinion. As the stench of cooking meat filled the air and he prepared a kettle for tea and coffee, the soft sound of the bedroom door opening and closing drew his attention towards the first to awake that morning.

A pair of green eyes greeted him, and he had to keep himself from wincing. Alone with Pyrrha after last night was- not the thing he was looking forward to, if he was honest. Nonetheless, the Champion yawned and stretched, the rich orange of her sleeping shirt compressing against her body as she slid into a chair at the dining table and seemed still to doze a bit. As his eyes turned back onto their cooking meal, he mused that perhaps he was being too paranoid.

“I know now.” Pyrrha remarked, and he could only succumb to the feeling of his muscles tensing up. “Why you looked that way. It’s normal for you, isn’t it?”

A steadying, easy breath. No- he felt his shoulders quake. It wasn’t as simple as he would have liked it to be. Even if he had all the freedom of movement in the world, he was “Trapped” in this conversation with Pyrrha Nikos.

A conversation he didn’t really want to have with anyone, let alone the redhead whom had started to come around- and was the most likely to be pushed to the edge of his little metaphorical universe once again. And ignoring her or playing it off would only assure that outcome.

Jaune knew there was only the ability to address it, if he wanted to keep bridging the gap between them. “Yeah.” He deflated a bit, testing that the first of many eggs didn’t run and cooked perfectly instead of bursting all over it’s fellows.

The numbness of minding the cookstove was preferable to being free to let his thoughts wander unto darker places. Camillia’s smiles, the remains of people who may have made a change- a new heart and a new light.
His advancement always made Camillia smile, the first time she’d actually taken him along on an actual fight against other people- kidnappers of a then-younger Ochre who had been pregnant with her husband’s second child- she had oozed pleasure at the sight of him standing over the body of the girl’s guards.

He’d been fourteen, it’d been easier than the bandits, as sad as that was.

“Jaune.” Pyrrha’s voice brought him back into awareness, and he noted he’d already started plating up breakfast for the redhead, offering it over an arm to the Mistrali woman. It was all so automatic that he could only accredit it to that same sense of coldness that washed over him when he knew he had to kill.

Her hand settled on his wrist, and he saw his hand begin to shake, even if he didn’t feel it.

“What would you do if someone threatened us?” The question was loaded, but it was also the only way Pyrrha could probably process it. Her only comfort to know her team leader was a murderer.

“Make sure they couldn’t.” The answer was given freely, but with half a mind. Her hand tightened against his wrist, and he let his eyes trail from where her fingers were against his flesh up unto her face. Conflict warred on those pretty features that he’d been dumbstruck by before, and now could only wonder when she’d come to hate him.

“No matter what?”

He nodded, and she let go of his arm to think as he stepped back over to the stove. “Even me?” Pyrrha asked, and he could only feel some of his sensations return to him as his lips curled up into a smile that he comforted himself with.

How silly, to think that Pyrrha wasn’t worth killing over- just because they’d had a disagreement or two.

He’d done it for less noble reasons, after all.
“All I want is to be your friend- for you to be happy, Pyrrha. That’s all I’ll ever want, unless you want more from me.”

He’d give RWNR and JBPY the world, if he could do it with his life.

As Blake and Yang awoke, stumbling into the kitchen one after the other, he plated up breakfast for them and prepared tea for himself, Pyrrha, and Blake while he muted a cup of coffee with milk for Yang.

She didn’t enjoy coffee much, but it suited her tastes in the morning- more than a soda would have with this heavy of a breakfast, anyway.

“Blake, let’s go to the CCT after you get dressed, okay?” A muted nod was returned, alongside a nervous little smile.

“... Okay.”

+x+x+x+x+x

He wasn’t sure, frankly, which of them was more nervous. Blake looked skittish and ready to run back into the elevator even as she settled into one of the station’s chairs, and even with him next to her, it was a mess as she put in the code for the Chieftain of Menagerie’s home. The sad part was that he couldn’t fathom why she would think her parents would do anything but be gleeful to hear from her after at least three years, if he’d gotten his sense of how long she’d been away from them.

It wasn’t something Jaune Arc, with his family, could understand. He’d talked to Peri just the other night, asking how the local stables were doing and receiving an altogether too thorough report on the status of mares to stallions- one of the strange fascinations of his beloved- if nerdy- sister. She was a lover of equestrianism, for sure, and he had fond memories of being sat alongside her upon the latest of one of the other family’s prize-worthy steeds.

There he went, distracting himself again. As amber eyes turned up towards him again, the digits on the screen displayed clearly alongside a button that ominously was labelled with “Call”.

“I’m here.” He said, gently, his hands settling unto her shoulders to rub and draw a light sigh from the ravenette as he felt the utter tension that suffused her body as an arm came up, and she pressed
the button.

He just couldn’t see the Kali Belladonna he’d met doing anything else. The ringing tone playing a time or two until a video feed began to establish- and a woman who could only be the one he’d danced with at the Masquerade answered with a charitable smile.

[This Time, Leitmotif]

“Hello, Belladonna re-”

Silence filled the air around them, and he could watch with a near front-row seat to the way Mrs. Belladonna’s face began to light up from a pleasant smile to an outright elated grin. He couldn’t see Blake’s face from his position standing above her, but the way her cat-ears perked back and then pushed forward purposefully again, he had a feeling Blake was feeling some of that tension leave her body in a sigh he heard.

“Hi, Mom.”

Two simple little words that had so much weight just then, his hands- in their leather gloves- still on Blake’s shoulders able to feel the way she slumped in the chair even while his gaze stayed fixed on the video feed through the console.

Kali Belladonna was a beautiful woman, and it explained a lot him that only she and that massive man who was her husband could birth a beauty like Blake. Kali’s age-lines did not detract from her prettiness in the slightest, and for a moment, Jaune wondered if Blake would be even more radiant when she was a similar age.

He hoped to find out.

“My little kitten . . .” Kali uttered, and then she turned from the display, yelling, “GHIRA! COME HERE NOW, BLAKE IS ON THE FEED!”

He could only laugh at that- so caught off guard by the sudden shift in tone- from motherly jubilation to familial demand. He got the feeling that, for all Ghira Belladonna was a wise and respected man, it was his wife who ran their relationship.
While he couldn’t pick up the sound of footfalls through the microphone on the Belladonna’s end, he got the impression from the way Ghira appeared in almost a panic around into the view that he’d all but charged from wherever he’d been when Kali called out for him. Jaune hoped that one day he’d be as loved a husband.

He had something so dear for him to live for, now.

“Blake!” His smile was probably softer than Ghira’s, but he was glad to be able to witness this moment of heartwarming family reunion. He’d take no pride in being the one to facilitate it, but he could at least be that selfish.

“Hi, Dad.”

It was easy to see as Kali grasped her husband, squeezing him so tightly that even he felt sympathy pain from the man’s uncomfortable expression. It seemed Kali Belladonna was a hugger.

He’d have to remember that, if this relationship with Blake worked out. After all, even Yang’s hugs tended to strain his aura sometimes.

He was fine just being an audience to this. Even as Blake’s face turned and he saw the tears threatening to spill from her eyes.

Sympathy made his own eyes water, and he felt so very -human- in that moment. Just to be brought to tears by the reconciliation of a family.

Good memories flooded him, memories of his youth. Memories of making a stand for his dreams to his family.

Memories of being loved, of being trusted and supported.

He hoped Blake was feeling that rush of positivity in the same way in that moment.
“Where are you?” It was a pertinent, important question that Ghira Belladonna uttered, and he couldn’t blame the man for wanting to know.

“Beacon, outside of Vale. I- I enrolled as a Huntress.” Blake’s voice was unsteady, and he knew without having to look that she was crying from the way her shoulders shook now and again.

“A Huntress?” Kali noted, her gaze finally moving from her daughter up towards him, and he offered a bow of his head.

“Hello again, Mister and Misses Belladonna. I hope you’ve been well since I saw you last.” All of that aristocratic flair was present again, and he let it simmer for a moment while Blake collected herself, an arm coming up to wipe away tears he knew must have burned her cheeks and eyes.

“Well, this is something special.” Kali mused, and he could only let his smile soften. Blake perked again, and her voice came out stronger than before.

“Mom. Dad. This is Jaune Arc, my Team Leader, partner- and . . .” She paused, and his gaze turned down onto her just before she looked up at him again, noting the way her eyes glistened and her lips curled just so slightly up into a smile. “Boyfriend.”

Wow, usually you dated first. Then again, they hadn’t yet had a chance to settle out for something more normal than a stint out against the White Fang- or a trip to his own family home.

Yeah, he’d have to make time to take the girls all out on dates again. Something simple and not too heavy. Yang, Blake . . . Ruby.

It was time he manned up.

“I told you she would like you.” Kali noted, and he could only flush at the smarmy smirk that told him that- yes- Blake was definitely Kali Belladonna’s child. Although he couldn’t help but think she was more playfully attuned with Yang than her own “serious” daughter. In comparison, Ghira seemed caught fully off guard, and he saw the man’s own amber eyes settle on him, and he bowed his head in return. Trying to stave off his flush, he spoke again.

“You did. I’m afraid it took a little work, though. I offer my word as an Arc that I will do my absolute best to make your daughter happy.”
“Oh? You seem to be doing a good job, I see a smile on her face . . .” Kali mused, and then the older woman’s lips split into a pleased grin. “Ooooh- now wait a second, I see that blush, Blake! Spill! Tell Momma everything!”

Blake spluttered, “M-Mom! Not in front of Dad and Jaune!”

Oh boy, girl talk. He didn’t look forward to -that- aftermath.

“Oh?!” He could -hear- the pleasure in the woman’s voice, while Blake’s father looked startled in turn. “That far already, huh~? That’s my baby girl!”

He wasn’t sure who was more embarrassed at that point. Him, or Blake.

Despite himself, he couldn’t hate the feeling. As Blake had to take a moment to center herself before bringing the topic back to something more mundane, he could only finally let go of her shoulders and rest a bit more at ease in a chair next to her.

“You have a break from school soon, then. You should come home!” Kali noted, and he privately agreed-

“I- I can’t, Mom. I’m going with Jaune to Ansel.” He raised a brow, turning his gaze unto her. Sure, she’d asked him, but he would have imagined she’d have preferred to go back to Menagerie to see her parents.

“Oh? You really are my child, aren’t you.” Kali noted, but didn’t seem remotely displeased by the admission. Ghira Belladonna’s eyes shot back unto him, and he held up his hands in a show of deference. “We’ll have to try and come see you for the Vytal Festival, then.”

“I’d like that.” Blake admitted, and his gaze swept unto his partner’s face, seeing the soft smile that stretched her normally pouty lips.

This- this feeling was what he’d always wanted. It was the feeling all “heroes” deserved to know. The feeling of mattering- of being the light in other’s lives. Even if it wasn’t as grandiose in scope, he’d helped to make this happen.
Jaune Arc let his eyes close, and he felt the most sincere, cheek-stretching smile give him the closure on their first semester together.

May they have three more great years ahead of them.
Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Summary

The food fight, meeting Sun and Neptune, Jaune and Blake head off for Ansel while Ruby Yang and Pyrrha head off for Patch. What kind of antics await our heroes?

AN: IF you’re wondering what madness I put this goofiness to, Noragami’s OST: Let’s Rumble

A Family Arc

[Time To Say Goodbye]

Chapter Sixteen

The Meal-time Melee; The Vacation

Praise the Gods, the last week of exams passed more peacefully than the first. He’d felt some anxiety about Blake coming with him to Ansel, but that had abated in favor of a feeling he was sure was shared amongst all of their two teams—

Fuck exams.

As the time approached, and they had their last day of their first semester, he found himself watching as Ruby announced plans for “The Best Day Ever”, which had led to indignation on Weiss’ part when it was discovered she’d used Weiss’ binder for it.

To be honest, he’d filtered most of the noise out, by this point used to the fun banter between teams Rainbow and Juneberry. There’d been only a few points he’d bothered to drop in when a topic was something he had experience in, but most of the time it was playful jibbing and idle talk about course load, projects, and elsewise.

Today, that was not the case.
“Regardless, we should try and do something together as friends.” Weiss remarked, a light smile on her lips even while in his peripheral view, Yang was grinning and spinning a plate with a slice of some whipped-cream-covered pie atop a finger.

Despite the warning signals that should have sent through his head, it went ignored.

“Oh yeah, Weiss Cream? What ideas you got?” Yang noted, obviously playing up the Schnee Heiress’ mood, even while he noted that Ren and Nora were beginning to develop looks of interest.

Once again, his danger senses weren’t going off.

“Well, we could-”

Splat-

And that was when it all started.

+x+x+x+

“Dude, Beacon is way more chill than Haven so far. And look at all the cute girls-” Sun Wukong grinned at his friend’s idle banter as they headed towards the school’s cafeteria. Early arrivals for the Vytal Festival, he’d been amazed at how seamlessly it was that he’d slipped into Vale by boat, but that probably had something to do with the hubbub that had occured over at one of the other docks that night. Things were looking golden for the Faunus.

“You would be happy with that, Nep. Come on, let’s get some grub and then-”

And that was when they walked into the sight of a war-torn battlefield, the lost and damned screaming for mercy as they fled through the doors that he and the blue-haired male had stepped into without knowing what it was they had done.

Pandora’s box had been unleashed. And as turkeys flew wholesale at them, both ducked behind an upturned table and then came up over it to spy the sides waiting to clash once again.
“I’m Queen of the Castle, I’m Queen of the Castle-” Nora broke into loud laughter, and he let his gaze wash over her, then Ruby, then Ren, then Weiss as his gaze went towards the floor where they’d set up the weapons of their own side. Already, the cafeteria had been cleared of the innocent—now only remained the guilty.

The charge was Treason, and the punishment was Death (by food related injuries.)

His eyes turned back towards his team, as Blake stepped up, Yang followed, with Pyrrha looking apologetic- but altogether enthused. It was a cute expression on the redhead, and he couldn’t help but smile in return. “Justice will be swift-!” He cried out.

“Justice will be painful.” Blake remarked, more placidly.

“And it will be-” Yang began, and finished alongside Pyrrha,

“DELICIOUS!”

And then all hell broke loose once again.

The fusillade of green cannonballs filled the air. His first task securing a weapon, and as he gripped a tray by it’s handle, he improvised it as a shield as he blocked the few shots that actually seemed ready to make their way towards the group. Around him, Yang ducked forth with a war-cry as her fists planted into yet more turkeys. Over the rim of his impromptu shield, he saw Ren break off to meet her in battle with likely aura-enhanced spring onions.

“Pyrrha!” He shouted, hearing her answer in the affirmative as a set of baguettes were sent sailing towards Weiss, the white-haired girl scrambling for cover from the javelins as hard as tack. With support assured, he charged in with a war cry of his own. As a table was sent sailing towards him by Nora landing upon one end of it, he spun around it’s form gracefully while his free hand grasped for a weapon- a baguette of his own- and drew in towards the redhead while Ruby and Weiss handled RWNR’s own long-range warfare.
“Blake! Take out- HNGH-” Holy shit, Nora hits hard! “-the snipers!” Cans of soda exploded as they were flung from behind him towards the two color-coded girls on the opposing side, and he could settle in to fight Nora in their element- close quarters combat.

He had no idea how she’d improvised a melon and a banner-pole into a mallet, but he wasn’t going to ask questions, especially when he was struggling to keep up with her furious swings and gleeful dodging when he’d slide in for a swing of his own. She had the reach advantage over him, unlike Yang, so it was more of a struggle than he’d have liked to admit.

Even if he’d studied Nora’s moveset before, it was strange to find himself on the receiving end of her power. She hit harder than -Yang- and that was a scary thought on it’s own as her next swing impacted against his impromptu shield and he adjusted his grip before flinging it low, trying to trip the Valkyrie girl up as he closed in behind with a stab of his bread-ly weapon.

She brought the handle of her impromptu hammer around and smashed the loaf in half, leaving him weaponless- and thus ready to make a retreat- before he saw her twirl the thing with the ease of long practice and he ducked to the side just in time for the shockwave to send him skidding backwards on his feet. He had just a moment to regard Blake breaking off from a stand-down with Ruby and Weiss, the faunus darting this way and that while using her Semblance to keep both of the other girls on edge.

As Nora closed distance again, he ducked another horizontal swing and then pirouetted his way up unto a table, hooking another serving tray against his boot before adjusting his stance and propelling himself down the table, past where Yang had finally gotten the upper hand against Ren and had sent him reeling back over a set of tables, a spray of food flying everywhere as the Mistralian man righted himself and then darted back inwards, though Yang had already turned back around to engage Nora as the red-head took seeming offense to her boyfriend (totally not together together, his ass) being sent flying.

“Pyrrha, get Ren!” He yelled, just as the end of the table came into sight- alongside Ruby and Weiss engaged with Blake who was looking a bit more staggered at having to fend off the two girls at once, Weiss with a swordfish in her dominant left hand and Ruby with an improvised scythe in the form of a swordfish on a pole just like Nora. He shifted his weight and then promptly pulled an ollie, sending himself sailing towards the white-haired girl.

“REVENGE!” He yelled out gleefully, right as the Heiress looked up at him in shock.
“LOOK AT HER, SHE WENT FLYING!” Sun yelled out, amazed at the actual craziness going on in front of him. Next to him, Neptune ducked behind the table occasionally when it looked like there would be collateral damage.

“Is that Pyrrha Nikos fighting another girl by throwing melons at her?” Neptune asked, shocked.

“That’s a boy’s uniform, man.”

“MY GODS, AND BLONDIE IS THROUGH THE TABLE, SHE’S BROKEN IN HALF!” Neptune yelled out, covering his face.

+x+x+x+

The yelling drew his attention away from the Heiress, groaning as she laid on the floor, watching how Yang had been- in fact- put through a table and was laying there with one arm held out towards him.

“YANG, NO-!”

He read her lips, “I love you.”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOO---”

Strangely, there was more than one voice in that, his eyes moving over to Ruby cradling Weiss and crying out her pain and misery. His gaze went to Blake, only to see that the ravenette was giving both team leaders a -very- mild look.

What, it was all good fun.

His attention shifted away from Ruby, taking in Pyrrha keeping Ren at bay with cans of bubbling soda and a platter-shield of her own, while Nora turned around towards him with a grin. Oh shit.
And that was when he felt it, the sudden wave of pressure that washed over him and threatened to knock him over as a sound-barrier busting **KRAK** filled the air.

*Oh shit, Ruby.*

Oh shit indeed.

+x+x+x+

“OH SHIT DUCK-!” Sun shouted, just as absolute chaos in the form of a storm of -everything- washed through the cafeteria, bodies blown over the two Haven students’ heads and then splatters of meat, fruits, soda, and what-have-you spray-painted the wall just above the entry to the place.

And that was the end of the Great Beacon Food War- as Glynda Goodwitch strolled in with a fury on her face not to be described lest it cause uncomfortable need to relieve one’s bladder.

All in all? A fun time.

The detention was worth it. Even if ALL OF THEM had been caught in the crossfire of Ruby’s last-ditch “attack” rather than just his own team. (“Teehee, friendly fire-“ had brought Weiss to the extent of speaking Angrish-) Yang had even slyly insisted on him giving her CPR- not that she was unconscious at all to warrant it. When Ruby had nervously asked Weiss if she’d wanted the same, the Heiress had- with an adorable flush- denied it with a set of wide blue eyes.

+x+x+x+x+

New faces were not quite something Jaune had grown used to, so when he was approached after classes ended that day (including the impromptu detention they’d all had to serve with Professor Goodwitch), he could only look befuddled at the fact they were obviously not Beacon students. Early arrivals for the Festival had been his guess- which he’d seemed correct on when they confirmed they were from Haven.

“Name’s Sun Wukong, and this is my buddy, Neptune Vasilias. It’s great to meet you all.” His eyes took in the two men, rather surprised from the individuality both oozed. The monkey-faunus,
he presumed from the tail, fully on display in all of his extroversion, while the blue-haired male had an altogether “cool” vibe that made Jaune think that he was the type to grin and try too hard.

Not that there was anything wrong with that at all, Jaune admired his fashion sense. The hair was an odd choice, but Neptune wore it well.

“Jaune Arc. Short, sweet, some ladies love it.” He noted with a pleasant air, imagining that neither would particularly note a more formal, stiff greeting. Besides, Jaune was feeling good about himself. The stress relief of the food fight had- well- been what the doctor ordered. Grins, smiles, and laughter had gone around the two teams ever since- helping to mitigate the worries about his past changing their viewpoints on him.

“Haha? That right, man? I guess that’s why you ended up on a team with three of’em.” Neptune noted, his hands settling on his hips and Jaune could only admire that candidness. Despite himself, he “liked the cut of their jibs” so to speak.

“Well- I ended up on a team of them mostly by happenstance,” He admitted.

“Your partner is the dark-haired girl, isn’t it?” Sun asked, and Jaune nodded in response. “She seeing anyone?”

He could only twitch at that forward question, but he felt a laugh bubble up inside of him. “Why don’t you ask her?” He wasn’t going to be THAT guy, nope. Never. If Blake wanted to put him down gently, he’d let her do it. If she wanted to humor him? Well, it’d only be fair of him.

Sun seemed like an alright sort, after all. He got a feeling that Blake wasn’t the type to appreciate his more- well- “Sunny” disposition, though. To him, Blake felt like a night sky. “Sure. Just thought I’d prod her partner a bit to see what it’s like. You guys entering the tournament?”

He nodded in return, feeling it was only to be expected, “If I have my way,” Jaune mused, “We’ll win the tournament. I have a lot of people to make proud, after all.” His family, his girlfriends, and friends- that was a lot of pressure.

Pressure he didn’t mind, if he was honest. Camillia being proud of him would be more than enough payment on it’s own.
“I like your confidence.” Neptune noted, but spun a grin unto his features. “But- you’re lookin’ at the winners here, man.” The blue-haired man offered an extended fist, and Jaune shook his head with a grin as he reached out to smack knuckles against knuckles.

“We’ll see.”

+x+x+x+

A last minute check was necessary before they boarded the Bullhead towards Ansel, which included a quick call to his mother to alert her to the additional guest. That had been a mistake all its own, since he’d promptly gotten the third degree on the fact he would spill all about what had occurred since he’d called her last. He’d promised under threat of severe training (read: beating), and then they’d moved to see the others off to Patch. He’d given Yang a hug and a kiss, and offered Pyrrha well-wishes- since he didn’t quite trust a hug with her just yet.

Last had been Ruby, whom he had decided to approach with a little more consideration. After a tight hug, he’d gently settled his hands upon her shoulders and put his eyes on hers, earning him a confused look from the little scythe-wielder.

“Ruby. When we get back, I want to take you on a date. I know you wanted us to just stay friends, but . . .”

His words had put a shock on the girl’s face, and he could only grin a bit lamely in response. Her head had hung a bit, and- for a moment- he worried she’d outright reject him.

“Can I . . . think about it? While I’m gone?” Ruby asked gently, and he could only feel his lips stretch into a smile.

“Of course, Ruby. Take all the time you need. I just want to do right by you- and- well- it’s only fair. You’re one of my best friends, and I . . .” He took a deep breath, “I know it’s strange. I’m dating your sister, and one of your friends- and I understand if that’s no good for you.”

He blinked when Ruby shot her head up, “What? No, that’s not- ugh- I’m- I just want to be a Huntress, you know?”

He did know very well. Ruby was- well- she was dedicated. “And I won’t stop you at all. After
all, we’re all at Beacon together.”

Ruby paused at that, and again her face clouded with a thoughtful look. Leaning in to press a soft kiss to her cheek, earning a laugh from a nearby Yang, he noted, “Think about it. If you decide you don’t want to, I’ll respect it, we’ll stay friends. But . . . I think we can be more- no, I’m sorry, that’s no good.” He put his back up straight, affecting as regal of a posture as he could force himself into. “I know we can be more, if you’ll let me try.”

Ruby nodded in return, and though the look in her eyes was stormy, she offered him a smile. “I’ll think about it, Jaune. Have a good time back home, okay? We’re gonna have a blast, so you gotta do the same!”

He threw up a thumbs up, sharing a grin with her, “It won’t be the same without all of you, but you can bet I’ll bring you those cookies from Mom.”

That news seemed to perk Ruby up, and he watched as the three girls boarded an airship headed towards the little island to the west, Blake stepping up behind him. He turned to her with a wistful smile, even while she shook her head with a light smirk.

“It’s about time.” She said, and he could only blink. “Come on. Our flight leaves in ten minutes- and you need to take your pills, right?”

Ah, she was right. He palmed the metal tin and went ahead with his airsickness pills, dry-swallowing them as they moved along towards what he hoped would be a relaxing time back home with his family and one of his girlfriends.

He should have known better.
Chapter Seventeen

Pyrrha's POV, finally. Pyrrha, Ruby, and Yang enjoy their week-long semester break back in Patch. Antics ensue.

A Family Arc

[Time To Say Goodbye]

Chapter Seventeen

A Garden of Roses

Pyrrha had been sure she’d be spending the semester break by herself in the Team’s dorm, but here she was- on a bullhead with Ruby Rose and her partner, Yang Xiao Long. Her father would have been proud of her, she’d like to think, for having found such strong friends. That was a much more morose thought than she’d meant to have on the flight over, but- well- it happened sometimes. Nonetheless, she felt her lips slide into an easy smile as she watched the two sisters tussle and tumble, Yang teasing Ruby about Jaune’s proposition- and that alone made her chest clench.

What was it that she was missing, there? Certainly, they had become “friends”, but . . . something about him just- there was-

Pyrrha wasn’t sure she could even categorize it. At first, she’d had the excuse of wanting to distance herself from him because he seemed to be yet another hanger-on of her celebrity, her power- but then he’d earnestly tried to make friends amidst both his team and their sister team, and so it had seemed for awhile that he truly did want to make friends.

And then his emotional episode to Blake had come out into the open, and she’d found out the truth. He was like her, in a way. Struggling under expectations, under unwarranted praise and recognition that did not feel rightly his. She’d sympathized with him, then, but had still felt distant to him. She’d preferred to stay away from him as a matter of course, and even she could admit to herself that it was . . . odd, for her to be so stricken with someone.
Yang had even pointed it out a myriad of times, usually as gently as the blonde -could-, but it had become more urgent when the blonde had even started to date their Team Leader. Pyrrha couldn’t even say she did it out of bias- she knew she was essentially Yang’s best friend in Beacon- and Yang had MANY friends- and it was only sensible that she would want her boyfriend and her best friend to get along. That was only normal.

The more she learned about Jaune Arc, the more she couldn’t understand. He came from a house of nobility, had a supportive and adoring- if eccentric- family, and had been personally trained by a Huntress for half of a decade- apparently in a manner of fighting that encouraged- or perhaps even focused entirely on- maiming and killing blows.

Pyrrha, for all her laurels feeling too heavy, understood innately that she was amongst the cream of the crop. She had developed an analytical and tactical mind that could only be attributed to training beyond the measure of most, and countless fights against fellow tournament combatants. And, from the beginning, she had studied her team-mates in their own habits and movements. Yang was easy to discern, with her straightforward and powerful brawling style, which made her overwhelmed by technique. Blake was a trickster, utilizing her agility and Semblance to keep ahead of her opponents and delivering surgical strikes as she could- though she sometimes lacked the power to actually make good on her attacks. Jaune . . .

Jaune never fought seriously in their spars. He was too conscious, always chambering something and then abandoning it in favor of a more roundabout attack. It spoke of someone who was . . . scared. No, perhaps scared was too lenient a word. Terrified. That hadn’t made sense when she’d first trained with him, and it had only started to recently.

Jaune was scared he’d resort to killing blows against them. While Aura could protect them from his blows, it was a given that he’d killed before. Perhaps he didn’t think he was capable of protecting them -from himself-?

That thought frightened her, even she could admit it. Even she’d only ever injured an opponent enough that the fight would be called, never even as severe as a maiming. Maimed tournament fighters couldn’t make money, after all.

She was a fighter in a blood sport, Pyrrha knew it, but she liked to think of herself as a heroic example. And she’d succeeded altogether too well, by the praise heaped upon her and the fame enjoyed by what remained of her family- mostly her mother’s descent into decadence.

That brought a frown to her face, and she immediately cut the line of thinking. Her attention turned outwards again, watching as Ruby leaned in over her seat to admire the view from the flying craft. As opposed to their usual Huntress attire, all three were in more casual clothes, though even Ruby was cradling Crescent Rose alongside Yang’s wearing of Ember Celica. Her gaze swept
down to her rucksack beside her seat, seeing Milo and Akouo be comforting in their closeness. She had no doubt that Patch was as safe as Ruby and Yang said it was, but she felt . . . strangely naked without her armor on. The simple Mistralian white gown was something she wouldn’t have otherwise wore if Yang hadn’t insisted.

“Dress down, soldier!” Yang had snarked with a grin, and Pyrrha couldn’t find it in herself to fight the blonde on that. So she’d pulled the comfortable dress free and tucked into it rather than her armor- which was all packed into her bags just in case.

It said a lot about her that she couldn’t feel comfortable unless she was wearing at least a few metal plates, didn’t it? Oh well, Ruby and Yang seemed happy.

“So, P-Money,” Yang started, drawing her attention towards the blonde as she noted the purple-eyes now settled on her own face. “You excited to have a Yang? Patch isn’t the most exciting place for the night-life, but I figure you’re not that type anyway.”

Pyrrha had long since grown inured to Yang’s (terrible) puns, so she only smiled and nodded. “It will be nice to get away after all of the stress with exams. Thank you both for inviting me along.”

Ruby leapt back around, inserting herself gleefully into the conversation. “It’s no problem! With everyone else either being a humbug or going off themselves, we didn’t want to leave you alone.”

Pyrrha could only laugh, “I’m sure I wouldn’t have been all that alone. Ren, Nora, and Weiss would have kept me company, I’m sure.” Ruby hemmed and hawed, but shrugged after a few moments. Pyrrha didn’t think she’d be left out in the cold, so to speak, even though she understood that Weiss seemed to particularly enjoy spending time with Ren and Nora together.

The redhead was glad for the Heiress, really. She’d made at least two good friends so far out of their larger friend group. She seemed to get along decently with Jaune and Blake as well, so it was only a matter of time before the whole of the group was . . .

All except her. She’d been steady friends with them all, save for Jaune. Yang was easily the best amongst them, purely due to exposure as her partner, but with Yang came Ruby. With Ruby came her team. She and Blake and Jaune were the most distant from one another. And Jaune and Blake had obviously become something altogether more romantic than she’d have expected otherwise.

Pyrrha winced at that thought. Was she- hiding? Perhaps she was. For all that Jaune’s sincerity
scared her, he was both sincere and now growing forward about his intentions with everyone. It’d been easier to deal with when he’d been somewhat- well- puppy-ish, if she was honest.

Such a mental image made her smile more than she would have liked to admit. She imagined Jaune would have been an adorable puppy- wait why was she getting off track?!

Her gaze settled on Yang again, watching as the blonde woman leaned back in her seat while the announcement of their imminent arrival on Patch came over the speaker of the craft. Pyrrha could only think, for a moment, that some of that brazen confidence had rubbed off of her partner and unto their team leader, whom had an easy air about him- but had always seemed somewhat anxious and nervous around them.

The girls at least. With Ren, he was damn near comfortable enough to sleep nude with. And Pyrrha would -never- admit how that thought made her cheeks flush.

+x+x+x+

As they disembarked from the Bullhead, Pyrrha took note of the few others milling about on the landing pad, at least until a voice rose and her companions perked up. “Yang! Ruby!”

Forth from the small crowd came a tall man with burnished bronze skin and scraggly blonde hair that Pyrrha could only blink at as she turned to regard her friends. It didn’t even take a double-take for her to assume the man was Yang’s father at the very least, though she couldn’t quite fathom that little Ruby Rose was his as well. Then again, perhaps the mother’s genes were more potent in that case?

Ruby was the first to fly- almost literally, in a storm of rose petals- into action, crashing into her father in a motion that she was sure would have knocked a less sturdy man over full-force. Yang was a bit more placid, though no less amused by the grin on her face as she waved at her, and so she followed along with her blonde team-mate as they stepped up to the man.

“Did’ja miss me, did’ja MISS ME?” Ruby asked, and Pyrrha’s smile only grew. Despite her thoughts, it was obvious that Ruby certainly treated the man like her father. It brought back sweet memories of her own- but ones she sadly had to squash down.

It wouldn’t do to get misty-eyed right now.
“You bet, Ruby. I missed both of my girls.” The man looked up, and Pyrrha could only give an amused look across to her partner after seeing the man’s deeply blue eyes. Yang’s confused look only made her next words more joyful to say.

“I understand now why you asked Jaune out.”

“HEY- WHAT DOES THAT MEAN!?” The flush on Yang’s face was worth it. Giggling, she trotted forward with her bags draped behind her in her arms. “Pyrrha!”

As she came within hand-shaking distance of Ruby and the sisters’ father, she bowed at the hips. “Hello, sir. I am Pyrrha Nikos, Yang’s partner. Thank you for letting me stay with you for the week.”

“PYRRHA YOU CAN’T SAY THAT AND GET AWAY-” Yang’s rant was cut off with a grin by her father, and a sudden arm reaching out to pull the blonde girl into a hug. “Oof- Dad- let me go- she’s- augh-”

“Don’t pretend I didn’t hear that, young lady. What’s this about you askin’ a guy out?”

“Oh, I am going to get you for this, P-Money- AUGH- Dad, tight- too-tight- hhahk-”

Pyrrha’s smile felt radiant. She was glad she’d come along now.

+x+x+x+

The Xiao-Long/Rose household was as pleasant little cabin in the woods, something Pyrrha would have otherwise attributed to a kind of summer retreat, rather than an outright home of its own. It had a quaint, pleasant little feeling that she couldn’t deny made her feel comfortable. And in keeping with Yang- and Ruby’s- wishes, the subject of Jaune was dropped for the moment in favor of dinner and getting their luggage for the week settled off. The first surprise of her trip with the sisters was the creature that greeted her at the door, barking and wagging its tail.

A dog. A tiny little dog. “Puppy!” Pyrrha noted, not even minding how girlish she sounded as she knelt down and rapidly picked the little fluff-ball up to cradle him. From the sight of Ruby and Yang looking suitably surprised, they hadn’t expected her to react so strongly to the animal. Flushing a bit, she nonetheless began to use a set of her green-painted nails to scratch behind the dog’s head.
while the other arm braced him against her.

“I guess she likes Zwei.” Ruby noted, conspiratorially.

“Easy bet there, Rubes.”

Nonetheless, what followed was a simple tour of the house at the behest of Ruby while Yang stepped into the kitchen to help their father. Even as they stepped up the stairs, Pyrrha could hear the soft voice of her partner uttering, “Dad, I- uh- yeah, I should tell you-” before they were out of earshot and Ruby’s own chattering made it impossible for her to hear more alongside Zwei’s panting and grumbling as he was babied.

“So up here is our bedrooms. Dad’s is across the hall. Since this is like a sleepover, we can totally just set up in one of the rooms!” Pyrrha could smile at Ruby’s enthusiasm, watching the dark-haired girl gleefully move through her explanations like a lightning bolt crashing to the earth and then racing through all it touched. The girls’ bedrooms were both relatively sparse, though there was still signs of individuality between both- posters, weights, and beauty products in Yang’s, while Ruby’s had an actual full blown constructable workbench set up in one corner, still covered with tools that she’d likely replaced when she’d come to Beacon.

“Shower is downstairs, under the stairway. Of course, you saw the dining and living room! Uh-we have a basement where Dad and Yang train when it’s cold, and the garage attached in the back where Yang keeps Bumblebee and I built Crescent Rose!”

Pyrrha still had yet to take a ride on Bumblebee. They’d have to correct that sometime. She wasn’t sure how safe she felt on a motorcycle, but Yang seemed confident in her skills.

“It’s a nice house.” She noted, seeing the pleasure on Ruby’s face as she said so. Zwei finally got sick of being held and began to fuss until she let him down onto the floor, brushing down the breast of her gown to clear it of his sheddings. “Thank you for letting me come along, Ruby.”

Ruby snorted, waving a dismissive hand, “Don’t be silly, Pyr! You’re Yang’s partner and bestie- and Jaune’s team-mate. What are friends for, but sleepovers and cool parties?” As they both settled out to plant their things in Ruby’s room, her gaze turned out the door towards the downstairs, where she hadn’t yet heard raised voices, so she could only presume that Yang’s talk with their father wasn’t going poorly.
“Do you… think your father will be upset?” She asked, before noting Ruby’s confused look, “About- the both of you dating Jaune.”

Silver eyes darted away for a moment, a flush on the girl’s cheeks even though for all the world she seemed ready to not engage in that conversation. Pyrrha didn’t blame her- it was intimate, after all, and they weren’t -that- good of friends, even if Yang perhaps skewed the idea of just how intimate “girl talk” could tend to be.

“Dad’s a little overprotective, but he’s not unreasonable.” Ruby noted, and Pyrrha could feel the way her maturity level rose just so quickly. “I’m- still not sure how I feel about it-”

Pyrrha didn’t buy that for a second, since Ruby’s lips were curled up into a smile that she couldn’t believe Ruby didn’t feel, and the girl’s cheeks were firmly flushed pink.

“- but I think he’d just want us to be happy. And Jaune makes Yang very happy, you can tell. Holding hands, kissing, it’s . . . cute.”

A tinge of jealousy wormed it’s way into Ruby’s voice then, and Pyrrha could only wonder what it was that enthralled the sisters so with the blonde man. Sure, she saw a great many of his positive qualities, but . . .

Ugh, she was being rude to him again, wasn’t she? He wasn’t even here to defend himself. Ruby had been right to tease her.

“He tries very hard.” She said, instead, being diplomatic. “And that seems to work.”

Ruby nodded in return, “He’s very respectable, if only because of how determined he is. But I imagine anyone who’d worked for a third of their life almost on something would be serious about it.”

Pyrrha had to agree. She and Jaune had that in common, at the very least. She’d started training to become a tournament competitor at about the same age he’d stepped up to become a Huntsman, by his own admission. That had been before her father had died of illness, and before her mother had . . . consumed herself in other pleasures.

Pyrrha was in a better place now, she knew that. Patting down her dress, she noted, “Why don’t
“Sure! Here’s hoping Dad made his special.”

As they stepped into the kitchen from upstairs, it was cause enough for both to pause in the doorway as they spied Yang and the girls’ father gripping each other by the necks, looking in the midst of a tussle while the smell of cooking meat and vegetables filled the air.

“Uh.” Taiyang noted, eloquently, while Yang agreed with a grunt of her own. “Hi, girls. Food’ll be ready in- like- five more minutes. If you want to- freshen up or something- go ahead.”

Pyrrha could only blink as the two promptly resumed their tussling, Yang trying to elbow her father while the blonde man tried to keep her knees and elbows from connecting with vital parts.

She turned her green-eyed gaze upon Ruby, and noticed how the younger girl was already trotting into the living room. I . . . guess that’s normal? Pyrrha noted, before following after the younger sister. It wasn’t her business to presume how the Xiao Long household worked.

Yang alone was confusing enough, thank you very much.

As Ruby flipped on the television in the living room, adjusting the channel a time or two until it cut to a familiar period drama- was that the show Ren and Jaune had been watching? Huh- and she promptly collapsed onto the family couch and got comfortable. The younger sister offering a gleeful grin as she patted the cushion next to her. “Come on and sit, Pyr! They’ll be done being goofy in a few minutes.”

Pyrrha could only shake her head. Ruby would know her family better than she would. Nonetheless, as she swept the skirt of her gown forward and sat next to the dark-haired girl, she felt it only pertinent to ask, “That’s normal, then?”

Ruby nodded in turn, her gaze fixed on the show on the screen for the moment. “Oh yeah. It’s not a day with Dad and Yang in the same room until at least one of them has pulled a sneak attack on the other. If he’s fine enough to horse around, we don’t have to worry about anything right now. Though-” Silver eyes drifted unto her in turn, and a more serious look crossed the little Reaper’s face, “- he’ll probably try to interrogate you a bit, since you’re on the same team as Jaune. Don’t be scared of him or anything- he’s a big softie at heart. Besides, if he bothers you too much, he knows me and Yang’ll put our boots on his butt.”
Pyrrha got the strange feeling that Taiyang Xiao Long was a thoroughly reverent parent, to have raised such spirited- but good- girls. She glanced towards the kitchen, hearing more scuffling and muffled curses before her gaze returned unto the program Ruby was watching.

Patch was interesting.

+x+x+x+

Dinner had been a meat and vegetable stew of some kind with thick noodles that reminded her of home in Mistral. Conversation had been kept light, mostly talking about coursework and how the three- as Taiyang had been careful to involve her in the discussion- were handling life in Vale. Yang talked about their girl’s night out, Ruby lamented the heavy amount of exams they’d just been through- which Pyrrha had agreed to with a groan, while Taiyang had simply looked amused- and then things had broken off into talk of what they could do while in Patch until the coming Sunday when they’d have to return to Beacon to be ready for the new semester.

Taiyang had suggested training, which she had privately agreed upon, but Yang and Ruby had whined at the idea of their time off being used for training when they’d just be leaping right back into combat classes and the like. Pyrrha could only giggle at how alike the two sisters could be when it came to it.

“Are you going to call Jaune at all while we’re here?” She’d asked Yang, more out of curiosity’s sake than anything else.

Yang cut her eyes towards the girls’ father, but shook her head. “Not really. With him back in Ansel, he’s probably out of range. Plus, he’s with Blake. He’ll be fine.” Pyrrha amused herself with the careful choice of words there.

“Ansel? That’s quite a bit more inland. He’s from there?” Taiyang slipped into the conversation, arms leaned on the table and his knuckles knitted together while he looked towards Yang, who nodded in turn.

“He’s supposedly a big deal in Sanus. He and his family.” Pyrrha felt that Yang was trying to underplay it now that she actually knew more about her boyfriend, and a small glance at Ruby showcased that the girl was a bit more leery of cutting in herself.
“Family, huh. What’s his last name?” Pyrrha could recognize the naked inquisitiveness for what it was- a protective father. Though, even she was feeling that the conversation was about to become a lot more awkward, and it made her wince.

“. . . Arc.” Yang noted, a brave face on, while Taiyang leaned back a bit, eyes a bit more wide.

“Well, that explains a lot, actually. Roux and Nevena Arc’s son, I take it?” When Yang nodded in turn, Taiyang let loose a laugh. “Well, hey, that’s pretty wild. I met his mom once. Real bundle of fire-dust.”

That drew her attention- along with apparently Ruby and Yang’s. All three of the girls were now staring at the Xiao Long patriarch. “You met Mama Arc?” Ruby asked, unable to hide her surprise. Taiyang’s bright grin and a shrug of his shoulders were soon followed by easygoing words.

“Sure did. Hard not to notice the blonde in a dress trashing a pub crawl with her fists like that. Qrow and I went for a drink while we were in Vale a little bit before I settled out in Patch. We got dragged into the fighting and I’m pretty sure none of us knew what was going on anymore.”

Pyrrha was pretty sure she could hear the collective blink at the idea of the stately Lady Arc trashing a strip through the city of Vale on a bender. And yet, frankly, it just seemed . . . sensible. Like Taiyang would never lie about something so audacious. “Mama Arc, though, I take it you met her?”

Ruby nodded in turn, “She’s cool! All motherly, and noble, and she has a really cool gun. She promised me cookies.”

Taiyang snorted, but nodded his head. “Sounds like. I only met her the one time, but any woman like that either settles down after marriage, or she runs roughshod over the entire family.”

Yang looked at her, and Pyrrha could only return the blonde’s nervous grin with a shrug.

“Explains a lot why he’d date you, though, Yang. You must remind him an awful lot of his mom.”

“And he reminds her and awful lot of you, Mr. Xiao Long.” Pyrrha noted, earning a gasp of betrayal from Yang. Though, when Taiyang turned a curious eye unto her, the redhead felt it was
only fair she got a little payback for her partner’s commonly teasing nature. Digging her Scroll free from her gown, she began to idly slip through it’s menus until she pulled up a more recent photo of the entirety of the two teams. Poised in the center was Jaune and Ruby, with the younger girl hanging off the tall blonde man’s shoulders and seemingly kicking her legs to get away from Weiss. At Jaune’s side stood Yang, a hand in one of his while the man’s other braced Ruby’s arms against his chest. Blake looked austere behind Yang, but with a soft smile that could be seen if one looked at her for longer than a few seconds, while Pyrrha herself was just next to Blake, a smile on her features.

In comparison, Weiss was stood with one hand cocked on a hip and the other pointing imperiously at Ruby while Ren stood within frame, looking quietly amused. The taker of the photo was obvious, from Nora making a peace-sign just in the corner of the photo. It was taken the day of the Food Fight, after they’d all changed into their combat attire and out of their ruined uniforms.

She offered her Scroll to Taiyang, letting him see the photo in its entirety. “The blonde there is Jaune. As you can see, he shares some similarities with yourself.”

The older man snorted out a laugh, and turned his gaze unto Yang, who by this point was blushing as red as a tomato, while to her side, Ruby whistled innocently. “Tall, blonde, blue-eyes. Yup. That explains a lot, little sun dragon.”

Grumbling, Yang glowered at her- but Pyrrha couldn’t find it in herself to be worried, smiling instead. Taking her Scroll back, she flipped through pictures while the conversation continued in the background of her thoughts.

Their team all sat together, Pyrrha looking a bit bored due to it being history class, though the angle from RWNR’s desk- Nora loved to take candid shots and send them out- showcased Jaune and Yang holding hands with Jaune working on whatever the subject that day must have been, while in comparison Yang was outright dozing. Blake, in comparison, was a little more subtle in the fact that one eye was open and she was about to lean over onto Jaune’s shoulder wholly. The date on the photo said it was before she’d apparently made the decision to enter the metaphorical arena for Jaune’s heart, but even Pyrrha could admit that the two partners had been much closer than the rest of the team had been for a little while.

Another flip and it came across a picture from the Girl’s Night, this one actually taken by Weiss, from the way she sat looking more than a little confused by Ruby’s drunken antics at dinner. In the shot was Pyrrha and Yang, Pyrrha remembering the easy smile that had reached her face while Yang had looked altogether too worried about her little sister being drunk on what ordinarily was a relatively “light” alcohol.

Pyrrha privately hoped Ruby never discovered just how low her tolerance for liquor was.
Another flip brought her to another pleasant picture, this one of Weiss cradling a piece of white material while Ruby and Blake fussed with the Heiress’ ponytail. Sadly, from the look on the two other girls’ faces, they had no clue what they were doing, and Pyrrha remembered Blake stumbling back into the dorm room to pull on Jaune’s sleeve- if she remembered correctly, he’d been doing a report for Professor Mulberry’s class that day- to drag him into helping the Heiress in fixing her hair. Another flip saw the subsequent picture, Jaune looking at peace as he groomed the heiress’ long white hair, while a bright red flush covered her from her forehead all the way to her breast. The piece of white material that she’d been holding in the first picture was strangely missing, but Pyrrha had presumed it to be some kind of skin-care item.

She put the electronic back on standby mode as she let herself phase back into the conversation, feeling a soft smile on her face that wouldn’t leave for the rest of the night.

+x+x+x+

Their first night in Patch together had gone quietly, with the only real disturbance being that Ruby seemingly had tossed and turned until she’d managed to fall asleep herself. Pyrrha had awoken somewhat confused, but had puzzled through the morning- awake much earlier than she’d gotten used to in the dorm. The sight of the coming dawn through Ruby’s window made her shake her head, slipping from the bed and gathering a change of clothes alongside a towel before making her way as quietly down the stairs as she could.

As she was about to turn to go towards the bathroom, a soft voice drew her attention to the kitchen, “Oh, you’re up, Miss Nikos. Did you sleep well?” She blinked as she spotted Taiyang sat at the table with a cup of coffee in one hand and a somewhat ratty looking sheath of a binder that he seemed to have been reading from before. The smell of baking dough told her that he’d planned a surprise for them- or at least Ruby.

“Yes, thank you.” She decided to be simplistic in response, cradling her things as she took a breath of the scent in the air. Ah, vanilla and chocolate, cookies if she had to take a guess without looking.

“That’s good. Before you step into the shower, since I’m sure the girls will either wake up when they smell these cooking, or sleep in until they’re cool, would you sit with me?” Glancing at the bathroom, she nodded.

“Let me put this down.” She settled her things within the bathroom, washing her mouth since she didn’t feel like leaving the sisters’ father waiting long enough to brush her teeth- but morning breath? She was more refined than that, at the very least. As she sat down at the table, she asked
softly, “What can I do for you, Mister Xiao Long?”

He offered her a light grin, taking a sip from his coffee- the rich caramel color of it telling her that Yang likely learned her preference for how it was served from her father. More cream, milk, and sugar than coffee. “Just Taiyang is fine. You’re my daughter’s partner, and my other daughter’s friend.” She nodded, and he continued, “You’re on the same team as Yang and this Jaune boy, right? What’s your measure of him? I know how my daughters are, and neither of them are dumb- don’t get me wrong- but they’re neither all that gifted with . . . romance.” He winced at the word, and Pyrrha could only raise a brow in return.

Still, she could understand where he was coming from. To speak honestly of Jaune would be . . . difficult for her, but it was for a good cause, in her awareness.

“Jaune is my Team Leader, as you know- so even I have my own bias for him.” Pyrrha noted, making her stance clear from the get go, as she’d learned to do with press releases. “But- if you were to ask me my personal measure of him . . . if you are worried he may hurt your daughters, sir-” She winced a bit, not liking the fact she was about to say something that directly conflicted with- well- how she’d acted towards him, “I wouldn’t worry about that. Jaune is the type who would kill and die for his friends.”

Taiyang’s gaze remained firm on her, and Pyrrha had to wonder if this was what her own father would have been like if he was still around. It was a sobering thought, and yet a strangely comforting one. “Yang likes him a lot.” The man finally spoke, and Pyrrha could only nod. She’d heard directly from Yang’s mouth that it had been a spur of the moment thing. Give him a shot, go on a date with him, have a good time or a bad time, and then just let it all play out.

Her partner had been flippant about the possibility of it getting to be more, even while Pyrrha herself had wanted to shake the girl for being so casual about it. Of course, hindsight was twenty-twenty, and Yang was fairly serious about the blonde man at this point. Serious enough that she’d okayed a foray into other people- though ostensibly Pyrrha understood the simple fact of his family’s thoughts on the matter that allowed Yang to explore her own sexuality in the same breath.

Pyrrha was a perceptive woman- even if it did bring a flush to her features to see Yang look at her the same way she’d look at Jaune when he was a little less dressed before them- and even Pyrrha at her coldest would freely admit that Jaune’s body was a loudspeaker in a quiet room.

“Did Yang . . . tell you?” Pyrrha asked, hoping plausible deniability would shield her if Taiyang had no clue what she was referring to.

“About his family? Yeah. I didn’t know he was Nevena Arc’s son, though. Nobility has always been weird, especially the little nobility that remain in this day and age.” Taiyang waved a hand, and
Pyrrha noted the way his muscles tensed and flexed, alerting her to the thought that Taiyang was definitely the one who had taught Yang her brawler style—though the father seemed to have a much more firm grasp of his technique and flow over his daughter.

She hated when those thoughts filled her head, treating everyone like a potential opponent in a match. It made her pay attention to things that should have just passed through her head unspoken.

“You’re not upset?” She tested the waters.

“Oh, I’m—well—confused, mostly. But, I can’t really do anything until I meet the guy myself. Some dads would just fly off the handle, I’m sure, but Yang and Ruby are both smart girls. If they trust him, he at least deserves a chance to prove himself to me, right?”

Pyrrha nodded her head, understanding at least that much. Taiyang Xiao Long was an interesting man—and a good father. She hadn’t asked about the sisters’ situation, but the lack of a mother around had said enough on its own. That alongside Yang’s seeming need to mother Ruby at times didn’t help.

Pyrrha was a perceptive woman. “Did you want to ask me anything else, Taiyang?”

“Ah, no—sorry for interrupting you. These should be done in about twenty-five minutes, and I’m sure the girls will sleep in if you let them. If you want, we have a big space right next to the house where you can squeeze in some practice—or, if you want, I don’t mind giving you a spar. It might be fun.”

The redhead let her thoughts drift over the notion for a moment, before she turned and nodded her head. “I would like that, Taiyang. I’ve sparred with Yang constantly, but it would be helpful to know what her teacher was like.”

“Sounds like a plan, then. See you outside in fifteen.”

Patch was truly interesting.

+x+x+x+
The spar against Taiyang was wholly different from facing down Yang, in that the older Huntsman was much less predictable than her partner was. That did not, however, tell her much of the nature of the two’s fighting style that she hadn’t already surmised. By the time five minutes had passed, she had worked up a sweat and Yang’s father was looking suitably flustered and worn himself. “Woo! You’re the real deal, aren’t you?” Taiyang remarked, holding up a hand and calling an end to their sparring match. “I haven’t worked that hard in years. I feel like I’m twenty-something again.” Another boisterously loud exhale followed, and Pyrrha relaxed into a more casual stance with Milo and Akouo settled at her hips- but the shield guarding the front while the sword was brought back in readiness for a swing. The simple black pants and red long-sleeve top not her armor, but good enough for the purposes of a spar.

Ruby had already gratefully told her that the father and daughter had a habit of sneak-attacking, after all, so she kept her guard level. “Thank you, Taiyang.” She noted, not meaning to sound stiff-but- well- at least she wasn’t calling him “sir” or something else.

“Phew- nah. Thank you, Pyrrha. A good work out like that is the best thing in the morning, especially before something as carb-heavy as cookies. Come on, why don’t you go wake the girls, and I’ll get them plated up?”

Pyrrha held her gaze on the blonde man for a moment, before nodding and slipping back inside the house as her weapons were returned together and settled upon her bags before she moved over to rouse the drooling Ruby from her slumber. “Ruby. Ruby- hey- your father’s made cookies-”

“COOKIES?!” Well, that was easier than she thought it would be. The sound of a snort and a loud thump from the adjacent room told her that Ruby’s shout had suitably woken up Yang as well.

+x+x+x+

Pyrrha had wondered when Ruby would bring it up, but it’d been almost the whole week until finally the younger sister had called an impromptu “team meeting” in her bedroom in the form of a slumber party. Not that their “vacation” hadn’t already counted as that, as far as Pyrrha was aware, but the difference had been that Ruby had corralled Yang in the room with them both and then proceeded to look altogether too nervous.

“Jaune-- Jaune asked me out.” She and Yang gave one another muted looks, and she got the feeling the message sent was loud and clear. We know. We were there. Of course, Yang had cared more than she had- ostensibly- but as far as most of the group had been concerned, Ruby and Jaune had already been an item of some kind considering how they often hung out and did things most couples WOULD do.
Even Pyrrha had found out about Ruby seducing the blonde male. Frankly, it hadn’t surprised her as much as it apparently surprised the rest of them. Pyrrha and Ruby shared some traits in common, and the redhead could freely admit that if she found someone so immediately for her, she would have thought she’d be much more daring in going after them, as well.

Pyrrha lauded Ruby’s willingness to be brave.

“We kind of already had this talk, sis.” Yang noted, reaching out and tapping her forefinger against the dark-haired girl’s nose, making those silver-eyes cross and a pout come across the younger girl’s features. “So what’s the big deal?”

“The big deal- the big deal is that I want to be a Huntress! We- don’t . . . have time to…” Ruby lost steam nearly as fast as she started to say it, but even Pyrrha raised an eyebrow at that, glancing at Yang. The blonde looked nonplussed, though the redhead wouldn’t have blamed her if she was even a little bit irritated by the thought that warranted.

_We don’t have time to date._ Or, if Pyrrha read into it more, _We shouldn’t waste time with dating._ It could be said to be a noble idea, but it was the kind of self-sacrificing that even Pyrrha couldn’t stomach. She knew the risks of this lifestyle- that most died young. People like Jaune’s family, or Ruby’s family were rare, living into their forties or later. Most died unnatural, painful deaths, and it was that solace that comforted a great many Huntsman into living much faster, much harder lives.

“Ruby.” Pyrrha broke the silence, “If you like him, you should go for it. Yang hasn’t complained, and Blake won’t either. If I had feelings for him, I’d want you to do the same. Life is . . . too short for what ifs, especially as Huntresses. Jaune knows that as well as the rest of us.”

Yang and Ruby’s eyes both settled on her, and she couldn’t help but feel a little bit too much focus was on her once again, but nonetheless, she put her confidence back into the fore. As Ruby let her gaze drift down again, the Mistrali woman gently settled a hand on the younger girl’s shoulder with a smile. “I- just don’t know.” Ruby admitted, appearing uncertain and shy.

Yang, ever one to inject humor, noted, “What, my boyfriend isn’t good enough for you?” Pyrrha could only shake her head at that, amazed at the temerity of the blonde woman.

“No- he’s- he’s great. I just- is it . . . really okay?” Ruby murmured, silver eyes coming up to look between her and Yang. “What if he doesn’t want to be friends anymore?”
She was sure Yang looked just as confused by that as she was. Ruby and Jaune were nigh-on inseparable when allowed to be. They had similar interests, similarly good hearts, and their contrasts only served to make them work harder to be better friends. It was hard to think of the chance that the two could come to loathe one another.

“Sis. Jaune likes you a lot. If you’d asked him to be your boyfriend, you’d be the one vetting all the girls, not me.” Yang admitting that felt like something huge, and Pyrrha couldn’t help but respect the strength it took to be the Yang Xiao Long dating Jaune Arc.

“You both are throwing one another the kind of mixed signals that’d make a TV play two channels at the same time, y’know?”

Pyrrha giggled at the mental image, and she flushed when both of the other girls put their attention on her again. “You know what, P-Money is right. This is way too silly and dramatic. Let’s do something fun. We have to head back to Beacon the day after tomorrow. You can go on your date with lover boy, we can all get back into the swing of things, and then it’ll be time to kick ass at the Vytal Tournament! That’s something to be pumped about, right? I don’t know about you girls, but I know I’m hyped to take home the cup!”

“I don’t think there is a cup.” Pyrrha noted.

“Who cares!”
Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Summary

AN: 100k Words HYPE! That said, I’ve opened a Patreon for those of you who might be willing to support me and help me deal with bills and such- I’d appreciate any of you who do chip in, but in no way will I be gating any of my written content behind Patreon. And, as with CyanideSins and NoOne, people are welcome to poke me on Discord as well- though I don’t see myself getting a following severe enough to make a server all of my own for it. For those of you willing to be charitable, you can patronize me at patreon.com/user?u=26216212 Bonus: For the Jade encounters, for maximum emotional moment music, listen to Final Fantasy X’s Wandering Flame.

A Family Arc

Chapter Eighteen
Feline Love; The Girl Who Sold The World

The trip on the Bullhead, as long as it was, was made more comfortable by Blake’s presence. He’d dressed down a bit in favor of a more simplistic shirt and vest combo without the usual tie or jacket, keeping his gloves and greaves on in case. Blake had settled for a purple button-up blouse and ruffled black skirt that he’d complimented her on, earning a light little smile and yet another “Thank Weiss.”

It was strange to consider that Blake and Weiss had become something akin to friends. After all, one was the heiress to one of the greatest “devils” amidst the Faunus population, and the other was essentially the Princess of Menagerie and a former White Fang member. Granted, here he was, sat on an aircraft heading home to introduce her to his family as- well- a potential Lady Arc.

The world was a strange place.

“So you have seven sisters,” Blake’s voice drew his ears, and his eyes settled on hers. “Which of them still stay at your parents’ home?” Jaune leaned back a bit in his seat on the aircraft, letting his thumb trace idly over the Faunus’ knuckles- igniting a soft pink on her cheeks while he thought.

“Well, Camillia is still in Mistral, and won’t be around until the Vytal Festival, when she said she’d come to see us for the tournament. Saphron lives in Argus with her wife, and Violette stays there with her. So, Jade, Bleu and Azula, and Peri.” His attention remained on her face, so he noted how some of that flush died away when he said Jade’s name. A raised brow made her clear her throat.

“I see. And then your mother and father.”

“Mmm. Mom will probably meet us at the landing pad, and then we’ll take the family car back
Blake paused for a moment, his eyes noting how her feline ears pinned back slightly. “Do you think this was wise?” She asked, and he could only give her an amused smile.

“It’s kind of late for second thoughts now, we’re half-way there.” The worried look on her face made him soften back down, leaning over to press a soft kiss to her lips that was returned after a moment, her free hand coming up to brush against his cheek in turn.

“Blake, it’ll be okay.” He uttered softly as their kiss broke. “There’s nothing to worry about. Unless you’re afraid of dying by embarrassment, anyway- but if that’s the case, we both have to worry about that.”

The curious look she gave him was darling, and he couldn’t help but snicker. “Trust me. If you thought Mom was interesting before, now she has an excuse- and my sisters? Ugh.” Despite how he tried to sound exasperated, he couldn’t hide how excited he was to go home and see his family again. That Blake was coming along was a sweet dessert to go with it all.

It gave him time to get to know her further, especially now that she’d- well- made obvious her intent. Still kind of reeling from that, if he was honest. That said, they still had another hour or two until they’d land, so he settled back a bit more in his seat and let his head lilt a bit towards hers. With his hand in Blake’s, and the slight discomfort of his stomach being eased by the medicine, he could only hope a nap might come regardless of how unlikely it seemed.

He felt the weight of her own head resting against his, and her ears perking against his scalp. Gently nuzzling her face and head against his, he let his eyes drift closed as her throat let out a soft little purr that lulled him.

He didn’t know how, but he fell asleep there. And when he awoke, it was with a slightly sore neck, but feeling better than he cared to admit to as they pulled in to land. They grabbed their bags and stepped forth from the craft, their weapons secured, he let his gaze settle across the airfield attached to the regimental levy base that had been a part of Ansel since the days of his great-great-grandfather. While others disembarked, he spied a familiar shade of gold and reached over to offer a hand to Blake- which she took- before he paced himself towards his mother.

As he drew closer, he spotted the fact she was not alone. A light smile settled on his face, while he turned his head slightly so he could speak more clearly to Blake without breaking his stride. “Bleu and Azula, in the blue clothes. The one with the curls is Bleu, the one with the straight hair is Azula.” Her amber eyes settled upon him, and he offered a light and- he hoped- reassuring smile to her before putting his eyes forward unto the collection of gold and blue awaiting them both.

True to form, his mother was adorned in a more complementary creme-colored shirt and a champagne-gold skirt as opposed to the dress she loved on hot summer days, with L’Belle d’Revolution stuck fast in its shoulder holster and no hat to stand in the way of the waterfall of golden waves that showed her pride as the Arc matriarch. At her sides stood one each of the twins, Bleu with her curls tucked high into a ponytail and in a floral-patterned dress with a more conscious revolver at her belt, and Azula with her hair free but in a set of jeans and a deeper blue blouse. As he stepped within notice of his mother and sisters, he paused to give Blake a moment to stand beside him and then dipped low in a bow.

With one hand in Blake’s and the other holding his bags, it would have to just be a bit of a faux pas. “Lady Arc.” He noted, gamely, with a smile while he watched in his peripheral view as Blake
curtseyed a bit stiffly- but well enough that he was glad she knew what to do. Before he could address his sisters, he was darted past and left bewildered while his mother seized up Blake and basically tore her from his hand.

The tight squeeze Nevena Arc put Blake into looked fit to raise PTSD flashbacks, from what he’d seen of Kali Belladonna. And as Blake seemed to cry for help with her eyes, he could only let loose a light grin. “Look at you, already making such progress! I shouldn’t have discounted you. The first one to visit! Why, I’m so elated we’ll -have- to have a party before you two go back to Beacon.”

“Mom, Blake can’t breathe.” Jaune noted, watching as his girlfriend panted for air after Nevena Arc’s (egregiously) strong arms unwound from around her while his mother laughed gleefully.

“Oh, pardon me, dear. I always forget my own strength. Bleu, Azula, are you just going to stand there gawping or are you going to introduce yourselves?” His mother turned to his sisters and gently clapped her palms, leading to the two other blondes stepping forward with an amused air to them both. As they curtseyed in turn, Blake replicated the movement with a bit more stiffness- though privately Jaune blamed that one more on his mother’s tendency to pulverize joints with her hugs.

That was privately why it was a good thing she didn’t tend to be a hugger, preferring to look the part of the austere Lady Arc. It was a display of how emotional she’d gotten that she’d done something so “crass”.

“Bleu Arc-”

“Azula Arc-”

“And it’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss Belladonna.” Matching smiles plastered matching faces, and Jaune could only shake his head at how Blake look mystified by the two. It was a reaction many had to the Twins, and never once did he blame anyone for it. The girls had delighted in such nonsense, and the only reason it ever became easy to tell the two apart was because they had such different interests in hair-care.

“Thank you all, I apologize for giving such short notice-” Blake winced a bit as she spoke, “But Lady Arc did give an open invitation, and with-” His eyes drifted towards his mother, watching her purposefully as Blake moved onwards in her speech, “- my new relationship with Sir Arc, I thought it agreeable that we spend more time together.” It was a bit stiff, but that was to be expected from someone who had probably- at best- asked Weiss for a few tips on how to approach high society elements. If Blake wanted to learn, he would help her- but he also wasn’t going to push any of them into -that- boring arena.

Politics sucked, there was no getting around that fact of life.

"Come, let's get back to the house. You must both be tired from such a long flight, and we've got dinner prepared.” Nevena gleefully noted, beginning to turn towards a black matte limousine. Pleased, Jaune scooped up his bags and helped Blake with her own, offering her a light smile when she gave him a confused look in turn. “Go ahead. I’ll take care of the luggage.”

“Are you sure?” He had the feeling that she was a bit less keen on spending time alone with his mother and sisters rather than questioning his chivalry, so he nodded.

“They won’t bite. I’ll be right behind you.”
With the boot of the car loaded with their things, he piled into the limousine after his family and Blake, seating himself on the back “couch” seat with Blake between him and his mother, while Bleu and Azula took up flanking seats towards the front. His gaze swept forward unto the back of their driver’s head, noting the salt-and-pepper gray of one of the manor’s staff. “Hello, Henri. How is your grand-daughter?” He asked, remembering the little bundle of joy that had been a recent arrival shortly before he’d left for Beacon. The older man turned his head, offering a light smile past a beard full of similarly white and gray hair.

“Well, sir. Thank you for asking. Welcome home.”

He bowed his head in turn, and then let his focus go back away from the man so he could focus. Bleu and Azula were on their Scrolls for the moment- likely making arrangements of their own if he knew the “busy socialite” lifestyles they loved to portray.

His attention moved unto his mother next, admiring her poise as the car shuttered off and the trip through Ansel proper began. The town wasn’t quite the bastion of humanity that Vale or the other great cities were, but it was a place that had been able to thrive despite the Grimm and Bandits- partially due to his family lineage itself. The heavy Faunus population was, after all, easily accredited to his grandfather’s actions.

“So, dear,” Jaune sat up a bit more straight, seeing his mother’s green eyes settled unto him past Blake, who looked a little uncomfortable. His hand snuck unto her’s, and gently wound his fingers with her’s- earning a slight flush and a somewhat easier- if still small- smile. “It seems you took my teasing to heart.”

He could feel his face melt into a look of wry amusement. “It wasn’t my idea at all.” He noted, glancing meaningfully towards Blake, who simply moved a shoulder up in a shrug. “But, yes, I did. . . get a few thoughts about it. I’m blessed that the girls see something in me worth giving a chance.”

Blake raised a brow at him, and he offered her another light smile. Finally, the Faunus spoke up. “You caused quite the stir, Lady Arc.” He watched as her amber eyes turned away from him, towards his mother. His attention diverted unto his twin sisters, Bleu and Azula finally putting up their Scrolls.

“What did Mother do?” Bleu asked, affecting the appearance of the well-to-do Lady, while her sister gave an amused snort.

“You know what she did. She only does it for every girl Jaune looks at for more than five seconds.” Jaune flushed, unable to deny his mother’s proclivities. Nonetheless, his eyes drifted unto his mother again, seeing past her how the military complex wore away into the pleasant drive into the Arc manor grounds.

“If it worked this time, we can only hope it means you’ll not make a mess of it, won’t we, my little sunbeam?” Nevena Arc’s face was a masterpiece in a mother’s amused stare, and he could only shake his head. This was his mother, through and through. Regal and purposeful, but always keen on causing the next big mess in her children’s lives- always out of love, he knew.

“Yang and Blake have been nothing but good to me.” Jaune huffed. Blake shot him another curious look, but he squeezed her hand, hoping she understood the message of not in front of them.

“This will be my first time in Ansel,” Blake noted, an attempt to divert the subject that he was
grateful for. “I should thank you all for hosting my parents, as well.”

“Oh, don’t be silly, dear. They were a delight to host, and Jade was so pleased to keep them company.” Nevena waved a dismissive hand, and Jaune took note of Blake’s slight twitch of her feline ears and her lips. Every time Jade came up, Blake had a reaction, and it was starting to . . .

Make him curious.

“Hopefully, the next time they visit, will be for your wedding-” He let his eyes close at that, shoulders slumping a bit. Yep, he’d expected that. And from the tensing of Blake’s hand against his own, she’d been shocked by it as well.

“That’s- a bit too sudden, Lady Arc.” Blake was at least diplomatic about it. Praise be for small mercies. “Though, I’m- happy that you think I’m worthy of your son.”

His eyes opened again, settling on Blake’s flushed face. He could only shake his head with a soft little laugh. “It is.” Nevena agreed, “But you are much more proactive than the other girls, so I can only be pleased with you. I had high hopes for Miss Schnee, and certainly Miss Rose must have wormed around quite a bit from what my little sunbeam has said, but for you to come with him home, when you certainly could have returned to Menagerie or stayed in Beacon? You’re serious about him, aren’t you?”

That had been on his mind, he’d admit. Though he was going to try and be gentle about giving Blake time and space to tell him more about herself- and explain her motives. Her attention turned onto his face in turn and he blinked at her seemingly mild look- though he saw the way her eyes glinted and her ears perked.

“I would like him to be the one I marry someday, yes.” He choked on air, and soon was left flushing while his sisters nearby laughed themselves metaphorically sick.

Nevena Arc, however, only smiled indulgently. “Do you love him? Or do you love what he can do for you?” And just like that, his sisters’ laughter died an ignoble death and he let his gaze trail away. His mother had always been a straight-shooter, in all of the forms of the words. He didn’t see Blake’s physical reaction, but he heard her all the same.

“I cannot say it’s love yet.” Blake noted, “But . . . he has done something for me that no one else has before. And I admit, when we first met, I hinged our relationship on his family history, but by now I’ve come to appreciate him for at least what I’ve learned about him.”

It wasn’t quite the perfect answer he was sure his mother would have liked, but as he looked at her through the reflection of the glass, his mother turned her attention back forward with a soft smile. “Well, that’s just fine,” The Arc matriarch noted, “Love takes time to grow, after all. And my son is in quite the garden for it to do so.”

His mother’s words were the last spoken as they pulled into the drive of the Maison d’Arc. Blake’s attention was drawn to the sight of the immense manor, and Jaune could only nod at her when her lips pursed and a soft little sigh of surprise came free from her.

In another world, it would have been described as a Victorian chateau, two floors tall and with a great ballroom attached to one wall. The brickwork and soft gray that a good portion of it had been painted gave it a gentle pallor in the evening light, and the steeples that formed it’s attic-space had been flitted into by every Arc child when they had inevitably played more active games such as tag.
and hide-and-seek. Many of his childhood memories came from this place, and he hoped that the house would stand the test of time long into his own children and grandchildren’s times.

As they pulled up to the walkway, he waited obediently for the three staff waiting to greet them to open the door before he slipped free from the limo, nodding his head in greeting to the two maids and the younger looking butler as they stepped around to see to his and Blake’s things. As Nevena pulled free from the vehicle after his sisters and Blake had stepped out, she directed, “See the young sir and his ladys’ things to his room, and make sure dinner is ready within the hour. My husband is in his study?” She asked of the older maid- a gray-haired woman who now that he had met her- reminded him of Glynda Goodwitch with her stern and officious air.

Arielle, her name was, he believed, Arielle d’Aubney. One of his tutors in table-manners when he’d been younger. So many memories were in this place, as he offered Blake a hand once again, and glanced to her with a wry grin which she returned with a more nervous stare, her ears flicking this way and that.

He didn’t blame her for her nerves, it was a very new experience for her- and he knew he’d be along with her every step of the way. As he followed his mother and sisters into the house, he guided Blake up through the small garden between the drive and the house. “I’m sorry,” He heard her utter, “I should have been more prepared.”

Jaune shook his head. “You couldn’t have prepared yourself for this, Blake. Just try to relax. Think of it as your home away from home for the week. We’re here to relax, after all.”

For as much as one could relax in the ancestral Arc home, that was. He knew very well that relaxation wasn’t often the first thing that occurred within its hallowed walls.

+x+x+x+

After having led Blake to his room and showcasing its place in the manor- on the second floor and in the west wing, just across the hall from Violett’s old room and shared with Camillia and Peri’s rooms, he’d led her back out towards the foyer, and ran into someone whom he’d had to think about more here recently.

Standing, leaned against the bannister above the foyer, Jade Arc was resplendent in a riding habit of green and gold. Her shorn short straw-blonde hair ruffling outwards from her face in its stylized state. Though, when her blue gaze moved from him unto Blake, she froze in place. The world seemed to drag on for her, and Jaune watched as something he’d never imagined occurred.

Jade Arc began to cry.

The indomitable, willful, powerful sister he’d always seen dominate conversations and inspire countless people to listen to her whims whether she was leading them into metaphorical hell- bawled and slumped down unto her knees, her elegant equestrian dress pooling around her hips. Shocked, his attention jumped between his sister and Blake-

-who stood there, looking caught between flight and inability to respond. And that was when he heard it. The soft, defeated little-

“I’m sorry.” His eyes once again firmed on his sister’s slumped form, her head bowed in what he could only describe as pained defeat. “I should have- I could have-” She blabbered, and he started to step away from his girlfriend-
-only for Blake to do so before him, kneeling with the green-wearing woman and entrapping her in her arms. Despite himself, Jaune could only watch as Jade buried her tears in the faunus’ shoulder and he could only watch as something beyond him occured.

For as odd as it was, he felt like an outsider to a moment he had no good reason to witness. What had his sister done that had made her lose that powerful mask he’d seen her wear so? That had affected her so deeply simply upon seeing Blake Belladonna?

He couldn’t ask just then, either. He could only step forward and offer what little comfort he could as he saw tears slip from those amber eyes that entranced him so.

As he bundled both women into his arms in the soft evening sun’s glow, he wished he knew what he could do. As the breeze outside blew across the windows, Jaune felt as if the world for the Arcs had changed once again.

+x+x+x+

Despite his desire to know, the moment had ended with the call for the family to come to dinner, and he’d been trapped in the social niceties of introducing Blake to the rest of his family. His father had given him a light raise of his fiery red brow, and Peri had offered a smile and an adjustment of her glasses as they’d all settled down for hunted game- elk if he was to guess- alongside steamed vegetables and honeyed bread. Blake had been sat to his right, and they’d been seated across from his sisters while his mother and father shared one end of the table that had once seated the whole family.

He wondered how they’d done, splintered as they were. With Camillia in Mistral, doing her work while Saphron and Violett were in Argus, living a life separate from the society that had been formed there since the days of the King of Vale. If it was as sad as he felt it ought to seem.

Not that his parents would ever put forth such an air. Roux Arc, in all his austerity, only spoke occasionally, while his wife dominated most of the dinner table grace and conversation, with his sisters slipping in light teasing and the occasional discussion of things more light in heart. Peri with her talk of Ansel’s stables, animal needs, and the like; the Twins with their discussions of the morning’s hunt- the elk he’d assumed correctly now on the dinner table; and Jade’s half-hearted attempts to speak about some of her dealings with connections in Atlas, he could only feel a certain stiffness.

Blake’s presence was his only comfort for the time, and even she seemed to be languishing in memories of her own. It was only when her hand once again found his that he could say that he knew she existed in that moment.

Something they’d have to share together, along with the bed that had been his up until his journey to Beacon.

The thought should have excited him, and yet instead, he worried that there would be no comfort between them tonight. Only questions, and an awareness that, for all they wanted to make it work- he and Blake were still young, and learning what love was. One painful step at a time.

As evening turned into night, he found himself once again upon the balcony at the back of the ballroom, leaned up against the bannister and gazing out across the fields that fed Ansel’s people
when the local fauna could not. The soft scraping of the door alerted him to company, and he turned his head to spy Jade wearing a more casual outfit of a long-sleeved sweater and a pair of jeans alongside her house shoes.

He acknowledged his sister, turning to press his back against the stonework and folding his arms across his chest as she stepped in closer. “You brought her here,” Jade noted, “Why?”

“She wanted to come.” He could only answer with the truth. It was all he had in the moment. As Jade stepped in closer, an accusing finger poked against his breast.

“How can I face her? After what I’ve done?”

“And what did you do, Jade?” He asked, unable to help the way his voice hardened- and not feeling very guilty when she stepped back again as if struck. He watched as emotions played across his sister’s face, even as behind her, he saw Blake’s shadow leaning in the frame of the door. He wouldn’t draw attention to the Faunus, however- she could do so if she felt like it.

This was something that involved her, but he did not yet know what had led to that moment upon the walkway outside of his room. “I…” His eyes settled upon Jade again, watching as her own lighter blue eyes closed and tears threatened to spill again. “I’m the source of her pain. Of so many Faunus’ pain and struggle. If- If I had been smarter, if I had-”

His hand reached out, gloved fingers brushing away tear-trails as they came. “Jade,” He mused, “Whatever you did is in the past. And it’s eating you up inside- you’re already crying again. You never cry. You’re Jade Arc. I’ve never seen you this upset before today.”

“I… I loved him.” Jaune felt as struck as he must have looked, from Jade’s uncomfortable little snort. “He was my friend, and I… I just wanted to help. I lifted him up when the world had put him down, I put the weapons in his hands, and he handed them to Sienna Khan.”

That was when things started to make sense. Sienna Khan, the leader of the modern day White Fang.

“Him?” He asked, nonetheless.

“Adam.” The name drew a flinch from Blake, still a shadow in the light coming from the ballroom itself. “I found him when he’d escaped from the Schnee Dust mines, when we were young. He was hurt, and confused, I couldn’t just leave him there. I thought I could change him, I thought that I could make it all -better-.”

Adam. Adam Taurus? Blake and Jade were connected to that name, though it didn’t mean much to him. A White Fang member of some breed, he could guess.

“I’d- Jaune…” Jade’s eyes settled on him again, and he saw a haunted look on his sister’s face, one that wouldn’t have been out of place on Camillia Arc’s face instead. “All I’d ever wanted was to help make Remnant a better place- I thought if the White Fang could protect the Faunus, it’d make the rest of the world -see- what it was doing, but…”

His eyes closed, and the world sharpened to his other senses. The wind blowing through the trees, the cool stone pressing against his back again. His sister’s struggle to speak through the sobs threatening to break free.
“All I did was make a peaceful organization into a terrorist militia. I helped ruin the Belladonna’s dream of a world of equality and peace, by putting guns in the hands of people who would listen to the words I put in Adam Taurus’ mouth.”

He wanted to insist that it couldn’t lay on Jade’s shoulders- that countless other people had helped to make such a grandiose mistake, but . . .

He knew it wouldn’t do any good. Jade wouldn’t hear those words, wouldn’t believe them. This was her burden to bear, and only when she saw it lifted would it ever stop being the weight she’d put upon herself.

He understood all too well. They were both children of the House of Arc, after all. Finally, he leaned away from the bannister again and let his eyes turn over Jade’s shoulder towards Blake, noting how she had long since begun to stare at her hands in front of her skirt. His gaze moved from his girlfriend unto his sister, and he said the one thing he could say.

“You’re my sister. For good or ill, and what you’ve done is only what you thought was right.” It was diplomacy at its finest, but even still, he knew it was empty air at best. He couldn’t know, couldn’t understand. All he could do was be her little brother. “And Blake seems to have forgiven you.”

The Faunus’ eyes rose, and he saw how Blake’s eyes gleamed in the light, the night-vision attributed to the whole of the race on full display as Jade finally noted his own stare, and turned. Her fists tightened at her sides, and he could only feel his jaw tighten as the two women stared at one another, the only music to accompany the moment coming from the world around them.

An unnatural, empty silence strung along with the breeze blowing notes through the leaves of trees, and his own weak heart pounding the soft little drum beat.

“Adam was my mentor- and boyfriend, for a time.” Blake spoke, so softly that he heard her only because she seemed to be purposefully directing her voice towards him and Jade. The facts of the matter shook him, and he could only begin to parse it all as she continued, “Everything he ever said just sounded right to me. That humans would never respect us unless we made them do so. At first, I loved him so much that I was willing to do anything, and then . . .”

Then he’d done something that Blake couldn’t accept- and she’d run. And that’s how she’d wound up at Beacon, huh?

Jaune could see it happening. It was, after all, exactly what had happened. It didn’t take much to tell him that Adam Taurus was someone he didn’t care about, though.

He’d hurt his sister- and Blake. That was more than enough reason for Jaune to hate him. And he wouldn’t have needed much if it’d just been one or the other.

“I’m sorry.” Jade said again, bowing firmly at the waist and with her hands pressed in tight against her knees, her shoulders shaking. His attention moved from his sister unto Blake, and saw the way the Faunus quaked herself.

“You- it’s not your fault.” Blake noted, and he watched the way those golden glowing eyes stared up towards the crowning stars. “He made the decision to become what he did. I made the decision to stop.” While she’d looked ready to flee earlier, Jaune felt an immense measure of pride as Blake’s face turned back towards him, and he saw a look of strength cross over her face. “Adam chose
hatred and violence. Sometimes, it’s necessary, but you don’t win hearts with a sword.”

He couldn’t help but smile- and when Blake stepped towards him, reaching out a hand, he took it and she drew in close until she leaned in against his chest. Jade watched, and he couldn’t find it in himself to care as he flushed. The faunus’ cat ears tickling his chin as he buried his face in her hair, breathing in deep of the scent of her shampoo and conditioner.

“I made mine.” Blake murmured, and he could only luxuriate in the feeling of warmth those words gave him.

Jade’s easy smile told him that the moment wasn’t just for the two of them, either.

“Just try to keep an arm open for Miss Schnee,” She noted, back to the Jade he knew. “It’d be nice if she could come to be more like us as well. An SDC without its oppressive history would mean a lot, too.”

He nodded his head, though he could only laugh when Blake murmured, “I’m right here, you know.”

+x+x+x+

After that first night, things settled down to a much more mild display. Blake was an affectionate girl when she didn’t have as much weighing on her mind, and Jaune couldn’t deny the pleasure of getting to wake up next to the ravenette. Gentle family breakfasts, getting to show her around the grounds, and even taking her horseback riding alongside Peri. The white mare had earned a suitably amused look from his girlfriend as they’d trotted along down the path through the woods surrounding the Maison d’Arc. With Blake cradled in his arms while he led the horse along, it had been an easy afternoon that had led into a more mild evening, with his mother’s insistence on a hosted party occurring that night.

It was much more muted than he expected it to be, but that hadn’t been a bad thing. Blake had looked a bit confused by traipsing around in a dress, but he had enjoyed the simplistic dance he’d walked her through. The look of easy pleasure on his mother’s face as they’d finished and returned to the dinner table had been a delight all its own.

That night, when they went to bed, Blake drew atop him, and he learned once again that- in comparison with Yang and Ruby- Blake seemed to enjoy a bit more romance in coupling. There was an animalistic desire that burned between them, but it was a side-note to the symphony of their bodies working in tandem to make mutual pleasure.

The look he’d earned in the morning from Peri said they weren’t as quiet as he’d hoped.

Lunch on Wednesday bled into a family gathering in the “teleconference” room, with his mother informing him that Saphron and Violett had been on the line. As he and Blake settled into a couch while his sisters’ fussed on the viewscreen, he watched as Saphron’s eyes darted from Violett fussing with little Adrian towards him and the Faunus.

“Oh, Mom wasn’t lying! You brought a girl home, Jaune!” He could only smile at his sister’s more modern apparel. Life in Argus seemed to agree with her, at the very least. Violett, in comparison, still had some of that trace of Sanus-elite nobility in her garb. The shyest of the Arc sisters was a little more muted, but she seemed in good health-
And considering the circumstances of her leaving Ansel, he could only find comfort in that. “I did.” He turned towards Blake, who had raised a brow in turn, “Blake, this is my other sister, Saphron Cotta-Arc, and Violett. In Violett’s lap is my nephew, Adrian Cotta-Arc.”

Nevena giggled, and he could only smile indulgently at the woman’s pleasure in seeing her grandchild. “Little Adi-bear. Look at him! You really should visit sometime with him and your wife, Saphron.”

The wry look on his sister’s face brought a measure of amusement to the discussion, “Maybe soon. Terra has been really busy lately, and it’s only because of Vi being here that we can have as much time to ourselves as we have.” He understood that. Kids were a big investment, after all. Adrian was darling, and Jaune looked forward to being a father himself someday, but he would never rush things the way Saphron had. She’d been married for all of a year with Terra before talks of a child had come forward.

He didn’t know whom had been entrusted with acting as the surrogate father, but it had hardly mattered from the fact little Adrian completely looked like his mother. He sometimes wondered why it was that Saphron- being the one who rested on her metaphorical laurels- had let Terra be the one to be impregnated.

He could only presume it had to do with Saphron’s own viewpoint, since she was a regular housewife as far as Terra had ever made any of them aware. If he was being mean about it, truly it should have been Saphron who should have birthed little Adrian. But, that was their business, not his.

“How are you, Violett? Argus treating you well?” Roux spoke up for the first time, his blue gaze settled on his daughter dressed in purple, and Jaune was content to let the conversation drift on in the background of his mind. His hand once again sought Blake’s, and when she squeezed his fingers in hers, his lips lighted into a smile.

The world would be a darker place without his family, he knew. And right then, sharing it with a girl he was growing to love, the world felt oh so very bright.

The week passed quicker than he would have liked, and they found themselves on the Bullhead back towards Beacon before he knew it. The dark-haired cat-girl musing as they settled into their seats, “That could have gone so much worse.”

Despite himself, he laughed. “It could have.”
“So,” Blake noted with a wince, “When are you coming to visit my parents?”

And with that, Jaune Arc promptly decided it was much better to try and sleep through the ride back to the school. Though, Blake’s soft snort said that she wasn’t going to hold it against him. So, with a little shrug, he noted- while pretending to sleep-

-”Whenever you want me to.”
Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Summary

Ruby and Jaune finally go on a "Date".

(The end note has the first Lancaster theme, "The First Time").

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN: Patreon@user?u=26216212

A Family Arc

Chapter Nineteen

Slow Dancing

The night of everyone’s return to Beacon had been interesting. They had barely landed before Jaune had been besieged by Yang for a hug and a kiss, and Ruby had given him a hug which he had insisted had easily been on the tier of his mother’s hug.

Blake shuddered at that memory. Nevena Arc’s hugs were no joke- and she was Kali Belladonna’s daughter.

Though, on that thought, she’d asked Jaune to handle getting their things back to the dorm room, and promptly made a trip up to the CCT tower, settling into a console and pressing in the digits for the Belladonna residence in Menagerie. A few light tones followed before her mother once again answered, an amused grin on her face. “Blake! You’ve been plastered all over the news!”

Blake blinked. She hadn’t seen or heard anything, so, “What do you mean?”

Kali stepped away from the viewscreen for a moment, and Blake’s ears perked while she heard her mother fuss about in the background, until the older cat-faunus came back, holding up a heavily
earmarked glossy print magazine. Thrust all across the front was a picture of her and Jaune walking hand in hand towards the limousine back in Ansel, with the Arcs in the background. In bold lettering, it said, The Faunus world’s new power couple, Arc and Belladonna coming together for peace?

Oh great, they were a gossip columnist’s wet dream- and that was before anyone found out about the odd dating situation that would eventually be found out. Blake felt an immense desire to plant her head in the desk of the monitor.

“So how was it?” Kali asked, and Blake could only shake her head, deciding to let it all wash over her. There was no real chance to fuss about it now that it was- well- out in the open.

“Nice. His family is strange, but welcoming. Ansel is- well- very different from Kuo Kuana. Still a lot of Faunus, but the culture there was…”

“Like no one noticed? That makes sense, considering. I imagine there’s probably a few of the Arc’s servants who got these photos-” Kali opened the magazine, showcasing an exceedingly romantic moment where Blake was in Jaune’s arms while they were on horseback out in the woods around the Arc family home. His sister Peri in the periphery of the photo, guiding her own raven black stallion alongside the snow-white mare that Jaune had rode that day.

“That… makes sense.” Blake noted, but couldn’t help but worry. Surely the Arcs would quell anything more intense than a few gossip rags. Perhaps it was allowed out under Nevena Arc’s careful eye- after all, a public display of the two would encourage them to perhaps advance the relationship more?

Blake wasn’t sure she was -that- paranoid. Nonetheless, she had to admit that it -was- how it looked, so she’d have to get a copy of the articles if only so she could see what all had been said about them.

After that, she’d settled into light conversation with her mother, and her father when he came back around.

+x+x+x+

The first morning of the second semester’s classes started with Combat Classes- and a lecture from Glynda Goodwitch about the upcoming Vytal festival and tournament. Jaune was privately excited
for the ball, though for the life of him he wasn’t sure whom he would take as his “primary” date for the evening. Of course he would give a dance to all of his friends, but there was a bit of importance to be placed in such events and who your “date” was.

The only one who hadn’t seemed all that enthused about it was Pyrrha, and he’d felt bad for her, though she’d at least admitted it being more to the fact that she didn’t think she’d find someone to go with.

Jaune privately thought such a thing was insane, but he’d offered her a grin in return. “Anyone would love to go with you Pyrrha. You’re one of the prettiest girls in Beacon, after all.”

Yang had smacked his arm for that, but seeing Pyrrha flush a bit had been worth the light teasing he’d gotten from his blonde girlfriend for it.

He’d enjoyed a spar against Ren that day, with the Mistrali man giving him a bit more of a challenge than he usually dealt with, since Ren-

Well, Ruby’s team-mates all were thoroughly aware of his preference for close combat outside of more “battlefield conditions”-relevant tactics. He couldn’t defeat Ren in full on hand-to-hand combat, but Ren didn’t have the Aura to compete with him in an outright brawl.

The truly interesting match of the day had stayed firmly in the realm of Blake and Yang’s, with the two seemingly playing around for a short time, until Yang had said something that had lit a blush on Blake’s face, and then things had gotten . . .

Interesting.

He never did find out what, but the way the Faunus’ eyes had darted between him and Yang had implied a few things. Nonetheless, as they’d moved on to settle into Professor Mulberry’s class and then lunch, it had felt nice to be back in the swing of things at Beacon once again.

After classes for the day had ended, Jaune had managed to get Ruby alone for a few moments, deciding it was time to make good on the girl’s affections and- well- actually be the proactive one in a relationship for once.

Thankfully, it’d been just outside their dorms, Ruby about to step into Rainbow’s dorm as he’d
called out for her. She’d spun with a room lighting smile, and he found himself smiling in turn.

“Hey, Rubes. I hope you had a good time at Patch. Pyrrha seemed to enjoy herself.” Just a little small talk, just setting the mood and heightening the comfort level. Nice and easy, nothing to fret over, Jaune.

“Yeah. She got along pretty good with Dad.” Jaune had to admit that was a curious thought. What was the sisters’ father like? If he had to take a guess, he’d imagine him to be a fun-loving guy at the very least. Both sisters were, after all, good-natured to a firm degree. “Oh! Speaking of which, Dad wants to meet you soon.”

I’m sure he does. Jaune thought to himself, but he didn’t hold it to a negative. After all, he was dating- his daughters. Even if Ruby didn’t, perhaps, see their relationship as being so advanced. But- well- that was what he was about to put forth.

“Did- you think about what I said before we left? Do you want to do something this weekend?”

Ruby clammed up for a moment, boot-clad foot fussing up the carpet beneath them before her face rose and silver-eyes fixed on his face in turn. Her earlier smile was nothing compared to the sweet, gentle little upturn of her lips that made his heart pound in his chest. “Sure.”

“That’s- that’s great. What do you want to do? Should I make reservations in Vale?” He questioned, and when Ruby shook her head, he tilted his head.

“Let’s do something here!” He nodded to that, seeing the sense in a more muted, casual thing- and knowing how it would appeal to Ruby’s senses.

“It’s a date, then.” He remarked with a grin, “Let’s link up Friday after classes.”

“Yeah! I’ll talk to you later, Jaune. Gotta do leader-y stuff.”

He snorted with amusement, but nodded and leaned forward to press a soft kiss to Ruby’s cheeks, watching them blossom in a color befitting her name before she vanished into RWNR’s dorm and he turned to go into JBPY’s in turn.
The first week of classes had been a short refresher course in most, so it had been a pleasantly lackadaisy period for both teams, and he’d found it to be Friday before he knew it. More periods of Yang and Blake trying- and failing- to stay awake in Professor Port’s class, with him often ending up being the two girls’ impromptu pillow. More calls to be Weiss’ hairdresser when Ruby would inevitably need aid in fluffing and grooming that mane of stark snow white. More of Nora taking idle pictures of the group, and flooding their group chats with them.

More of what he missed, more of what made Beacon feel so amazing every single day.

He found his gloved hand raised, knuckles rapping against RWNR’s door and being greeted by Ruby in that breezy white top and the simple red shorts that was likely one of Ruby’s favorite lounging sets. He offered her a smile while she beamed, and from his back he pulled a tray of wrapped confectionaries that drew her eyes immediately when he unveiled them for her as they stepped into RWNR’s room. His gaze went around, noting Weiss posted up at the dining table with a set of books in front of her and her left hand scribbling away at a report due the next week. Of all the things to admire about Weiss Schnee, her dedication to bettering herself was an immediate one. He greeted her with a smile and a wave, while Ruby led him along to the TV mounted in the “living room” section of the dorm, and promptly had him sit before she settled between his legs while he leaned back against the couch, and they settled into a tale as old as time.

Ruby took a butter-cookie, gleefully grinning as she settled the controller for the sisters’ console in his hand and she encouraged him through the latest challenge in the game they’d nearly through before the semester break had closed out. Her head resting back against his chest, and his arms wrapped around her waist while she chewed her way through the treat he’d brought her.

It was so perfectly Ruby- so like the girl. So much so that it reminded him just how normal this was. For him to play while Ruby “coached”- though many would call it “backseat gaming” more like. The little leader’s enjoyment of a sweet treat and the ease of being with someone reminding him just how much Ruby Rose was a girl who- while shy at heart- truly did make for an excellent friend.

His best friend. A girl who he’d shared so many smiles with, so many fits of laughter. His arms squeezed her tighter, and Ruby nestled in further against his chest. The smell of her cherry and rose shampoo wafting into his nose from their nearness.

Someone else would have said a date should feel more special, more unique, but to him- this was Ruby Rose at her finest. Comfortable, gentle-
They took a break after he finally vanquished their mutual foe, with Weiss finally stepping away from her homework when he stepped into RWNR’s kitchen to make dinner, the snow-haired heiress metaphorically leaning over one shoulder while Ruby bounced on her heels at the other. Jaune enjoyed cooking— even if it was a skill he thought would never see much appreciation for a man. He would never claim to be the best, but both his team and Ruby’s often insisted that some of the best meals they had had come from his hands— often times with Ren’s help.

Serving the two girls— and himself— with a broiled meat dish with vegetables in bechamel, he’d settled at the table with them— with Ruby sat just to his right while Weiss regained her seat at the end of the table— they chatted about inconsequential things. Weiss talking about her time spent with Nora and Ren while they stayed at Beacon, and him listening with an easy air while Ruby occasionally tried to steal an extra bite from his plate.

He indulged her now and then, pretending he didn’t see her fork spear one of his cutlets of meat.

Soon, Weiss left for training with Blake, and the two were left in RWNR’s dorm room alone, Ruby pulling him back over to the couch and making him lay down upon it before she flopped atop him in turn, his arm already adjusting her hand away from the place it wanted to go against the collar of his button-up shirt down into his own with a light air as she used her free hand to turn the television unto a cartoon they both enjoyed. Her head nestled in against his pit, and his other arm draped across her back.

She gave commentary, and he smirked when she would inevitably give the bad guys “bad guy voices” that sounded like Ruby trying to do a baritone— and failing miserably. Ruby hated the cliches, but nonetheless always loved the simplistic shows that didn’t have the gray— the struggles of everyday life. Where villains were villains, and heroes were heroes. It reminded him of a simpler time in his life, before the training with Camillia. When he’d been young and impressionable, before he’d made the decision to become a Huntsman.

It made him feel that youthful gentleness. With Ruby Rose draped across him, and just the comfort of a silly, cliche cartoon that tried to have hidden and deep messages to speak to an older crowd, while it appealed with its colors and noises to a younger crowd.

Before he knew it, the show was over, and Ruby’s lips had lifted on his own. The first of many that always came, her now sure lips pressing against his own. When her hand wound up against his collar again, he let it happen once again, and calloused and scarred digits slipped in and undid the buttons that protected him from the girl’s attention. She touched him without an air of eroticism, finding comfort in the warmth of his flesh and the lines of his muscles. Her face sank in against his chest and her ear pressed in over his heart.
He could feel the soft breath she let out with each time she heard his heart beat with a steady, comfortable rhythm. He knew by then her sterling silver eyes had closed, and if he let her, she would fall asleep like that. The hand that had held hers slipped upwards, raking his nails through her hair through his gloves. A gentle, easy breath had his name come from her lips.

Ruby Rose pressed a kiss to his chest, and he let himself close his eyes in turn.

They dozed like that as the evening sun washed through the dorm from the window, night coming and ushering in a different breed of girl. He awoke to find her lips trailing down his body, and igniting a wholly different reaction. Brushing her nails through his pubic hair, and then engulfing him in those lips that gave such angelic and sweet little kisses. And when he was fully “awake”, she would undress.

And then they would make love. He’d never considered it sex, or even crass fucking- despite how Ruby was easily the most adventurous of his three partners, but Ruby put such a purpose into everything that he could only be swept up in her rhythm.

The soft beats of the night, and the tension that always drained from him when she would lay herself atop him- having moved from the couch to the bedroom where she pulled her covers and pillows down to make a pallet where they could have their tryst.

As they laid there, with Ruby looking up at him from his naked chest, he was awash with that feeling that had burned in his heart since the first time Ruby Rose had dared to tell him how special he made her feel.

And, in turn, how he’d yet to tell her how special she made -him- feel.

“Ruby.”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

And, with those three words, Ruby Rose turned a deep and colorful red that matched the color of
her cloak. Her lips, pursed and unsure, came apart.

“I love you too.”

And like that, things changed forever for Jaune Arc and Ruby Rose. Uncertainty dripped off of the little reaper’s face as she came forward again for a kiss less comfortable and more -aware-. More accepting of the facts as they were.

As he shifted their positions to put himself above her, there was a different breed to the way she shifted her legs open and he once again found himself pushing into her with a comfort born of two young lovers who knew everything about one another. When his hips rocked for the first time, Ruby whimpered in that way that made his heart soar with delight. When she nipped at his neck, he angled his head to let her leave a mark on him that wouldn’t go away for an hour.

Her fingers would trail through his hair, and she’d husk out breathily.

“I love you.”

But it had never been those words.

Those three wonderful words that made his heart ache. And, despite himself, he treated her like a fragile pane of stained glass. Nurtured deep within them both, but without yet being given wings to fly. “I love you too.” He uttered with a throat too tight, with breaths too weak. Infirm movements brought them both to completion, and for the first time-

He stared into her eyes as they reached climax together, her hands cradling his face and the world seemed to only consist of that one moment together.

Affection made continuing easy. There was no need to rush, no need to fuss or fight over sensitivity- only the steadiness of touch and the comfort of lips trilling against one another. Of her soft, yet trained, body pressed in against his own scarred form, of a young woman experiencing the true difference between sex and making love.

Of feelings realized, and acknowledged- allowed to build and burn freely from within the little cage that was called uncertainty. The brush of his fingers against her breast earning a soft little breath, her lips sinking in against the flesh of his shoulder followed by her teeth ushering forth a
groan from within his chest, the stirrings of a body not willing to give up the fight when the battle wasn’t yet won telling him that Jaune Arc would stand and deliver once again.

They were warriors, a whole different caste from the rest. In that moment, however, they were just two young adults relearning what they’d already committed to memory. The way she giggled when his lips tickled at her throat, the tightness in his chest when her hands would press against it, the feeling of her toes tickling across the back of his knees.

Sensations old, but yet again so new. He’d compared his time with her to his time with Yang and Blake, but the truth was simply that there was no real comparison.

Ruby Rose was Ruby Rose, and he loved her in a wholly different way than he loved her sister or his partner. And that was just fine.

+*+*+*+*+*+

They stepped back out of the bedroom a short while later, with the rest of her team already back, with Weiss playing a card game of some kind with Ren and Nora- much to Nora’s consternation since she seemed to have an unenviable ability to fail miserably at winning in cards against her boyfriend and her snow-haired friend. Ren offered him a smile, and Jaune offered his knuckles to bump, and as they settled in at the table to be ante’d in, Jaune offered a light smile while Ruby turned in her seat and leaned her back against his side, silver-eyes studying her own cards.

He played a few hands, returning the playing chips back to equilibrium by virtue of careful bets and control of who was meted with what, leaving Weiss pouting when he had to stand from the table and divvied his winnings so far back out to the table at large.

Nora grinned triumphantly, Ren simply acknowledged his “charity” with a mild smile, and Ruby gave him a kiss and a hug before he walked to the door. “This was nice.” She noted, and Jaune could only agree.

It was a very good date.

The rest of her team bid their farewells, Weiss seeming comfortable with him now was a blessing he could appreciate, and so he stepped out and then into Team JBPY’s dorm with a comfortable air. Yang and Blake were sat upon the couch, with Pyrrha stretched out in the sole chair, once again dozing.
“Training?” He asked of his two “conscious” team-mates, and Blake’s immediate flush told him that he’d missed something, but he’d allow it to come in its own time. Yang looked up with a grin from the “noise program”, and promptly pat the cushion next to her.

“Yeah. You know how P-Money is. She even sparred with Dad while we were in Patch.”

“Ruby told me.” He remarked, settling into the couch and not feeling bothered at all when Yang slumped in against him- the blonde woman pulling Blake in against her and thus crushing him metaphorically under the weight of the two women. Despite how he should have found it uncomfortable, it was pleasant.

“Yeah? You smell just like her. Enjoy your date?”

He smiled, and nodded. That seemed to assuage his girlfriend’s thoughts, and so they settled into the comfort of a Friday evening together. Yawns coming from Blake and Yang shortly after Yang’s show had gone off the air.

“You girls go get ready for bed. I’ll help Pyrrha to the bedroom.” As the blonde and ravenette portions of his team went to clean up and dress down for the evening, he took in the state of the redhead. Already basically asleep- but probably likely to wake up if he went and put his arms around her.

Stooping a bit, he noted, “Gonna pick you up, Pyrrha. You should sleep in bed.” A drowsy little grunt answered him, and he took it as an affirmative as he hooked one arm under her knees and the other under the curl of her back. It took a little maneuvering to get her tall form through the frame, but he slipped her unto her bed. Then, carefully, he pulled her heeled boots from her feet along with her greaves and then the tiara that would have otherwise tangled in her lovely crimson hair. As she nestled into her covers and pillow, he knew the smile from earlier hadn’t left his lips.

“Good night, Pyrrha.”

“Mfnight, Hauen.”

Rather than awaken her with a laugh, he pushed it back down into his chest and went to return to the bathroom, stopped in the doorway by Yang, whose grin looked perfectly like the cat who had gotten the catch of the day. Powerful arms wrapped around him, and he returned her hug with an
ease born of comfort and feelings that had expressed themselves profoundly.

“Sleepin’ beauty in bed, Blake’s in the shower. You gonna peek?” The blonde woman asked, and Jaune- for a moment- considered it. He’d seen the Faunus naked and in a much more intimate way, after all. “Naughty, I see that gleam in your eyes, lover boy. Save some for tomorrow. Sleep first.”

He had to agree with that. With a kiss that Yang returned, she brushed past him into the bedroom, and he posted up at the dining table to wait for Blake to come out before he could dress down for the night and join them all in dreaming of another wonderful day filled with things that he’d always hoped to engender in others.

Jaune Arc was happy.

Chapter End Notes

The First Time
Lancaster Theme 1 (Casey Lee Williams (Ruby); Jeff Williams) [Soft and subtle, R&B / Instrumental inspiration]

(Intro)
[Melody]

(Verse 1)
From the very first time we met,
When our eyes touched,
And your hand reached out to mine-
I wondered if this could be-
The fated time,
That pleasant flutter building up in my heart.
The pitter-patter of the race waiting to start.

(Pre-Chorus)
I was always waiting for you,
Even though I never knew,
The way you'd come into my life.

(Chorus)
From the first time,
Till the very first time,
Of all the first times-
I always wanted to be with you.

(Verse 2)
[Melody]
(Verse 3)
From the very first time,
I trusted you-
I wanted all the world-
To know it was a dream come true-
That you could be-
The one for me-
The tingling feeling in my fingers-
When our hearts met-
In the middle and we made-
It feel like just the first time.

(Chorus)
From the first time,
Till the very first time,
Of all the first times-
I always wanted to be with you.
This is the first time-
I ever thought-
Dreams could come true.
And this first time-
Couldn't be anymore sublime-
So for the first time-
I'll say I love you.

(Outro)
From the first time,
Till the very first time,
Of all the first times-
I always wanted to be with you.
This is the first time-
I ever thought-
Dreams could come true.
And this first time-
Couldn't be anymore sublime-
So for the first time-
I'll say I love you.
Chapter Twenty

Chapter Summary

Jaune steps into a war, born within his heart— one started so long ago that it doesn't matter to he and Blake. Weiss feels something missing, and— looking into a mirror that had been her greatest fear— she wonders why she cannot recognize herself.

The Queen of Winter sits on her throne, while the King of Spring visits and plays her a tune.

(The end note is Jaune's first theme, Burnished.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A Family Arc

[Time to Say Goodbye]

Chapter Twenty

Snow White, Lacking in Bliss; Hurt by White Fang's Kiss

The Vytal Ball was an important thing for Weiss Schnee. It was a show of high society for the students of Beacon, of which only Jaune, Pyrrha, Cardin, and herself might have the ability to make a proper display of themselves.

It could be said that the Dance was a premiere moment in a young Huntress' life, with many a romance having bloomed from the Vytal Festival. Even her sister had participated almost eight years ago, though she had lost in the semifinals. It had been a humbling experience for Winter Schnee, and Weiss remembered it well, her youthful self questioning why the older girl had come home so distraught.

It was only by asking Winter herself that she had finally gotten an answer from the woman about her seeming rivalry with Camillia Arc.

The two had simply fought like cats, it was a sobering admission from the ostentatious sister she had
always looked up to. Both were driven, spirited women who couldn't reconcile one another's histories.

Winter and Weiss, who detested the way the Schnee name was like a collar and cage. Camillia, who languished under expectation and instead became a hurricane of violence and murder.

And then there had been Jaune . . .

Jaune Arc. A man who seemingly was happy to please the conniving and dangerous Lady Arc, who viewed his renegade sister as a mentor and third parental figure.

And they'd met by chance at a dance, him playing the role of the beast in stealing her away, and she the beauty who danced to the Snow Queen's Fantasy with him. There was a great symbolism steeped in that song, written by an Atlesian conductor. The death of movement and silence contrasting the uplift and the deep bass steps. It was a song for lovers, seperated by the seasons- as the King and Queen of the Faeries were. He of Spring, She of Winter, only able to touch one another when Winter became Spring.

It was the day she felt her heart race for the first time. And immediately after she had broken away with what of her grace remained, she had been approached by one of the Arc sisters, clad in a Jester's mask and a fine green gown.

[Mirror, Mirror pt. 2]

“Miss Schnee.” She’d been greeted with a fine curtsy, one corner of a fine gown being swept forward and upwards to showcase the fronts of fine rider’s boots. “How kind of you to share a dance so lovely with my brother.”

She remembered the nerves, the breathlessness she’d greeted the woman with. The only defense against the other being the mask that hid her flushed features. “Lady Arc.” She returned, gracefully offering a curtsy in return while a passing waiter was divested of two flutes of light champagne, Jade offering one to her before gleefully drinking both when Weiss waved a hand. She’d have to remove her mask to drink- and she had no interest in doing so while she was “vexed”. “Your brother is a fine dancer, it was only my pleasure to do so.”
“Is that so?” Jade Arc had noted, an air of pleasure expressed over deeply painted lips and pearl-white teeth. Champagne was polished off with an ease to be expected of a socialite like the Arc daughters, and then the flutes were deposited on a passing servant’s tray- a pair of curlicue ram horns adorning the woman’s head, oddly enough, standing out against the deep black of her jacket worn over a servant’s dress of fine white. “Then it should please you that my mother has her eyes on you-”

Weiss let her eyes glance away from the sister, towards where the mother and father had settled in amidst some of Ansel’s other noble title bearers. Though she could not tell at this distance, it was easy to imagine the woman wearing the witch’s mask staring at her.

“- after all, the point of this party was to find my beloved brother a wife.”

That was an easy thing to discern on it’s own. After all, Jaune Arc was a single young man, worthy of the title of Sir until he would one day take control of the House of Arc- when he would become its Lord.

“I-” She had to take a moment to process how to respond to such a revelation, “I am sure there are plenty of young ladies who would happily join hands with him.”

It was better that Weiss Schnee remained alone.

“Are you one, Miss Schnee?” Jade Arc was her mother’s child, always aiming towards the heart of the matter. The preliminary report on the family had been reported to her by Klein, whom had been the only one she’d trusted to do so.

And despite the fancy that took her, thinking of a life away from the grasp of her father, Weiss had seen the man lingering in the shadows not so far away, speaking with yet more of the upper crust of society.

A grip of ice had grasped her heart. Happy things were not for her- not for Weiss Schnee.

Memories of seeing him again, free of the ghost of her father lingering over her shoulder, she had felt a strange tenseness in her breast. And as he’d wormed his way into her presence-

She’d found herself having such dreams again. Weiss Schnee did not deserve to have happy
things, no matter how she dreamed of them.

But... 

As her fingers clasped the pure, unrelenting white, she wished it would color itself for her- to take away the ache it represented in her heart.

“Weiss! We’re gonna be late for class!” She looked away from it, putting it away once again as she looked herself in the mirror and saw someone wholly different from the girl who had come to Beacon.

A girl with friends, a girl who wasn’t so lonely anymore. It was a story told in a smile that lit her lips like the first rays of dawn.

“I’m coming, Ruby.”

+x+x+x+

It was a stormy Saturday, as Jaune found himself seated in a cafe in Vale’s east side. The arrival of Fall had seen a return of a different breed of jacket, since this wasn’t a place he was likely to end up in combat, though he’d worn Crocea Mors regardless. Ostensibly, it had been time away from his team and Ruby’s, though even then he found himself advancing something about the girls.

Today, it was a meeting with one of Jade’s contacts within the new White Fang, a woman who had once been one of Ansel’s many Faunus families that had left the place under the aid of Jade and- apparently- the cloying words of Adam Taurus.

He wondered idly if Blake recognized the path she’d chosen instead of the hurt and violence inspired by this swing into the chasm of terrorism instead of peaceful protest that had been held dear by her parents.

A pair of deer antlers matched the worn gray of her jacket and the light cyan dress she wore underneath, similar to the easy blue of her eyes. As she stood by his table, he bowed his head to her and she settled across from him in the booth. It was anything but a clandestine meeting, but it was easy to two youths sharing coffee and tea.
“Good afternoon, my lord Arc.” She noted.

“A shaded one.” He responded, “Thank you for coming to meet with me.” In his mental eye, he saw the way Blake had poured through reports and other papers that had absolutely nothing to do with school-

They had the same classes, she couldn’t hide this new fixation, especially not from him.

“It’s my pleasure, after all your sister did for me and my family, my lord.”

He could only shake his head. “You owe me nothing. Vale has been kind to you, to see you in good health.”

A smile lit her face, and he could only feel his memories return to others who wore similar features purely by purpose of his own mind. “I can’t help but refuse such thoughts, my lord. It is by your family’s graces that I can fight for what’s right now.”

He wondered if that was truly something to celebrate.

“Then, you know that what I ask you is for our own good. When is the next?”

“Tomorrow night, I’ll be there myself, if you’d like me to-”

“That won’t be necessary. Just give me an address, and I’ll burden you no more.”

[Cold, Leitmotif]

As he stepped out into the rain of the day, he tucked the hood of his long jacket up over blonde hair, he let his feet carry him through the walk, watching as passing cars washed through a world wreathed in the gray of civilization.
A world wholly separate from the wilds of Sanus and Anima that Camillia loved so. The justice of the frontier had always fed his sisters’ great soul. In the background, he could almost hear the piano play amidst the stream of the world’s tears as every drop hit window panes and gave forth nature’s music.

He shouldn’t involve himself. It was the sensible logic that was prevalent in his father and Peri, but no matter how he tried-

-he knew he would. This was a battle fought by Blake since she was young- and it was something Jade had found herself wounded over.

It was his fight, too. He’d sworn himself in to the conflict with a blade made of love. As he pulled his Scroll from the pocket of his coat, looking to the picture that decorated its access screen, he found himself staring at the photo of RWNR and JBPY all together, piled in tight.

All of them were his reasons, damn good reasons. If it had been Pyrrha- whom he was still the furthest away from- he still would have stepped into the light.

It was the promise he’d made, almost six years ago, that made Jaune Arc truly know that he would never be able to escape the nastiness of the world. Camillia’s horror stories of maimings, death, loss of friends and family-

All had been a firm grip that only made his heart even stronger. To wander a world painted in the gray of people’s ambitions, dreams, desires-

His fingers tapped the keys, and the message was sent. A “received” notice alerting him, just before his gaze turned across the street to see his reflection in the polished pane of a storefront glass.

Quietly, he stepped across the divide, and his eyes raked over the display within the store. Stepping inside, he put his hood back down.

Call it a flight of fancy, but something within belonged with him. The storekeeper was a young Faunus man and his wife, and his patronage was greeted with a gentle reverence. Scaled features tilted this way and that as he hefted the wooden instrument, and he tucked it in against his chin as he took the bow to it. A whisper of the wind grew into the melody.
It would need to be tuned, but it was a fine thing that didn’t belong collecting dust on a shelf. He produced a set of lien chits that he handed over to the pair.

“The Lord Arc in our store, how wonderful,” The man’s wife- a Faunus of some breed from her wagging bushy tail- noted. “Please, tell me- is it true that you and the young Belladonna are seeing one another?”

He could only smile in turn to her, tucking the fine instrument into it’s case once again. “If it was,” He breathed, “Would it please you?”

“Oh, terribly, my lord.” The wife spoke while he was handed change by her husband, the woman’s tail wagging- was that a racist thought? He hoped not. “The mere idea- a Faunus child to help bring equality promised to us all so long ago? It’s like something out of a story.”

He laughed. It was a lighthearted thing, but inside, he knew it was a fake one. Just the promise of his own bearing asserting itself once again. Leaning in conspiratorially, he noted, “Then, be happy. It’s as true as the sun brings the day. Miss Belladonna came with me to see my family- and my mother sees wedding bells in our future.”

The squeal of delight from the wife was only mitigated by the husband’s pleasant demeanor. “Thank you for coming to the Musical Scales, my lord. Please come see us again soon.” He nodded his head in turn to the husband, and stepped once again back out into a world awash in a Fall rain accompanied by a light chill.

He checked his Scroll again, seeing the small message of Thank you. from Blake that made his countenance light back up in a smile as he stepped towards the Bullhead docks once again.

He had a new violin to tune.

As he stepped back unto the floor for their own dorms, he spied Weiss beginning to enter RWNR’s dorm, and so he called out to her. “Weiss!” When she turned, he enjoyed the way she let her ice-blue eyes settle across him before noting the case held in his hands, lightly dusted with the rain.

“Good evening, Jaune. Another instrument?” He nodded in turn to the platinum-haired woman, and he patted the case’s side.
“Would you like me to tune it and play for you?” It was an attempt, and even he’d admit it. The question was, would the snowy woman allow it?

As she seemed to pause, he hoped she would. And when she nodded, he didn’t hide the happiness that curled his lips up. She unlocked the door to RWNR’s dorm, and he stepped in after her, watching as she settled down in the dorm’s sole solitary chair. He settled the case in atop the table, and pulled the fine wooden instrument from within along with the bow.

“Atlesian.” She noted, and he nodded. The design and maker’s mark was firmly Mantlean, and he was sure that the thing had more history than some people did. Tucking it in against his chin, he lightly began to pluck the strings with his finger while tuning it, and- only when he was satisfied with its ability to produce a sound worthy of her, did he plant the bow and let it sing.

Sing of feelings that could be buried under layers of snow. Of an ice cold heart that rested in wait for the thawing of spring’s touch. These were the messages only music could push free without even words to accompany them.

He was not an expert violinist, but it was one of his stronger instruments, amidst stringed instruments and the piano itself. As the rain against the window played the bass-line to the world’s sweet music of the moment, he let the instrument speak for itself. Decide its own fate with strings and the rush of a feather that touched it only so lightly.

Ocean blue eyes met frosty blue, and he smiled in turn as Weiss sat in all the regal world’s splendor. The Queen of Winter yet to come, the pronouncement of Fall’s welcoming in every siren quail of the wooden instrument.

As her voice rose, he let his eyes close.

“She came along, her wounds for all to see-
My winter maiden, fair as can be-
The sadness on her face,
Turning all to winter and sundry-”

Her voice had always been lauded, and he could see why. He’d never had the pleasure to attend one of her concerts, though it was likely something he would have been afforded had he ever known of her loveliness before the first time they’d met.
“Her lover had gone away-
Chased away by the light of the day-
She cried out-
“I’m still here!”
As long as he would come back to stay.”

His grip on the neck of the instrument shifted, and his gloved fingers wound against it like he might choose to strangle the once unloved thing. His eyes were unnecessary, only his feelings and the way they made his body move by simple magic.

“Her hand could touch his-
And he could feel her-
Melting under the caress of his fingers-
The strings made from ice-
Breathing new life for the people she-
Held most dear.”

The lament became softer, a more muted tone as he finished the piece and he could finally open his eyes to regard the way she stared past him, at some phantom that only lived in Weiss Schnee’s mind.

As the instrument tucked away from his neck once again, he settled it back in it’s case with the bow, and he offered her a smile which she shakily returned. She clapped, but just in turn, he gave her the applause of his heart.

For a moment, the world was just the two of them. Two caged birds that had started to learn how to fly.

The magic was banished back where it belonged, and she stood after a few moments. “Thank you.” She uttered, and his smile stayed strong on his face.

“Thank you, Weiss.”
Without a need for other words, he stepped from the dorm with the new soul imbued in the instrument, and he moved back into JBPY’s dorm room, noting how it was devoid of his teammates. Blake was likely in the library- Yang and Pyrrha either in a training room or off getting dinner, if he was honest.

As he found himself pressing his back into the wall near the door, he slumped down until he was firmly upon the floor, the case in his lap, he wondered idly if they would ever share that moment again.

That connection that had made him feel that there was something in the world that he was missing-

-that he needed.

+\textcolor{red}{x}+\textcolor{red}{x}+\textcolor{red}{x}+\textcolor{red}{x}

It was the worst kind of thing imaginable, allowing himself to be led into this once again. He knew, however, that he couldn’t just sit idly by while Blake tortured herself with her family’s legacy. It was exactly the kind of thing he would have expected his friends to force themselves into if he’d say anything about his own struggles.

And so, he was proactive. He gave her what she wanted, and then cornered her in the library, watching as amber eyes settled on his face once again. A few stray bags under her eyes telling him that her nights away from the dorm’s bed weren’t doing her any good.

His arms wound up around her, and she—defeated—slumped into his grasp.

He didn’t want her to feel alone anymore. And if she thought she would be alone in facing her own demons, he wouldn’t stand for it. He was Jaune Arc, and he would take on the world for his friends.

Lovers were just a step above friends, and Blake was both. In comparison with before, when he would have said as much, he let his refusal to walk away from her speak for itself.

“Come back to the dorm.” Those were his only words, and she nodded after a few moments.
Tomorrow, they could address the problem of the White Fang.

Chapter End Notes

Burnished
AFA Jaune Arc Theme 1 (Jeff Williams (Jaune) feat. Casey Williams (Backing))
[Inspired by Rising / Miracle]

( Intro)
Touch hands with the one who made you who you are.
You caught the edge of the blade,
And light came this way to cut the shade.
And, as the moon rises-
We’ll get there together, someday soon-
Just like the night and the day-
Are never so far away.

(Verse 1)
A hero stands up after-
Being defeated, no matter who-
What-
Or how.
They’re the one who will raise a leg-
And triumph once again.

(Pre-Chorus)
A dream standing above,
The feelings and the breathlessness,
Shining like a brand new dawn-

(Chorus)
Polished to a mirror sheen-
The armor and the weapon of the clarion call-
The announcement of Armageddon as we know it-
Lightning strikes-
And the earth splits-
As gold becomes burnished silver.

(Verse 2)
It crosses the horizon-
And touches the mountain’s top-
Like the rays of the sun-
Promised to bring the world out from the night.

(Chorus)
Polished to a mirror sheen-
The armor and the weapon of the clarion call-
The announcement of Armageddon as we know it-
Lightning strikes-
And the earth splits-
As gold becomes burnished silver.
The color dulls, but the promise remains.
A world built-
For you and me.

(Solo)

(Chorus)
Polished to a mirror sheen-
The armor and the weapon of the clarion call-
The announcement of Armageddon as we know it-
Lightning strikes-
And the earth splits-
As gold becomes burnished silver.
The color dulls, but the promise remains.
A world built-
For you and me.

(Outro)
Nothing about you will change-
And no matter the color that your soul burns brightest-
You’ll find your way,
And bring forth that dream-
In the name of a future-
Born in the light of the moon.
Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Summary

AN: In keeping with your musical accompaniment, today you can enjoy FE:3H’s Fodlan Winds during the fight scenes, and the Apex of the World track for the V. Paladin fight. Don’t forget to go bother me with guilt by patronizing me at my PatREEEEEEEEEOn page.

The battle with the Paladin and the White Fang, Blake and Yang talk. Blake talks to her mother.

A Family Arc

[Time to Say Goodbye]

Chapter Twenty-One

The Knight and the Rapscallion

Deery’s information had been as good as gold. Posted up atop a nearby warehouse, Jaune could only watch with his own eyes as masked, hooded figures wound their way into the dock-side warehouse. His blue eyes switched from the sight of Blake slipping in, wearing different clothes and with Gambol Shroud tucked away nearby in a pre-prepared “dead drop”, to Pyrrha nearby, posted with Milo in it’s rifle form. Yang’s partner was adorned in a more rough red coat and with her hair tucked up into a wide-brimmed hat that was cocked up high on her face so he could see the way her eyes scanned up and down the street now and then. His position as Pyrrha’s “spotter” was the best he could do since he was -thoroughly- too easily identified by the faunus population.

Even Blake had to wear her hood up thanks to the new amount of publicity she’d endured. Jaune’s thoughts meandered for a moment towards the requests for interviews that had come flooding in from the Faunus-friendly news-sources-

-even Lisa Lavender had wanted in on the action, though he couldn’t for the life of him figure out what Vale’s news would do with such a story beyond spin it into an aggressive political piece. Next
thing you knew, he’d be on a talk show across from Sienna Damn Khan herself.

He knew he was distracting himself from the numbness that washed through him. From Yang, down below hiding out and likely bored out of her head. Clandestine operations like this weren’t his team’s forte, he was easily able to admit. They were, as a whole, an assault team.

He and Blake were the “stealthy” half of the immense combat potential of JBPY - though to be fair, RWNR wasn’t much different- only having a more severe focus in long-ranged combat by virtue of Ruby and Weiss being more comfortable at mid-to-long ranges. In so few words, they were teams that worked well together both because of their specializations and because they were all friends- or more.

As he tucked the hood around his face, he slid his fingers in against the earpiece that was connected to all four of their Scrolls. “Don’t forget. If things start to look bad, get out. This isn’t the time to try and be a hero, Blake.”

The silence from her was answer enough, and Pyrrha’s eyes drifted towards him. He rolled a shoulder in a shrug, idly letting his other hand hold Crocea Mors’ blade against the rooftop.

He knew those green eyes were studying him- judging him- but he knew all the same that he’d never let that affect him. Not during a time like this.

She knew the deepest, darkest part of him. And yet here she was, still willing to be a member of his team- even if the distance between them stayed the same parallel. Perhaps it was hopeful of him to think of her as so stalwart, but-

-it helped him sleep at night. It was true.

Contrary to the idea of a stake-out like this on television programs, the worst part of it all was waiting for the inevitable point it would go wrong. As his Scroll toned out, he pulled the electronic device and let his gaze wander over the picture message he received, a somewhat messy angle shot of Roman Torchwick standing in front of an Atlesian piloted mech.

*How the fuck did he get something like that here?*. That was a very worthy question, in his own opinion. And it wasn’t some simple Knight, or one of the Bishop-class Spider Drones that had always made Jade question the very nature of the Atlesian military as an entity.
He couldn’t argue that Ansel was any different, a place born of a military garrison scraped together by the blood, sweat, and tears of his grandfather and the peoples who had come to call it home since the Revolution.

Vale’s council could not touch them, and never would his family have allowed such a thing even if they didn’t have the noble intention of protecting the people who owed their livelihoods to the protection of the name of Arc.

As he tucked his Scroll back away, he mused aloud, “Tin can.” Earning a raised brow from Pyrrha, which he elaborated on, “Atlesian robot. Big one. Probably what has the Faunus willing to follow someone like Torchwick- though I’m sure he’s just some middle-man.”

After all, terrorists only had so much in common with “common criminals”- even that mech surely couldn’t need so much Dust that they’d all but turned Vale’s Dust economy on it’s head.

He was privately thankful his weapon and fighting style didn’t rely on the commodity. The benefits of a combat style easily described as “miserly.” Camillia Arc, even with Crimson having a Dust-based shotgun all its own, preferred to use it for its intended use as a melee weapon. Without even having that for himself, he relied on other’s weapons if it came to be time to use something besides Crocea Mors.

His sister’s training had been eclectic and informative. “Toys” brought forth from her preferred quarry, even though he’d been taught from a young age to hunt and use a gun himself.

It just didn’t have the same “heroic” feel as the ancestral blade, if he was honest. Perhaps he’d blackened Crocea Mors’ lovely blade with the blood of people who didn’t deserve to know it’s kiss.

“Lover boy.” He let his eyes drift away from the tense silence surrounding the White Fang Rally within the warehouse, pressing his fingers to the earpiece to activate it’s receiver. “I can feel you from down here. You gonna be okay?”

It was so perfectly Yang, to downplay her own anxiety in order to act as the solid one to her friends and family. “I’ll be fine.” He said over the connection to the rest of the team, “Even better if this ends without a mess.”

“I don’t know that that’s possible,” Blake’s voice finally cut in, the drone of chanting Faunus’ in the background telling him that if nothing else, she was safe enough to speak. “That thing on it’s
own would cause havoc.”

His finger pressed in the receiver again. “Blake, I know- but-”

“Jaune.” His name was said like a plea, and he could only nod in agreement, even if she couldn’t see it.

She was right. “That thing” would likely take a team of Huntsmen all their own to handle. But, how to deal with it? And how to do so without drawing the attention of whomever was likely pulling the strings behind getting such a highly advanced piece of Atlesian tech into the White Fang’s hands?

They weren’t an espionage cell, and none of them were saboteurs, either. He could pretend at it, certainly, but that would mean getting him close enough to it without witnesses.

“The crowd is dispersing,” Blake noted into the connection, “I’m going to make a move-”

Jaune’s eyes widened.

+x+x+x+x

It went wrong so fast that Jaune could hardly believe it. One moment, things had been simple- a reconnaissance mission that could have ended where it began, but then it’d turned into an outright scuffle. He’d known that it would go this way purely by virtue of their involvement, but he’d had some hopes, really.

He’d ordered Yang in to assist Blake, and then he’d begun his own descent down the side of the building as gunfire and cries of panic had filled the night. Pyrrha was hot on his heels, and he could only be thankful that she could function as their fire support for it as they broke into the melee.

He could only thank his lucky stars that it was easier to pick out his companions from the rest of the chaff. The mech in the background trying to get a bead on his partner while he fought his way through the masked and garbed terrorists towards her. There was no need to fret or fear, only swing-
And so he did, the first announcing slash of Crocea Mors filling the air with a dull hum as an unprepared grunt was felled in the blow. That cold feeling washed over him before he’d even crossed the threshold, and for the first time, it wasn’t uncomfortable.

Blake’s life was worth so much more than whoever stood in his way. There was no time to lament, only to move.

His peripheral vision saw Yang move in to guard Blake, the mech by now crashing through a wall and- likely under the blonde woman’s arrival- standing out in the open. Subtlety was now officially out the window.

Frankly, that suited Jaune just fine. It was better than the anxiety. He deployed his shield just in time to block an array of gunfire, before he ducked low and return fire cascaded over his head, pinpoint shots crashing into the three who had turned to engage them.

Pyrrha was a sharpshooter just as fine was Ruby was, and he was glad to have her on his team then.

Keeping half an eye on Yang and Blake’s tussling with the mech, he advanced through the crowd of armed men and women, shield upraised and his body tucked forward to minimize exposure. “Stay with me!” He yelled, hearing her heeled-boots resound from behind him as he crashed into a group of men wielding mass-produced blades, sending two bowling over before he brought Crocea Mors around and tore into the remaining one’s pelvis and then tearing back outwards, sending him crashing to the floor from the loss of ability to hold his own weight.

More men and women with no Aura to protect themselves. He flipped the ancestral blade in his palm, and brought it forward and down into the man’s jaw and then -wrenched- it free in a gout of arterial blood as his other arm came up and brought his shield up high. “Vault!”

“Okay!” Pyrrha’s response was immediate, and he felt the sudden weight on his shield arm before he braced himself with his aura and promptly repeated a tactic that had worked well for them so far. The red-head’s coat billowing as she flew through the air, Milo turning into it’s javelin form while she drew Akouo from her back. With Pyrrha in the fight to help against the mech, Jaune worked up unto his feet and reversed his sword back into a proper swordfighting hold.
A dozen of the White Fang between him and the girls-

Thirty seconds, at best.

A pair broke off, swinging their blades towards him without any finesse or real talent inherent. Rather than block with the shield, he reared back and kept his defense tight in case their companions decided to open fire, and carved through both men’s swinging arms, causing both to drop their weapons and let out a shrill, keening set of wails. Yang might have made a joke about disarming them, but Jaune wasn’t so pithy.

Especially not now, when they were standing between him and his team. As the six toting guns raised them to aim, he tucked forward into a roll, grasping one of the fallen blades and flinging it with his shield-arm towards the right-most one- hearing a choking noise in response- so he could draw his shield up to protect him from a hail of gunfire. Regular bullets wouldn’t puncture his Aura that fast, but he would rather not take any shots at all if he could help it. A few stray bullets pinged against his aura from what he couldn’t protect and went wide.

Shouldering himself up, he let his greave-clad feet carry him forward into the mass of shooters, the remaining four melee-weapon wielders swamped towards him and he could only sigh as they showed little to no coordination.

They were likely new recruits, but he couldn’t help but feel disappointed. Camillia would only have gotten a baseline amount of pleasure from this, and he just felt sad that they weren’t truly ready to “fight for their rights.”

He could respect the message of the White Fang. The modus operandi? Not so much. He tucked himself into a slide, ducking three wild swings while the last crashed into his shield right before he sent the man sailing over his dynamic form. As he raised himself up unto his feet, he brought Crocea Mors inwards and then outwards in a wide arc that only one man ducked back from in time, the other two sent spilling to the floor with ugly gashes marring their throats, leaving them clutching and trying to breathe through the sudden influx of blood into their respiratory systems.

The first gunman was brought low with a crash of his shield against the man’s front, tucking in against the force of his arrival so he could crush the man’s sternum under his full weight before he adjusted Crocea Mors at an angle once again and shoved it into the meat of his throat. Only weaponless for a moment, he grasped the man’s fallen rifle and brought it up and around, unleashing the magazine within into his compatriots and downing two.

The spent rifle was discarded as he rolled off of the man’s crushed torso and pulled his weapon
along with him. Crocea Mors’ blade was a dull red from the golden hilt to its very tip, and he didn’t bother to examine the feeling that welled up within him as he used his momentum to break out into movement again. More bullets followed his advancement, and the one man he’d bowled over was looking for his fallen weapon.

The last three gunmen were not so lucky. The first was neutered- metaphorically- with a diagonal slice that tore open his flesh from the jaw down into the meat of his shoulder, and Jaune shifted his grip on his shield to grasp the man’s weapon before planting his boot against the gurgling foe’s waist and sending him toppling end-over-end into another of his compatriots. The rifle was brought around, a quick burst of lead flooded the man seeking his sword’s head before it was swept back around to kick against his aura-infused arm.

One remained, the one struggling under the weight of his own brother-in-arms. Jaune took just enough time to blast the last round into his jaw and sling the rifle at him before he ran full-tilt towards where his team was fighting the mecha.

He arrived just in time for the Atlesian suit to rear back with a fist, readying to swing towards Yang. Rifle discharges filled the air as servos in the elbows were jammed with bullets and weakened the strength of the swing enough that the blonde woman caught it against her gauntlets and then whipped an uppercut into the armor-less part of the thing’s wrist, shotgun blasts accompanying the attack as the machine’s “fist” was sent sailing up into the air to crash into the ceiling and send debris scattering about.

“Tch!?! I thought I’d end up fighting Red again, but here we are-!” Roman Torchwick’s voice came through the speakers in the mech, the mech’s non-pulverized arm cycling and readying to fire. He ducked inwards and brought himself low, readying to take the punishment of the fusillade, and feeling his aura strain under defending himself and the blonde behind him. In his peripheral view, he saw Blake and Pyrrha taking pot-shots at the mech’s joints and moving to engage and split the man in the mech’s attention.

“Always up to play the last second hero, huh, lover boy?!!” Yang noted with glee, and he could only mimic that smile. As he adjusted his arm again, he didn’t even need to say it as she hiked herself up unto his shield and he launched her upwards towards the top of the suit. With Yang in the air, he pushed forward towards the machine and into it’s reach.

I think this is legitimately the first time Camillia didn’t train me for something. He thought, taking a few stray moments while he ducked and wound his way between kicking robotic legs to see where he could do the most damage to the thing while Yang arrived atop it’s chassis and began to deliver dust-fueled punches to it’s compartment. Seeing one of the mech’s unguarded heels, he pushed himself forward and let Crocea Mors bite into the steel construction, scoring its moving parts and sending it stumbling further as Dust-powered jets fired up and he had to duck to keep himself from getting scorched by the propulsion system. The Paladin rocketed back into a wall and sent Yang
Jaune saw red. As the mech reared around to use it’s one good arm to pummel Yang, he put Aura into his legs and propelled himself up unto the less-armored back of the thing, judging where would do the most damage, he sent the blade slamming home into the base of a spheroid part of the mech’s arrays and sent it spiraling off with a heave before letting himself fall back to the floor into a roll. “What?!” Torchwick’s voice sounded out, and lasers began to project forth from what must have been a secondary sensory system.

So that had been a camera of some kind to allow the pilot to see. Well, that made things easier. Or, at least, he’d thought it would. The punch that had been about to crash into Yang went a bit wild and crushed the support of a wall, sending the warehouse beginning to crumble around them.

“Everyone out!”

As they lead the retreat, with Blake and Yang in the front, he heard each time his greave-clad heels crashed against the pavement and announced his movements downwards from the platform that held up that part of the manufacturing district.

*Shit that thing can move fast.* Jaune had to admire Atlesian tech, or at least it’s ability to take punishment and still move around like that. It moved with a limp in the leg he’d managed to carve up, and it was obvious that Roman wasn’t seeing them perfectly from how the stray shots and missiles that were sent shooting towards them weren’t aimed with deadly precision.

Still, as they settled into a wide-open space beneath the overpasses, he could only feel that cool grip of logic and bestial impulse once again. The non-maimed arm of the Mech powering up for another blast from it’s weapons as Torchwick’s voice came through the speakers again.

“You goody-two-shoes kids always want to get in the way, y’know? Thankfully, I have a big gun to-” His speech was interrupted by the firing of the thing’s dust-cannon, sending an explosive bit of ordinance their way that they all ducked out of the way of.

Jaune could probably block the hit, but there was no need to. They had all been prepared to move. “Blake, Yang!” He called out, receiving mutual shouts of acknowledgement as the blonde and ravenette broke off to dart in and engage. “Pyrrha, with me!” As the two shieldbearers charged forward, drawing fire, he saw Blake use Gambol Shroud to “connect” with Yang. The blonde being whipped around like an exorbitantly large flail.
All they needed to do was buy them time to finish the swing. He had a feeling he and Pyrrha could do that easily. As he serpentined with Pyrrha to deliver a set of hard hits to the legs of the mech to stop it’s momentum, he traded places with her again as Crocea Mors bit into the servo that he’d already marred and finally split the foot off from the support structure.

“Woah-woah-wo-” Torchwick’s panic was audible, but only as Yang was delivered by Blake in a huge swing, the blonde’s momentum feeding further into her power as a loud crash punctuated her fist tearing through the torso of the mech and sending the red-headed criminal flying from it’s broken up parts.

As the man righted himself and came up dusting himself off, he wished he had been closer to capitalize on the moment, but instead, a flash of pink and brown filled vision for a moment before a loud crash broke through the air as the two faded away.

As the stillness of the night asserted itself once again, Jaune could only let himself relax. The tension fading from his body as his blue eyes settled on each member of his team, all a bit wore out, but in one piece and well.

Offering a light grin, he couldn’t help himself. “So, you ladies want to go get dinner?”

+x+x+x+

[Mirror, Mirror Pt. 2 Instrumental]

Contrary to Jaune’s jest, they ended up going straight back to Beacon afterwards. Blake was certainly tired herself, and would surely want a larger breakfast, but- well-

As they settled into the dorm once again, Jaune giving RWNR a sit-rep on the night’s events, the ravenette had collapsed unto the couch and found herself with her legs raised and in Yang’s lap. Pyrrha herself had stepped into the shower, and left the two members of JBPY alone.

“You okay, Blake?” Yang asked, and Blake had to admit that it was exactly what Yang would do. Ignore her own issues in favor of protecting and mothering others. The Faunus was sure she didn’t see it as thoroughly as those more close to Yang did, but even she saw it for what it was. A coping mechanism. The same way she hid from the world, the same way Jaune disassociated himself from the one who relied on his sister’s training to destroy threats to those he held dear.
“I’ll be alright after I get some sleep.” She remarked, “You? It can’t be easy—”

Yang laughed, a bit hollow in tone, “-Seeing our boyfriend cut through people like that? Yeah. It’s- it’s something, I admit. Even if it’s for US, y’know?”

Blake understood. She dealt with it better than the others likely did- her former paramour had been Adam Taurus, for the Gods’ sakes- but it was still a vexing thing to know. Jaune was normally a loving and gentle soul, but when he entered -real- combat, he . . . changed.

She hadn’t seen it, but she hadn’t needed to. The lack of interference with their fight with the Atlesian Paladin had said enough. There was no one left to interfere.

No one left to stand between him and them.

Some might have drawn parallels between the two, but to Blake, the two couldn’t be more different. Adam’s bloodlust was natural, his spite wholly cultivated through a hard life.

Jaune lamented the things he had to do. Even if it wasn’t in the moment, she saw the haunted way he had grinned and made that light remark.

It had been him trying to make light of a dark situation. And- for that alone- Blake knew she could love him.

Jaune Arc and Adam Taurus were nothing alike- and that made her decision seem all the easier. He was her Alpha Male- the one willing to kill to keep her, but only insofar as she would let him hurt himself in order to keep her smiling.

That thought made her wonder if she’d ever done something, if she could have saved Adam’s soul- but Jade Arc’s words had told her that it was a folly to think so.

Adam had all the chances in the world to be a better person- to be a better fighter for Faunus rights- and he’d chosen bloodshed and heartache.
“He loves you.” She said, knowing they weren’t the right words, but that they were the truth.

“I know.” Yang said, and for a moment, the blonde woman’s shoulders slumped, “I love him too, y’know. It scares me how fast I knew I loved him.”

Blake could appreciate that- probably Ruby could as well. Jaune Arc wasn’t someone you could just stay in equilibrium with. You either were friends to the true and tried end with him, or you drifted away.

How many people had Jaune pushed away with his brightness like the sun?

She didn’t know, but she knew one thing- she’d be the shadow that helped make this brightness bearable for the rest. It was only the fair thing, with all that she would ask of him.

Sleep came easy that night, contrary to how she thought she would lay awake.

She begged off of classes, using the excuse that she wanted to call her mother, and it had gone accepted by the rest of her team, with Jaune assuring that he’d keep his notes for her to pour over- not that she thought she needed to worry about them. JBPY’s class grades were some of the better ones both because of having Jaune and Pyrrha around, but also because Ruby and Weiss were just the next door down and if they truly struggled with anything, there was plenty of help for them.

As she settled into the console for the CCT, she found herself brushing down the front of her blazer as the call connected, her mother once again appearing on the display- though in a lounging kimono rather than her usual “official” clothes. “It’s rare for you to call this early, Blake. Is something wrong?” Her mother’s immediate concern was a pleasant wash over the roiling in her heart.

She loved her parents very much, even if she’d disagreed with them on the nature of the struggle for Faunus rights once upon a time. Now, here she was, about to ask her for . . .

Ugh. Relationship advice.

“Yeah- it’s mostly fine. Um- I have… a question.”
“Ask away, kitten.”

“Am I- doing the right thing?” Perhaps it was the wrong way to word it, but it was how she could put it forth at the time. “With Jaune?”

Kali Belladonna’s amused expression told her more than her words likely would have. “By getting so close to him so fast?” Her mother asked, and Blake could only nod in return. “No, dear. If you like him, it’s only to be expected you stake your claim as quickly as possible. Do you think I should have waited around when I thought your father might be the one?”

Blake could have done without the generational comparison, but it at least put things in perspective. Her mother continued, “Love is difficult. You feel it most strongly in the immediate sense, and then it starts to boil over time. It’s even more confusing for Faunus. We have our animal instincts further interfering with the workings-” Kali paused, pressing a hand against her breast, “- of the heart. You look at him, and your immediate thought is “I want to be his”. It’s nonsense at its finest, seeing a strong mate and desiring to have that power for your own.”

Blake could only laugh at that. It was, as her mother put it, “nonsense”.

“Does that make Faunus love less “right” than human love? I don’t think so. Do you love him, Blake?”

“I- think I do, Mom.”

“Then that’s all that matters. If it doesn’t work out, that’s fine. But I think you two will be good for one another- and not just because of all the “fringe benefits” as some would say.”

Blake had enjoyed the articles. Many were wild exaggerations, but a fair few touched on topics she had shared with Weiss. Then, there was the gossip columns where readers insisted they were “cute” together.

Blake liked that. She had never been the most feminine of girls, but she could appreciate being called cute in the arms of her lover. Her man.

That she shared him with other women wasn’t wholly strange. She was the lioness to his lion. While Yang held the primary spot amidst his metaphorical “pride”, she knew that the feelings
between them were so very real.

Adam had never looked at her the way Jaune did, and those looks always made her insides bubble like nothing else. And when he stared into her eyes . . .

She flushed, and her mother’s amused smile didn’t help. “You have it bad.” Kali Belladonna noted, and Blake could only nod.

She did, indeed.
Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Summary

Jaune and Yang go out on another date. Someone special arrives . . . and thoroughly reminds Jaune of the monster he could be. Weiss laments.

(Edit: Camillia Arc's character sheet is now at the bottom of this chapter.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN: In keeping with our musical accompaniment, the song tonight is “Fall For You” by Secondhand Serenade- and “Closing Time” by Semisonic.

A Family Arc

[Time To Say Goodbye]

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Dragon and the Sun; An Arrival Most Bloody Red; Snow White and the Blackened Prince

Jaune Arc had a plan. It was a simple one, albeit a somewhat risky one. If he was more candid, he might have called it “Operation Dragon Smile”. No, wait, that was stupid-

Ah, well, stupid tended to work when he was at least sincere about it. So after classes, he had dragged Yang back along to their dorms, and insisted she change into clothes to go out. He’d gotten a confused look until he’d smiled. “Let’s go out together.”

So, as he’d tucked into his “going out clothes” of a black button-up, white vest and red tie, leather gloves, white slacks and his greave boots, he came out of the bedroom to find Yang having rushed through a shower and into a less ostentatious set of casual clothing in comparison with the dress she’d wore for their first date.
She was ravishing in a dress, it was true, but this was more spur of the moment. He wouldn’t blame her for being a bit more caught off guard. He noted Pyrrha and Blake sat at the table, Blake pouring over his notes from the day before and Pyrrha likely there to make sure the Faunus didn’t grow lonely, since the redhead was sketching something with the flat side of a pencil rather than working from course-books. He offered a smile to the other girls, and noted, “Yang and I are going out. We’ll leave our Scrolls on if you girls need anything while we’re in Vale.” When he got a set of nods, he turned his attention back unto his blonde girlfriend- her hair still wet from the shower. “You have Bumblebee’s keys?”

That made her pause, the brawler getting a somewhat mystified look on her face. “We’re taking my baby?” When he nodded, it was worth the potential of being ruined on her driving forever to see the way her entire face lit up with her smile.

He still packed his motion sickness pills, just in case, though. Taking one if only for the Bullhead ride- though he was starting to get somewhat more used to the trips. The benefit of taking them so often, he supposed.

He didn’t get bothered at all by the curious glances of the other students as they made their way towards the Bullhead docks, hand in hand with the strong blonde who had stolen his heart with the glee of an explosive first breath.

As they settled into the delivery down to Vale, he took her hand and offered Yang a smile which she returned with the one that hadn’t left her face since their dorm. Feeling cheeky, he leaned over to press an adoring kiss to her lips, enjoying the way she returned it and brought her other hand up to run calloused fingers against his cheek.

“What’s the occasion?” She asked, and he could only grin.

“I have an amazing girlfriend, who deserves to have the world served to her on a silver platter.”

“Oh-ho, so you’re feelin’ guilty, lover boy?” She chided, and he could only smile fondly at her.

“Only guilty that I get to be so lucky. Let’s go for a ride, and then you can pick what you want to do. Tonight’s your night, Yang.” Would he regret it? Maybe. But he was a good boyfriend, and she was a good girlfriend.

They hadn’t spent near as much time together as they should have. “Sounds like a real Yang of a
time, Jaune.” She noted, and he nodded in turn.

“I know it will be.”

The walk to the garage where she kept Bumblebee in Vale was pleasant, walking hand in hand with the fire that raged in his heart while they talked of light things- the blonde teasing him with knowledge that she’d been intimate with Blake and -damn if that didn’t make him blush Dust-reactor red-.

He was still a teenage male, and the idea of his two beautiful girlfriends doing anything together naked was- well- it was an image that couldn’t be denied in its appeal.

Those thoughts hadn’t left him until he’d settled unto the back of Bumblebee, Yang slipping astride the yellow and black thing and offering him the secondary black helmet which he tucked his hair into and fit carefully before wrapping his arms around her middle.

They’d peeled off into the evening red, and he was frankly thinking he might have thought her driving skills to be worse than they had been. They didn’t zip through traffic, but Yang truly went wild when they hit the by-ways that were only dominated by the civilians making their way to later work schedules. She ducked in and out of the lines of the road, one of his arms keeping wrapped tight to her waist while the other tucked his hand in against his other fist. Yips and shouts of excitement coming from Yang as she saw them deeper into Vale proper.

They were two flames feeding on the wind whipping against them. A grin was on his face, and he was sure her’s was just the same beneath those aviators she wore while on the bike.

They stopped to refuel the bike and shared a convenience-store doughnut with sprinkles and strawberry icing. She grinned and teased him about getting some of the pink frosting on his nose, then dipped in to press a kiss to his lips that he returned and wrapped his arms around her again.

They broke away as the dispenser dinged its completion, and he smirked as she turned to fish the pump from Bumblebee’s tank-

And he delivered a light swat to her jean-clad rump, which made her jutter forward and then look over her shoulder at him with a mild grin. ‘Oh? You’re feelin’ brave tonight, aren’t you?’ He shrugged, the smile on his face stretching his cheeks so bad it hurt.
He could hear the kitschy guitar chords as they pulled away, his arms around her again. The red of the setting sun turning into the purple and blue of a moonlit sky. Their first destination for the night was a mom and pop diner that Yang walked in with all the bombast he expected of her, settling into a booth with him arriving on the other end. She greeted the young Waitress- easily their age- with a grin and a quirk of her sunglasses before she put them away. A couple’s milkshake ordered along with a basket of fries to split.

It was a quintessential teen date in the movies, but it felt so perfectly Yang that he couldn’t complain. A few of the other customers in the place, mostly Faunus, looked at them askance while he faded them all out in favor of his wild blonde date.

“A place like this must be too normal for you.” Yang noted, and he shook his head.

“The only thing that matters is who I’m with.” It was cheesy, but it was the truth. His friends always made places feel just right. Yang had been the first to give him the chance, and he’d appreciate that until the day he died. He’d appreciate her until he died.

He was an Arc, he could make that promise.

“You’re corny.” She noted, but he saw the way her cheeks lit up pink and the way her pretty lips split open to showcase well-taken care of teeth.

“I don’t want to hear that from you.” He teased in turn, as their treats arrived, and she stole the first drink before he could even get a finger on his own straw. His blue eyes narrowed at her while she looked coyly at him through her lashes.

She was beautiful. There was no other way to put it- it was the only word he could think of to truly appreciate the moment.

She made him feel so dumb.

She scooped up a dollop of whipped creme from the top with a fry, and he took a drink from the strawberry cream confection, letting thoughts of how he hoped this would last forever overtake him.

They finished their fries and shake, and he left much more than the diner cost for the whole ensemble, and slipped back unto her bike. Night progressed, and he found himself at yet another
club - this one a bit more modern and filled with people their age trying to sneak liquor and hook-ups. It was funny to him, to see the struggles the youth not dedicated to their lifestyle went through.

The uncertainties, the problems that weren’t near as bad as “live to see another day while you fight the enemy of mankind.”

It put real perspective on just how “meaningless” all of his own inner struggles could seem. A few guys tried to pick up Yang, and he could only laugh when she’d rebuke them by grabbing his arm and dragging him further into the center of the dance floor, where she went wild and just enjoyed herself.

With Yang around, he could only ever live in the moment. There was no other speed but “Yang Xiao Long”. The bump and grind, the erratic and shaking movements accorded to modern music, the way her lilac eyes lit up when his hands settled on her hips and she gave him a playful, easy smile when he stole a kiss from her lips.

Jaune Arc felt that his plan - as stupid and nonsensical as it was - worked.

They danced and played until it was too late to take the last Bullhead back, and so he’d offered her a smile as he pulled his Scroll from his pocket, and she’d given him a quirked brow. As he sent a message to their Team group chat about how they’d stay in a hotel that night, she slipped in and squeezed his hip with one of her rough hands.

They’d be late for classes, he knew, but it was only reasonable. They were two stupid teens out having a good time. The night wouldn’t end right if they didn’t make a mistake or two.

So they made it in the hotel, naked and sweating. Her lips on his, and his body pressed tightly to hers. A comfortable bed keeping them warm in the Fall chill. “Don’t go thinking I’m easy.” She teased, and he shook his head.

He would never think anything of the sort. All of this was just another sign of how amazing he thought she was. How much he loved her.

How he might die without her.

The tickle of liquor in their stomachs just a muted little part of their senses as he drowned in her
softness and her drive. The way her fists clung to his hair and his shoulders as he shifted in time with the beat of their ever racing hearts. The feeling of her warmth telling him he would melt if she wanted him to.

And he wanted to, oh so desperately. Nothing more did he want for Yang Xiao Long and Jaune Arc to stop existing and just be together. Her lips pressing in against his throat while his hips shifted, and she cooed to him when he would angle himself just right and touch the spot inside of her that made her squirm.

There’d been no need for foreplay, this time. Their mutual comfort and affection for one another the perfect beginning to a relationship so steeped in feelings. She marked him, the same as Ruby and Blake had, and he would wear the bruises with pride as he felt defeat at the hands of Yang Xiao Long in a horribly pleasurable way for the first time that night.

“Jaune.” His name from a tired pair of lips drew his attention, eyes opening once again to drift towards where her head lay against his breast, wondering if she could hear the way his heart beat for her.

Hoping she could.

“You remember the promise I asked you to keep for me, right?” Her question earned a nod, and he felt it was only fair that he speak.

“I’ll always run to you, Yang.”

“I know you would.” Her body rolled over atop his, and he felt the soft pressure of her weight against him, comforting and familiar. “So, I want to make a promise to you.”

His eyes opened a bit more, some of that drowsy haze flitting away in the face of Yang’s “serious face”.

“I won’t leave you alone in the dark.” She began, and he watched the way her eyes began to glimmer in the low light of their hotel room. “I won’t make you feel like my Dad did when Mom left. Until you get sick of me, I won’t let you go.”

Her words choked him up more than he cared to admit in that moment. Feeling vulnerable and
aware of everything around them once more, he could only watch as she soldiered on. Her eyes finally started to tear up, and he wondered if she was trusting him—TRULY trusting him—with what had ate at her before.

“I don’t care about what you’ve done—” He thought that was a lie, but he also knew that Yang was making the effort, “—you’re Jaune Arc. You’re the guy I didn’t think I’d fall in love with, but I did. So, don’t”—Her fists rested against his chest, and he knew she could feel the way his heart pounded like a drumline, “—you dare. Ever. Think I’d want anything else but for . . . us. For this. To work.”

He knew she’d already felt that way. After all, it was only through Yang’s words and efforts that the world had agreed to work with them—in all this strangeness she must feel when she saw him spend time with her sister or her team-mate.

There was only ever one response to a confession like that, so he wrapped his arms around her and brought her in to his chest, feeling the curtain of her wild blonde mane resting across his shoulders and chest, and he whispered a weak promise.

“I love you, Yang.”

And those words broke the dam, the tenderness of the moment exclaimed with bodies young and virile, but spoken softly with intent.

“I won’t let you disappear in the night.” Her last words to him that night as they drifted off into dreams.

+x+x+x+x

The week progressed with a sense of urgency and anxiety as he both heard and saw Vale and Beacon begin to boom with arrivals from the other nations and all of Remnant’s roundabout, the Vytal festival’s coming attracting people from all over, and it led to him checking his Scroll more and more often. He knew that his parents would take the trip to see him and his team in the tournament, but there was another person he was much more interested in seeing arrive.

And it was Thursday evening when he finally got the message. *I’ll be arriving in an hour.*

Camillia.
His smile had lit his face, and everyone from RWNR and JBPY had noticed, even as the Bullhead docks filled with Atlesian ships and elsewise transporting part of the tribute needed to power the arriving Amity colosseum, alongside many of the dignitaries and the military presence that would surely be another excuse for Atlas to flex their military might before the eyes of the rest of the world. Alongside Haven, and Shade, he could only feel the stirrings of a darker impulse in his gut.

The tournament would be *grand*, as Pyrrha would say.

Weiss and Ruby were similarly on their way down to the docks, and his own excitement made his steps all the more pronounced as he looked for ships marked with Haven’s own sigil- the most likely arrival for his sister. Behind him, he heard the chatter between Weiss and Ruby as they seemed similarly vexed in looking for someone.

“So what’s your sister like?” Ruby asked, and he let his mind drift a bit while he searched. *Weiss’ sister. Winter Schnee, Atlesian Specialist, if I remember right. She and Camillia were rivals eight years ago-*

It seemed all too convenient, but he could acknowledge that almost everyone would start arriving for the Vytal Festival at the same time. Surely the two could be trusted to stay above baseline instincts and stick to decorum- he expected at least that much from his own sister, and if Winter was anything like Weiss, he was sure she was a level-headed and controlled woman.

A flash of golden blonde drew his eye finally, and he watched as his sister stepped down from the landing-plank of a Haven ship after three students. A ravenette, a silver-haired male, and a green-haired girl. He dismissed them out of turn as his feet began to carry him towards the strip dedicated to her ship.

Her golden hair like a halo wreathing her shoulders and head, wild and untamed in nature, but with an air of sophistication to the curls and waves that bloomed outwards save for the few errant strands that stood out at sharp angles in the form of her bangs.

*Crimson* was tucked into the small of her back in it’s compact form, and her body was- as usual when he saw her in “official” capacity- tucked into her bloody red battle-suit with it’s dust-resistant plates. He knew beneath the neck of the thing was tucked the golden locket that held a picture of the Arc siblings all gathered together so many years ago.

He could almost hear the signature *click-clack* of her “battle heels” as she stepped towards
Beacon proper, and he met her with a grin that wouldn’t come free of his lips.

His sister was here. The one he hadn’t seen in almost a year and a half in person. The one who had taught him how to be a Huntsman amongst Huntsman. A “hunter of hunters”, if one was poetic.

Her lips lilted upwards at the corners, as close to a smile as the woman would get when she was outside of the fights she loved oh so much. The scars dotting her jawline and tickling their way across her brow and nose not at all lessening her beauty. “Hey, Cam.”

“You look great. You have the scent of blood on you.” She noted, and he could only shudder at the pleasure in her voice. The mingling guilt and the satisfaction of having her approval coursing its way through his veins. “Beacon hasn’t softened your blade at all, has it? That’s good. You’ll need to be sharp to be a great Huntsman, Jaune.”

He knew it was the truth, and so he accepted it without study. A noise like the clanging of steel against steel reached his ears, and he barely caught the curious look on his sister’s face before she led him along to another of the landing pads.

Two duking it out in the midst of a crowd, a woman wreathed in white and a man with a flowing red cape and spiked raven hair.

While he did not know the man, he had a disturbing inkling of who the snow-haired woman was-

-and it only took the sight of his sister’s gleeful visage, moments before she darted through the crowd and he heard the similarly memorable sound of Crimson expanding and cocking, to know that the world was once again a madhouse built only for him.

[This Will Be The Day, Orchestral Battle (Jeremiah George)]
“WINTER!!” The name was sung as if a shout for glory, and the two scuffling were separated by a flurry of sanguine as the Schnee woman was knocked back away from the man, a shotgun blast from Crimson sending the man skidding further back with a dumbstruck look on his face while Jaune, horrified, watched his sister dart after the Atlesian Specialist with a manic gleam that could only be depicted in a masterwork written upon her face.

The answer to his earlier hopes was to be shattered, as Camellia Arc drew Crimson up high and brought the bat-wing blades down into the Schnee woman’s saber, then adjusted--

“EVERYONE MOVE!” He shouted, knowing already that his mentor wouldn’t care about casualties when they were surrounded. No, Camillia Arc only saw one thing--a foe she had wanted to fight for almost a decade. A worthy challenge to make her blood sing. Students ducked out of the way as a dust-shell impacted past Winter as the Atlesian woman dodged out of the way and engaged some kind of mechanism in her blade that flung a secondary blade into her free left hand, the look of rage that had been upon her face now one of startled panic. “ARC?!”

It was the only words exchanged between the two, and he was sure that was all that Camillia cared about- that Winter Schnee remembered her. That this moment in time would finally happen. He knew the next attack before it even came, Camillia bringing the blades of Crimson around to pirouette and slam the longest point of her ranseur right towards Winter’s liver-

The secondary blade knocked the strike askew, and he heard another KRAKK-THOOM announce the firing of his sister’s weapon as she used the recoil from the blast to bring the long weapon around in a retreating stab aimed up high towards the throat.

Dear gods, his sister was trying to kill Winter Schnee in front of everyone. Surely, the Specialist had her Aura to keep her from grievous wounds, but--

He watched as Winter brought her primary saber up and caught the blade before it could touch her flesh, the blade hooked into Camillia’s weapon now- and he knew that someone needed to intervene, because-

“CAMILLIA!” He yelled- watching as his sister’s palms shifted and she readied to wrench her opponent’s sword from her grasp with the ornate design of her weapon. “STOP THIS!” Crocea Mors was ejected into his hand and the shield was brought free-
-just as a purple glow encircled both combatants and flung them from one another, both women righting themselves in mid-air while other voices joined the shouting, “Schnee!” “Enough!”

His attention moved from where his sister had poised with Crimson so elegantly spun against her hip, ready to return into the fray with a lunge and where Winter’s stance had dropped wide- nervous, unto the sight of the Headmaster, Professor Goodwitch, and a man adorned in regal white and blue.

General James Ironwood. Easily distinguishable. His peripheral view saw Ruby darting towards the man who had been in the fight earlier, while he spied Weiss heading towards her sister with a worried look on her face.

“Weiss, no!” It was a primal, easy fear. Camillia wouldn’t be cowed so easily, and he knew it. Interference only ever made her focus more on the fight- and so he pushed Aura into his legs in preparation to leap-

-only to watch his sister twirl her weapon and turn the blade up towards the sky, a sly smile on her face. The momentum carried him within stepping distance of his sister instead of right into her, and so he was left with what must have been a dumb look on his face. Blue eyes turned towards him with a twinkle in them, and he could only gawp. “What, dear brother? Did you think that I’d maim her here?”

Yes. Yes he had. The fact she wasn’t still trying to scared him.

His sister’s lips bloomed into a- false- smile and she let loose a melodic laugh. “You look terrified. Is the little snow-haired girl so special to you?” A few clack-clacks of her booted heels announced her steps as she raked a gloved set of fingers through his blonde locks. “Oh, yes. Mother wanted you to marry her, wasn’t that so? Very well, I’ll treat her specially as a future sister in law. It’s the least a big sister can do, don’t you think?”

He agreed, but nonetheless he could only feel the tension slowly drain from him, the adrenaline forcing his heart to pump a million miles a minute. Nervously, he sheathed the blade of the ancestral blade at his hip again as his gaze moved from his sister to where Winter was saluting the General and Weiss-

-Weiss’ eyes were on him, and he could only bow his head in as deep an apology as he could without being closer to tell her to her face.
How could he do anything but? “Qrow.” The Headmaster’s voice rang out, and his gaze went back towards where Ruby and the man- presumably Qrow from how he stiffened at the name- had been catching up and he could only shake his head as the General, Winter, and the Headmaster headed on towards the school while he saw a blonde head of hair head towards them in turn.

“Lady Arc, I know you know better than this.” Glynda Goodwitch hissed, and he could only wince as he stepped back from between the two blondes. While his Professor looked incensed- Camillia looked pleased, as if holding onto some secret joke. “Simply breaking up a fight on school grounds, Goodwitch. It’s uncouth for Huntsmen to act that way, don’t you think?” He watched the way her blue eyes glimmered over the Professor’s shoulder, and his own attention was drawn to the tightness of the Combat Professor’s jaw.

“It is-” Glynda started, but he saw the continuation before it was even out of her mouth, “- but it doesn’t help for you to engage with the way you did. What would have happened if you’d hurt Specialist Schnee?”

Jaune couldn’t help but feel that Goodwitch was downplaying the situation. He’d seen it, the way his sister’s eyes had gleamed with utter pleasure when Winter had made the foolish mistake of catching his sister’s blade-

-he could picture it. Crimson whipping the saber from the white-haired woman’s grasp and then planting the barrel of the shotgun against her abdomen before a spray of red would announce the ending of one of the Schnee children as a deathknell.

His sister would have killed Winter Schnee in that moment, he knew it deep inside of his bones, even though his mind tried to push the thought aside in favor of belief in the words of his beloved mentor and sister.

He already knew he wouldn’t be able to sleep that night, even as his gaze turned onto Camillia’s carefully constructed mask of noble intent, her red-painted lips crowning pearly white teeth. “Winter is a strong woman, she wouldn’t have been felled by something as simple as one attack.”

It only ever took one swing. Even the strongest of people just needed the right movement of a knife at the right time- he’d been taught that over half a decade of tutelage under Camillia.

Overwhelming, immediate, surprising force was mitigated with training to strike with surgical
precision and neuter any threat when they were unprepared and weak.

He’d been taught to kill humans even more than Grimm. Grimm couldn’t protect themselves with Aura or sense, Humankind . . . were the only true prey.

Humans- or Faunus- always satisfied Camillia Arc more. And as Jaune emptied the contents of his stomach into JBPY’ s dorm room toilet that night before bed, he could only comfort himself with the thought that she was his sister- who loved and wanted only to protect him.

No matter how extreme the methods used to do so. He couldn’t see the way the rest of his team had hung around the bedroom door, looking at one another with worried glances as he stared at himself in the mirror, wondering if he made them so sick with worry when he fell back upon the training ingrained in him by his sister.

And so, for the first time in awhile, Jaune Arc wept. And the peace of Team JBPY was shattered by a young man’s shaken faith.

+x+x+x+

Weiss studied herself in the mirror once more, making sure that her slight amount of make-up and her combat attire were perfectly even as afternoon classes let out and Friday evening took place. Students of Beacon and the other academies alike venturing out into Vale while she readied to meet her sister once again.

They’d made arrangements to meet in the garden plaza, and Weiss wouldn’t be late- only fashionable. As she stepped from her team’s dorm with a soft “Back soon”, she paused in the hall and glanced at Team JBPY’ s dorm.

Jaune hadn’t been to classes again today, and Ruby’s questions had only gotten a glum look from the women on his team. It was . . . sobering, to see him humbled and shaken like that- metaphorically.

Apparently his team hadn’t seen much of him, either. He’d stayed in bed and insisted an ailment, and none of them had been willing to fight him on the matter- not that Weiss blamed them.

It was an illness, but sadly not one of the body. One of the spirit, and one Weiss could
She knew he probably thought she hated him, but the truth was simply that she couldn’t.

Winter and Camillia’s business was their own, and misplacing that blame wouldn’t make her feel any better. Weiss was a more mature woman than that. Time to ruminate would prepare him for help, and Weiss knew that he was surrounded by friends ready to help him.

Even she would, though it might pain her heart to do so.

The soft clack of her heels was the only music to fill that lonely walk to meet her beloved sister.

Chapter End Notes

Camillia Arc, firstborn daughter of House Arc.
Nicknames: Cam (Jaune), Milly (Arc family), Lady Camillia Arc (Sundry), Hunter of Huntsmen (Mistral)
Race: Human
Age: 28-29?
Hair: Blonde
Eyes: Blue
Height: 5’10”
Weight: ? ? ?
Distinguishing Features: Scarred, prosthetic left arm.
Semblance: :Predator:, Camillia Arc's sensory abilities are heightened beyond human means. Scent, hearing, vision, and touch are all heightened, can be further heightened by focus on her senses- she has trained to dilute them when not necessary, to mitigate the downsides of heightened senses.
Aura Color: Sanguine (Originally, Gold)
Weapon: Crimson, Mechashifting Ranseur w/ Dust-chambered Shotgun mechanisms
Affiliation: Solo Huntress; House of Arc
Handedness: Left

Misc. Notes:
Camillia (spelled with an I, instead of an E) is named after the flower Camellia.
She is most supportive of Blake as Jaune's love interest (because she feels closest to the Faunus girl)
She prefers the wilderness to civilization.
She has a perceived rivalry with Winter Schnee.
Camillia's ideal VA would be Tara Platt.
Chapter Summary

Nevena Arc isn't so above her family's overall goofiness. Sometimes, a noble lady just needs a glass of whiskey, and some good company. The fact her drinking buddy is Sienna *Fucking* Khan? Just normal for her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN: Thank you to all of you who showed support, whether through reviews or PMs. I appreciate those of you who took the time to acknowledge what I said, and I apologize to those of you who aren’t as pleased with the story as I wish you all could be. I admit, perhaps I’m not giving characters as great of a voice as they deserve to have-

So many people do not like Nevena or Camillia, and I can assure you that I want people to understand where they come from- in fact, this chapter was purposefully designed as a somewhat more gentle moment to showcase that Camillia- for all her psychoses- is actually a good and loving big sister. I’ve wanted desperately to get to the Ball, for obvious reasons if you’ve been reading since the Prologue, so I was rushing a bit to try and get there, and instead I’ve managed to make a depressing mess of some things as a result.

So I apologize again. As readers, you all deserve to get to enjoy the whole of the subtleties of the story just as much as the in-your-face action and drama. With that said, have a fun omake to keep you all sated for awhile. For extra fun points, go read Nevena’s character sheet on AO3 and discover that Nevena and Sienna would share a VA, so it would sound like they were -talking to themselves.-

A Family Arc

[Rising]

Omake One

Shotgun Lady

She was Nevena Arc. Formerly Nevena Hauteclere, a proud young woman who had loved only
two things before she met her husband-

-a cold bottle for whiskey on the rocks, and the excitement and prestige the Huntress lifestyle afforded a young, poor blonde girl who only had a strong soul and a pair of fists she loved to bloody.

Then, she’d found herself pregnant with Roux Arc’s first child. That was the day that Nevena’s life had changed. A whirlwind romance became a lifetime commitment- one that she was ultimately happy to keep. Her little crimson princess was a precious child, always so happy when they inevitably added yet another child to the Arc family registry.

As she nursed her glass in one of Ansel’s pubs- one of the ones she knew would serve her without questions thanks to the Faunus owner’s appreciation for her husband’s lineage allowing him to live a life away from the racism and struggle that the trait-possessing people suffered in other parts of Remnant- her green eyes studied her drinking partner of the night.

The tiger-skinned faunus woman was metaphorically elbow-deep in a glass of rum that stank to the high heavens of being harder stuff than your average cocktail mixer.

It was the start to a great joke, she was sure. The leader of the White Fang and a human noblewoman walk into a bar-

Too bad the stories of Nevena Arc entering a bar usually ended in “And then six people were sent off in an ambulance.” The gold-wearing Matri-Arc was well aware of her rambunctiousness when a few glasses deep.

As she hefted her glass and took another deep draw of the delightful amber liquid again, she phased back into the words of her drinking partner of the night.

“And then there’s the fucking brothers, always talking shit behind people’s backs. No respect, not even an ounce. A real faunus ought to bear their teeth and claws proudly, not like a pair of mice.”

She had to bow her head a bit in a nod. One of the most unpleasant parts of being ennobled was being surrounded by people who would smile and kowtow, but then would turn around and plot putting a knife in your back. Nevena could remember a time when she would have solved everything with *L’Belle d’Revolution* or her fists, but nowadays she couldn’t do that without- well-eradicating the entirety of Ansel’s genteel population.
Not that she couldn’t, but it would look very bad. Nevena had learned how to schmooze and control people because she had to, not because she wanted to. How else could she protect her little birds from the predators who waited in the wings to clip them and make them trophies on a shelf?

There were plenty of good reasons she’d made a firm example of the first idiot to make a mess of one of her children. Violette’s husband had looked fine at first, but had promptly proven himself . . .

A liability, so to speak. Unlike her oldest, Nevena hadn’t taken any particular pleasure in destroying the poor boy’s life, but it had been a matter of both pride and him having hurt her lovely little Vi.

Violette had always been the most sensitive of her children. Even Jaune, before the family’s training, had been made of sterner stuff. That said a lot about her purple-loving daughter’s fragile state of mind after the divorce, since Nevena was easily able to admit that her only son was well a sensitive young man.

Many had thought he was gay from how fervently he enjoyed effeminate things, and “suffered” from a much less manly mindset than her beloved husband. For a while, Nevena had feared that to be the case, but nowadays that worry was far from her mind. Jaune had been looking for romance, not for a woman.

She couldn’t say she wasn’t proud. That would have been a lie.

“I understand.” She noted, diplomatically, hearing Sienna Khan’s snort in response before she continued, “Ansel is filled to the brim with people who enjoy what they do because of my family.”

Sienna nodded in return, “So many faunus, and do you know how many recruits we get from here? One in dozens.” The tiger faunus raised an arm with her glass in her hand, a clawed finger pointing towards her in turn. “And it’s always the young ones, the ones who think they have something to prove. The older generation? All happy to praise your fuckin’ family up a landing strip and down the other side.”

Nevena nodded her head in return, nursing another sip from her glass as the world swam in more pleasant colors as her buzz kicked in. The world was a much more fun place after a few glasses of fine aged whiskey, she didn’t get to cut loose nearly as much as she’d have liked to.
Roux was a sweetheart, but she was a middle-aged woman. She’d been drinking since she’d become a Huntress, and she wasn’t going to go off the deep end because of one bottle, the silly billy.

“Faunus in Ansel enjoy a lifestyle so near equality that the only reason it isn’t egalitarian around here is because our population is something around seventy-percent Faunus.” And, if Jaune had found himself a wife from around here, it likely would have been a Faunus, if she was honest.

Her lovely little sunbeam was a hit with the girls, and Nevena had never been blind to it. Only Jaune’s gentle and self-effacing nature had ever prevented him from seeing how the young woman saw him with a light akin to worship.

It was only reasonable that she thought her lovely young boy could inspire such pleasant feelings in the girls who dreamed of being his. His days out and about had never been without the stray admirer or two offering him a smile or words of encouragement and affection that he’d nobly returned with all the class ingrained in him by the many women she’d paid to teach him to be a true “ladies’ man”.

Ostensibly, she’d hoped he would have found a fondness for one of them, but the closest she ever got was the flushed looks some would have when she checked to see how all of them were responding to him.

And now he was neck-deep in a relationship that would shake the foundation of nobility in Ansel, and she could only think that the apple never fell far from the tree.

The Belladonna girl had simply been more forward than the rest- and had the aid of the two sisters, it seemed, since she couldn’t see how the two would have gotten together so quickly and so fervently.

Nevena couldn’t be more proud of little Ruby Rose, and she was so pleased with the young blonde and the ravenette whom had both taken a step in being women above the social moors of the world.

“People with your power are always given to abusing those under them.” Sienna noted, and Nevena couldn’t argue against being the exception to the rule. After all, she knew very well the ugliness built up by Jacques Schnee and many other powerful figures all over Remnant.

Was it her business? Only insomuch as she expected Weiss Schnee to become Weiss Arc at some
point. She would have preferred it much earlier, but she—again—wasn’t blind.

Her little sunbeam never had approached a girl, never had stepped away from a dance with a smile. Her son loved to dance, she knew—and she loved to see him dance—but she also knew what it was to fall in love through a brief moment of connection.

Nevena Arc was a romantic at heart. And that was only one of many reasons she did not “push” her children to marry the way other nobelwomen often did. Her encouragement was always more gentle than others—who would force children, literal actual children, into marriages of convenience for more power.

That idea disgusted her on a deep level.

“Have you ever been in love, Sienna?” It was a question from out of the blue, but it was one Nevena was curious about. Sienna Khan was, after all, closer to her age, even if she wasn’t nearing it like her predecessors, the Belladonnas.

The queer look that came across the flushed Faunus’ face was darling, even she could admit it.

“Not… really?” Sienna’s bare admission made Nevena smirk behind the rim of her glass. It was easy to imagine the woman being so busy with her ambitions and dreams that she’d insist her life was full of too much business to do something as silly as hunt for her own happiness.

“I’m sure you’ll just say you’re too busy, but you know that it would mean a lot to your people to have someone to “rule” alongside you.” Nevena mused, spinning her glass to note how her lipstick had smudged across several sides of the chilled crystal tumbler that she took a moment to fill once again with the expensive whiskey that came from Vacuo.

Sienna Khan’s snort told her plenty about how she thought of that idea. Once again, Nevena found herself amused at how easy it was to read these types—the zealot warriors who fought for their dreams and ambitions, wanting to bring “equality and peace” through a type of change that only ever engendered negativity.

Terrorists were an amusing breed, even if Nevena could agree that the way Faunus were treated was . . . disheartening. She wasn’t quite the freedom fighter her lovely little Jade thought herself, but Nevena hadn’t been above helping her fellow man—whether they had animal traits or not-out.
A great many of the Arc family’s servants were pulled from the destitute. Giving them a new lease on life had the important benefit of engendering a certain breed of loyalty amongst them, and it sat well with her conscious.

Let it never be said that she wasn’t a bleeding heart when it came down to it. It helped that a great many young maidens would inevitably have fantasies of marrying the young Master of the house. She’d caught a great many of the younger maids with diaries detailing . . .

. . . explicit . . . dreams of what her young sunbeam would be like in the bedroom. Most of the time it was darling, though a few had to be corrected lest they get the idea that he was to be abused in their head. Some girls unfortunately made the word “obsession” look mild.

The world was sometimes a dark place, as sad as it could be.

“You know,” Nevena set her glass down, a smile tugging at her lips, “You could even fall in love with a human man. Imagine the stories of love conquering hate.”

Sienna snorted again, “Like the Belladonna girl and your son?” Ah, so she’d already seen the articles and pictures. Nevena shouldn’t have been surprised, but-

“Oh, so you like those kinds of publications?” She wouldn’t be a mother if she didn’t tease the woman who was easily her oldest daughter’s age. The slight flush on the woman’s cheeks wasn’t easily attributable to the liquor anymore. When Sienna hunkered back into her glass of refilled rum, Nevena continued. “But yes, like young Blake and my little sunbeam.”

Sienna’s eyes hardened, and Nevena could tell the liquor wasn’t as strong in the woman’s system as she liked to make it seem. Though the glazed look in her eyes said that Nevena could easily defeat her in a contest of drink and debauchery regardless. “Is that your idea, human?”

“To have them get together and bring together humans and faunus? No. They are darling together, but I just want him to find someone who will love him- and give me a great many grandchildren.” She didn’t even bother with one of her fake “noblesse oblige” smiles, it was easy to be happy with the situation as it was around her only son.

All of the girls sounded quite smitten with him, and she could only be happy that Jaune was finally coming out of his shell and embracing love outside of the family.
Sienna muttered, “You and Kali would get along well.”

“We did. She was a very pleasant woman to be around.” Nevena noted, once again nursing her drink.

The White Fang leader looked flummoxed by that, and Nevena could only laugh and lean forward to pour another glass for the tiger woman. “Come now, drink. I’m going to be disappointed in you if you can’t hold your liquor, Miss Khan. Don’t let an old lady like me beat you at this.”

The “friendly spar” that ensued an hour later was fun, and Nevena returned to the manor with a hop in her step. She loved having a good time.

Chapter End Notes

[b]**Nevena Arc, Lady of House Arc**[/b]
Nicknames: Lady Arc (Sundry)
Race: Human
Age: 45-47?
Hair: Blonde
Eyes: Green
Height: 5'10"
Weight: ??

Distinguishing Features: Wild, lengthy blonde waves; Austere presence; scary smile
Semblance: :Cruise:, Nevena Arc uses her Aura to produce air pressure at varying strengths around her body- primarily used to enhance her Martial Arts or enhance her own Aura’s protectiveness.
Aura Color: Gold
Weapon: L’Belle d’Revolution, Great War-era Dust-chambered specially modified Shotgun (Lupara-style sawn off); Martial Arts (Savate)
Affiliation: House of Arc; Ansel
Handedness: Right

Misc. Notes:
Nevena means “Marigold” in slavic languages.
She is most supportive of Ruby as Jaune's love interest (because of similarities between herself in youth and the young Rose. Though she prefers the approach of many women in order to procure more grandchildren)
Nevena’s ideal VA would be Monica Rial
Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Summary

Yang and Ruby, Winter and Weiss, Camillia and Jaune . . . three different pairs of siblings, and so many different perspectives to consider and contain.

(The end notes is Jade Arc’s character sheet.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

AN:  Put you on some tunes during this soft, easy chapter of A Family Arc Radio.  I can recommend “Beneath the Mask” from Persona 5, if you’re feeling jazzy. Because it’s about to get dark soon- and then bright again!

A Family Arc

[Time to Say Goodbye]

Chapter Twenty-Three

Sisters

For Ruby Rose, there was only a certain breed of happiness that could be attained in so short a time.  Having lived a harsh life, she had always been a bright girl, but there had always been something that felt like it was missing from her life.

And then she had met Jaune.  As strange as it was, Ruby felt it hadn’t been the first time. She remembered his sweet, sincere, if nervous, smile alongside a much less fashionable outfit.  The same discussion of weapons, though again slightly different.

She didn’t remember feeling so strongly about him- or him flirting with her. It had felt so new and so intense intense could only smile at the memory.  Despite herself, she couldn’t say it was the moment she fell in love with Jaune Arc.
No, in fact, it felt like a new dawn on it all. Meeting Weiss, and Blake- becoming friends with Pyrrha, Ren, and Nora-

Even Blake's looks at Jaune after they had gotten together rang of a familiar tone that, strangely, made her heart ache. Some days, Ruby found herself sitting with Jaune or sneaking in to enforce her affection for him after Blake had clearly spent time snuggled up with him.

It was healthy, surely. No need to hide emotions or struggle when it could be expressed in a healthy way? Perhaps that had been part of why she'd felt so . . . Aggressive with her lover. At least part of it, after all.

Regardless, Ruby found herself settled in with Yang as the sisters indulged in lounging about Team Rainbow's dorm. "So Weiss went to see her sister, and Jaune's sis dragged him out of bed early this morning-"

"Wait, that's why he didn't come to classes?" When Yang nodded, Ruby grew a little worried. "Did they say where they were going?"

"Nope. He was just gone when we got up, with a note on his bed. Here, I kept it in my pocket just in case-" And so Yang pulled the scribbled piece of ruled paper out and Ruby saw the elegant and curving handwriting of the oldest Arc sister.

Taking your leader. Don't wait up. Will return him before bed. - C. ARC, I. After the message was a carefully drawn caricature of the Arc family symbol with a spear passing through the center.

Ruby couldn't help but feel that the symbolism was a little worrying, though perhaps it was just Camillia Arc's flair for the dramatic- and she had gotten quite the front seat to how dramatic Jaune's sister was.

A great deal of Jaune's proclivities started to make sense now. After having met Nevena and Camillia Arc, Ruby Rose was reminded of things that had seemed . . . Off.

Another thing that stood out was the fact she knew the model and make of the gun Nevena Arc used- even though she was sure it hadn't been something she'd heard of before.

Even Ruby Rose, weapon enthusiast, could admit that was strange. The knowledge had just
popped into her head, like the sudden wash of feelings she had felt when she had met Jaune for the first time.

Oh well.

“Well, since it’s just us at the moment, what do you want to do, Yang? Wanna play some games?”

Yang shifted her body on the couch, laying on it lengthwise and letting her arms rest under her head full of blonde hair. “Actually, you mind if we talk for a bit? Something’s been bugging me for a little while, but we haven’t had a chance to sit down and talk since . . .”

Yeah. Ruby thought to herself, when Jaune had left them alone to sort out the whole mess with their- at the time- friendship with benefits. They hadn’t even told Jaune how that had went, though at the time it hadn’t felt important to Ruby.

“Sure, sis. What’s up?”

Yang’s purple eyes went to regard her while Ruby settled into the chair, watching the way Yang’s face softened a bit from a more serious tone. “Are we doing the right thing? With Jaune, I mean.”

In Ruby’s heart, she could admit that it probably wasn’t. After all, Ruby could feel a somewhat uncharacteristic greed when it came to the blonde-haired male. It was easy to imagine if she’d been braver, that she’d have been the only one in Jaune’s life.

That thought hurt her more than she’d care to admit. Something about it seemed wrong, like she was taking a knife to the tethers of her friends and family. At least this way, they were all happier- even if there was still strings of jealousy that made her wish she’d been more mature to start with.

“I mean-” Ruby couldn’t quite get her words in order in the same space as her speaking, so she simply let herself run at the mouth. “Probably not? But, do you want to risk all the heart-ache and pain of fighting over him, which will -definitely- make us all hate one another, and him hate himself for doing it to us? Because Jaune would blame himself.”
He had already blamed himself once. She knew it innately.

“Of course not.” Yang noted, and Ruby was comforted by that. “I wouldn’t have supported Blake if that was the case, y’know? If it was just between us sisters, it wouldn’t have been . . .” As strange, even Ruby understood that.

After all, they had both had the same father. They were both just alive to enjoy the intimacy, the romance.

“Do you regret it?” Ruby asked, wanting to make sure whether this was an attempt to make Yang feel better, or just to address the metaphorical Goliath in the room.

“No.” Yang shook her head, an expression on her face that spoke of strength that Ruby was privately proud of her sister for. Yang was a good girlfriend, even though Ruby had always known that would have been the case.

Yang was her sister, after all.

“Is it because of Weiss?” Neither of them were blind, and it was obvious from the start that Weiss had always had . . . certain responses to Jaune that were much more understandable now that they were there in the same place as the girl and Jaune. It wasn’t quite so clear since Weiss’ own upbringing changed things from being as simple as “girl likes boy, boy likes girl” and instead Ruby now understood a bit more that it was a matter of “even though boy and girl both like one another, there’s a lot of things that would have to change for them to get together.”

“A bit.” Yang admitted, “I was his first girlfriend, but you can tell they have . . . history together, y’know?”

Ruby nodded. The way Jaune and Weiss looked at one another- once upon a time it had only been him looking at her- was what she expected from a hero and a heroine fated to be together. “He loves you.” She noted, wanting to reinforce that thought as much as she could.

“I know. Blake said the same thing.”
“Blake’s smart, so you should listen to her.” Ruby nodded her head. Blake read big novels! Smart people read lots of books. Ruby didn’t like reading as much, herself, preferring fairy tales or comics. Working with her hands had always had the most appeal, even besides becoming a Huntress.

If she hadn’t done that, she would have been a mechanic or an engineer of some kind. Even if she knew there was no other life for her, the silver-eyed girl knew very well that she found her passion young and appreciated it.

Now if only she could convince the rest of their teams to let her indulge herself upon their weapons. Ruby Rose guaranteed super awesome customizations! Crocea Mors needed a gun, Stormflower needed interchangeable magazines-

Only Pyrrha’s weapon met Ruby’s strict standards of being a veritable Atlesian Army Knife.

“I’m not that insecure, sis.” Yang noted, and Ruby smiled indulgently, pretending she believed the lie. They were sisters, and it was a deep and unabiding scar they both shared deep down to the color of their souls.

Ruby Rose, shy and unsure of herself and her place in the world, and Yang Xiao Long, hurting and aching for having been abandoned.

It’d only been recently that Yang had started to firm up a bit more, with the help of their friends and their mutual boyfriend. It was pleasant to see her sister mask herself less and just -be- the good-natured girl that Ruby knew her sister to be.

No one could be happy plastering on a smile, and Ruby hated the thought that people did. Jaune had. Weiss had- in fact, Ruby struggled to think of someone amidst her friend group that didn’t at one point look like they were dying on the inside while wearing a smile.

It broke her heart.

Ruby didn’t consider herself a mind-reader, but a heart-reader? She was pretty good at empathizing with people. Jaune had called her strong in the heart, and she’d flushed pleasantly at the praise. “I love you, sis.” Ruby offered her sister a smile, climbing out of her chair and proceeding to flop herself on top of Yang while wrapping her arms around her blonde sister for a hug.
“Plagh-- Ruby, oww- you’re- nnghk- crushin’ my spleen--!”

Ruby hugs!

+x+x+x+

Weiss had expected a certain degree of civility to be present in her meeting with her sister, but a simple cup of tea out in the gardens was a bit more “casual” than a meeting after what felt like years without seeing one another face to face ought to have been.

To be fair to her sister, however, Weiss had always been much more painfully instructed in etiquette and noble affectation than her sister- who had stole away into the military- had. In comparison, Weiss had been engaged to be the heiress since youth, her sister’s predilection towards not bending the knee to her father’s whim had been known since Weiss was but a girl learning to walk.

Such memories, of the time before her mother had become distant and interested only in drinking her pain away in the Schnee manor’s gardens, were some of the few things that made Weiss believe she had a family at all.

Part of her had longed for that same escape, though perhaps she’d foolishly denied it’s one appearance in the form of a blonde young man at a dance that shouldn’t have affected her so deeply- but did.

“How are you doing, sister?” Winter questioned, and Weiss let herself relax into a more “proper” seating position as opposed to the more lackadaisy one she’d found herself mirroring in her teammates since after the first week of troubles between her and Ruby Rose.

“Well!” Weiss didn’t have to fake the smile. Even with heavier thoughts on her mind, it was only fair to admit that she was having a good time at Beacon. Her friendship with Ren and Nora was hard and fast- “I’ve made quite a few friends here. My team is one of the top of the year-”

Winter’s brow perked at that, and so she decided to elaborate, “Our sister team, Team Juneberry, has two of the top Huntsresses in the year, and the other two members are exceptional as well.” At her sister’s nod, she continued her original train of thought. “Ruby is a gifted leader, and a good friend. Ren and Nora have helped me a lot since I first came here, and without them I’m sure I would have felt more alone- but I’ve…”
Winter smiled as she trailed off, “It sounds like you’ve certainly bloomed since your arrival here. It seems this was a wise decision.”

“Thank you.” Weiss wasn’t above lavishing in the praise of her sister, and from the fond smile that stretched Winter’s lips, she was thoroughly willing to let her have the moment. But, she also couldn’t let herself rest on her laurels, besides, it was rare that she got to indulge in a free chance to have a heart to heart with her sister. “But . . . it’s not all been… perfect.”

“I take it you have something on your mind, then?”

Weiss nodded, deciding it was best to start from the beginning. “You remember, a little over two years ago? When father and I went to Ansel-” She was cut off by her sister nodding once again, a more light expression of thought on her face.

“The Arc’s party, yes. It was a curious decision on father’s part--”

Weiss winced, but interrupted her sister nonetheless, “Because it was mine.”

“Your’s?” It was the first time she’d seen her sister outright surprised in awhile. “You wanted to go to Ansel, the second highest per capita of Faunus in Remnant? For a birthday party?”

“Masquerade.” Weiss corrected, but then continued, “I thought it would be a night where I could just not-be- Weiss Schnee.”

Winter leaned back in her seat, letting her tea-cup settle unto it’s saucer for a moment. “Being who I am, I can’t scold you for such a thought, but it was quite a dangerous gamble. But- why do you bring it up now?”

“Because I met someone there.” Weiss was floating around the issue, and she knew it, but her nerves were getting the better of her. How could she admit to being vexed over a -boy- to her sister? Winter Schnee had no such distractions in her life, being the model of a perfect woman- at least in her own eyes. Successful in her career, vaunted and adored, and free to do as she pleased! Such a life was beyond Weiss’ dreams.
“Jaune Arc, correct?” Winter was surprisingly cool, even for her sister. Weiss grew a curious look on her face, which was shortly answered, “Camillia Arc is his sister, after all. I . . . may have known of his existence.”

That thought brought a whole new slew of questions to the fore, but Weiss decided it was better to press forward. “Well- it was his birthday, and . . . we danced together.”

Now, it was Winter’s turn to look confused. “I’m sensing there’s more.” She even went so far as to say, while Weiss simply shook her head.

“There wasn’t- at the time. He was just a handsome young man who-”

And that was when Winter Schnee’s face broke out in surprise. “He must have made quite the impression for you to call him handsome.” She noted, her even voice betraying only a hint of the surprise etched on her face.

Weiss hated how she flushed at her sister’s teasing. Traitorous cheeks turning pink! “He’s- He’s Team Juneberry’s leader-” That knowledge made Winter nod her head again, an understanding look on her face. “And . . .”

“And?” Winter asked, waving a hand as if to ask for more details.

“I- I may- I have-”

“Weiss. I won’t judge you. You’re my little sister, I’m here to help, if I can. Has he done anything to upset-”

“No!” Weiss cut that thought off before it began. For all Weiss understood Camillia Arc’s own intensity, she was similarly aware of her own sister’s particularly outrageous reactions to such small scale things as “bullying” or elsewise. Weiss still remembered the young socialite who had pulled her hair and then promptly been introduced to the third degree by her sister. “Nothing of that sort! It’s- it’s far more complicated than that!”

“Then tell me as simplistically as you can, Weiss.” Sadly, that was the barrier of conversation between the two. Winter was a stolid woman, and while she was more socially aware than a great many she’d met, she was also a woman of few words in comparison with the grandiose speeches
Weiss had been engendered to know how to perform just the same as an opera or ballad.

“He’s- he’s of noble blood. He is well-mannered and gifted with-”

“A bit -more- simplistically, if you could, sister.” Winter’s face had an abject expression of amusement on it, and Weiss knew she was starting to ramble.

“Father approved of him, and- I- I…”

“You like him?” Winter asked, once again sitting forward while picking up the cup of tea that had been left to cool somewhat over their conversation. “You seem quite vexed with him, at least.”

Weiss, not trusting her lips, nodded. Winter continued afterwards, “And because father approved, you find yourself wishing you weren’t attracted to him?” Another nod. “Is he worthy of you?”

That question actually made Weiss pause. It was- in so many words- a damn good question.

Was Jaune Arc- already rife with potential paramours- worthy of her, Weiss Schnee? No, wait-?

That question had nearly put her on a path that she didn’t want to walk. Was he worthy of Weiss? There was no reason to bring the name of Schnee into it. If she chose to walk with him, it would be under his own name, not the name that had been like a cage to her since birth.

Could she be Weiss Arc? Could she be happy, sharing a husband with other women? Even if those women were some of her closest friends?

The idea was outrageous on its own, but . . . part of it appealed to her. Never being lonely again, always having someone to count upon- even as they made steps into a world beyond politics, beyond noble lineage, beyond all of the social graces she’d been instilled and restrained with since birth.

And she could not deny the flutter that had built in her heart, the ache that had filled her after he’d played for her. Had he felt so empty inside, so desperate to reach out and touch, the way she had?
Did he hold onto that mask from the ball, thinking of her?

Winter’s expression morphed between emotion after emotion, before she spoke again. “You’re serious about him.” It was a condemning tone, but one she knew she deserved in that moment.

“I don’t know.” Weiss admitted, even while Winter Schnee let her head droop a bit, a soft little murmur escaping Weiss’ ears in meaning, but not in presence.

“What do you want to do, Weiss?” Winter’s question was one that shook her, even if it was the one she’d been asking herself for a month or so now. What did Weiss want to do? Not Weiss Schnee, daughter of Jacques Schnee, and the heiress of the Schnee Dust Company, want to do?

She loved him, she understood. Perhaps not as fiercely as one might ought to, but there was a pleasant tingle that washed over her when his focus was on her- when the circuits looked ready to bridge the gap.

If Jacques Schnee had not approved, would she have indulged in Nevena Arc’s invitation to spite him-?

-or because Weiss had felt what it was to be in the same world as someone like her? Someone who could understand-

-someone who could love her- no, that was disingenuous.

Jaune -would- love her, if she’d let him. . .

But did Weiss let him have that chance?

+x+x+x+

Being shanghaied by his sister was a more common occurrence than Jaune would freely admit to. Since he was twelve, it had happened more often than he’d spent time at home- though that was only to be considered fair considering the brutality of Camillia’s training regimen for him.
The fact that they had instead sauntered out of Beacon proper and then into Vale- after both had
taken motion sickness pills (the damned familial curse, he swore)- was a bit more out of the
ordinary. Including a stop at a pleasant little cafe for breakfast, where Camillia had enforced quiet
with her own poise and he’d not fought against her for the matter.

His questions and words could wait until later, when they both had food in their stomachs. He
understood the message innately- she’d been in the wilds of Anima for too long and hadn’t gotten to
indulge herself in something resembling a cooked meal outside of the rare inn or homestead’s in what
had likely been months.

Camillia Arc was a survivor, through and through.

Finally, the silence was broken as Camillia took her second cup of coffee, black which was a
surprising difference from the remainder of the family, to have a sip, “Classes are so very indulgent,
don’t you think, Sunny? Have you learned much from any of them?”

He knew that Camillia had chosen the hard route to becoming a Huntress herself- it was displayed
across the whole of her flesh, covered in scars and marks of her prowess and how she earned every
inch of it- but he couldn’t help but feel she was being a bit more vehement than usual. “I’ve learned
a few things.” He erred on the side of mediation, not wanting to indulge her in an excuse to rant or
for her to return to one of the points of contention that she’d always held with him about his future.

Camillia had firmly believed that he should have stayed under her as her trainee- and while some
days he would agree that it would have made him a better Huntsman, Beacon had done wonders for
him as a person alongside improving his skills- if not as much as if he’d kept studying under Camillia
for two more years.

Beacon was a school dedicated to turning out quality protectors, Camillia was his very own
personal expert instructor in how to fight.

“Certainly. Plenty to do with your love life- and whom you can trust in this world, don’t you
think?” Camillia’s rouge-painted lips quirked into a smile that showcased the bare hints of pearl-
white teeth, and he let his eyes close in favor of enjoying the soft musical ambiance and the scent of
coffee and tea in the cafe. The cool morning air of Fall left him feeling lackadaisy, and that just
wouldn’t do on a morning when he was out with his sister.

“Are you going to say “I told you so”, as well?” He remarked, lips lilting up into a smile before
Camillia’s smile muted itself in turn.

“I would have, if it’d stayed the way it seemed to when you first enrolled. But, it seems you’ve
grown into your own here.” Despite the way she insisted on that fact, his sister sounded . . . sad.

“Do you not approve?” Jaune asked, worried.

“Don’t be silly, Jaune,” Her usage of his name earned another notch on the meter of his
discomfort, “I only want you to be happy. If Beacon is what has helped you be happier, then I can
only mum my complaints.”

It was the best he could expect from his solitary, independent sister. She’d always been a beacon
of what it meant to be self-successful, driven, powerful-

-he had so many good role models in his life, and it was a thankful Jaune Arc that he could enjoy
living a life with such a blessed family.

“Thanks, Cam.” He noted, and she simply raised her prosthetic left arm, the sleeve of her bloody
red sweater torn away to showcase the fine Atlesian make.

“I’ll step away from the topic.” The bass-y lounge-singer voice of his sister rung softly, but he
knew to her she probably sounded as if she was speaking at a more normal volume. Camillia’s
Semblance was a blessing and a curse, one she’d had to learn to mitigate since she’d become a
Huntress. “How about, instead, we discuss the news I received from mother and our sisters?”

Ah, so it was her turn, then. “What news?” Playing coy wasn’t like him, but it was the best he
could do when he was sat at a booth across from The Camillia Arc.

“You and your little consortium of girls.” Camillia noted, a flicker of amusement in her deep blue
eyes. “And now you’ve set your eyes on the girl mother wanted you to marry? Turning your mind
in rotations, aren’t you?”

He could admit that it would look strange from the outside. In a way, he’d run away from Weiss
just as much as she’d ran from him- but . . . there had been a connection there, one that he couldn’t
deny.
Weiss was beautiful, and that was only the most meager of reasons he found himself enthralled with her. So much of her resonated with him, and if the world were a more simple place, perhaps they would have fallen in love, married, and been happy with one another without all of this.

Instead, Remnant was an ugly place filled with the Grimm. He wanted to be a hero, and she wanted to be free of the chains of a controlling parent. She’d never told him as much, but Jaune knew he was the prized peacock to her gilded cage songbird.

Perhaps they didn’t belong together, but he found himself reaching out to her nonetheless.

“My… love life has nothing to do with you, Camillia.” He didn’t say it in a haughty or angry way, but he knew direct was the only way to dissuade her from engaging the topic further. In a way, social interactions with his oldest sister had been enforced as combat between the two.

Striking, defending- it had been even more training from his oldest sister, and some that he’d used more in dealing with people outside of his friend circle rather than inside of it. He could never talk to any of his friends the way he could talk freely with Camillia- admittedly because most of them would find such brusqueness hurtful.

They wouldn’t understand, they wouldn’t know just how hard it was to know someone the same way.

“One thing.” She noted, and when he nodded in acceptance, she continued, “The Faunus. She will make a fine wife. She has the fangs for it, give her an Arc child.”

Rather than be flustered, Jaune simply nodded his head in acceptance of the direction. Because that was what it was, rather than teasing or encouragement. Camillia did not see things the same way as other people did, and so he couldn’t take her words the same. It was akin to someone else saying “I approve of her as my sister in law.”

After all, in the end, Jaune agreed. Blake would make a fine wife- and with a little direction, a wonderful Lady Arc. Would he focus on such a thing? No. What they had was love- budding and blooming in slow, but steady measure- and not something as crass and “stupid” as an arrangement for children.

They were Arcs. They did not just witlessly breed and obey the whims of others about how the
world ought to work. Nevena Arc had instilled a deep sense of romance in all of them, though not all of the Arc children had taken that to be about romantic love itself.

Jade buried herself, apparently, in fighting for a cause she believed in. Peri found her joy in caring for animals. Camillia herself had only a passion for battle and being a Huntress.

Only Saphron, Violette, and himself had ever sought such comforts from others. Perhaps one day, his other sisters would find love, but he did not see himself holding out breath. Even Azula and Bleu seemed to thoroughly lavish themselves in living independent, free lifestyles that did not mesh with settling down.

He wondered sometimes if Violette’s horrible stint with marriage had encouraged that thought. He could easily say it had jaded him somewhat more to the world of romance, even if he’d come around to a more positive outlook thanks to the girls in his life.

It made him remember he needed to get gifts for them all. They -were- in Vale, after all.

“Come. It’s been some time since we spent time together in genteel society. Let us take a walk, shall we?” As he stood from the booth, settling a pair of lien chits on the table, he followed Camillia out into the brisk morning that ensconced them both.

A breeze whipped his sister’s curls, and lifted the tails of his coat, the few people out indulging in a wonderful morning to go for a jog keeping a wide berth to the two while his eyes trailed down to where Crimson was collapsed against the small of his sister’s back.

“Vale is so different from how I remember it,” She noted, and he nodded his head in turn, “Eight years. Has it truly been so long since I walked these streets? It must have been. Why, Winter looks like a woman rather than a girl pretending to be one.”

The topic forced his interest. “You were excited to see her.” It was one, polite, way to put it.

“Oh- I was overjoyed.” He could tell. “She is even more radiant than she was that day, when I swore we would meet and one of us would hopefully die on that stage. What a triumph it would have been, a tournament to remember.” He knew the tournament wasn’t to the death, but to Camillia?
Such a thing could only end in one of two ways. And those ways depended on who was left in the body-bag afterwards. He knew that Winter Schnee would not have agreed, but if Camillia had lost that fight, she would have insisted beyond reason.

That was just how Camillia Arc was. A fight was not over until the only thing that remained was a victor, and a body.

He wondered if she’d been a softer person almost a decade ago, to have not been disqualified from the tournament. He could only presume so. It had been before his time, after all, and he still had fond memories of the adoring sister she’d been before she’d become cold, detached.

Hateful to those who plagued their world with the negativity that fed the Grimm.

What had changed his sister? None of his family knew, but his parents had always whispered that it might have very well been their fault.

Jaune hoped not. If such a thing were true of Roux and Nevena Arc . . .

What did that make him?

As they walked the streets of Vale, stopping only when he saw vendors and stores with suitable gifts for his friends- and taking the short time to have them all sent to Beacon- the Arc siblings languished in a world that made sense. Where he was once again able to indulge in the feeling of safety and comfort of his oldest sister’s presence-

-and where that oldest sister felt her heart be at peace, if only for a few, scant moments without the ring of battle to bring her back down to earth.

Chapter End Notes

Jade Arc, the human Faunus Revolutionary
Nicknames: Lady Jade Arc (Sundry), J.A. (White Fang)
Race: Human
Age: 24-25?
Hair: Blonde
Eyes: Blue
Height: 5'8"
Weight: ?? ??
Distinguishing Features: Confident aura, tomboyish
Semblance: :Woman of Fortune:, Jade Arc is uncannily lucky.
Aura Color: Locked
Affiliation: House of Arc; Ansel; White Fang
Handedness: Right

Misc. Notes:
She is most supportive of Weiss as Jaune's love interest (In order to correct the SDC’s abuse of the Faunus.)
Jade’s ideal VA would be Lenore Zann
First off, I apologize to those of you who read this story here and didn't get the hiatus notice from Fanfiction.net. I went on hiatus for, what was supposed to be a week at least, and couldn't get away from the story- posting the chapter I wanted to finish. Frankly, I got a great deal of negative reviews on Fanfiction.net and a lot of critique that I just couldn't honestly sit well with, so I was agonizing over the story more than enjoying writing it.

So, that leads to the result of today. I removed the story entirely from FF.N, and am discontinuing it for the foreseeable future. With this story being shelved indefinitely, I'll be making a return to Atlesian Winters, Dripping Gold, and my Fate-verse fics. I'll probably even start another story instead, probably outside of the RWBY fandom just because of the mess inherent. That said, at least all of you will hopefully enjoy Vol 7 (I'm wary of watching it myself, but at this point I've heard a few things about what they're doing with Jaune that makes me hopeful they won't be screwing everything worse.)

I am sad to let this go, because I've had plans for a great long story, but at this point I just can't put up with the mental stress over a story that I don't get paid to write, don't even get much satisfaction from anymore since it causes more grief than pleasure.

As a favor, I would like you all to give a mental thank you to NoOneImportant for both being a beta-reader and allowing me to mystify him with all the wild shit I had planned for this fic, like the fact it was potentially going to be a continuation from Regency (which I'll be updating more often as well.)

For those of you who enjoyed the story so far without resorting to the ugliness I had to delete or outright ignore, thank you sincerely for supporting me this far.

I hope I see you again in the next story.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

To soften the blow, have the epilogue I've wanted to write for a month now. Kids! Happy family!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Family Arc

Epilogue

Shade Arc was the daughter of Jaune and Yang Arc. This was a universal truth that could only be accepted. Her deep blue eyes were a testament to it, as was her long and unbridled mane of raven black hair that her mother had assured her was passed down from her grandmother.

The other universal truth about her was that it was her birthday. Seventeen winters had passed since her birth, and so this was potentially the last birthday she would celebrate at home in Ansel, alongside her siblings and large extended family.

Yet another universal truth about Shade Arc was that she was not an early riser. In fact, the admittedly dark young woman couldn’t fathom being up before nine in the morning. It was one of the “cute points” her father insisted on babying her about.

Nonetheless, as two pairs of dainty hands rested on her arm and shook her awake, bleary blue eyes broke open to regard the faces of her twin sisters, Snow and Angela’s amused grins showcased in stark reality as she moved from the embrace of a dream about her victory as a Huntsman to the unfortunate nature of a life before noon.

Sitting up, and feeling the way her overly large Nevermore-emblazoned T-shirt shifted against her body, she rubbed sleep from her eyes while her sisters spoke.

“You’re going to miss your own birthday, sleeping in like this-” Snow’s more operatic voice came free-
“-the sleepiest of sleepy-heads.” Angela’s pleasantly demure tone returned. Mama Weiss’ daughters were the closest in age to her, with them being the “middle children” of the great House of Arc. She’d been assured that even the oldest were coming home for the celebration, and so Shade was pleased with the idea of seeing her sister Aphrodite and Luna once again.

Her boorish, easy-going brother? Not so much. As much as she loved Yin, he attracted all kinds of trouble with his sunny demeanor and . . . disgusting amount of happiness.

She blamed the fact he was so popular with the ladies.

As she stood from her bed, Snow and Angela thrusting out her “Huntsman” attire towards her, she let her thoughts drift on the nature of her life as one of the young Ladies of House Arc.

Her sisters, by her Mother Weiss, did not bother to leave the room while she garbed herself in the Mistrali robe and then tucked the dust-protective-plates of her eastern pattern armor over her arms and thighs, feeling sadly naked without a weapon all her own. Mama Ruby had assured her that they would have one properly made for her by the time she left for Beacon- but-

-Shade had felt like something else was laid in store for her. Her sister Luna, the eldest and the child of her father and Mama Blake, had received Crocea Mors and promptly allowed Mama Ruby- with all the glee that could be expressed by a face half-covered and her sole remaining eye- to modify it into having a handgun-esque part added to the greatsword part of the shield. In comparison, the rest of the Arc children who had chosen to become Huntresses or Huntsmen had allowed their mechanically-inclined mother to help them create a myriad of weapons of war.

Shade knew she had a greater destiny. She could feel it in her bones. The fact that the Vytal Festival was once again being held in the year she entered into Beacon made her train harder, with the help of her older sister Aphrodite- who had long since become the second coming of her own mother, Pyrrha.

She wanted to bring home the glory of victory in the tournament for the name of Arc. Her brother and her sisters Sapphire and Summer by Mama Ruby had just missed the tournament themselves, having graduated two years beforehand. Little Sunny, Mama Ruby’s youngest child, would go to Beacon next year.

The name of Arc was synonymous with the institution of Huntsman excellence, and Shade had no thoughts against furthering that glorious fact. They were a family full of strength. They deserved
to be at the pinnacle of the world, even if only her own mother, Mama Ruby, and Mama Pyrrha had continued to show their strength to the world at large.

It was to be expected, from the stories told of her family’s struggles. Her father had retired the ancestral blade to Luna, Mama Blake had kept Sunshade held tight in order to protect her family, but had contented herself with being the Lioness of the Family Arc rather than continuing to roam and display her strength outside of the family home, where she was the first mother to all of the fifteen children that had come of her father’s five wives.

Mama Weiss was the social, pretty face of the Arc marriage, and also the one who dealt with all of the political elements of it. She, similarly, enjoyed her status as the second mother to all of the Arc children. Shade had spent many a day luxuriating under her parents’ attentions, and though she would always pout about it-

-Shade privately loved her family very deeply. From her own mother, rambunctious and proud when she would excel. Mama Pyrrha, always so tender and ready to act as a personal cheerleader when she wasn’t in the fighting circuit. Mama Ruby, gleefully baking them all confectionaries that would have made them all fat children if all of them weren’t strenuously trained- even if they’d made the choice to live civilian lives.

Even her father’s doting and caring nature, always ready to pat her head and proclaim her the lovely princess of his heart alongside all of her sisters and her fewer brothers.

As she stepped out from her room, following after Snow and Angela Arc, she saw where Aphrodite Arc was leaned against the hallway nearby, her long bloody red hair tucked half into a bun and then into a long ponytail at her nape. “You’re finally awake.” Her brusque, lounge-singer’s voice came from crimson-painted lips, and Shade could only smile at the sight of her mentor and the favorite of her older siblings.

“I am. The raven of the House Arc wakes when she is needed.” Her melodrama earned an eye-roll from all three of her sisters, but Shade found herself falling into step back into the manor proper regardless. In the foyer below the balcony where the rooms for the children all lay, she spied her oldest sister fussing with her own younger brother.

Luna Arc was a beauty with her long golden waves, the deep blue eyes, and the bushy but pronounced cat-ears that spoke to her status as a Faunus of nobility. Wearing a gown of fine silver while at her hip rested the white and bronze blade of the Family, the gleeful future Lady Arc had her dark-haired sibling in prime noogie-position while Erin, the youngest of Mama Blake’s two children, fuzzed and whined.
“Sis- let me go- I’m- I’m gonna tell Mom!”

“That you were being bullied by your sisters, again? Please! I’m toughening you up!” Luna Arc happily noted, letting go of Erin Arc’s head and sweeping him in to press a kiss of silvery-white against his forehead. “Look at you, so pouty and needy, just like when you were younger! All these months you’ve been gone, and you still are the little black cat of the family!”

Shade could only shake her head as they began to mount and go down the stairs into the foyer. “Sister,” She started, seeing as Luna’s mystifying blue eyes- filled with the light she could summon via her Semblance as easy as with a thought- turned up unto her and her sisters, “Are you going to bully him for the entire day of my birth? Where is Daddy and the others?”

Luna’s gleeful expression at her usage of the term was ignored, as Shade stepped down to stand half-a-head below her eldest sister’s eye-line. “The birthday girl awakes! Father is still working with Mama to make your cake, you know. But, brunch is already served, come, come. Little Diana is going to tear asunder all your gifts before you’ll even lay eyes on them.”

Diana, Mama Pyrrha’s youngest- and now last, since her body could take no more pregnancies from the words of the doctor- daughter. Another Huntress in the making, like most of her sisters? Or another to join the queue of her siblings who had chosen not to take up the path of violence and strength? Shade hoped it was the first. Arachne and Astarte could not measure up to their oldest sister, Aphrodite herself, but they were joining her in Beacon this year, and thus Shade had high hopes she would have one of her sisters on her team.

Shade and Arachne would make for a formidable team on their own- she with her Shadowstep Semblance and mastery of the blade, and Arachne’s thoroughly confusing weapon- Mama Ruby’s great masterpiece that she loved to crow about- and her own ability to control the momentum of things she could touch through her Aura- a Semblance that fit perfectly with the Threadspinner.

“Let’s go, then. I would spill blood for Mama Blake’s eggs.” The direness of the situation was accepted with a nod by her siblings, even Erin breaking into step with his siblings as they walked- not strode or rushed, she refused to accept rushing for food!- into the dining hall adjacent.

Within, she spied her redheaded mother seated with little Diana in her lap, Astarte and Arachne fussing wholly over their youngest sister while she was sure Atreyus, Pyrrha’s only son, was in the kitchen helping with the lunch and dinner to come.

Mother Weiss smiled at her redheaded sister-in-marriage, and Shade watched as Snow and Angela moved to stand in attendance behind their mother. “Where is Mom?” Shade asked as she drew in
close, Pyrrha and Weiss both looking up, though Pyrrha was the one who spoke.

“Your mother is teasing your brother about his girlfriend. It seems both Erin and Yin are both ashamed to bring their girls around family yet.” Shade was privately pleased by that thought. This was a family occasion, not one for outliers- even if they might eventually join the vaunted House of Arc.

“Up above, then-” Probably in Yin’s old room, if she was to make a guess, “And Mama Ruby?”

“In the kitchen with your father and Blake.” Weiss spoke, the regal and cultured tone of her snow-haired mother soothing to Shade’s senses. “Though I’m sure she’s not being allowed to help as much as she’d like.”

Shade understood that. The scythe-wielding Wife of Arc could bake just fine, but cooking was something that just escaped her abilities. Everyone needed a foil of some breed, and it seemed that if it didn’t in some way deal with sweets, Ruby Arc could not make it.

Shade thought such a meager weakness was a better one than one rife on the battlefield.

“And since you’re asking- Summer, Sapphire, and Sunny are all outside playing-” With their weapons, she was sure. Sunny, the meekest of Mama Ruby’s daughters, was still a warrior at heart- even if all of the mothers had insisted she had a combination of her mother’s and father’s good hearts to weigh her down as a Huntress. “Sit, Shade. Tell me, are you eager to go to Beacon?”

She nodded as she sat. A more appropriate phrase would be “brimming with excitement”, but she wouldn’t go into a rant about it. Mama Weiss hated when she indulged in melodrama, and Shade was a good child to not do so. “I’ll make you all proud.” She noted, instead.

“You make us proud every day.” Pyrrha’s voice cut in, and Shade turned her attention onto her red-haired mother with an upturn of the lips. “Never doubt that. We all love you and your siblings dearly.”

The House of Arc was one built with love, and that love was only one facet of the great strength within it. Some insisted what occurred there was immoral, but they were blind to the unity amongst the family.

Shade, for all her melodrama and love of dark colors, knew that her position in life was one to be
envied. As she went to indulge in the first bite of her breakfast, a dark-haired girl with silver eyes darted into the dining hall and shouted energetically, a white cloak loped around her shoulders.

“Mama! We have a visitor!” Sapphire Arc, a vision of her grandmother Summer Rose, spoke. The irony that the child named Summer was more like a blonde version of her mother rather than the one not named for the grandparent, was never lost on any of them.

Weiss blinked, as did Pyrrha. “A visitor? Today? Who could it be.” As her snow-haired mother went to stand, Shade joined her and they walked back out into the foyer alongside Sapphire.

There, standing at the door, was an older woman with dark feathered hair beginning to gray at the roots, awash in black and red. Shade’s eyes widened, and a word dripped from her lips before she could do anything else. “Grandmother?”

Raven Branwen’s blistering red eyes settled on her as she arrived, and a few curt steps tore open the distance between them before two visions stared at one another. One who had stepped away from her family, and one who had been born into a family full of love and affection. For a moment, there was a stillness, as up above Shade caught Yin and her mother standing atop the rise of the steps.

A wrapped bundle was held out carefully to her by her grandmother, and Raven Branwen relinquished it as Shade took hold of it and watched as part of the black and red silk fell away in favor of revealing the weapon within.

For it was a weapon. A matte gray nodachi fitted into a rotary sheath still filled with dust vials. “Happy birthday.” Raven’s lips broke open to speak, and her hands fell on Shade’s shoulders, squeezing them. “Make us all proud, little shadow.”

And just like that, Raven Branwen walked out of their lives again, while Shade held her grandmother’s- now her’s- sword in against her breast.

For a moment, the stillness returned, Shade watching her grandmother depart until a prosthetic arm fell upon her shoulder and she turned her blue gaze up unto her lilac-eyed mother.

Despite herself, despite her head saying it would look weak, Shade Arc cried and hugged her mother tightly. The blonde woman’s fingers raking through her long and wild black hair.
This was her family, and she would make them all proud. Shade promised it.

Arc Word.

Chapter End Notes

Pyrrha pulls out the ABSOLUTELY MASSIVE Family Album
"That's Luna, the oldest, and Erin, her little brother- they're Blake's-" (Luna; Heir of House Arc- Erin; White Fang PR)
"Then there's Snow and Angela, twins, they're Weiss'-" (Both Civilians)
"Then there's Ruby's three daughters, Summer, Sapphire, and Sunny-" (Huntresses, Summer on team with Yin)
"Then there's Yang's kids, the older brother Yin and the little sister Shade-" (Huntsman; Yin on Summer’s team, Shade two years behind him, champion of the Vytal Festival)
"And then there's your grandkids! Five girls and one boy. The boy is Atreyus, the girls are- in order of age- Aphrodite, Athena, Arachne, Astarte, and Diana, the baby!" (Atreyus and Athena civvies; Aphrodite, Arachne, and Astarte Huntresses)
Chapter Summary

I just couldn't let this sit without people being able to see it. It lacks as much punch because there was less build up, but damn it, it would literally not leave me alone.

An: Because it won't leave me alone. I need to get this out just so I can actually work on Saint, or on Netherworld, or-- As a note, the version of *Shine* in this chapter was going to be reattributed, with half of it being dedicated to Jaune’s POV while the rest was from Weiss’. Comparatively, *Forever Fall*—which was still going to be a Jaune / Pyrrha song—was going to become a triumphant song about love rather than a lament.

A Family Arc

The Winter Queen and the Spring King

It had been a clash of perspectives, a rush after their mission to Mount Glenn that had left her aware of the truth of the situation. If it had not been for their quick decision to call reinforcements and, in turn, get JBPY prepared for the Breach . . .

Weiss was scared they would have died. As it was, almost the entirety of Team Rainbow had ended up enjoying a few nights in Vale’s hospital, in the ward for Huntsmen. JBPY as a whole had visited, she was sure ostensibly at Yang’s request to see her sister, but even she wasn’t that cynical.

All four of their sister team’s members had been relieved to see them okay. Jaune had fussed relentlessly over both her and Ruby, and that was when something within her had clicked.

It had seemed terribly inappropriate in timing, but . . .

A lady couldn’t go to a dance alone. But, as she’d asked Jaune to be alone with her-

x+x+x
Everything felt so intense as Weiss looked across the sea of bodies on the dance floor. Stepping past Yang had been an exercise in restraint, because the blonde had been flush with amusement as the white-haired girl had came in alone, the lovely blue gown a bit more ostentatious than the knee-length skirts most of the other girls had worn. The music was soft, more modern than she was used to, even after trips out with Yang to clubs. The thing in her hands felt heavy, and she could only attribute the emotional weight it held more than anything else to that fact.

Where was he? Would he not show up? Had she fought against him for so long that she’d missed her chance? Her fingers, nails dipped in soft sterling silver colors, held on even tighter to the thing that had become her comfort since she’d left the dorm that night.

That was when the soft music changed, and a gentle melody began to play, a hush falling across the crowd as the singer began to croon.

_I was cold in the dark_

_I was empty in my life_

It was such a sad song when it was played so slowly. Something she might have sang when she was back in Atlas, not surrounded by friends and people who valued her beyond just being Weiss Schnee. To hear a man’s gentle, hurting voice tickle her ears made her wonder whom he was singing to. She stepped into Beacon to find herself, to showcase that she was her own person, not held down in chains by Jacques Schnee and the company her grandfather had started-

And then a hand gently settled on her shoulder and, feeling her heart skip a beat while a soft little sound of surprise came from her throat, she turned.

_From the outside, it looked so bright_

_But nothing felt right to me_

Black, gold, and blue filled her vision and she looked for the second time upon a glossy black mask that was the symbol of something that no longer was true, but nonetheless was something they- and they alone- had shared. She wondered if he’d thought of how much that meant to her, seeing him holding it in the dorm what felt like years ago now, but had barely been months.

He offered her a hand, silent and resolute, the same way he’d done so at his fifteenth birthday.
Like a sky with no sun
Like a night that has no day
My heart was eclipsed by the dark
Then something changed

Weiss Schnee’s chest tightened. She wanted to cry, but in that same breath, she wanted to laugh. She offered him a smile-

I saw a little ray of light come through
The tiniest of sparks came into view
And then
You made me hope again

And she lifted the comforting thing in her hands up to her face, softly attaching the magnetic-aura of it to her face, as the blank and featureless white hid her away from view. The smile that had bloomed on her face, the tears that streaked her cheeks and ruined her make up, none of it mattered.

Because as she donned the mask she’d worn so long ago, she took his hand and they walked gently to the dance floor-

And connected. The music changed in tone, a female singer taking over from the male’s lament. The sad piano becoming a steadily increasing, pleasant beat as they stepped together and energy washed over her.

I’ve been watching you-
Helping you-
Wishing that you’d see-
That the girl you’ve been waiting so long for-
Could be me.

They weren’t quite in the center of the dance floor, but Weiss hardly cared as the world around
them ceased to exist. Just the song, his hands in hers, and the man she’d been struggling so long for to try and decide if she could dare to fall in love.

*Now I’ve never been in love-
But I think this is it.*

*It might seem like a schoolgirl crush-
But I have to admit-*

*I want to take a chance-
And make you see-*

*I think that you’re the one who’ll rescue me-
This time-
You’re finally gonna see you should be me-*

*But baby-

Mask to mask, body to body, her feet moving automatically with grace while his lips- the only visible part of his face- curled upwards.

As the chorus continued, her hands moved away from his and- rather than continue the dance, Weiss found herself daring to break up the rhythm.

Her hands tore the masks from their faces, and- uncaring- she flung them to the floor as she grasped his cheeks and pulled him in for a tear-streaked kiss.

*Because baby, tonight,
You and I are-
Gonna shine.*

It was the only dance they shared in public that night. Stealing his hand again, she dragged him from the floor, passing a softly smiling Blake and Ruby and out the door by a grinning Yang.
Their next dance would be more private- or at least, that had been Weiss’ intent. Instead, they barely got out of the hall before they’d found themselves embroiled in an embrace that heated until they were aflame with one another’s souls just outside of the dance.

Weiss learned that night that she had a very particular love of the public arena for displays of love.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!